

**DIASPORA, IDENTITY AND XHOSA ANCESTRAL
TRADITION: CULTURE IN TRANSIENCE**

by

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Submission date: 2015

DECLARATION

I, Zingisa Nkosinkulu (student number 49079328) declare that this dissertation, *Diaspora, identity and Xhosa ancestral tradition: culture in transience*, is my own unaided work, except to the extent explicitly acknowledged. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

This dissertation is being submitted for the Master in Visual Arts, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination by any other University.

Name: Zingisa Nkosinkulu _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work and give many special thanks to the Nkosinkulu family. Especially to my grandmother uMamlambo and my late grandfather Ntsabo whose enculturation, lessons about life, love, words of wisdom and push for tenacity ring in my ears.



To my mother Bukelwa and my beautiful son Khazimla, thank you for your patience, support and understanding.



To my one and only sister Tamie, my aunts and uncles, thank you for your prayers, inspiration and encouragement. May God bless you and your lovely families.



To my nephews, nieces and cousins: may you also be motivated and encouraged to reach your dreams.



To the Mqalo family.



To Mdantsane, my homeland, may your children be inspired and encouraged to pursue their dreams.



Above all, I dedicate this work to my creator, my provider, my redeemer Qamatha.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this dissertation has been one of the most significant academic challenges I have ever had to face and a life changing experience. It would have been impossible without the support, patience and guidance of the following people:

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Ania Krajewska, for her excellent guidance, patience, caring and providing me with an exceptional and inspiring atmosphere for doing my research.

I would like to thank my co-supervisor, my academic mother, my inspiration, Dr Nombe Mpako who provided me with this opportunity to do my MVA.

Special thanks also to the UNISA Art Gallery team for hosting my exhibition, for academic support and for allowing flexible working hours so that I can finish my research.

I would also like to thank the University of South Africa for providing me with this opportunity to do my Master's and for the bursary, *ungadinwa nangomso, nakwabanye*.

To Barbara Shaw, thank you for editing my research and for your advice that gave me hope and direction. I could not have done this without your kind help and patience.

Thank you to Dawie Malan for your excellent support and for teaching me how to use library sources and for providing me with information when I needed it.

Thank you my family, I relied heavily on your prayers, love and support that gave me strength.

I would like to thank God again, thank you for the blessings.

ABSTRACT

Most Xhosa people experience the condition of feeling dislocated and confused when choosing a spiritual belief between Christianity and Xhosa ancestral traditions. This study uses the concept of diaspora to describe the mental dislocation that people whose culture has changed experience. This study is based on the phenomenon of diaspora as a state of identity in the contemporary cultural identity of amaXhosa, the people of the Eastern Cape Province, by exploring the interrelationship between the key concepts, namely, identity, culture, land, and home as they relate to ancestral worship and Christian practice. Two installation artworks by Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo were selected for a comparative analysis under the spectacle of Xhosa ancestral tradition. In this study, I seek 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. Touching on notions of mediation, altar, and dislocation, this study uses Martin Buber's concept of I AND THOU to weave the key concepts together.

Keywords

Xhosa, identity, Xhosa ancestral traditions, diaspora, auto-ethnography, Bill Viola, Nicholas Hlobo, Isivivane, *Ocean without a shore*, Umthubi, mediation, interculturalism.

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PREFACE

This study has been designed to investigate the idea of being in between two spiritual practices, namely Xhosa ancestral tradition and Christianity. At present, the world faces issues of identity crisis brought about by the rapid increase in dependence on technology in the midst of globalisation and the Western theological worldview that God has given instruction not to worship ancestors. Many African tribes believe and worship ancestors as helpers that guide and protect the family providing the necessary ancestral tradition is fully practiced. The Xhosa people were spiritual beings and acknowledged God before they were introduced to Christian practices. Many Xhosa people converted to Christianity because of the effects of hunger, the burning of cattle and the result of the Frontier War. The majority had to join missionary schools for education and shelter. In the past, it was generally accepted that African tradition relied on ancestors and Christianity was a foreign practice.

The members of my family were victims of this dilemma. They arrived in Mdantsane in 1973 from a background of farming and Xhosa traditional ways of living in a modernised space. It is generally assumed that people who are deeply troubled seek help from a divine source; they turn for help to something greater than themselves when threatened. In some families, people believe in direct interventions with God, others do this via ancestors while some people believe and worship ancestors. Because of this historical background, my generation is the one that is trapped in between choosing between Christian practice and Xhosa ancestral traditions. In contemporary society, there has been more religious practices and ways of worship that influence traditional societies. It is generally known that, to lose the traditional values of our cultural identity is to lose a layer of who we are. Therefore, to study traditions, is tracing our roots. Most Xhosa people I have spoken to, especially the youth at my age, find it hard to choose ancestors as

guardians over their lives. The majority of people in Mdantsane practice Christianity rather than the ancestral traditions because of economic reasons. Most people I spoke to felt that they had just recovered from apartheid and the effects of dislocation that left a big economic need and that ancestral practice, or most Xhosa traditional practices, demand a strong budget. As a result, people find Christianity fairer and cheaper to practice. Normally in Xhosa tradition, a ritual is about the faith of the family but Christian practices unify families and the community under one narrative that makes more sense to some Xhosa people. Some people I speak to feel there are elements in Xhosa culture that can be kept and preserved while, at the same time, some need to be changed or forgotten.

My family is in a space in-between because of the transition of generations. The older generation believed in the ancestors while the next generation is trying to find itself through Christian practices. During this research, I used Bill Viola's and Nicholas Hlobo's work to identify elements of interconnectedness that can be viewed through the Xhosa ancestral tradition. The study is based on the elements of mediation that seem evident in both Christian practices and Xhosa ancestral traditions. Instead of a smooth combination of both Christian and Xhosa practices, people choose one and rebuke the other, forgetting that cultures influence each other. Growing up between Christian and Xhosa practices has resulted in a diasporic mind state which is a position of confusion and feelings of dislocation. At the same time, "being in-between" cultural practices and the discomfort of dislocation can yield new vistas on cultural identity.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Most people experience the conditions of a diaspora even though they are still in their homelands. This study investigates the phenomenon of diaspora as it is experienced as a state of identity in the contemporary culture of the amaXhosa people of the Eastern Cape Province by exploring the interrelationship between identity, culture, land, and home as they relate to ancestral worship and Christianity. Two installation artworks of Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo were selected for a comparative analysis in relation to cultural practices of the Xhosa people and their religious practices. To explore the interconnectedness between people and place, visual analyses of *Isivivane* in Freedom Park as a signifier of interconnectedness was also conducted. The aim of these analyses was to explore the notion of a mediator as a common factor between the ancestral worship of the Xhosa people, the selected installation artworks, *Isivivane* and Christian practice.

In this study, I investigated how identity was constructed within a particular geographical and ideological culture of my childhood and how self-identity was constituted through the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of my culture.

Due to the changing culture of the Xhosa people, the concept of the diaspora has entered their contemporary identity through the loss of traditional culture and the introduction of Christianity. According to Robin Cohen, diaspora is the “dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions” (2008: xii). In the medieval period, the diaspora mainly referred to the resettlement of Jews outside of Israel and, more recently,

has been applied to larger scale migrations of populations such as the African diaspora or the diaspora of the Irish or Palestinian people (Cheyette 2003:45).

As societies move and resettle around the world, the concept of the diaspora becomes an extension of globalisation because “diaspora is not only a consequence of globalization, it is itself determined by the effects of globalization” (Fludernik 2003:xxii). Globalisation, therefore, has resulted in relocation and the transformation of the relationship that displaced people have with the world but, according to El-Ojeili & Hayden (2006: 139), this may not be a bad thing because:

[i]t is widely believed today that the globalization of culture will lead to greater global understanding. It will make people aware of the difference, lead to rich cultural intermixing, and might even reduce the likelihood of cultural misunderstanding and conflict. Some would argue that a new global culture will emerge in the process. This could potentially lead to the demise of specific cultural values and practices, but this is not necessary to be lamented. On the one hand, those echoing a modernization theory approach might argue that the demise of tradition and the spread of Western-led cultural globalization will lead to a generalization of individualism, choice, freedom, democracy, and greater prosperity.

The practical component of this study deals with ephemerality of Xhosa culture and interculturalism. This cultural transience of amaXhosa people is metaphorically represented by layering of *ishweshwe* fabric and plastic materials to reflect multilayered facets of cultures by creating a coat that is made of plethora of magical allusions.

Before I embark on analysis of selected artworks and compare their use of metaphors to Xhosa related concepts, I firstly explain the nature of the diaspora as it is understood within the globalisation of the contemporary

world. According to Ulfried Reichardt (2003:287),

the context in which the contemporary centrality of the diaspora concept emerged is the overwhelming globalization process observable in politics, economics and culture.

As the world transforms through globalisation, the diasporic experience affects the interrelationships between identity, culture, narrative, land and home. These are universal attributes that connect people.

An investigation of this interrelationship between the concepts of identity, culture, land and home has been used to establish whether the diaspora can be a condition that a person or a group of people can experience while they are still located in their ancestral homeland. Cultures do not have to physically move in order to connect with other cultures that are moving. The diaspora can therefore become a metaphor for the spread of cultural beliefs, such as Christianity, and the formation of new evolving identities that are not limited by ethnicity, geographical space, religion and socio-political factors. Choon Sub Bae (2007: 11) states that:

a person's understanding of the world and universe is very closely linked to their identity, religious and cultural heritage. When individuals convert to Christian faith which entails a different worldview and implies a different set of values, they embark on a journey during the course of which they are faced with an identity crisis of significant proportions. This is exacerbated by pressure from their communities to stay true to their roots and traditional value system.

According to El-Ojeili and Hayden (2006: 139),

the crucial feature of contemporary cultural globalization is the diffusion by Western cultural industries of the most vacuous and destructive Western ideas and practices outwards, leading to the involuntary demise of other cultures.

It can be argued that such demise can be experienced by people and it makes them feel like strangers in the world where their own cultural set of belief systems is being compromised by foreign cultures and religions:

Xhosa-speakers are today predominantly Christian. Even chiefs and traditional healers (diviners and herbalists) are nominal if not practising Christians. Nevertheless, the Christianity of the Xhosa is increasingly one which has reached various forms of accommodation with the ancestors and the traditional rituals commemorating them (Hirst 1998: 15).

Xhosa-speakers have integrated Christianity as part of their cultural practice. This is an example of how cultures are continuously flexible and ready to influence each other. In doing so, this integration provides a barometer of cultural diplomacy and cultural transformation which is the subject of this thesis.

Systems of globalisation and control, paradoxically, emphasise the global identity of individuals, while, at the same time, are often detrimental to the cultural identity of a group of people, creating a sense of diaspora.

1.1.1 Defining the use of diaspora for this research

The term “diaspora” has connections to physical movement and social politics that places emphasis on the loss of land and the home which results in the loss of identity and encourages the formation of a new identity. In this investigation, diaspora represents a condition that is experienced in contemporary society and visual art is one of the lenses through which metaphors can be viewed for detecting interconnectedness and cultural diversity which is common to all humanity as explained by Robin Cohen (1997) and William Safran (1990). The diaspora, as a concept, has gained a meaning beyond just a synonym for migration, which has to

do with diaspora and development (Ionescu 2006; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2007). The phenomenon of diaspora can be experienced by individuals or communities in a physical or psychological way. Diaspora can contribute to the interconnectedness of cultures, identity formation and can have an impact on the spirituality of a person.

The practical work of this research will be based on the dispersal, ephemerality and crossover of cultures. The concept of diaspora is used to explore the notion of objects that are connected through the formation of Xhosa cultural identity by introducing a new dialogue between identity formation and cultural connectedness. The concept of diaspora is aligned with the German fabric print known as *ishweshwe* fabric (fig 1). The reason for adopting *ishweshwe* (fig 2) is that it is a material that came from an external culture through trade but became part of Xhosa and other cultures in South Africa. It is a suitable material to explore cultural identity formation in the context of this research. The *ishweshwe* fabric (fig 1) reflects trade routes, the slave trade and the formation of the new diaspora as it is now being used in diverse ways in the diaspora.

I use *ishweshwe* fabric (fig 2) with plastic which symbolises *umhlelo* (the fat that covers the innards) that is left to dry during Xhosa rituals. I construct it into a coat that is assembled out of multitude of symbols and metaphorical allusions making it into a magical hiding place.

1.1.2 Background to the study: Artists and artworks

Bill Viola is an American born artist who is considered to be a pioneer of video and installation art. His work is based on philosophical issues such as the study of ontology, human life in relation to the universe, the human spirit and the soul, nature, birth and death (Robson 2002:1). Viola uses

video installation art as an outlet for externalising his inner spiritual world. Viola's art is relevant to the topic of this research because he touches on universal issues that connect us as human beings. Viola's work is influenced by aspects of Christianity and Zen awareness which evoke strong feelings of melancholy, spirituality and meditation.

Viola has been making video installation artworks since he was a university student. He uses performance artists to perform on his videos while he takes the role of a director, arranging the sound and lighting and building his own props. One of Viola's installations called *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 12)¹ is a portrayal of the connection between life and death displayed on flat digital screens mounted on three pillars. According to Robson (2002:1) the work was

inspired by the writings of the Senegalese poet Birago Diop and ... takes its title from Andalusian Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi, who wrote: "The Self is an ocean without a shore. Gazing upon it has no beginning or end, in this world and the next".

Ocean without a shore (2007),(figure 12) is a High Definition video and sound installation that was inspired by its setting in the 15th century Venetian church of San Gallo. The video installation was first exhibited at the 2007 Biennale di Venezia and has now been purchased by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) as part of its permanent collection.

Robson explains that

¹ Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007 High Definition colour video triptych, two plasma screens, one screen mounted vertically, six loudspeakers (three pairs stereo sound)

Viola's work expresses this sentient self and, bathing the viewer in a sensorium of light and sound, is a masterpiece that asks us to reflect upon fundamental ideas of love, hope, sorrow, anxiety, death, regeneration, and being (2002:1).

Viola's work is selected because of the dispersed elements that it exhibits when analysed through the framework of this research. These diasporic elements of travelling between life and death suggest that the soul is in the diaspora. These elements, among others, connect Viola's work with the discussion in this research including the materials used.

Three screens are installed on the pillars of the church that Viola has transformed into altars for mediating between two spiritual worlds, life and death. These three stone altars in San Gallo become a passage for the manifestation of images of the dead attempting to re-enter our world. The world that they approach has no color and little detail or clarity. The screen presents a series of encounters where life and death interact. The cycle repeats itself continuously. More than 24 performers and a technical team of 20 participated in the creation of this video work. Each person passed through an invisible threshold of water and light in order to pass into the physical world. Once resurrected, however, all beings have to eventually turn away from the material existence to return from where they came from once they realise that their presence in this world is finite².

The work alludes to the overlapping of worlds, the physical and the spiritual. This is done through mediators which are the altars and the curtain of water in Viola's installation that take the person through the physical world to the world beyond. Viola (1997:147) explains that

² <http://www.designboom.com/eng/interview/viola.html>.

we have all come from a place of the unborn and we are all here for a short period of time. We have to cross a threshold of water and light to arrive and to leave. We will ultimately all go back to this eternal non-spatial, non-temporal world of potentiality.

During this life circle, we leave signs of our existence such as family, children, toys, material objects we own, photographs and other people's memories. These belongings become an extension of ourselves in the diaspora.

This video installation can be aligned with customs, ancestor beliefs and spirituality of the Xhosa people. The mediator which works through the altars, the curtain of water and the ancestors in Viola's video installation correlates with Xhosa spiritual symbolism that also uses altars, ancestors, water, and our bodies as mediators between the living and the dead. The Xhosa people believe in ancestors who live under water. They believe that ancestors can visit the living through dreams, omens and the performance of certain rituals. These rituals are normally performed inside a kraal or a cattle byre because "historically chiefs were sometimes buried on a river bank or in the forest, household heads were buried in the cattle byre near the gatepost" (Klopper 1998:12). The water and the cattle byre or kraal serve as an altar and a mediator for the Xhosa people to speak to the ancestors to ask for guidance or help to solve family troubles. This overlap of Xhosa cultural practice with Viola's installation opens common ground between them.

Nicholas Hlobo (1975), a contemporary visual artist, was born in Cape Town and grew up in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape Province and now lives and practices in Johannesburg. His work has been influenced by the geographical shifts in his life which are echoed in his choice of materials. It

was because of this rich diasporic background and his use of his cultural heritage as a Xhosa male artist that Hlobo was chosen as one of the artists analysed for this research. Hlobo has often engaged in deep dialogues with his audience and explores issues of origin, and sexual and cultural identity through material objects which includes his formative cultural environment and his present reality as a gay person. While Hlobo's work is autobiographical, he also explores desire, imagination and the potential for transformation by articulating his sexual politics, socio-historical positioning and ethnicity in the different spaces that his artworks inhabit.

Hlobo (2006: 1) explains that, in his work, he explores

Xhosa traditions, and gender issues, with an emphasis on masculinity and rituals. When I thought of making an artwork that is particularly masculine, I decided to make a kraal—but to challenge the purpose of the kraal.

Hlobo's use of the kraal allows a strong comparative analysis between his installation work, *Umthubi* (2006),(figure 18), and Viola's video installation *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 17). This comparative analysis will provide grounds for these installation artworks to engage in a particular conversation about their correlations.

The artists, Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo, have been selected for this dissertation because the concept of a mediator that forms a major link for this study is manifested in different ways in their installation artworks. Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo have different backgrounds and they live and practice their art in different parts of the world. They explore different themes, even in the two selected installations under discussion but both artists use aspects of Xhosa cultural practice for reference even though

that might not have been Viola's intention. But under the comparative analysis, Viola's installation reveals symbolism that is also embraced in Xhosa cultural practices. The interrelationship of the key concepts identified in this dissertation for diaspora as a metaphor for a moving and evolving culture, namely, identity, culture, land and home, will be a cornerstone for the comparative discussion.

The concept of mediation that Viola's and Hlobo's work embrace speaks to the metaphorical use of *isishweshwe* fabric (fig 2) that became a symbol to mediate a particular message depending on the cultural context in which the fabric is used. The work of the selected artists might not, at first glance, have anything to do with cultural interconnectedness or even Diasporic connotations. But when they are observed through the eyes of a Xhosa person, in the process of investigating and documenting, they exhibit similarities and differences in meaning and context to Xhosa cultural practices. The choice of materials in these artworks, as part of the analysis, locates where these artworks overlap and cross over each other.

1.1.3 Visual art component: Description of my work

According to Gillow and Sentence

the history of the world can be read in textiles, the rise of civilisations and fall of empires are woven into their warp and weft along with the great adventures of conquest, religion and trade (1999:9).

The intention of my work is to present situations in which the process of layering visual metaphors is used to reveal the connections between humanity and cultural identity. Work that speaks about interconnectedness alters social and personal constructed perception, and creates an awareness of the integration between humanity and cultural

identity. Fabrics and garments are not only for our physical protection but also serve as buffers of our cultural belongings, cultural preferences, position, status, and self-expression. Making a coat using fabric and by stitching fabric with plastic, using fire, painting, stenciling, juxtaposing and layering of images, creates visual metaphors that communicate the construction of cultural identity and our dependence on society.



Figure 1 *Ishweshwe* fabric print (three cats)



Figure 2 *Ishweshwe* fabric print (modern design) Photo by Z Nkosinkulu

The use of textiles, especially *ishweshwe* and other materials signifies the

ephemerality of cultural identity and its diasporic condition, the idea of our ancestors, connections with the past, present and future as the fabric is still used even by young fashion designers and *omakoti* (Xhosa new brides). This symbolises those parts of our cultural identity which seem dead, but still have significance and the ancestors who always appear when we look at our faces in the mirror and see some of their features.

Gillow and Sentence (1999:9) argue that:

the study of the traditional textiles of the world reveals at times an amazing diversity of techniques and styles, while at another we can only wonder at the way in which cultures separated by vast distances have developed such similar solutions to the problems of design and construction. Sometimes only a limited number of solutions may be possible, but the frequency of similarities in techniques and the choice of motifs and symbols makes one wonder if this is evidence of ancient unrecorded trade routes or if it is substantiation of Jung's theory that we have a collective unconscious.

The interrelation of *ishweshwe* fabric and the Xhosa culture is an example of any other cultural identity. By adopting *ishweshwe*, the work raises some questions such as: Does our culture define us? Who do we become if we do not save our culture? Is it self or society who constitutes the identity formation? Can humanity live without culture and identity? How, what and who decides which objects or symbols to adopt from other cultures?

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims to seek evidence of elements of the cultural beliefs of the Xhosa-speaking people in the works of selected contemporary visual artists in relation to the integration of Christianity as a sign of cultural ephemerality. The principal aim of this dissertation is to identify and assess selected installation artworks against a social and cultural backdrop of

Xhosa culture. These artists' works, I believe, carry commonalities with Xhosa culture regarding ancestral worship and human interconnectedness by displaying similar symbolism through the use of water, tomb, altar, body and a kraal. The use of these symbols is a common feature in their works, although these artists come from different cultural backgrounds. These symbols also belong to profoundly different cultural contexts and yet they display great human interconnectedness. By closely examining the use of Xhosa symbolism in the selected artworks and the exploration of the nature of the diaspora, the dialogue between cultures is being opened.

This investigation was prompted in part by the observation that the artists used symbols and metaphors that are common to the culture of the Xhosa people to achieve what seems to be a deeply spiritual immersive experience. The use of diaspora in this dissertation represents the evolution of culture, the encounters between cultures and the construction of identity. I approached the concept of diaspora as a metaphor of the spreading and interconnecting³ of the culture of Xhosa-speaking people with other cultures by exploring the elements of cultural practice from the works of Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo such as water, altar, ancestors, tomb, kraal and body. These elements, I believe, work as mediators for both artists.

In the use of the diaspora as a metaphor for cultural interconnectedness, I chose to focus on the spiritual element of Xhosa cultural practice such as

³ Interconnection also happens during postgraduate workshops that are annually hosted by the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Musicology at UNISA, where students bring concepts from their cultures and spread knowledge about their cultural customs and traditions in academic discussions. Platforms such as postgraduate workshops and debates can be used to popularise concepts across different cultures.

ancestral belief and worship at an altar. In the artworks investigated in this study, the altar and the ancestors have become the mediators, making the connections between the artworks and the cultural practice of Xhosa-speaking people.

The objective of this dissertation was to establish the following:

- (1) How Bill Viola's video installation work *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 14) and Nicholas Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006), (figure 18) installation artwork exhibit human interconnectedness that can be viewed through the lens of Xhosa ancestral practices.
- (2) How cultural elements of the Xhosa people such as the notions of mediation overlap with other South African cultures and what are the universal symbols of mediation?
- (3) Whether the diaspora can be viewed as a metaphor of how cultures evolve to ensure their survival and does globalisation contribute to the feelings of disconnectedness and displacement?
- (4) Whether the diasporic experience and the integration of objects from other cultures forms part of contemporary cultural identity and whether they exhibit cultural interconnectedness.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The boundaries of this research revolved around the issue of ancestral worship of the Xhosa people as mediation that connects human beings to another sphere. This has led to the focus on the role of mediators within cultural identity and the interconnectedness of human beings to the rest of creation. The research explores altars, water, ancestors, art, body and a kraal as mediators which have common factors with all human cultures.

The study is not about coining new definitions of any of the key words used in this investigation, especially diaspora, but the idea was to investigate the connections between humans through spiritual mediation. The culture of the Xhosa people was used as a starting point and a stage for this investigation. I was not intending to forcing the idea of ancestral worshipping on the contemporary Xhosa community and those who are in the diaspora, but I was interested in finding some correlations.

1.4 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The context of the study is based on historical incidents of the Xhosa people's encounters with Western people at the beginning of colonisation. This historic reference lays a foundation of physical and psychological dislocation for the Xhosa people. Therefore a historical background of the Xhosa people is given in order to explain the notion of diaspora as a state of the mind in the contemporary Xhosa people and their culture.

The Bantu speaking people of South Africa can be categorised into two language groups, namely, Nguni and Sotho-Tswana of which a number of distinct culturally and linguistic groups are found. Historically, these linguistic groups were based on an affiliation to a hereditary chief who had jurisdiction over a defined area (Klopper 1998:10).

The Xhosa-speaking people comprise nine groups which are related, but politically independent from each other. These nine groups are: the Xhosa, Thembu, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Bomvana, Xesibe, Mfengu, Bhaca and Ntlangwini. Although these groups might differ in terms of chieftdom clusters, they share a considerable cultural conformity which is evident in the layout of their homesteads, the prevalence of ancestral worship and of initiation practices (Klopper 1998:10).

The Hlubi, Zizi, Tolo and Bhele people migrated during the 19th century into the region that later came to be called Transkei (now part of the Eastern Cape). These people, known as the Mfengu, were affiliated with the Xhosa Paramount Chief Hintsa. Their land was claimed in 1835 by the missionaries and the British colonial authorities. Even today, the Xhosa people are principally located in the eastern part of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Hirst 1998:12) extending east of a line bisecting the province between Grahamstown and East London.

1.5 HISTORY OF THE XHOSA AND THE IMPACT OF COLONISATION ON THEIR IDENTITY FORMATION

The colonial history of contact between the Xhosa people and the Western cultures carries with it more than just negative ideologies such as apartheid and the dehumanising effect it had, but also had positive elements such as cultural interaction, clothes, machines and other objects became significant in the culture of Xhosa people.

Two stressful events manifested in the early stages of the nineteenth century affected the history of Xhosa-speaking people of the Eastern Cape. Firstly, the trekboers rebelled against the new British government in the Cape Colony. The Xhosa initially had the upper hand in the early confrontations, but soon things were different once the British joined the fray (Carver 2007:38). Secondly, an influx of refugees, known as *Mfengu*, caused by the expansion of the Zulu nation, was putting stress on to the northern border of Xhosa lands. The boer settlers, hungry for land, used aggressive military action, which included a collaboration with the *Mfengu* refugees, considered a lower class by the Xhosa.

Hirst argues that “these cross-cultural contacts were to have profound effects on Cape Nguni culture” (1998:12). This encounter with the settlers

introduced what was called European bovine pleuropneumonia, which is a lung disease that infected the cattle belonging to the Xhosa and led to their [the Xhosa] dislocation and subjugation. On January 1, 1866, half of the Xhosa land, west of the Kei River, was incorporated into the Cape Colony, which later became known as the Ciskei during the apartheid regime (Carver 2007:39). The remnant of the Xhosa lands was made a supposedly independent territory known as the Transkei.

After the defeat of the Xhosa, some traditional practices were discontinued, such as raising and ownership of livestock and the chiefs and other leaders who were found disloyal were replaced.

The Afrikaner government introduced rule based on tribal chiefs, appointed by the government in Pretoria, in the late 1950s. This was part of the move by the Afrikaners to “solve” their African “problem” by creating independent “homelands” into which black African citizens were to be placed. Transkei was the first homeland to accept independence in 1976. Initially, rather than being independent, Ciskei became self-governing in the early 1970s. Full independence came in 1981. Ciskei was also forced to absorb the vast majority of the Xhosa who were systematically being forced out of areas that were for “whites only” in the rest of South Africa, a policy of the South African national government from the 1960s (Carver 2007:39).

After the formation of a democratic government in 1994, Xhosa traditions and customs became more influential in national policy development for the new post-apartheid regime. After the apartheid regime, the new government of South Africa drew out of Xhosa people and their traditions more than just the first black president of South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla

Mandela. Written records reveal that

as its source and inspiration, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission drew on the Xhosa concept of *Ubuntu*,⁴ a term that encompasses notions of harmony and reconciliation particular to chthonic and African concepts of justice (Carver 2007:34).

The culture and traditions of the Xhosa people were used as a form of inspiration by the new government and Nelson Mandela personally. This can be seen in Mandela's autobiography where he states the value of his culture, the importance of his identity and his Xhosa heritage as his inspiration during the first day of the treason trial that led to him being jailed on for 27 years. During this trial, Mandela used his cultural identity as a symbol of resistance against the apartheid regime, as cited in his autobiography:

I entered the court that Monday morning wearing a traditional Xhosa leopard-skin *kaross* instead of a suit and tie ... The *kaross* electrified the spectators ... Winnie also wore a traditional beaded headdress and an ankle-length Xhosa skirt. I had chosen traditional dress to emphasize the symbolism that I was a black African walking into a white man's court. I was literally carrying on my back the history, culture and heritage of my people. That day, I felt myself to be the embodiment of African nationalism, the inheritor of Africa's difficult but noble past and her uncertain future. The *kaross* was also a sign of contempt for the niceties of white justice. I well knew the authorities would feel threatened by my *kaross* as so many whites feel threatened by the true culture of Africa (Mandela 1994:384).

After this profound performance by Mandela, it is recorded that "three

⁴ Nguni Xhosa term for "human kindness" and relates also to respectfulness towards the others. The term/concept enables the flow of cultural exchanges because it focuses on openness to humankind rather than on "boundaries" between people.

decades later Xhosa customs would be the tools by which the new South Africa was healed, and reconciled” (Carver 2007:34-35). It can be concluded that the history of the Xhosa people and the Xhosa culture has been a symbol of interconnectedness, a symbol of the unity of cultures in diversity because “while there is a need for cultures to reach out to one another and borrow from one another, this has to be on the basis of equality and mutual respect” (Thiong’O 1993a: xvi). This means that, in order for them to be in harmony and peace, cultures in their diversity must learn to acknowledge one another on every level in the relationship between them.

This historical background shows how the cultural identity of Xhosa people is shaped by Western influences, civil wars and trade. The encounter of the Xhosa people with their colonisers resulted in psychological and physical dislocation. During these early encounters with the West, materials such as *isishweshwe* became part of Xhosa culture, although the fabric was already used in Africa in places such as Egypt where it was known as “Indigo” (see Gillow & Sentence 1999:140).

The presence of indigo cloth in South Africa has a long and complex history which probably extends as far back as early Arab and Phoenician trade along the eastern seaboard before 2400BCE. The indigo cloth emerged in the Cape of Good Hope after the 1652 establishment of the Dutch East India Company. Slaves, soldiers, Khoi-San and Voortrekker women were clothed in indigo, and there is also evidence of floral printed indigo. Much of the early indigo cloth at the Cape was from India and Holland. Natural indigo dyes were obtained from *Indigofera Tinctoria* plants. *Ishweshwe* fabric has become a complex layer in many cultures. This historical background displays the diasporic condition that has been aligned with

ishweshwe as a metaphor for interconnection of humanity through cultures.

1.6 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: MARTIN BUBER

To contextualise this research, Martin Buber's relational experiential theory of the *I-It* and the *I-Thou* philosophical framework has been adopted as the theoretical basis of this study. In his book, *I and Thou* (1937), Buber's argument begins by explaining two primary combined words which are the *I-It* and the *I-Thou*.

The *I-It* is a relational experience of which Buber argues that "without a change in the primary word, one of the words He and She can replace It" (1937:3). The *I-It* relationship is a relation in which "it is bounded by others; It exists only through being bounded by others" (1937:4), meaning a relationship that is derived from objectivity, subjectivity, materialism, experience and sensation. This relationship between "I" and "It" is a material relationship which can be said to define societies in the age of technology, the crossing of cultures and globalisation. This relationship could be based on ethnicity and skin color which could result in racism, xenophobia, capitalism, apartheid and gender politics.

Buber's main proposition is that existence can be defined by the relationship between *I-Thou* in a philosophical and spiritual interconnectedness. This relationship could be between humans and God or the ancestors, which Buber defines as a relationship with "... nothing ... no bounds" (1937:4). This means that the *I-Thou* relationship is not limited to interactions with physical objects but it transcends all boundaries and unifies the *I* with the *Thou*. Practices such as yoga, meditation, prayer and mourning can belong to this relationship.

For Buber, “when a primary word is spoken the speaker enters the word and takes his [sic] stand in it” (1937:4). This means that when one utters a primary word, one takes on its existence and the two parts communicate with each other or become one. In Buber’s terms, *I* cannot be uttered independent from the *Thou* or independent from *It* because the *I* has two parts. He argues that “there is no *I* taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word *I-It*” (1937:4). Buber’s theory of the *I-Thou* and *I-It* is based on the fact that humans find meaning and wholeness in engaging in relationships. For Buber, the *I-Thou* relationship expresses the great *Thou* and that directs us to the eternal *Thou*, meaning to God or any force that one considers greater than oneself because

in every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us we look out towards the fringe of the eternal *Thou*; in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal *Thou*; in each *Thou* we address the eternal *Thou* (1937:6).

Buber’s theory of *I-Thou* and *I-It* is represented by the use of *ishweshwe* (figure 2) fabric and was used for this research to establish the connection between the installation artworks that were selected for the comparative analyses in reference to the cultural practices of the Xhosa people.

When humans look at cultural difference they turn to create margins instead of a productive dialogue between cultures. Humans look at the power each culture has over other people’s cultures instead of looking at deeper human experiences that are more biological based in relation to culture, such as love, beauty, nature, laughter, birth, life and humanity. Like memories of beautiful moments with family and friends, or when we share the pain of mourning for our loved ones, or how we mourn and relate to the concept of death. In all cultures, we have these universal experiences

that link us no matter which cultural background a person comes from.

When looking at Viola's video installation *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 14) from any cultural background, there are memories of personal relationships and experiences with death, life, ancestors, worshiping and being connected to invisible spirits or simply memories of water, showers, pools and playing in the rain. Simply by looking at Hlobo's kraal as some kind of mediator, there are notions of rituals, spiritual presence and ancestral worship. Or one sees the kraal as only a piece of a particular culture inside the gallery which is a space of another culture. The interconnectedness of cultures manifests itself every day in a life of a person, whether in a positive or a negative way.

In the field of cognitive sciences, neuroscience research reveals that

with regard to action understanding, a class of neurons in the brain called "mirror neurons" are thought to be important because of their amazing ability to transmit electrical impulses not only during the execution of a particular action, but also during observation of the equivalent action being carried out by someone else (Nakahara & Miyashita 2005:644).

This means that human beings respond to actions that are performed by other humans. This reaction is caused by mirror-neurons that react when observing an action performed by another person, although the physical body is not literally performing the action.

Athen explains the inner-working of the human brain:

The human brain is a network of approximately one hundred billion neurons. Different experiences create different neural connections which bring about different emotions ... depending on which neurons get stimulated, certain connections becomes stronger and more efficient, while others may become weaker. This is what is called

neuroplasticity.

This means that a person can be trained to excel in a particular set of skills, like, for example, an artist who can be trained to observe and be able to express the observation in a creative way. This could also mean that a person can be “trained” to believe in a particular culture because research reveals that “cultures are formed around the meanings people construct and share” (Lewis 2002: 1) based on certain events and experiences.

The construction and sharing of meaning, for Buber, is the relational experience of the *I-Thou* that is a subjective relationship in contrast to the *I-It* relationship which is an objective relationship. If human beings are connected through mirror neurons that automatically react when witnessing another person performing a particular action which can influence their behaviour and emotions, it can be argued that mirror neurons suggest a subjective relationship. We therefore become each other’s actions because “subjectivity is an open process which allows us to choose who we want to be” (Lewis 2002: 35). Because of mirror neurons, the body becomes a form of mediator to mediate meaning. This is a similar concept to Buber’s concept of the *I-Thou*. Buber argues that “if I face a human being as my Thou, and say the primary word *I-Thou* to him [sic], he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things” (1937:8). Buber is asking us to step out of the embodiment and consider a relationship with the world to be viewed as more open-ended and extended beyond physicality of boundaries. The notion of *Thou*, for Buber, strips away any objectivity and takes things as they are. This is similar to the reaction of mirror neurons because they also transcend the boundaries of objectified reality and subliminally activate subjective relationships.

The connection between the theories of Buber and Athene allowed the

researcher to adopt a bio-cultural approach because

a bio-cultural model of the human can only be richer than a solely cultural model ... since it implies neither genetic determinism nor limitation to the *status quo* (Boyd 2005a:1).

A bio-cultural approach looks at the interrelationship of human biology and culture because the culture does not disconnect humans from each other, it connects their biological functions just as mirror neurons do.

A computer can be used as a metaphor to explain the connection between human biology and its cultural relationships. The biology of humans can be considered as the hardware and the culture can be called software. In a computer, hardware consists of the physical parts of the computer, such as the hard disk drive, mouse, RAM, motherboard, memory and processor. The software is made up of the operating system and packages such as Microsoft Word, Photoshop and CorelDraw. The hardware is the body and the software is the culture, belief systems and nature of humans. Therefore, a human's life is a constant dialogue between biology and nature in relation to culture because "aspect[s] of human experiences are formed through culture and are therefore 'constructed' or 'mediated' just like a novel or a film" (Lewis 2002:8). According to Nakahara and Miyashita (2005:644), "if mirror neurons also are involved in the understanding of intentions, then they must be activated according to the context in which the action occurs". Mirror neurons therefore provide a platform for this construction and mediation to manifest itself. This means that culture contextualises biology. The human action, expression, gender, skin color, voice and eyes are all biological attributes which transmit meaning depending on cultural context. Therefore, a bio-cultural approach is adopted to understand the nature of this contextualisation process.

Boyd (2005a:6) believes that, beyond the level of the individual, there is an even more precise level of explanation of biology to study behaviour at the species level within local ecologies and in terms of individual variations but it also considers animals as responding strategically and flexibly to particular situations. Authors or artists can be considered in the same way; as responding strategically and flexibly to the situations they place themselves in order to undertake works of art.

Our biology equips us for endless speculations about the outcomes of our behaviour, consequences of events and possible solutions to problems encountered. The aim of this investigation was to construct meaning in order to undertake a comparative analysis between Viola's and Hlobo's installation works. By applying the theories of Buber and the findings of mirror neurons, the researcher aimed to establish the nature of human interconnectedness in relation to identity, culture, narrative, land and home. This forms the basis of the visual symbolism and metaphors used for practical work.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative enquiry. I will use an interpretive research method because of its emphasis on experience and interpretation. It seeks to arrive at an in-depth analysis with emphasis on the interpretive understanding of social phenomena by explorative ethnographic descriptions and interpretations of the subject matter of representation. Auto-ethnography is a narrative approach of writing that falls under qualitative research in social studies. I have used my personal narrative as the main data for this enquiry because "narrative inquiry embraces narratives as both the method and the phenomena of study" (Pinnegar & Danes 2007:4) while it "characteristically begins with the researcher's

autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly 2000:40).

1.7.1 What is auto-ethnography?

Auto-ethnography is the qualitative method of enquiry (see Ellis and Flaherty 1992; Ellis 1995; Ellis and Bochner 1992, 2000, 2002; Fox 1996; Quinney 1996, and Ronai 1996). Auto-ethnography comes after ethnographic research. According to Lionnet auto-ethnography is defined as "open[ing] up a space of resistance between the individual (auto-) and the collective (-ethno-), where the writing (-graph) of resistance cannot be foreclosed" (1999: 391). In auto-ethnography, the researcher tells his or her story by being the subject rather than an object of study and the context is about the researcher. In an auto-ethnographic form of enquiry, understanding is gained through the researcher's ability to use his/her own life experience to enter into the research subject.

Ellis and Bochner 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 (2000:139).

As the world moves towards globalisation in the 21st century, multiple perspectives emerge. Postmodernism promotes multiple viewpoints on knowledge, culture, history and collective and individual experiences. Therefore the auto-ethnographic approach is in line with postmodern thinking about enlarging the scope of human experiences. Auto-ethnographic research embraces the subjective approach and acknowledges the writer's story as legitimate (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Ellis

1997; Ellis & Bochner 2000; Patton 2002; Reed & Danahay 1997; Richardson 1995; Tierney & Lincoln 1997 and Van Maanen 1995) in contrast to other research methods that embrace only an objective view. Ellis and Bochner argue that “auto-ethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world” (2000:761). My reading of this text inspired me to use my own story to tell a story that could touch many people who also experienced conditions of alienation. I did not want to use dislocation because I did not know where I was located in the first place.

According to Ellis and Bochner, the auto-ethnographic research method displays multiple layers of consciousness connecting the personal to the cultural (2000:739). That tends to explain why I adopted a technique of layering in my art making process to create work that will allow some level of understanding of my experiences and then try to re-build a renewed image of who I am. This then opens the research to the line of critical theories that speak on issues of alternative realities and multiple consciousnesses to try to unpack the past life experiences that influenced my post-apartheid identity as a Black African man.

The power and freedom of adopting the auto-ethnographic research method has to do with the reason that I used “I” in reference to moments about my life and I can place myself as a primary data source, in reference to my experience and my self-examination. The essential reason for this is that auto-ethnography is a self-narrative that places the self at the center within a social context.

1.7.2 Views on auto-ethnography

There are many ways to understand auto-ethnography as, “presentations

focusing on auto-ethnography and arts-based research dominated the 3rd International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (QI) in May 2007” (Shank & Boyd, 2007:1). Auto-ethnography has similar objectives to those of art which are to touch the reader/viewer, evoke emotions, and provide alternative perspectives for viewing life (see, Barone & Eisner 1997; Bochner & Ellis 2002; Ellis & Bochner 2000). Auto-ethnographers can use different formats such as graphic, audio-visual or performative components in their work (Miller 2010, Scott-Hoy 2002, Saldana 2008). According to Bartleet (2009) and Ellis (2004), the result of an auto-ethnographic study is a narrative written in the first-person similar to novels and short stories. Chang argues that auto-ethnography should be “ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (2008: 48). According to Rugg “in autobiography, the object and the subject of the text are the same” (Rugg 1997: 2). While studying the literature on auto-ethnography, it becomes clear that this approach encourages deep introspection and self-reflexivity and I became increasingly fascinated with this method and decided to adopt it for this study. The complexities and contradictions I experience as a Xhosa male, visual-graffiti-artist, and my father, both inspired me to take on this research, as I constantly found myself faced with challenges of dislocation as a result of new cultural influences. So this research is indeed responding to cultural influences.

The element of self within culture is strongly evident in most definitions of auto-ethnography. Reed-Danahay (1997) defines auto-ethnography as “a form of self-narrative that places the self within the social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography”. Central to my research was the understanding of self in relation to other people and the “crisis of representation” in contemporary society in an autobiographical

act of writing or visualising one's life (Behar & Gordon 1995; Clifford 1988; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Conquergood 1985, 1991, 1998; Geertz 1973, 1988; Marcus & Fischer 1986; Myerhoff 1979, 1982; Trihn 1989, 1991; Turner 1982, 1987).

1.7.3 Why auto-ethnography?

As I searched deeper and my understanding of research and methodologies expanded, I realised that auto-ethnography is a relevant methodology for my study because it allowed me, myself, as "I", to voice my interpretation of my position in the world relative to others as I tried to find my cultural identity, art practice and being the "other". With the auto-ethnography methodology, "I" as a subject allowed me to have a voice in the interpretation of Viola's and Hlobo's installation artworks from my own cultural perspective. I looked at them through my cultural identity and my artistic knowledge as a practicing artist. This is followed by a reflection on some of my previous work, *Beyond Synergy* and *Lines of Power* which is followed by my practical work in a form of visual auto-ethnography (Shank & Boyd 2007). The use of visual auto-ethnography gives this enquiry a base for understanding issues from my point of view on the subject of self-reflection.

Regrettably, the general qualitative research criteria does not favour auto-ethnography as a legitimate research method (Garratt & Hodkinson 1999), as it runs the danger of being too self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey 1999) because of the use of self as the major source of data (Denzin & Lincoln: 2000, Sparkes, 2000). This could raise some concerns regarding reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the study (Holt 2003). Nevertheless, according to Tierney (1998:66),

autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalised those of us at the borders.

The validity and trustworthiness of any auto-ethnographic study should be assessed on an individual basis. My need to do this study was based on the fact that I was raised in a family which followed the traditional Xhosa cultural practices while my sister rebelled against them and turned to Christianity. My upbringing was based on these two complex worlds that required me to choose, although my grandfather mixed them. Now, as a father myself and artist, a new way forward is needed in order to be able to pass knowledge to my son. This study will assist those dealing with same identity complexities that I am dealing with. I am aware of the criticism auto-ethnography has received over the years as some authors quote above, nevertheless, because of its freedom, I found it relevant for this research.

1.7.4 Auto-ethnography as a metaphor

Auto-ethnography can be used as a metaphor in different ways. It has been depicted as a camera that zooms inward and outward, backward and forward, from one dimension to multiple dimensions focusing on rarely heard stories (Ellis & Boscher 2000; Maanen 1988). While Pinar (1986:58) refers to auto-ethnography as the architecture of life, other artists depict auto-ethnographic writing through the metaphor of a long journey of discovery. A Hip Hop artist named Nas called one of his albums “I Am The Autobiography”, Sticky Finger called his the “Autobiography of Kirk Jones”. I see these metaphors corresponding to the South African journey towards a democratic country. The former President Nelson Mandela entitled his

autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom*, Churchill Madikida used auto-ethnography in one of his exhibitions *Like Father Like Son*.

The use of visual auto-ethnography makes the process of self-enquiry an open space where the objective is to achieve a segmented yet holistic sense of self, which Rollo May (1967: 90) describes as “not merely the sum of various roles one plays, but the capacity by which one knows one plays these roles”.

Paula Mc Neill uses photography as an auto-ethnographic medium for reflection. She uses old family photo album as a source of inspiration for her artworks (Shank & Boyd 2007:1). Anniina Suominen Guyas also used a photograph of her grandmother as part of her auto-ethnographic study (Shank & Boyd 2007:1).

The process of self-enquiry through visual auto-ethnography reveals as much about the researcher as it does about the researched. I adopted the metaphor of layering visual metaphors to deconstruct and reconstruct a new identity. My practical work is discussed in an essay in the catalogue of the exhibition.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this research is based on Martin Buber’s concept of I AND THOU and the notion of diaspora as a metaphor. The word “diaspora” originates from a Greek word, *diaspeirein*, meaning “disperse” in English. It originally referred to

the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel. Jews living outside Israel. The dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland. People who have spread or been dispersed from their homeland (*Compact Oxford English dictionary* 2008 sv ‘diaspora’).

This term has come to define people who are dislocated from their place of origin.

Studies of diaspora reveal that emphasis has been placed mostly on the relationship between diaspora and their homeland in the economic, social and political sectors (see Levy & Weingrod 2005; Sheffer 2003; Van Hear 1998; Braziel 2008; Dufoix 2008; Wahlbeck 2002; Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009). This literature deals with the question of whether the engagement of diaspora is positive or negative toward the development of their homeland (see for example, Levy & Weingrod 2005; Sheffer 2003; Van Hear 1998; Braziel 2008; Dufoix 2008; Wahlbeck 2002). Nevertheless, it has only recently been used to define the movement of people around the world. Dufoix (2008: 1) observes that

[d]ue to the expanded use of the term diaspora beyond the plight of the Jews, it came to refer to other groups who experience displacement or even object such as work of art and exchanged products ... the concept diaspora is applied to migrants and their following generation. This approach is often applied by policy makers, international organizations and academic journals. Today the literature on the engagement of diaspora on development processes has expanded to a great extent.

Robin Cohen's book, *Global Diasporas: An introduction* (2008), gives a global perspective on the subject of the diaspora. Cohen (2008:161) summarises the concept of diaspora into nine features:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically;
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland;

4. An idealisation of the supposed ancestral home;
5. A return movement or at least a continuing connection;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time;
7. A troubled relationship with host societies;
8. A sense of co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries; and
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host societies.

Cohen's explanation of diaspora includes a living homeland and a collective memory of shared history, culture and social interrelationships. For Cohen, diaspora, refers to the experience of losing a home while still feeling connected to that home through memories and feelings of belonging to a homeland in the past. It implies being dispersed by personal choice or by force and resistance.

Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments (2003) edited by Monika Fludernik contains essays on the subject of the "new" diaspora. A book by Paul Gilroy called *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness* (1993) is an exploration of the African Diaspora which was the result of the slave trade (for a sense of the contrasting approaches see Cohen 2008; Safran 1999). Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, a Malawian literary critic contributed to the debates on diasporism, and, according to Bakewell (2008):

Zeleza categorises African diasporas by the location of their dispersal, identifying four different groups: Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Atlantic and intra-Africa. He further breaks down the intra-African category to five sub-groups with examples: the trading diasporas (the Hausa and Dioula in western Africa); the slave diasporas (West

Africans in North Africa and East Africans on the Indian Ocean islands); the conquest diasporas (the Nguni in southern Africa); the refugee diasporas (for example, from the Yoruba wars of the early nineteenth century); the pastoral diasporas (the Fulani and Somali in the Sahelian zones of western and eastern Africa).

A paper by Fernando Galvan called *Metaphors of diaspora: English literature at the turn of the century* (1999) distinguishes three different metaphorical constructions of diaspora, the metaphor of the imaginary homelands created by immigrant writers, the metaphor of the Black Atlantic as a space occupied by those who are part of the diaspora and the metaphor of the journey as an intrinsic element of diaspora (Galvan 1999:113). The growth of the use of the concept of diaspora was criticised in 2005 by the UCLA sociologist, Rogers Brubaker, in his paper titled “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora” where he argues that “the universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora” (2005:3).

Diaspora, as defined by Galvan above (1999:113), opened Diaspora as the metaphor of the movement and spreading of the cultural practices of Xhosa-speaking people of the Eastern Cape Province by means of mediation. The practical component of this dissertation explores this concept of a mediator through the use of the technique of layering and *isishweshwe* fabric.

1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One presents a brief explanation of theoretical, conceptual, and provides the structure of the research project. It also creates a path within adjusted academic research perimeters. This chapter defines the objectives of the research, introduces a theoretical framework on diaspora, states the

role of the selected installation artist and briefly describes the autoethnographic methodology of the study.

Chapter Two: The interrelationship between diaspora, identity, culture, and Land and Home

Chapter Two unpacks diaspora and its interrelationship with identity, culture, narrative, Land and Home. These key concepts will be examined as part of contemporary society and in relation to the cultural context of the Xhosa-speaking people. Since diaspora has more to do with the attributes of movement and loss of identity, the key concepts are connected by Land and Home where the physical and spiritual relationship between humans and their environment is evident. Although diaspora presumes a movement away from Land and Home, here it will be approached from a perspective that diasporic experiences can occur at home because they can be a crossing-over of cultures, a spreading of cultures and an interconnectedness of identity in the globalised world. This view is linked with Buber's relational experience of *I-Thou* in which Buber declares the need for a more subjective relationship between humans and the rest of creation. Also, the relationship between humans in relation to their cultures by means of mirror neurons is explored here.

The objective of Chapter Two is to set signifiers to be used as guidelines for the construction of my practical work, to provide insights towards these key concepts and inform the visual comparative analysis of the selected installation.

Chapter Three: Christianity and ancestral tradition in contemporary visual art

Chapter Three reflects on Buber's philosophy of *I-Thou* relational experience in relation to the signifiers that were established in Chapter Two. It focuses on comparative visual analyses of installation artworks by Nicholas Hlobo and Bill Viola against the Xhosa cultural background. Once these installation artworks are situated and aligned with ancestral worship as the Xhosa cultural practice, a bio-cultural approach is adopted to analyse this relationship as an altar or mediator, which together with *Isivivane* can be identified as a symbol of a national altar. This situates the works of these artists as evidence of the interconnectedness and the overlapping of humans and their activities through the universal relationship of *I-Thou*.

Chapter Four: Ephemeral identities

Chapter Four is the practical aspect of this investigation that was informed by the set of signifiers that were established in Chapters Two and Three. This is based on human interconnectedness through a universal relationship which is described by Martin Buber as and *I-Thou* relational experience. Buber's *I-Thou* relationship embraces the notion of interconnectedness through an unbound relationship. This kind of relationship recognises everything as part of being who we strive to become. It is a relationship that opens the ancestors to become more than just a part of memory for Xhosa people but as a thread that weaves the culture together.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Chapter Five presents a report of whether the objectives were valid giving reasons for this decision. The conclusions will present answers (if they exist) and recommendations. This chapter also resolves whether the common elements of Xhosa ancestral tradition that can be found in both Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo's work, framed by Buber's concept of I AND THOU, exhibit interconnectedness through experiences of cultural transience.

The additional essay in the Artist Catalogue: MY INSTALLATION ART WORK

The chapter initially planned about my own work is included as an artist essay in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition. The essay presents my body of work that unpacks culture as a spreading entity and subliminal confinement normalised through the presentation of an installation that consists of paintings, a goat sculpture and a divine coat made with plastic and *ishweshwe* fabric. For clarity and technical reasons, I chose to discuss my practical work in the exhibition catalogue rather than including the discussion as a chapter in this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIASPORA, IDENTITY, CULTURE, NARRATIVE AND LAND AND HOME

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the interrelationship between diaspora, identity, culture, narrative, and Land and Home is investigated as they are relevant to contemporary society and visual art. The way these key concepts intersect in society, in Xhosa cultural practices and in contemporary art, will provide a framework for the study of their interconnectedness. This interconnectedness finds its outlet by means of a mediator which, in this case, is Martin Buber's theory of the *I-Thou* relational experience.

In this study, the term "diaspora" is used as a metaphor for the interconnection of cultures through human relationships. The investigation begins by defining and investigating the term diaspora followed by the explanation of key terms, namely, Identity, Culture, Narrative, Land and Home.

The key terms will then be framed against the Xhosa cultural background and conclusions will be drawn based on the interrelationship between, and overlapping of these terms. Buber's *I-Thou* relational experience and theoretical framework is then applied to this interrelationship, touching on aspects of neuroscience such as mirror neurons. A bio-cultural approach is later used to further understand the nature of human interconnection through relational experience.

2.2 DIASPORA

Dislocation can manifest itself in many ways. It can be psychological, social, historical, cultural or a combination of these factors. People, who are in the diaspora, might be faced with feelings of dislocation, and forced,

therefore, to adapt to their new circumstances. In some cases, people might want to arbitrarily belong to a group by taking into the account the attractiveness and the face value of such a group. Or they might chose to examine their cultural and historical origins in the hope that this will help them to determine their group allegiance and show them where they belong. Many people feel fragmented in their identity and find it hard to make choices about realising themselves. It is this uncertainty that crowds my own socio-political memory and my ancestral geographical space so that I regard the diaspora as a condition of dislocation that children can be born into. Families relocate in search of better jobs, to stay with relatives abroad, to study abroad or are forced to leave and stay away from their homelands for social, political and personal reasons. A diasporic experience has become a part of adapting in multicultural contemporary societies in this global world we live in.

According to Akhtar ([sa]), diaspora is

an emotional and psychological state of (a) strutting between two geographical and cultural states (b) struggling between regression and progression, dislocation and then, relocation⁵.

Diaspora refers to the collective experience of groups that have dispersed into foreign regions (Cheyette, 2003:293; Fludernik 2003:xii) where collective memory plays a significant role in shaping identity. This means that the belief systems, the politics of identity, history, geography and the behaviour of these groups come from the same source. Diaspora suggests the movement of cultures and the creation of a hybrid culture that lies

⁵ <http://www.stephengillcriticism.info/Nilofar%20Akhtar%20.htm>

between an existing culture and the new culture. This multiplicity of cultural spaces underpins socio-psychological dislocation in these societies. South Africa is an example of such a multicultural society where traditional cultures are threatened by the introduction of new cultures.

With the spread of cultures and people moving away from their homelands for many different reasons, Fludernik (2003:xvi) explains that it is possible to feel at home while being physically away from home because

in present-day diasporas, one encounters utopian vision ... that promise [of] peaceful existence in a tolerant society, in which one's collective identity can be cherished and preserved despite physical distance from the homeland.

It is generally assumed⁶ that as people and their cultures move, the hosting culture of the place of arrival is influenced by the new culture in its midst, and vice versa. One of the responses of the hosting culture to such "infiltrations" can be defensiveness, aggression and resistance to accommodating the arriving culture. This crossing over of cultures is experienced by both the local and the foreign groups. However, the issues of xenophobia are peripheral to this study as its main focus is on spread of cultures and not on violent responses to "in-between" cultures. This research investigates the spread of cultures and uses the findings to create my practical work component.

Uma Parameswara, in her essay entitled *Dispelling the spells of memory:*

⁶ History is full of examples how unpredictable cultures can be in influencing and "conquering" each other. For example, one famous case is the battles that took place in the Eastern Cape as resistance against Boer and British people known as the Frontier Wars. To engage in a war for one hundred years changes enemies culture, economy and infrastructure. The battle over land is still happening today and the issue is very complex (Conquest of the Easter Cape 1779-1878 [sa]).

Another approach to reading yesterdays (2003: xi), argues that

Exile, Memory, and Desire are concepts which have been dealt with in different ways in each of the three eras—the colonial, the postcolonial, and the present (what I call the diasporic) age.

In Parameswara's opinion, the diaspora is a stage or a period that will eventually change over time and can also be a frozen moment in history. Parameswara treats diaspora as an expiring matter, something with a beginning and an end while, for Fludernik, the concept of diaspora evokes connotations of memory, nostalgia and dislocation or dispersion.

According to Cheyette (2003:48), the term "diaspora" has effectively reverted to its original etymology indicating "a universalized state of homelessness that is at the heart of the new gospel of postmodern and postcolonial theory". The idea of homelessness brings a sense of discomfort, dislocation, loss of family, loss of security and loss of personal identity. This sense of homelessness can also be experienced while still located in the homeland. For this research, the diaspora will be regarded as subjects dispersed in space, occupying the same space but disconnected and connected at the same time. The physical scattering or dispersion of cultural influences will be the foundation of my practical work for this study. I use *ishweshwe* fabric (fig 2) and its symbolic state as a metaphor for dispersed condition; it also addresses the meanings of the fabric in the Xhosa culture. For example, it is used in wedding ceremonies where a bride, when she wears *ishweshwe* garments, becomes *makoti*. This means that now she belongs to a new family and demarcates the beginning of a new life. The metaphor of this particular Xhosa ritual is suitable for my own works about personal transformation.

Cheyette (2003:293) argues that "diaspora identities are understood as

performatively constructed rather than as stable, fixed and rooted entities". Therefore, a diaspora identity changes when it arrives in a new space or resists the host culture. According to Cheyette (2003:288),

diasporic cultures and "identities" help us to better understand a contemporary world-system and its ramifications which so far have mostly been described with reference to economics and communications technology.

I approach diaspora as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of cultures, people and societies in an attempt to understand the contemporary world. This interest in what connects people rather than what divides them is highlighted by Cheyette (2003:288) who says that

the study of diaspora cultures enacts a necessary shift from essentialist conceptions of identity to a dynamic exchange between people and cultures, moreover, it acknowledges the hybridity, contingency and mixing of contemporary identities, cultures and societies.

Diaspora is viewed here as a framework which can be used to study the concept of belonging, identity, home and cultural exchange in the globalised world. The experience of encountering other cultures in the diaspora forces the arriving culture to adapt and change. This process of the meeting of cultures can result in some cultures losing their centre and becoming weaker. When a physical dislocation occurs due to a diasporic experience, on a deeper psychological level, the loss of the homeland could mean a loss of symbolic interaction with the world and could result in an identity crisis since identity is partly constructed by our surroundings.

My argument is that every society across the world could be considered as being in a diaspora because it is rare to find a society that is still located in its place of origin since the recording of its history. Even traditional

societies that are still practicing traditional cultures have been exposed to other cultures' clothing, language and customs. Therefore, diaspora can be a symbol of interconnectedness, interrelationships and enculturation.

Theoretical frameworks applied to the phenomenon of diaspora always look at the present issues and conditions of the diaspora. The effects that manifest in the lives of people in the diaspora after dislocation become the focal point of academic discourse where the nature of the diaspora has been defined as beginning only after people experience dislocation, but, according to Harutyunyan (2012:3),

where and how these people lived before actual migration to their current place of residence and, most importantly, what cultural baggage (symbolic or otherwise) they continue to bring with them from their countries of (re-) migration to a concrete local community should also be considered when investigating the Diaspora.

Harutyunyan's approach to the diaspora allows the past to be acknowledged as a carrier of the diaspora's fragments of identity and culture that could assist with the construction of the new identity in a changing space. Harutyunyan (2012:12) further argues that understanding contemporary diasporas is done through:

- a) juxtaposing the concepts of local community space vs. transnational/global diaspora space;
- b) exploring the local community from the perspective of cultural representations and beyond an ethnic umbrella;
- c) symbolically returning to the *emotional places* of life before migration and re-migration, which, in most cases, does not match the publicly acknowledged *homeland*.

This perspective on diasporas acknowledges the relationships that people

have with their surroundings, before relocation and after relocation. By acknowledging other cultures while still being attached to one's own culture, John Peffer (2005:341) states that

peoples in diaspora become like signs of some elsewhere and some other time for the mainstream culture in the "host's" country. As a result they too, in a sense, misrepresent the homeland as a mythic and homogenous locale, lost in time. Nostalgia for this homeland-made mythic, and the experience of displacement within the host culture, can be a powerful nexus for personal and collective identity.

Peffer views diaspora as a representation of a shift in time between now, the past and future that can be detrimental to collective identity because people exist on different time frames, psychological and demographic. This will be reflected on how they view themselves and how they interact with other cultures. If the diaspora can be viewed as a set of signs, as stated by Peffer, it can be assumed that some signs carry a particular culture with it, therefore it becomes moving evidence of that particular culture's existence. According to Zeleza (2010:5),

Diasporas emerge out of processes involving movement, migration from a "here" to a "there", from a homeland, real or imagined, to a hostland, loved or hated. But the relationship between dispersal and diasporization is complicated, for dispersed people can "return" or "disappear" through assimilation. In short, diasporas are born, breed, and can die, and they even can undergo reincarnation or resurrection in future generations. Movements can be short, circulatory and permanent, generational and transgenerational in their longevity.

Here, diaspora emerges from a shift in time by imagining or physical movement from one place to another while experiencing complications in assimilation with the new culture. This assimilation to a different cultural context speaks to the integration of rituals and belief systems such as

Christianity and *isishweshwe* fabric (fig 2) to the Xhosa culture and can also be evident when artworks are moved from one exhibition to another. The artwork may come from a different cultural context to a new one that might accept it or reject it. Also the artwork influences and changes the history of the people accepting or rejecting it. Peffer (2005:339) proposes

a consideration of all African art from the perspective of diaspora, as objects in motion, and as objects that articulate between and across disparate cultural histories and the cultural zones of others.

These artworks, as Peffer explains, become signs of the diaspora as they are also considered objects in the Diaspora. As stated above by Zeleza, "Diaspora emerges out of processes involving movement" Zeleza (2010:5) , artworks therefore, can be considered a sign of diaspora because they also move from city to city by exhibitions or collectors.

Peffer further writes that artworks can be viewed "as surrogate bodies, like persons with biographies" (2005:340). Peffer deals with the fact that artworks also have a culture and a history which can be compared to people from many different cultural contexts and can experience challenges of rejection, misconception and vanishing.

Isishweshwe (figure 1) symbolically represents trajectories of cultural influences and points of significance in the formation of cultural identity. (WRITE TWO SENTENCES ABOUT HISTORY OF ISHWESHWE FABRIC – INTRODUCE IT). The use of *ishweshwe* fabric (figure 2) and the layering technique for this study signifies the idea that life is all about trajectories, it is about moments that impact our lives positively or negatively and sometimes we are caught up in these moments we can or cannot change. Therefore, to move out of these trajectories is healthy. Similar to culture, it needs to change otherwise, if it remains in one place, it poses a threat to

itself like *isishweshwe* fabric trajectory that landed on the culture of the Xhosa people. Therefore, to follow trajectories of a culture is to follow the steps of “becoming” something, whether it is an artwork or a person’s identity. *Isishweshwe* symbolically represents trajectories of life, identity and culture.

The movement of artworks or people results in a dislocation of context as old meanings disappear and new meaning is gained through new experiences. In order to remember the old meaning, Peffer (2005:342) says that

attention to the diasporic nature of the processes of cultural decontextualisation and revaluation gives life back to the objects, not in the sense of retrieving a holistic anthropology of original context, but rather as a means to reassert the absent history part of African Art History and explore the origin as a geographically and semantically mobile focal point.

Peffer talks about the diasporic nature of African artworks and his perspective of studying the point of origin and of relocation is similar to that argued by Harutyunyan above. If diaspora is approached by exploring the point of origin, “the object can be understood as an encounter at any given moment, and if tracked over time the same object can represent a history of encounters” (Peffer 2005:342). Diaspora can therefore be a sign of encounters that may change our lives as we come across different cultures in our day-to-day interactions. Diaspora is about the experience of losing home while still feeling connected to home through memories, feelings of belonging to a homeland in the past and cultural dislocation. This experience can have both positive and negative effects in identity construction, therefore, in order to understand these effects, we need to investigate the nature of identity formation.

2.3 IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND DEFINITION

Identity is one of the key concepts, namely, diaspora, culture, narrative and Land and Home that form part of this investigation. The interrelationship between the key concepts can be clarified once the nature of identity is understood.

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2006 sv 'identity'), identity is "the fact of being who or what a person or thing is; the characteristics determining this". Identity is made up of the attributes of a person by indicating particular characteristics, namely, behaviour, sense of belonging, sense of self, emotions, physical body and psychological qualities. These attributes are also included in the nature of the phenomenon of the diaspora and introduces it as a common state of mind and a social phenomenon. Diaspora has become a new way of looking at contemporary identity construction. Bhatia (2008: 302) notes that

the formation of diaspora cultures as transcending space and time has led to the creation of identities that are often characterized as multiple, fractured, dual, shifting, and hybridized.

Due to the spread of the diaspora, identity is constructed under various cultural contexts which have resulted in identity transformation through cultural interactions. Wenjing (2005: 402) states that

in the field of communication, there is increasing attention paid to the fact that identities are not fixed and stable but are, rather, constituted and reproduced within the process of communication and everyday interaction.

People in the diaspora often look back to the past to define themselves. This means that the identity of a diaspora before dislocation becomes a sign for that diaspora to identify with, even in places of dislocation. On the

other hand, Wenjing (2005: 397) believes that “instead of being fixed in the memory of the past, identities come from transformation”, meaning that identity is constructed through change rather than history. Transformation comes through encounters and experiences in daily life and become part of memory and the past, denying the opinion of Wenjing that the past does not define identity. Identity, therefore, is bound by geographical boundaries of time and place.

I would summarise the issue of Identity to be constructed in the following ways:

- Identity as a social construct.
- Identity as subject matter in contemporary visual art.
- Identity construction through interaction with the world.
- Identity is connected to place.
- Identity is constructed through narratives.
- Identity is constructed through Land and Home.

2.3.1 Identity as a social construct

Identity can be constructed as a means of affiliation with certain groups of people in society. Fearon (1999:2) explains that identity is used in two ways, which may be termed social and personal. In the social sense, an identity refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the personal sense, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable.

If identity is constructed as means of social affiliation, it can result in situations such as racism, xenophobic attacks, marginalisation and being treated as “the other”. Identity construction is driven by socio-political conditions such as forced removals in South Africa under the apartheid government.

Fearron (1999:17) distinguishes between two types of identities which are role identities and type identities. He explains that:

role identities refer to labels applied to people who are expected or obligated to perform some set of actions, behaviors, routines, or functions in particular situations ... Type identities refer to labels applied to persons who share or are thought to share some characteristic or characteristics, in appearance, behavioral traits, beliefs, attitudes, values, skills.

Examples of role identities are, for instance, artists whose role is to create art or police officers whose role is to stop crime and protect communities. Type identities can be established by appearances and characteristics such as, for instance, Rastafarians who have a very specific appearance with dreadlocks and wear black, gold and green hats.

2.3.2 Identity as subject matter in contemporary visual art

Dowling (2011:1) states that

for centuries artists have expressed their personal or projected identity of self and society through the means of visual representation using a vast array of mediums and techniques. Many artists utilize the theme of identity consciously in their art, creating a visual self-examination of the past, present and future. While other artists may unconsciously incorporate personal matters and experiences within their art.

Identity has been explored by contemporary visual artists in their artworks

and can be constructed through encounters with these artworks. The theme of identity has been a subject for many contemporary South African artists such as Nicholas Hlobo who “has engaged in richly enigmatic conversations with his audience that explore themes of sexual and cultural identity via the suggestiveness of materiality that compose his evocative artworks” (Murinik 2013). Nicholas Hlobo uses various materials that are significant to create his identity. Hlobo’s use of materials bridges the gap between different cultures while, at the same time, he uses his own culture as a point of reference.



Figure 3 Nicholas Hlobo, *Inkwili* (detail of work). Rubber inner tubes, ribbon, hose pipe and packaging material. 300x1200x400cm, site-specific.



Figure 4 Nicholas Hlobo, *Umtya nethunga*, (2005). Rubber inner tubes, bink ribbon, chain, plastic pipe, a wooden stick, steel rope. 175x270x220cm. UNISA Art Gallery



Figure 5 Nicholas Hlobo, *Ndize*, 2010. Wood, rubber, leather, steel 44 kilometres of dyed lint. National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design

Hlobo's use of materials and his expression of creative ideas and identity issues is described by Murinik (2013):

The artist's now-signature eclectic pairings of rubber inner tubes, ribbon, lace, leather, silicon, organza and satin, as well as occasional found props, have come to represent a growing visual vocabulary of the artist's concerns. With such materials and their corresponding forms, Hlobo conjures amorphous but allusive imagery redolent of the particular vernaculars of fetishized sexual clothing and objects, of queer dress codes and of Xhosa cultural references⁷.

Hlobo uses materials in a metaphoric way, like many other artists. His use of materials and cross-cultural subject matter explores his Xhosa cultural background and his present identity of being a gay Xhosa visual artist in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The materials used by an artist can mediate between the artist and society

⁷ <http://kaleidoscope-press.com/issue-contents/nicholas-hlobo/>

because Viola's installation work suggests that art and the use of materials by the artist can evoke forgotten experiences, encounters and memories that have shaped who we are and how we change with time. Dowling (2011:5) states that

reaching a deeper understanding of self directly correlates to the construction of identity. Every piece of artwork provides a new canvas, so to speak, to create depth and breadth to an artist's personal character, in turn, constructing identity. This notion can be expanded beyond self to include culture, race, gender and religion.

Hlobo's performance art explores issues of identity while making reference to cultural and social identity constructions and is described by Murinik (2013):

In his earliest performances, *Igqirhalendlela* (2005–06), Hlobo donned a worn-leather biker's jacket modified with a large, rubber hump. With the jacket, Hlobo wore a blue ruffled blouse, a skirt made from old neckties and a pair of hand-stitched rubber boots. Invoking the African dung beetle, Hlobo has written that the title of the work "derived from the Xhosa choral song *Igqirha lendlela nguqongqothwane*. This means that the dung beetle is the doctor of the road ... They are not intimidated by having to move things larger than their bodies." Wearing this dramatic hump in the performances, then, seems to infer that whatever baggage you're carrying could well be an impediment along your journey to self-realization⁸.

In this artwork, not only does Hlobo explore issues of personal identity based only on Xhosa culture and social identity construction, but he also touches on issues that are universal. He uses material objects from different cultures such as the biker's jacket that belongs to the culture of bikers, but is used here as part of a dialogue with another culture.

⁸ <http://kaleidoscope-press.com/issue-contents/nicholas-hlobo/>

According to Dowling (2011:1),

constructing identity literally involves life experiences, relationships and connections, a solid mental or emotional stamp on a human. Constructing identity figuratively involves metaphorical or symbolical representation of thought or emotions in an expressive way, creating a conceptual visual representation.

Hlobo uses materials in layers that metaphorically create the identity of the artwork. These layers symbolise encounters and experiences that construct his identity.

2.3.3 Identity construction through interaction with the world

Identity can be constructed through our interaction with the world through symbols and meanings. Identity construction has become a contractor for traditional cultures because of globalisation. According to Bornman (2003:24),

the term globalisation refers to the transformation of temporal and spatial limitations, that is, the shrinking of distance due to the dramatic reduction in the time needed to bridge spatial differences which has, in turn, resulted in the gradual integration of political, economic and social space across national borders.

Globalisation has transformed traditional cultures that are no longer limited by time and space from the rest of the world. Interaction with the globalised world has become detrimental to the traditional identity construction as cited by Bornman (2003:27) who says that:

circumstances in the current world have not only changed the processes of identity formation, but have added new dimensions to both personal and collective identity. Furthermore, whereas the term identity implies continuity, that is, a solid basis in which people anchor themselves, the rapid changes that characterise the age of

globalisation, eroded most of the bases on which people used to anchor their identity. The age-old “problem of identity” has thus changed its shape and content.

El-Ojeili and Hayden (2006:150) suggest that “we seem to have moved a long way from the orthodox Marxian assumption that class provides the basic coordinates of identity” and that “Identity now seems very unstable and fractured, involving numerous shifting factors”. Identity is no longer constructed only by the limits of social class but can also be formed through other outlets offered by globalisation as Bornman (2003:29) explains:

the forces associated with identity formation are thus no longer restricted to the local space, but have their origin on different levels varying from the local to the global. Individuals’ identities have consequently become a complex mixture of both local and global elements.

It is evident that globalisation has created multicultural societies across the world, making identity formation and identity search difficult to maintain if it is based on only local ideas because

human’s frantic search for identity in the current age cannot be regarded as a residue of pre-modern and pre-globalisation times. It is a side-effect and by-product of the combination of globalising, localising and individualising forces themselves and their concomitant tensions (Bornman 2003:44).

Bornman suggests that the formation of identity cannot be limited to the past and that globalisation and the stresses that it brings contribute to this search. El-Ojeili and Hayden cite this as a negative because “the problem with this, for critical theorists, is the shallowness, in authenticity, conformism, atomisation, and depoliticisation that this tendency is thought to bring” (El-Ojeili & Hayden 2006:152). This is detrimental to the

formation of identity because it causes rootlessness and dislocation which could lead to confirmative assimilation.

2.3.4 Identity is connected to place

According to Lappegard (2008:1), “identity manifests itself on many levels, one of which is place”. People’s identity is connected to the place they come from because people make a mark on the places they occupy. For example, graffiti artists put their mark or “tags” on walls in the streets where they live. In graffiti art, a tag is a signature or a nickname done in a stylised manner which becomes a personal sign that a graffiti artist writes everywhere he or she goes. Therefore, when graffiti artists put their tags on objects in places they have been, they are placing their identity on that place because “people affect places, and places (and the way places are affected) influence how people see themselves” (Lappegard 2008:2) and are seen by others. This relationship between the environment and identity, is called “place-identity” which

has become popular and has clearly filled a gap in environmental theory and research. The term is still used in the literature to emphasise the physical environment’s impact on identity, referring to a high degree of “place attachment”.

Naturally children are born and grow up in environments they do not personally choose, eventually assuming identity that is influenced by parents’ belief systems. Being born under a particular family through means of natural selection attachment to family and place called home is normal. But because people change places and environment also changes, identity is also bound to change. Some elements of culture and tradition can be preserved and some can be changed according to the person’s new environment (Lappegard 2008:8).

An interaction between people and place is able to construct meanings

based on personal memories and historic events. The attachments made to a place can provide a basis for narratives of the past because according to Fludernik “identity operates through narratives, and narratives need to start in the past and piece its way to a future that embraces and resolves the discrepancies between past and present (2003:xxix).

Therefore, it can be concluded that identity can be formed through past attachments to places that remain nothing but a memory and a narrative that connects the place to the people in the past, the present and the future. These personal memories can also consist of cultural rituals and customs, burials of the ancestors, significant historic events, whether social or political, and artworks.

Without the narratives of the past, a change in place can be problematic for identity formation, as Hall (1989:222) argues that

identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.

Hall explains that identity is not fixed but instead, by its nature, is a shifting phenomenon that depends on a cultural context and spreads in time and space whether by assimilation or resistance.

To understand the connections between diaspora and identity, we have to define culture in the context of diaspora as a metaphor for belonging and identity. To understand how diaspora can be viewed as a metaphor, we have to compare its nature with the nature of narratives. Narratives are one of the key concepts of identity formation and will be discussed after the following definition of culture.

2.4 CULTURAL IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION

In this part of the research, the theoretical background of the concept of culture, its definition and its interrelationship with other key concepts, namely, identity, narrative and Land and Home will be investigated as key concepts to understanding the nature of dislocation. The investigation seeks to see how culture is constructed and how these are affected by the manifestation of dislocation experiences in present day society and how this could affect identity formation. This is done in an attempt to establish how the construction of culture is affected by dislocation and how this could have an impact on contemporary cultural identity. Culture is a common factor that interlinks Land and Home, identity, and narrative, therefore it is impossible to investigate culture without establishing links between these key concepts.

For us to understand the position in which culture unfolds and identity negotiates its place in the world where, according to Lewis (2002:15),

[a]n individual human subject may participate in many different cultures simultaneously. Each of the cultures may have its own system of meanings which articulates itself through norms and values, beliefs, political ideas, rituals (repeated behaviors), clothing style, vocabulary, status position, and so on.

This means culture is wired in humans as a means of living and relating to the world in its diversity and constitutes the formation of identity while it serves as a mediator between the human subject and the world.

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2006 sv 'culture'), culture is 1) "the arts and other manifestations of human achievement regarded collectively" and 2) "the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society". This definition of culture carries distinct attributes of

the nature of culture, as a collective manifestation. Asante (1993:25) defines culture as “a product of historical processes which lead to self-conscious recognition of the defining characteristics in the social, political, and economic arenas”. Culture is a carrier of our past and the maker of our future. In other words, the world is a vast complex space where a person could get lost like the ship without a compass in the ocean of global cultural knowledge.

Cultures serve as a form of systems of navigation and mediation as we strive to interact with and make meaning of the world. Asante (1993:26) says that “culture has the ability to assemble behaviors, symbols, customs, motifs, moods, and icons into a single comprehensive affirming presence”. This means that culture contributes to the making of meaning and mediates between people of different cultures.

Some aspects of culture can be constructed through memory and place where we attach ourselves by giving buildings and streets the names of our ancestors. Isivivane at the center of Freedom Park in South Africa is an example of a collective remembering by interaction with the land, objects, clothes, other people and how we are interconnected through these interactions.

Thiong’O (1993a:56-57) compares culture to a flower by saying that

culture has rightly been said to be to society what a flower is to a plant. What is important about the flower is not just its beauty. A flower is the carrier of the seeds for new plants, the bearer of the future of that species of plants.

In a same sense, a culture can be regarded as the carrier of a particular person who believes in and practices the rituals of that culture. It spreads and links people of different societies in their diversity. It tells us what it

means to be Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho or Pedi, how we are all connected to the earth and to spiritual forces, how we slaughter and sacrifice, what we wear and why. The belief in omens, the symbolism of colours, water as a metaphor, mourning for the dead, celebration of birth, identity and the interpretation of dreams are things that are determined by culture. Therefore, to lose a culture is to lose a sense of connection to traditional meaning. Boyd (2005b:2) states that

some anthropologists have become interested in the effects of culture—especially the effects of technologically advanced modern culture—on the built-in biological capacities and limitations of human kind.

This creates a dialogue between culture and biology that could establish a different perspective similar to the questions that Boyd (2005b:2) poses which are:

How, for example, has the growth of multicultural communities over the last past few years affected human biology and its evolvement?
How does an organism that is wired to adapt in environments by means of culture survive in the world of fast produced cultures?

These questions, explore the nature of human interaction, adaptation and the role culture plays on human biology regarding abilities such as mirror neurons.

Culture develops within the process of a people wrestling with their natural and social environment. They struggle with nature. They struggle with one another. They evolve a way of life embodied in their institutions and certain practices. Culture becomes the carrier of their moral, aesthetic and ethical values (Thiongo'O. 1993:27).

South Africa is a good example of a place where multiculturalism is part of the unity in diversity. As it has been cited in section 2.3, individuality can

form part of identity formation and interconnectedness also forms a big part of identity formation through culture because “the environment influences the cultural growth and thinking of any given group. Every human person is a cultural agent” (Lewis 2002:1). The environment has become an outlet for the human connection with nature through biology and culture, as Spiro (1994: 5) says that “cultures vary across space and time, and since behavior is culturally variable, the inference that man’s nature is similarly culturally variable seemed irrefutable”. Therefore, it can be difficult to separate the human subject from his/her culture.

Carver (2007:37-38) states that

studies of indigenous peoples are notorious for their methodological problems, usually grounded in Eurocentric ideas of what constitutes a culture or cultural advancement ... Xhosa is principally a linguistic term rather than an ethnic term, but there is a correlation between the customs and traditions of these linguistically linked peoples that allows one to recognize the Xhosa as a distinct indigenous people.

A brief background on the culture of the Xhosa people explains the installation artworks of Viola and Hlobo in the context of the Xhosa belief system and will provide a backdrop for the symbolism and metaphors that can be traced in these installation artworks because, according to Lewis (2002:5), “culture is constructed out of the trait of mediation, though it is also the fundamental resource for the formation of those mediations”. It is one of these reasons why I adopted auto-ethnography as a research method because it acknowledges the researcher as a source from which culture is mediated and as a mediator of that culture.

The comparative analysis explores the concept of an altar as a mediator and as a common trait that connects the two installation artworks against

a backdrop of Xhosa cultural practice and belief systems. Xhosa people's belief in ancestors incorporates symbolic rituals and sacrifices that are mostly performed in their home grounds, whether by burial of the deceased or ritual performed inside a kraal. This creates a profound interconnection between the people and their environment or Land and Home as well as a layer of cultural heritage and personal belonging.

This is why people who have lost their Land and Home also lose their sense of belonging, their identity and their heritage. The cultural practices of the Xhosa people were threatened because

conversion to Christianity resulted in the development of a major cleavage in Cape Nguni [Xhosa] society, which was to last up until the 1950s, between the so-called "School" people and "Red" traditionalists ... The "School" people adopted a distinctive style of dress and evolved cultural traditions which centred on church and school. Traditionalists were described as "Red" [amaqaba] because of their practice of smearing red clay on their face and bodies. Rejecting both the church and Western education as foreign introduction, the traditionalists continued to perform time-honoured rituals centring around the spirits of ancestors (Hirst 1998:12-15).

Ntsikana, known as a Xhosa prophet, a composer of hymns, a preacher of the Christian Gospel and a translator of the Scriptures to vernacular (Booi 2008:7), became a symbol of this cultural division because he was amongst the first Xhosa-speakers to convert to Christianity. Ntsikana symbolises the transformation from belonging to a group of "Red" people to belong to a group of "School" people. He washed off his red body paint in a river, as a sign of renouncing the old ways and adopted the new ways of Christianity. Booi (2008: 11) explains this by saying that

the symbolic washing away of red ochre was akin to washing away a substance which had ingrained itself into the practitioner's skin and

blood and become part of the believer's systems. Red ochre represents Xhosa culture, traditions and indigenous belief systems.

Body smearing with clay is symbolic in Xhosa tradition because

after they have undergone circumcision, Xhosa male initiates (abakhwetha) are secluded in the bush in temporary shelters. At this stage, they rub white clay (ifutha) on their faces and bodies. While in seclusion, the initiates must abstain (ukuzila) ... and they are considered to be in the care of the ancestors (Hirst 1998:12).

This shows that it is in the culture of the Xhosa people to believe in a strong connection between the people and the ancestors.

Carver (2007:39) describes the way that traditional Xhosa people live:

Xhosa society is based on family units, largely hierarchical, and male dominated. This theme is reflected in all aspects of traditional Xhosa society, including the organization of traditional homesteads, the structure of chiefdoms, marriage customs, reverence and interaction with ancestors, and rituals such as circumcision, that mark transition from one stage of life to another.

Assimilation of Xhosa metaphors into Christianity can be highlighted as Hirst reveals that

probably one of the oldest of these metaphors used for the ancestors is wind (umoya), a term which was adopted by the missionaries for the Holy Spirit and has been in Xhosa translations of the Bible ever since (1998:32).

Bamford (2006:96) argues that

metaphors of unity are not merely metaphors; they can also render accessible the necessary intellectual space in which to reflect upon and reconstitute the socio-cultural environment that we inhabit.

Bamford suggests that, through metaphors, it becomes possible to relook

at reality and be able to adjust and adapt new ways of living while embracing interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is practiced in Xhosa traditional life throughout the stages of life as Hirst (1998:32) explains:

quite apart from illness and misfortune, traditional rituals (amasiko) are performed at virtually every stage of the life-cycle, from birth through puberty, marriage and menopause to death.

The interrelationship between the Xhosa people and their ancestors is significant in their traditions and customs because the ancestors are believed to be involved in every aspect of life.

2.5 NARRATIVE

In many different cultures across the world, telling stories or narrating has been used as a form of entertainment and of enculturation. In the Xhosa and other African cultures, storytelling was done around the fire at night normally by a grandmother to bind the family or community. Through narratives, cultural, historical and social events are intertwined to form a story that tells the origin stories of the people, their spiritual beliefs and their myths. Gee writes in his book about the Ghanaian sculptor, El Anatsui, called *El Anatsui: When I last wrote to you about Africa* (2011) that

in many cultures, storytelling serves a means of entertainment, education, and cultural preservation. One of the most popular times for storytelling is after the sun has set and the day's work has been finished. Among the Limba, an ethnic group from Sierra Leone, a full moon is seen as the optimum opportunity for storytelling, because people go to bed later during this time.

With the ability to spread and act as a preserver of cultures, storytelling or narratives can be compared to the diaspora because both the diaspora and

the narratives contain fragments of other peoples' cultures. They record human beings and their interactions and relationships with nature and with one another.

According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2006 sv 'narrative'), "narrative" means "a spoken or written account of connected events; a story; the narrated part of a literary work, as distinct from dialogue. The practice or art of telling stories".

A narrative is a sequence of events and scenarios which construct meaning. Narratives transform over time as they carry fragments of the past and stories of the culture of the people at their place of origin or in the diaspora. A narrative is created by connecting elements such as characters, language, nature, animals, a plot, sound and action, to name a few.

Narrative need not involve only language,

it can operate through modes like mime, still pictures, shadow-puppets, or silent movies. It need not be *restricted* to language, and often gains impact through enactment or the emotional focusing that music offers in dance, theater, opera, or film, or the visual focus in stage lighting, comics, or film (Boyd 2005b:159).

Narratives therefore transcend the boundaries of language and time. They record memories of the past, the present and possibly the future because "individuals employ narrative processing as a means to create a life story" (Thomas 2009:18). Aristotle, "the first great analyst of narrative, called storytelling the imitation of an action" (Boyd 2005b:159). Since actions can determine identity and culture, as stated under the definition of identity, it can be concluded that narratives can contain fragments of identity. Listening to a narrative can be similar to the experience of viewing an

artwork because they both act as vessels of culture and influence identity formation. They both are agents of human connection and interaction.

Boyd (2005b: 163) states that

through mirror neurons and other systems we are wired for emotional contagion. We half imitate what we see others doing, although an inhibiting mechanism stops us from actually moving while we simulate. We automatically have empathy for others. We know how they feel because we literally feel what they are feeling.

Biologically, we are able to be moved by narratives and encounters with artworks that may have an impact on identity formation and human emotion. This means that our biological universal human factors as human beings transcend all boundaries of culture, gender, race and age. Therefore, in a world where we constantly mimic each other, it might be hard to really tell who am I which is why this research came to take the form of autoethnography, as an attempt to find myself in this evolving world and changing cultures.

Thomas (2009:18) explains that

we consciously (and unconsciously) construct our life story through every anecdote or story we relate to others. By telling a story relating to his [sic] past, the individual presents his audience with an image of who he was, who he is, as well as making visible his current image of the relationship between Self (remembered) and Other (audience).

It is evident that narratives have the ability to restore identity and influence its nature and that a loss of narrative becomes a loss of identity. It also means that as much as humans imagine themselves to be separate from each other, they are connected through mirror neurons and narratives. Through the ability to simulate one another by means of mirror

neurons, human beings learn by observing others.

Boyd (2005b:166) says that

so far we have considered narrative as an extension of our compulsive, emotionally-attuned social monitoring. But narrative may help us to make better decisions even without supplying immediate information. We talk about the past not only to disclose currently relevant social particulars but also to provide tools for reasoning about action. Narratives may record practices previously successful or unsuccessful.

Narratives preserve events or past experiences; they serve as reminders of the point of origin challenges, the successes, the losses and the history of the people. Narratives teach people lessons that can help them in their lives.

Boyd (2005b:131) further argues that

we are not *taught* narrative. Rather, narrative reflects our mode of understanding events, which appears largely—but with crucial exceptions—to be a generally mammalian mode of understanding. The many culturally local conventions of human behavior and explanation tend to be adjustable parameters within common cognitive systems.

Boyd makes the point that narrative is a form of wired biological attributes that operate within culture. It is similar to playing which is a form of training for real life situations. Art is also a form of play and of narrative. Human beings also learn through the medium of art. Artworks carry information in the form of a story that is narrated visually through symbols and metaphors. Gee (2011: 25) writes that

by creating a moon, El Anatsui [the Ghanaian sculptor] might provide viewers with a new kind of social space within which viewers may be

inspired to share stories with one another.

By visually creating a moon or a symbol of a moon, the artist created a space of interconnectedness and human interaction. The artist took an object which belongs outside in the sky when it is dark and placed it in the gallery. This action on its own forms a narrative which tells a story of how art can mediate between human relations and experiences.

Buber (1937: 9-10) explains this concept by saying:

This is the eternal source of art: a man [sic] is forced by form which desires to be made through him [sic] into a work. This form is no offspring of his soul, but is an appearance which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power. The man is concerned with an act of his being. If he carries it through, if he speaks the primary word out of his being to the form which appears, then the effective power streams out, and the work arises.

According to this statement, the form (art) comes from a higher spiritual source, *Thou*, through an artist to that which it cannot attain on its own. It speaks to the artist in order to manifest itself. The artist and his/her body become the mediators for this manifestation of form. Although it is not part of the artist's being or soul, it becomes part of the artist by demanding his/her ability to create. While creating, the artist is concerned with the act of being in relation to the desire of the form. Therefore, the action of creating an artwork to tell a particular narrative requires a more interconnected perspective of life.

This means that the moon projects itself to the artist whether as a cultural symbol or a particular metaphor or just a moon and this inspired the artist to create a visual narrative. By creating a moon, the artist is highlighting story telling as a social binding agent and as a form of passing on cultural

knowledge to maintain identity.

The most profound narrative is the story of Jesus Christ. It can influence lives and belief systems, change cultures and even cause death in honour of the narrative. It can be argued that prayer, as an act of faith, is also a form of narrative. It is a narrative of a person's life in front of God. Prayer is a narrative that mediates between humans and God. It is believed that, through prayer, God can hear a person.

Visual art and narrative assist in identity construction because "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall 1989:225). A narrative connects people to their past, present and future and to one another. It can be a mediator to transmit knowledge. A narrative becomes a form of interconnection because it is made of connections to knowledge.

2.6 LAND AND HOME

The concept of Land and Home is being explored here together because the terms are conceptually combined to indicate a space where families live, where they have buried their loved ones and where they attach symbolism and meaning such as places of significant events in history and structures like dwellings and homesteads. Eboh (2005:13) states that:

Land can equally mean a field of action, a specified location of land, a specified area occupied by a community, a clan, a tribe. It can also mean ecology and the environment. It can interchangeably be used with space the visible sphere shared by human beings with the earth-forces, nature spirits and ancestors. Land embraces the world beneath the earth, the spirit-land, believed to be the habitat of ancestors and the guardian spirits of living human community.

Human interaction with the land is both physical and spiritual. This means that land is suspended between a tomb and an altar, between death and rebirth. Land is a home for the living and a burial place of the ancestor who guide those who live upon the land. Land is a mediator that binds human beings with their past, present, and future.

It is clear that land contributes to identity formation and culture preservation. There have been many cultural objects discovered by archaeologists that they use to construct a narrative of people who lived on that land. Therefore, by placing their mark on the land, humans shape the environment according to the cultural context and, in return, the “environment shapes culture” (Eboh 2005:1). This relationship between culture and environment varies from culture to culture as Eboh (2005:14) indicates that

among the Scandinavians, the Germans and Japanese, a new-born baby is dressed and laid on the ground as a form of dedication to Earth goddess, the mother of all. In some parts of China, Egypt, Hungary, women about to be delivered of their children, are laid on bare ground.

In my culture, the umbilical cord of a baby is cut and buried underground and, during the rite of initiation, the foreskin is cut and also buried underground. Eboh (2005:3) shows that

the traditional African communalism considers the individual and the community as a whole. One lives from birth to the grave, in an unbroken inter-dependence. Life is essentially co-operation and mutual co-existence. Every member of the community feels secure and fulfilled.

African culture practiced and believed in the interdependence of humans and nature where everything is owned collectively including land. There

was no single ownership of the land; it belonged to the whole of the village or community. But “colonialism introduced confusion and incalculable damage to the *African* property rights and ownership structures” (Eboh 2005:3). This resulted in African people leaving their land and homes, losing their rights of ownership to live and work in strange lands. This dislocation changed how African people see themselves and their past through the changed circumstances. A change of place by moving to other land could mean a change of identity and a loss of home and cultural heritage.

The earth can hold a narrative of the past and archaeologists construct a narrative of the past by studying the material culture buried in the land. Klopper mentioned that

archaeology tells us when and where people settled, more or less how they lived, what they ate and so on. It can also link groups together through the artifacts they left behind (e.g. pottery) (1998:8).

Archaeology can form a narrative where each finding provides new information to add to the narrative. Archaeologists rely on a process of digging, dusting and documentation by means of text and photographs that are used to construct a narrative which will tell the story of the people who lived on that land.

The land, for archeologists, becomes a way to map the path of history because, as Klopper (1998:10) explains,

archaeologists relied mainly on the colour, texture and finish of pottery fragments to identify particular traditions and to determine the ways in which different styles spread across the subcontinent.

With this approach in mind, the concept of digging up the past can be aligned with the concept of diaspora. People in the diaspora can be

compared to the fragments that are uncovered by archaeologists that enable them to construct a narrative about the culture of the people who lived there.

Bongela (2001:76) describes the interconnection between the land and the customs of the Xhosa people by saying that

the traditional Xhosa society maintained a traditional practice of keeping certain places as shrines i.e. places to be revered where certain sections of the population in a society were not allowed to visit or even come near to them.

The earth has become an integrated aspect in the life of the Xhosa people and as a form of mediator for cultural practice, as Eboh (2005:13) says,

life is continuum. It is a transition from existence in the land of the living to existence in the land of the dead through death. The earth is normally the medium for this historic transition.

The concepts of transition and of earth as a mediator are explained further in Chapter Four while conducting comparative analyses of the installation artworks under discussion.

Land has personal connections with the life and culture of the Xhosa people and is a keeper of their history and memories. Bongela (2001:78) said that

before the advent of Christianity and so-called western civilization, people of the Eastern Cape did not have cemeteries run in the Western style. The majority of the common people were buried inside the home garden or very near places of residence or in clusters of graves which hardly qualified as cemeteries.

It is evident from this investigation that Land and Home play an important role in the way Xhosa people interact with space, other humans and with

each other. To speak of Land and Home in a Xhosa context is to incorporate more than just a physical aspect of the environment, it is also a means of incorporating cultural, spiritual, social, and political relationships. Therefore, to be dislocated from one's Land and Home is to be stripped of a layer of personal heritage and identity.

Hall argues that

we should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails (1989:224).

Therefore, to lose Land and Home is to lose that moment of rediscovery because, without those memories of human habitation and interaction on the land, the narrative of these people is also forgotten.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the interrelationship between the key concepts of diaspora, identity, culture, narrative and Land and Home have been established. The mutual relationship they have with each other embraces the notion of Buber's *I-Thou* relational experience because "as an experience, the world belongs to the primary word *I-It*. The primary word *I-Thou* establishes the world of relation" (Buber 1937:6). Therefore, the interrelationship between the key concepts suggests the *I-Thou* relational experience. Buber further argues that "the spheres in which the world of relation arises are three. First, our life with nature ... Second, our life with men [sic] ... Third, our life with intelligible forms" (1937:6). For Buber, this interconnection is what constitutes the totality of the relational experience. I embrace Buber's theory of the totality of relational experience because he made it clear that our relation to nature, our relation to humans, and our relation to a spiritual being is the relation to *Thou* and these three spheres confirm

that existence.

Since the nature of the totality of relational experience that affirms existence, according to Buber, manifests in an interrelationship with nature, humans and a spiritual being, does it mean that ignoring one of the spheres constitutes a loss in the other spheres? And if so, how does this loss manifest? To answer these questions, the provisional interrelationships between the key concepts of diaspora, identity, culture, narrative and Land and Home have been highlighted. It has been established that:

(1) Diaspora is about the experience of losing home while still feeling connected to home through memories, feelings of belonging to a homeland in the past and cultural dislocation therefore diasporic experience manifests itself as a state of mind.

(2) In Identity, as many encounters and experiences are shaping the identity by transformation, they will become part of memory and the past that Wenjing defines as not being the core values of identity determinants. Therefore, identity cannot be bound by geographical boundaries of time and place even though it was established that:

- Identity can be constructed as means of affiliation with certain groups of people in society by society;
- Identity, as diverse as it may be, can also be constructed through encounters with artworks;
- Identity can be constructed through our interaction with the world through symbols and their meanings;

- Identity manifests itself in many different ways, one of them is land.
- (3) According to Spiro (1994:6), the proper study of people is the study of culture, because people are the products of culture and culture is diverse therefore it must be studied in its diversity in order to study people properly.
 - (4) Through narratives, human beings have been able to store knowledge about their past and their cultural beliefs and myths. They have been able to learn about life and they have been able to hear stories about other people's cultures and history.
 - (5) Land is one of the elements through which the interrelationship is made possible. The concept of land has many connotations that connect it to people's homes, spirituality, nature and identities. It was concluded that human interaction with the land manifests in a physical way and a spiritual way and constitutes identity.

This summary highlights the interconnection between the key concepts through which Buber's definition of the totality of the relational *I-Thou* has been adopted. By looking at the interconnection between these key concepts, a loss of one is a loss of a complete relationship in existence. Each key concept has become a mediator for human beings to express their existence and they mediate what a human cannot mediate alone. It is evident that human beings can be considered to be whole only once they are in full connection with their culture, identity, narratives of the past and Land and Home. The picture that vividly portrays the link between Buber's relational experience and the interrelationship of key concepts is drawn in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: MARTIN BUBER'S CONCEPT OF *I AND THOU* AND THE CULTURE OF XHOSA PEOPLE

3.1 INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KEY CONCEPTS AND MARTIN BUBER'S *I AND THOU*

Buber (1937:3) explains that

to man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.

Buber creates an interrelated account when he aligns man's experience of the world and focuses on the relationship between the words: *I-It* and *I-Thou*. Buber establishes that the *I-Thou* relationship and the *I-It* relationship are encounters between humans and others. These relationships are different ways that people relate to each other and their surroundings. The *I-it* relationship is focused on self-fulfillment while *I-Thou* relationship focuses on fulfillment of a whole. This means that part of human relationships are constituted by the relationship with the *I-Thou* and another part of human relationships is constituted by *I-It*. If the above investigation is taken into consideration, the interrelationship between the key concepts and Martin Buber's *I and Thou* relational experience theory can be drawn.

The aim of this dissertation, as stated in Chapter 1, is to investigate the phenomenon of diaspora as it is experienced as a state of identity in contemporary culture of amaXhosa people of the Eastern Cape Province by exploring the interrelationship between identity, culture, narrative and Land and Home in relation to their ancestral worship. The key concepts in relation to human universal interconnection and Xhosa culture are aligned through Buber's relational experience of the *I-Thou* relationship. This is

because it allows for a comparative interpretation of Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo's installation artworks.

Buber further argues that by speaking of *I-It* and *I-Thou* which he refers to as primary words, we run a risk because "when a primary word is spoken the speaker enters the word and takes his stand in it" (1937:4). When a person speaks of the primary word s/he acknowledges that s/he is connected to the *Thou*. Therefore, this eliminates the need for human disconnection and encourages a more humane and connected relationship. Buber further argues that "when *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing, there is another thing. Every *It* is bounded by others: *It* exists only through being bounded by others" (1937:4). The *It* relationship can result in a situation of trying to fit in within particular socially-constructed concepts. It moves to self-surveillance and results in a society which fits in with a particular trend. The internet and social media are flooded by social groups and social networks where people can have many friends or followers and are judged by the number of responses, comments and number of "likes" to see if they are still relevant.

In this relationship, there is a personal, relational experience to material things. This relationship disconnects people from each other and from nature because people who are always driven by material things are often considered ignorant and individualistic. The increase in the use of technology has resulted a more separate and cold human connection.

Buber explains that, in the *I-It* relationship,

the world is not presented to man by experiences alone. These present him only with a world composed of It and He and She and It again ... If we add "inner" to "outer" experiences, nothing in the

situation is changed. We are merely following the uneternal division that springs from the lust of the human race to whittle away the secret of death (1937:5).

Therefore, all things mean nothing; even a person can be an “It” in the *I-It* relationship.

This study adopts the *I-Thou* relationship because, for Buber, “*Thou* has no bounds. When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he [sic] has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation” (1937:4). In the *I-Thou* relationship, there is no embodiment and the person accepts the relationship as it is. This relationship, based on the *I-Thou* relational experience, describes the interconnection between the key concepts of this study.

The *I-Thou* relational experience consists of three spheres which are:

- Nature: This type of relationship is, according to Buber, beyond the level of speech.
- Humans: In this sphere, the relationship is defined by speech.
- Spiritual beings: Here speech is not used but this is where it could possibly begin (1937:6).

These spheres of nature, humanity and spirituality, according to Buber, provide the totality of human existence. If the relationship between humans and nature and with spirituality is open and understood in a positive way, culture becomes a mediator in this relationship. Therefore, to study human beings is to study their culture in its state of flux because nature, humanity and spirituality all change over time.

Although humans are separated from each other physically or geographically, they are also connected to each other through their

cultural practices which, this study believes, is the mediator for human interconnection. The need to love or to be loved, mourning for the dead and religious beliefs transcend all boundaries of language and culture.

Visual signifiers and metaphors create the ambiguity of interconnectedness and disconnectedness, contradiction and confirmation, and combination and separation. To locate these relevant signifiers and metaphors, a comparative analysis of the installation artworks of Bill Viola's video installation work *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 19) and Nicholas Hlobo's installation work *Umthubi* (2006), (figure 19) is conducted in this chapter. This analysis is conducted by comparing aspects of the Xhosa ancestral practice that are common between these two installation artworks.

The aim of the analysis and comparison process is to reveal the interrelationship and interconnection of human beings using culture as a mediator. In order to do this, a contextual framework for the analyses of these installation artworks needs to be formed. A contextual discussion is also conducted between Xhosa ancestral traditions and Buber's *I and Thou* relational experience. Since the totality of existence is affirmed by the interconnectedness with nature, humans and spiritual beings, the loss of a connection with one is therefore a loss of total existence which could result in a diasporic state of mind and the loss of identity.

The interrelationship between identity, Land and Home is determined by the interrelationship between Land and Home and mediated by means of symbolic interaction and social affiliation. This means that a loss of Land is a loss of Home, identity and spirituality. The interrelationship between Land and Home, narrative and identity is determined by the fact that total

interconnectedness is constructed through a mediator which is culture and its interrelationship with nature, humans and ancestors. Therefore, to connect with other things on the Land is to connect with the self.

3.2 ANCESTRAL WORSHIP OF XHOSA PEOPLE IN RELATION TO BUBER'S I-THOU RELATIONAL EXPERIENCE.

According to Buber's model of interconnection, it is in the total interrelationship with nature, men and spiritual beings that humans find total interconnection. Bae (2007:29) explains that

if something is moved the balance is upset and the whole network is affected. The notion of community is important here, for if the balance is disturbed at one point, everyone will be affected.

One way to clarify this phenomenon of the interconnectedness that comprises humanity's full existence is to reconsider the phenomenon of interconnectedness and pose the following question: Does the interrelationship between nature, humans and spiritual realm constitute the totality of existence?

Weinberg (2006:7) is of the opinion that it does because

the world within (the spiritual realm) and the material world are in a constant state of dialogue. They are not separated but part of one's daily life. Ancestor veneration is a continuum, a search for answers—there is always a reason for everything: disasters and calamities can be explained.

Since the totality of existence depends on the relationship with the elements of nature, humans and spiritual beings, ancestral worship is therefore linked with other concepts through which interconnectedness is constructed through mediators, namely, altars, ancestors, water, art and the kraal.

Bae (2007:23) reveals that

in most societies where belief in ancestors is common, a record of people who have lived and have died is kept in the memory of the living members of the community. They have moved into the category of ancestors, or the living dead. The concept of ancestral involvement in everyday life is more than a story or a myth. It is lived by millions in many areas in the world.

This human interrelationship with ancestors is demonstrated through the construction of places of remembering such as using ancestors' names to name streets and buildings, monuments, museums and other places of commemoration such as *Isivivane* (figure 6) which is located at the center of Freedom Park, in South Africa.



Figure 6 View over *Isivivane* from the pathway above looking eastwards. 2012

These places are a form of symbolic embodiment of the spirit of the

ancestors; they become bodies in the presence of absent bodies. The *Isivivane* at Freedom Park has been designed to facilitate an experience of reverence and evoke strong emotions in visitors. The design of the *Isivivane* consists of universal symbolism, African symbolism and belief systems. It also incorporates other materials such as stones, water and plants. The use of these materials signifies the mountains and caves that represent places of safety for people as well as ancestral shrines of ancestral devotion. The interconnectedness of land and the ancestors is considered as a relationship of significance and symbolism and the *Isivivane* becomes a mediator in the same way as an altar does.

In terms of the nature of interconnection with the spirits of the ancestors, some kind of construction or interaction with the Land is significant. According to Eboh (2005:13)

in its functional dimension, land is regarded as a fruitful Mother, the Mother of all mothers. It is the natural habitat of vegetation and animal lives. It constitutes equally the roots-source of their existence. In some places, it is called the Earth Mother.

Eboh is a Nigerian priest, but his concept of the relationship with the land shares many of the same sentiments with a Xhosa relationship with the land. Xhosa people also respect the land as a Mother and home to ancestors.

Ancestors are people who have died and are buried, linking them to the Land, and are believed to be protecting the living. By reciting their names during prayer, it is believed that they will pass the message to God or, if they are ignored, bad luck and misfortune is likely to manifest itself. Bae (2007:22) discusses ancestors by explaining that

the “dead” is an open category (which includes all people who have

died, either recently or long ago), whereas the category of “ancestors” relates to (more narrowly) the founders of a kinship group, of a community and even of a nation.

Regarding relationships, Buber (1937:8) says:

if I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I-Thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. This human being is not *He* or *She*, bounded from every other *He* and *She*, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities.

The relationship with the dead is similar to the *I-It* relationship while the relationship with the ancestors is closer to the *I-Thou* relationship. According to Bae (2007:23), the *I-Thou* interrelationship shows that

the difference and links between ancestors and totemic plants and animals is a fine line. Totems (animals or plants) are clearly ancestral in that they link a person with a line of ancestors.

Because totems, plants and animals may be used as a link between humans and the ancestors, “generally speaking, the totem (or identifying emblem) is an animal that is never hunted or exploited in any way” (Klopper 1998:10). Ancestor worship therefore entails a relationship with nature which results in the respect and protection of animals and plants because of their connection to the ancestors. Weinberg (2006:7) says that the need to connect with the ancestors is because

the dance between past and present opens up a mass of possibilities, movements and assimilations. The response of Africans is generally complex. The return to a spiritual way is a deep response to their need to survive in a modern world.

Therefore, the establishment of a relationship with ancestors is done to

seek guidance and identity, especially in the globalised world that facilitates the diasporic mind state. Weinberg argues that

the process of making contact with the spirit world is not only to search for answers but for affirmation of the positive force. The practice of rituals and ceremonies is both social and communal (2006:7).

Ancestor worship is therefore a uniting force for the living and the spirits of their ancestors act as the guardians and messengers to God. Ancestor worship can be viewed as a form of reclaiming identity because

during prayers, the living pray by reciting all the names of their ancestors. This list reaches as far back as the names can be remembered, and therefore, through a chain of ancestors, their prayers reach God (Bae 2007: 28).

In societies that practice ancestral worship, in order to be able to reach God, it is required to establish a relationship with the ancestors. This relationship requires a mediator as Bae (2007:32) reveals:

These relationships are constituted through communication. The ancestors speak with the living through dreams, visions, nature and persons. At times they can be seen, particularly when they appear in dreams. At times only their presence is felt. Often the communication is facilitated by a mediator (diviner, witchdoctor, priest, shaman), and in many traditions this position is a very powerful one, enabling the living to consult with the ancestors.

The role of ancestral veneration and its interrelation with the Xhosa people show that there are connections between ancestors, nature and humans that constitute a balance that is disrupted if one of the key elements separating the living from the ancestors and God are ignored. Therefore, the interrelationship between the spiritual and the physical is in constant dialogue to provide answers and to explain natural disasters. In this way,

ancestor worship is interconnected with everyday life.

This relationship and the reliance on the ancestors means that they are considered to be nearer to humans than the Supreme God. To understand the nature of these interrelationships between humans, ancestors and the Supreme God, Christianity will be discussed as an alternative spiritual practice and to establish the correlations between ancestor veneration and Christianity.

3.3 CHRISTIANITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE FOR XHOSA PEOPLE INSTEAD OF ANCESTRAL WORSHIP

In the history of the Xhosa speaking people of the Eastern Cape, the encounter with Christianity is known to be part of the tools used to colonise Xhosa people. Consequently, Christianity has negative connotations attached to it because, as cited,

missionaries used education and literature to spread the gospel: education enabled potential converts to read the Bible. For this reason, mission stations were centres of learning (Ndletyana 2008:2).

To speak of Christianity in Africa is to speak of missionaries and to speak of missionaries is to speak of colonisation which makes the practice of Christianity to be seen as a deviation or spiritual and cultural dislocation from African traditions. Although colonisers might have come with the Bible and introduced schools for learning education and Bible scriptures, they did not introduce the idea of faith and sacred knowledge. Xhosa people have been practicing their own traditions and culture which required sacred knowledge and practices of faith through certain rituals they practiced, including ancestral worship.

The life of the Xhosa prophet Ntsiakana could be said to reflect a life of

many Xhosa people in contemporary society due to the integration and assimilation of Christianity with traditional cultures that motivated ancestral veneration and Christianity to be practiced together as a cultural spiritual practice. Ntsikana's life is described by Ndletyana (2008:7):

Ntsikana, the Xhosa prophet, formed an important link between the traditional and the modern worlds. His story is the story of the penetration of Christianity into the eastern regions of the Cape colony. It is a story of faithful, earnest and zealous missionary enterprise. But it is also a story of a clash of cultures: the old culture of the Xhosa in juxtaposition with the new European culture of the whites and missionaries. Ntsikana was the first Xhosa-speaker to convert to Christianity, to preach the Gospel of Christ, and to compose hymns. He laid the ground for the future translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular.

The life of Ntsikana shows that commitment to Xhosa ancestral tradition was not something solid but only a mediator to reach the God. It also shows that culture, as a way of doing things, can be changed when a new way of doing thing is introduced. Generally people confuse what they do and learn with who they are.

Ndletyana states that "the Bible and newspapers were the most common pieces of literature among the indigenous Xhosa population" (2008:12) which resulted in Xhosa people gaining knowledge that was alien to their cultural knowledge systems. The integration of Christianity with Xhosa ancestral tradition can be seen in the life of Ntsikana. Ndletyana (2008: 5) said that

in the area of Christianity, which was embryonic in early nineteenth century South Africa, Ntsikana made a pioneering contribution to hymn-writing in Xhosa, and combined Christianity with the indigenous value system. He demonstrated, as is now commonplace,

that one could be Christian while also adhering to one's own value system.

According to Bae (2007:50),

although most Africans believe in God as a Supreme Being, this concept and identity of the Supreme Being is fairly nebulous. He is not worshipped directly or addressed directly in prayer. Instead prayers are addressed to the ancestors who are considered the intercessors with the Supreme Being.

This makes ancestors mediators between the living and God although the practice of ancestor worship can be regarded as a sin according to the Christian perspective as Bae (2007: 161) explains:

in Christian terms, idolatry then means a form of worship, adoration or veneration of images or material objects as symbolic manifestations of the deities or "gods".

This indirect way of praying to God through pleasing and sacrificing for the ancestors is, according to Christianity, a form idolatry because it is believed that those who worship ancestors are praising self-made "gods" which the Old and New Testaments say that is against the will of God.

Romans 12:2 says:

... and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

One must not be bound to the patterns of this age, its ways and its values that are based and adapted to its external, superficial customs but must be changed by the new realisation and transformation of the attitude of the mind in order to separate what is right for us so that we can be right in front of God to receive God's grace and blessings. Exodus 20:3 states that

“thou shalt have no other gods before me” but, according to Bae,

this does not mean that it denies the existence of gods other than the true God. Instead it appears to indicate that if these other gods did exist, none of them should be given the worship which is owing to the true God (2007:160).

Exodus 20:5 states that “thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God is a jealous God”. God’s jealousy is further mentioned in Deuteronomy 5:8,

thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth.

In Deuteronomy (17:2-5) it is stipulated that those who practice idolatry will face punishment by being stoned to death. Therefore, if the above description of idolatry is taken into consideration, it can be concluded that the practice of ancestry cannot be far from idolatry. This means that any form of respect, honour and worship that is due to God but paid to an idea, object or image, material things, money and other things such as the moon, sun and any other form of man-made “gods” constitutes idolatry, therefore it is a sin which can separate God from the living instead of bringing them into his presence. This attitude towards images and objects raises a question of whether appreciation and deep adoration of the arts can constitute a form of idolatry?

According to Harbinson (2006:23), it does constitute a form of idolatry. He refers to Calvin who

rejected the claim that images and representational art must be in the church as “books for the unlearned.” This, he believed, could only lead to idolatry and had no support from Scripture.

This raises another question: can art be considered a medium of preaching and worship of God or another form of earthly “gods”? In this regard, Harbinson (2006:23) explains that the arts

were for our “instruction and admonition,” not to be used as vehicles of worship or preaching. The arts could enlarge our understanding of created reality, extend our experience and “not least of all, bring delight to our hearts”.

Nettleton (2009:53) says that

the sculpture that Hlungwani made for his church negates the divide drawn by European missionaries between Christian practices in Africa and indigenous African ancestral veneration.

Some Africans and African artists use the praising of ancestors as a way to integrate Christianity into their traditional cultures and spiritual practices. It is the faith of ancestral worship that allowed the adoption of Christianity as a spiritual practice.

To further understand whether ancestral worship is against the word of God or is a form of a sin, the nature and definition of idolatry has been stipulated in the Old and New testaments. The understanding of ancestral worship, according to the Bible, will give a new perspective to the installation artworks of Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo and also to the construction of the practical work of this research. Following is a discussion of idolatry according to the Bible.

3.3.1 Idolatry in the New and Old Testament

According to Bae (2007:161),

in Christian terms, idolatry then means a form of worship, adoration or veneration of images or material objects as symbolic manifestations of the deities or “gods”. Thus, the term can be

extended to refer to the gods or deities represented by the idol or objects concerned.

This means that ancestral worship can be understood as a form of idolatry as it has been mentioned before that ancestral worship also includes an interrelation with the land and other materials or objects and things such as goats for sacrificing, rituals and altars. It has been cited in the Bible that the Israelites and their neighbours practiced pagan cults where they worshipped other gods even though the Bible clearly stipulates that

no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24).

This Biblical verse states that no man shall worship two gods at the same time and James (3:10-12) warns about the use of speech:

... out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, fig? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

This means that a person has to choose his/her words wisely in order to please God or to do what the word of God says that s/he must do. A person cannot live a life that is motivated by evil doings and, at the same time, worship God. Hence the Bible says that people must choose whether to utter evil to hurt or disturb other people's feelings and utter praises for ancestral worship or to utter goodness such as healing words, words that build and encourage other human beings, which is regarded as Godly.

The Bible mentions many instances where people worshiped idols, even the Israelites created new idols:

... they provoked him to jealousy with strange *gods*, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrifice unto devils, not to God; to *gods* whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not (Deuteronomy 32:16-17).

Also, in Jeremiah 44:15, it states that

then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros ...

Isaiah 40:19-20 reflects on how some of the idols were made stating that

... the workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no obligation chooseth a tree that will not rot: he seekth unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.

Deuteronomy 29:17 further states that “and ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stones, silver and gold which were among them”. According to Bae (2007: 161),

the Old Testament accounts indicate that these nations believed that the idols or images of the deities were actual manifestations of the god they worshiped. By implication, they thus believed that the image possessed some power, presence and personality of the god.

It is evident from the above scriptures that people worshipped their idols instead of worshipping God. They worshipped idols that they constructed themselves and to whom they offered sacrifices, praising them and eating the meat of the sacrificed animals. 1 Corinthians 8:4 states that

as concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

This implies that eating of the things that are offered to the idols is forbidden because idols are also dead objects and should not be regarded as a living God.

Judges 2:17 further states

and yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a-whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so.

According to Isaiah 2:8-9,

their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.

In Deuteronomy 31:16, God speaks to Moses:

behold, thou shall sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a-whoring after the gods of the strange land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

And God further states to Joshua in Deuteronomy 7:25 that

the graven image of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shall not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God.

The Bible also reveals that those who worship idols shall face consequences or must repent because Romans 1:23 states that they

changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.

Ephesians 5:5 also says:

for this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

And in Jeremiah 9:15-16, it is cited that

therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, *even* this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.

It is evident from the above Biblical scriptures that people worshipped man-made gods and that they offered sacrifices to them instead of worshipping a living God through faith. The Bible also states that those who worship these idols are considered as sinners therefore have no place in heaven.

3.3.2 The Bible on death and the afterlife

In Xhosa culture and other African cultures, ancestral worship is interconnected with daily life activities. In some cultures, people worship idols or they worship ancestors (see section 3.3.1 above) and are considered as sinners, according to the Bible. They make their idols with wood and stones and therefore their idols are dead objects that cannot create the heavens and the earth.

In contrast, in the culture of the Xhosa and others, such as the Zulu, Ndebele, Tsonga and Basotho, venerate ancestors who are dead family members who are believed to have great influence in the lives of the living and are considered to be able to pass requests to the living God.

The Bible states the meaning of the dead in many instances. Some of them are:

Job 7:9-10 says that there are no spiritual connections and relationships with the dead:

as the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.

In Leviticus 19:31, it states that people are not to worship and seek guidance from those who are dead because they “regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God”.

In Deuteronomy 18:10-11, God warns that

there shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or a witch. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

As the Bible states that

for all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee (Deuteronomy 18:12).

In the book of Leviticus 19:28 it is stated that “ye shall not make any cutting in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord”. This means once a person is dead, they have no connection with the living human being. Therefore, venerating them is pointless. People who practice ancestral veneration and consult other form of spirits such as witchdoctors are considered sinners and practitioners of idolatry.

3.4 ANCESTRAL TRADITION IN XHOSA, ZULU, NDEBELE, TSONGA AND BASOTHO CULTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to Hirst, “the Xhosa refer to ancestors as *iminyanya*, whereas the Mpondo call them the *amathongo*” (1998:28). Ancestors are called various names according to each culture and depending on the role they are believed to have for the living. Ancestors in Xhosa culture are believed to influence the life of the living in a day-to-day relationship because

the ancestor cult is essentially the cult of the domestic unit, the extended family. As the living link between the members of the homestead and the ancestors of the agnatic group, the male household head officiates on ritual occasions, in person or by proxy (Hirst 1998:28).

To enhance the relationship between the ancestors, certain rituals are compulsory. Hirst (1998:28) says that

[t]he deceased household head is incorporated by his sons as an ancestor of the homestead, a process which normally involves two sacrifices. In the first (*umkhapho*), a white goat without blemish is slaughtered to accompany (*ukukhapa*) the spirit of the deceased to the shades. In the second (*umbuyiso*), an ox is slaughtered to bring back (*ukubuyisa*) the spirit of the deceased as an ancestor to brood over the eaves and threshold of the homestead.

Once a person, who qualifies to be an ancestor, dies, the sacrifices of a goat and an ox are done in order for the spirits to awaken and give proper guidance in the life of the living. Hirst further argues that

The role and meaning of the ancestors for the Xhosa people is integrated with their lives. When they die, those who are elders in the community become ancestors after the previously-mentioned rituals.

According to Klopper (1998:61),

the Zulu make a distinction between the herbalist (inyanga yokwelapha), whose task it is, still today, to administer medicines made from plants and animals, and the diviner (inyanga yokubhula), who “smells out” or divines the cause of complaints by using bones, shells, seeds and other artifacts. The diviner keeps these items in a special container which he or she throws on a mat, much like the throwing of dice, and from the way they land is able to divine the client’s problems.

These people, the traditional healers and diviners, communicate with the ancestors through dreams and omens. Klopper (1998:62) further explains that

according to Zulu beliefs, human beings have a body (umzimba) and a spirit or soul (idlozi). In addition, there is inhliziyi (heart or feelings), the ingqondo (brain, mind, understanding) and the isithunzi (shadow, personality). The Zulu believe that the isithunzi becomes the ancestral spirit after death, but only after the ukubuyiswa ceremony has been performed, during which the spirit is “brought back home”.

The Zulu beliefs in the ancestors are similar to those of the Xhosa people and both performing similar sacrificial rituals to honor the dead as the custodians of the living.

For the Ndebele people, their life is also interconnected with the spirits of ancestors in their daily lives as described by Van Vuuren (1998:67):

The ancestors (abezimu), the most important denizens of the spirit world, are both solicitous and jealous, requiring constant placation through sacrifice. Failure to follow the dictates of the law and custom, as demanded by ancestors, is believed to be the main cause of bad luck. They are also believed to protect the living against misfortune by counseling them in dreams, and by giving strength to medical preparations made from herbs and other concoctions.

The Ndebele people also perform sacrificial rituals to the ancestors in

order for the ancestors to fully guide the living. The Ndebele believes, like other African cultures, that the practice of ancestral worship has a great influence on the life of the living and the failure to obey and follow these principles will result in detrimental consequences such as misfortune and omens.

In the Tsonga culture, Harries (1998: 96) states that

the belief of the Tsonga lie in ancestor worship. They believe man has a physical body (mmiri), and a spiritual body with two attributes, moya and ndzuti. The moya is associated with the ancestors. The ndzuti is linked to a person's shadow and reflects human characteristics—it is that person's "understudy" who, on death, leaves the body in the spirit world.

The Tsonga people's belief in relation to the ancestors is based on their belief of the relationship of the human body with the spirit while the person is still alive. According to Harries (1998: 96),

the spirit of the dead (swikwmbu) is imbued with the individual and human characteristics of the person. Not only is there life after death, but on entering the world of the dead, the individual retains links with the living.

The Tsonga also believe that ancestors maintain the relationship with the living and maintain the characteristics of the deceased person. The ancestors are respected spirits that cannot be contacted by an ordinary person, not even their living family members, but only through the diviners or traditional healers. Harries (1998: 96) explains that

ancestor worship, still practiced today, requires the performance of rituals, particularly during crises, under the direction of a nanga (diviner). The family gathers at the gandzelo (set aside for rituals and sacrifices) to pay homage to their ancestral spirits.

For the Tsonga culture, ancestors are also regarded as the pillars of their life and family members gather in sacred spaces to communicate with the ancestors under the guidance of a diviner.

The Basotho people also have ancestral beliefs, although their belief is based on the human body. The role of ancestors is based on their idea of the human body in relation to the spirit while still alive. According to Spiegel (1998:113),

the Basotho believe that man (motho) has two elements: the corporeal body (mele) or flesh (nama), and the incorporeal spirit (moea, also the word for wind) or shadow (seriti). The body is temporal and subject to death and decay, but the spirit is indestructible and immortal.

The Basotho people acknowledge that the human body is only a temporary container that embodies the human soul and that the soul lives forever. Spiegel (1998:113) explains that the Basotho people believe that

during life the spirit lives in the body, some believe it is in the heart, others in the head, but the more general view is that it suffuses the whole body. The spirit may leave the body at night and roam about, dreams being the manifestation of these wanderings. Witches and wizards can make their spirits leave their bodies at will and direct their activities.

Each culture embraces the need to acknowledge and honour their ancestors. Other cultures believe that ancestors can bring them closer to God while some believe that sacrificing to the ancestors brings good luck and good fortune, while others believe ancestors to be the human soul. Cultures that practice ancestral veneration have many overlapping beliefs and rituals, although their interrelationship with the ancestors contradicts with the Bible regarding the worship of other spirits that are not Christ and

God.

3.5 EARLY ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND XHOSA CULTURE OF THE EASTERN CAPE

The encounter between Christianity and African cultures can be traced back to before the 18th century. This was regarded as both positive and negative by African societies because of the introduction of education and because every aspect of their daily lives, their customs and their beliefs had come under sustained attack from missionaries. This predicament is described by Hodgson (in Elphick & Davenport 1997:68):

During the nineteenth century the Xhosa-Cape frontier was moved eastwards step by step, following conquests by the British Imperial and Cape Colonial forces. By the 1880s, after one hundred years of war, the Xhosa-speaking peoples, from the Zuurveld in the Eastern Cape to Pondoland, had been incorporated under British sovereignty, suffering dispossession of their ancestral land, destruction of their polities, and displacement and domination by alien rulers.

Asante (1993: 48), the father of Afrocentricity, argues that

to lose one's terms is to become a victim of the other's attitudes, models, disciplines, and culture, and the ultimate point of such a massive loss is the destruction of self-confidence, the distortion of history, and psychological marginality.

This means that to lose a sense of one's culture by being moved out of the land dislocates one from one's historical heritage and sense of belonging. This changes one's identity as Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport 1997:71) describes the importance of the land:

apart from its economic importance for agriculture, cattle, and hunting, land was important to Xhosa, too, because of its mystical attachment to their ancestors, and their sacred burial places. The ritual space of the cattle enclosures was also sacred; people could not

leave them without fear of losing the blessings and protection of the ancestors, the guardians of the land.

This means that, for the Xhosa people to be dislocated from their own land, was to be dislocated from their blessings and ancestral connections. This exclusion created a gap that separated the Xhosa from their spiritual and historical heritage, requiring them to adapt to other cultures as they resettled after dislocation.

Molefi Kete Asante (1993:1) describes how the loss of land and place affects those who have been dislocated from their cultural heritage and identity:

Afrocentricity is primarily an orientation to data. There are certainly data and facts which may be used by Afrocentrists in making analyses, but the principal component of the theoretical piece has to do with an orientation, a location, a position.

For Asante, orientation, location and position form guidelines for studying data and situations according to an Afrocentric perspective. These guidelines form a framework because this term

tells you where someone is, that is, where they are given certain markers of identity. Thus, the person who uses terms like minority, third world, primitives, natives, and mainstream is definitely in a particular intellectual space (Asante 1993:100).

This shows that it is possible to tell how another person relates to things by analysing the terms that that person uses to position him/herself in the world.

This extract is also part of the Xhosa cultural position and relation to God as it is stated that

the background God-names—uDali, uMdali, uMenzi, uHlanga, iNkosi

yezulu—express two principal concepts of deity: the one relating to origin and the other connected with sky and natural elements (Hodgson in Elphick & Davenport 1997:69).

These terms for God exhibit the Xhosa belief of God's interconnection with natural forces and with themselves.

Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport 1997:75) describes an unwilling conversion:

Matshaya, a Zuurveld refugee, told of his own struggle in coming to terms with the cost of a personal Christian faith that was at risk from Ngqika's wrath:

The Sabbath was made known, and we were called to attend the worship of God. At the time I knew nothing of the Word, and was unwilling to enter the church. By listening to the Word a struggle commenced within me, and I felt as if I had two hearts, the one loving the Word and the other hating it. After I began to attend to the Word, I became sorry for my friends, who were living in the pleasures of the world and did not see the dangers to which they were exposed.

Eboh advocates that a "peaceful coexistence implies *unity in diversity*, dialogue, reciprocity, live and let live" (2005:x). This means that differences in cultural beliefs should not be regarded as negative, but should be embraced because the denial of other people's cultural values can result in resistance. Hodgson (in Elphick & Davenport 1997:74) describes this resistance in an event that took place at the Williams mission station on 14th April, 1818:

Ngqika, complaining of missionary cultural interference, said:

You have your manner to wash and decorate yourselves on the Lord's day and I have mine the same in which I was born and that I shall follow. I have given over for a little to listen at your word but now I have done for if I adopt your law I must entirely overturn all my own

and that I shall not do. I shall begin now to dance and praise my beast
as much as I please and shall let all who see who is Lord of this land.

Thiong’O (1993b:20) also displays a similar concern regarding African values in relation to European culture. He argues that

in the area of culture, the raw material of African orature and histories developed by African languages are taken, repackaged through English or French or Portuguese and then resold back to Africa.

The encounter of Africans with Christianity has been associated with missionaries and European cultures and have demoralised African traditional cultures. But receiving the Word of God from the missionaries had severe implications as Elphick (in Elphick and Davenport 1997:7-8) describes:

This explosion of Christian adherence coincided with massive social, economic, and intellectual transformations that some theorists call “modernization,” while others, especially those influenced by Marxism, see as products of “industrial capitalism.” Three aspects of these transformations were of particular importance to the churches: urbanization, secularization, and a closely related intellectual current, theological liberalism.

The encounter between Christianity and the Xhosa culture begun with resistance that later transformed into acceptance. The Xhosa people resisted this paradigm shift that Christianity brought, although it still had elements that overlapped with Xhosa cultural practices such as belief to the omnipresence, use of altar, sacrifice, among others. In time, they both intergrated into one practice that comprises elements of each. Maybe it can be called African Christianity. In order to see the overlaps and the interrelationships between Christianity, the ancestral beliefs of the Xhosa people and the key concepts, signifiers were established. Signifiers for the

analysis of Viola's and Hlobo's installation artworks will provide a framework for the construction of my practical work that will be discussed in the artist catalogue that accompanies this exhibition.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we see how Xhosa people believe and relate to ancestral traditions and Christianity. We see how the interrelationship between the key concepts is formed and explained in relation to Martin Buber's theory. This interrelationship, I believe, explains and sets a framework to be able to analyse the artworks of Viola and Hlobo and discuss them according to Xhosa ancestral tradition. The summary of the interrelationship between Buber's three spheres that make up the totality of existence are the key concepts from which Xhosa ancestral traditions have been drawn.

The role of ancestor veneration is connected to other elements such as altar, water, kraal, land and the relationship with the surroundings. Xhosa traditions, or any other culture, can be kept, changed or integrated with new cultures. Xhosa ancestral practices contradict Christianity even when looked through Buber's concept of *I and Thou*. Christianity believes in death and the afterlife differently from Xhosa ancestral traditions. Christianity and Xhosa ancestral tradition have elements that overlap such as altars, mediation, connections to the past, and belief in something bigger than us, but contradict each other in the concept of death.

CHAPTER 4: CHRISTIAN AND XHOSA ANCESTRAL TRADITIONS IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART

4.1 INTRODUCTION THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

After the exploration and discussion of the interrelationship between the key concepts in the previous chapters, a conclusion has been drawn, namely, that the manifestation of Christianity and ancestral veneration has resulted in a diasporic mind state in consciousness and spirituality, which raises questions regarding the position of art and the role of the artist.

If the manifestation of Christianity and ancestral veneration is deeply embedded in the consciousness of contemporary society, it can be concluded that visual artists will explore and reflect this dialogue in their works. Therefore, to understand the nature of these issues in contemporary society, a discussion of visual artists who have dealt with the subjects of Christianity or ancestral veneration in their work is conducted.

According to Dowling

art is means to explore identity, to celebrate and promote self-expression and its diversity. Through this expression dialogue is created that speaks to community, acceptance, and the safeguards that are necessary for expressing individual identity in a society (2011:2).

This meaning that, through art, artists can explore subjects that can influence society such as identity and spirituality. Their role is to create an awareness of identity in spirituality whether through the Christian faith or ancestral veneration. Artists can also create artworks to challenge these notions and to establish whether there are any contradictions, correlations or even possibilities for integration that can lead to spiritual enlightenment

to the worship of God or the ancestors.

Every human being belongs to a particular culture which is based on their upbringing. People in a particular society that has adopted a certain belief system based on past practices are, for Boyd the place where art is situated. He explains that

all human art indeed takes place within particular cultures or at the intersection of cultures; and no art can be explained without culture, without considering both particular art traditions and the society within which artists deploy them (2005b: 71).

Therefore, to study art is to study the culture of the artist or the culture which the artist is challenging. This means that art can reflect on the beliefs and practices of that culture according to the meaning, myth, metaphors and symbolism that the culture reflects, as Dowling notes: “many contemporary artists utilize symbolism and metaphor in their art to construct identity” (2011: 7), so to understand the artwork is to understand the nature of identity and the possibility of constructing a new spiritual identity or to question an existing one. This is in line with the premise of this research.

According to Boyd,

art, too, is a specifically human adaptation, biologically part of our species. It offers tangible advantages for human survival and reproduction, and it derives from play, itself an adaptation widespread among animals with flexible behaviors (2005b: 1).

Therefore, through art, the human species can learn to adapt to new ideas, challenge belief systems and cultural identity.

Practicing Christianity or ancestral veneration for the Xhosa people and other African societies, is believed to prepare a way to heaven or to receive

guidance and good fortune from God or the ancestors. This interrelationship explains and sets up a framework for analysing the artworks of Viola and Hlobo, and opens them up for a discussion according to Xhosa ancestral tradition. The fact that Christianity was introduced by missionaries during the time of colonisation, according to Elphick (in Elphick and Davenport 1997:12) affected the intellectual life of African Christians because they

faced the need to “translate” Christian doctrines, values, symbols, stories, and rituals into their own culture. Typically, two distinct modes of translation emerged, reminiscent of the Biblical distinction between putting new wine in old skins, or in new wineskins. An old-wineskin choice in literature has been to praise the Christian God in classic African praise-poems; a new-wineskin choice to restore to formal, printed poems, plays, and novel.

Some African artists used the mode of new wine in old skin to integrate Christian subject matter that is based on the Biblical scriptures by using the African ways of art making and mediums such as carved wooden sculptures and symbolism. Some artists have made an attempt to use a new-wineskin approach by also exploring Biblical subject matter integrated or contrasted with African traditional religion by using new media such as video and installation art.

Boyd (2005b: 166) states that:

as our brains expanded, we could apply the past to the present and future still more flexibly. But we were still trapped within what we had witnessed and remembered ourselves. With narrative we could, for the first time, share experience with others who could then pass on to still others what they had found most helpful for their own reasoning about future actions. We still have to act within our own time, but with narrative we can be partially freed from the limits of

the present and the self.

Art is also a form of a narrative for it can tell stories in different contexts based on the medium used to tell that particular story. It can tell the stories in new or old wineskins, shift between different time frames to past, present and even the future. Therefore, it can serve as a mediator and it can be concluded that the artist is participating in the process of narrating shared experiences of the past and present in order to shape the future.

I was born and brought up in a culture that assumed a particular narrative. To analyse and understand this narrative in a coherent manner, in my new identity, I will adopt a way of analysing text and language because narratives are made of text and language.

4.2 CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS EXPLORING CHRISTIAN AND AFRICAN TRADITION IN THEIR WORK

This part of the research provides a broad overview of the prevalence of artworks that are concerned with the concept of Christianity and African traditional religion in contemporary society. This part will serve as an introduction and foundation for the comparative analyses between the works of Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo.

Christianity and African traditional religion are phenomena that contemporary artists have explored in their works as both a spiritual occurrence and as a source for the diasporic mind state. Some of the artists participated in a contemporary group exhibition held during the apartheid era in South Africa. They reflected on the notion of tributaries. In one of her books, *Art South Africa Now*, Sue Williamson describes this phenomenon:

First shown at the MuseuMAfrica in Johannesburg in 1985 before it went to Germany, Tributaries featured 111 exhibitors, almost equally balanced between black and white. Precise graphite on wax drawings of damaged X-rayed bones entitled Biko 1 and 11 by Paul Stopforth hung alongside a massive wooden crucifix with a carved Christ figure by Jackson Hlungwani. Johannes Maswangani showed two nyamisoro, kneeling marula wood figures of women with removable heads, so sangomas (traditional doctors) could put medicine inside the hollow bodies (2009:66).

This exhibition where black South African artists exhibited side by side with white artists displayed artworks that explored African themes with the use of traditional skills and materials such as wood carving and sculptures. Williamson mentions another exhibition that took place before Tributaries and also featured African artists with African traditional themes and art-making techniques stating that:

[i]t was starkly different from another exhibition showing the studio work of professional artist alongside African rural art that had been mounted in 1984, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, no less. Titled *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the tribal and modern*, it was curated by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe and featured 150 works by modern artists such as Klee, Picasso, and Brancusi, paired with tribal masks and another traditional objects with some physical resemblance from Africa and Oceania (2009:66).

Since these exhibitions, African artists showing African themes have displayed their works across the world. Some of these artists integrated Christianity and African traditional religion in the subject matter using traditional African ways of making art. Among these artists was Jackson Hlungwani who exhibited his “*Large Crucifix*” (1990)⁹, a sculpture that is

⁹ Jackson Hlungwani, *Large Crucifix* (1990). Wood, pencil and charcoal, 293 x 178 x

almost three meters high. The sculpture depicts the figure of Christ that is literally fused with the cross, a profound expression of religious fidelity. This was similar to the large sculpture that he carved for his hilltop *Altar of God* (2008),(*figure 8*) at New Jerusalem located in Mbokoto, which is an open-air altar constructed by the artist with the help of his family and followers (Williamson 2009: 72).



Figure 7 Jackson Hlungwane. *Christ playing football* (1983).

120cm. In the collection of Johannesburg Art Gallery. Photo courtesy of Johannesburg Art Gallery. Available at: [http://www.la-motte.com/2014/10/24/jackson-hlungwani-1923-2010-artistic-spiritual-life-woodwork/#lightbox\[auto_group1\]/0/](http://www.la-motte.com/2014/10/24/jackson-hlungwani-1923-2010-artistic-spiritual-life-woodwork/#lightbox[auto_group1]/0/)

In his sculpture *Christ playing football* (1983), (figure 7), Hlungwane fused Christianity and sport therefore it can be said that he is humanising Christ, making him a man who is like any other man. Hlungwane has used a common material used by African sculptors while portraying a Christian figure. Williamson argues that “his art reflects the charismatic confidence of an artist who is a self-proclaimed vessel of God” (2009:72). Hlungwani embraced Christianity and used his art as a way to express this as can be seen on most of his sculptural works where he leaves the indigenous wood that he use as his material, showing its raw form.

In this approach to his subject matter and material, it could be said that Hlungwani was representing Africans who chose to integrate Christianity into their African traditional religion. In this way, his technique of allowing his wood to show its raw appeal, Hlungwani represents a fusion of Christianity and ancestral worship. Williamson agrees by saying that

Hlungwani’s works, like his acclaimed fish sculptures, which are both a materialization of a Christ symbol and a tribute to the creature itself, employ a complex conceptual basis that merges religious, traditional, philosophical, and technical concerns. Using predominantly indigenous wood, Hlungwani constructs his works with consummate skill, translating the material into a figurative form with a sensitive handling that preserves its raw appeal and, in many cases, its monumentality (2009:72).



Figure 8 Jackson Hlungwane. *Altar of God* (1984).

Hlungwane's integration of Christianity and African traditional religion can also be seen in his work *Altar of God* (2008), (figure 8). According to Kim Gurney (2008):

The Altar of God is also testament to the problematic aspects that recur in any westernized display of African art. This altar was created in a highly specific context, standing in its original form atop a mountain in Venda where it performed a religious, cultural and social function. Now, it appears somewhat diminished in a gallery where its display is double-edged: more people get to view it but totally alienated from its original function. Even the steel "aerial to God"—a rod that projects upwards—is a reduced substitute for the original that stood much higher and was decorated with number plates and

mirrors in an eccentric hotline to the almighty.¹⁰

Here, Hlungwani's belief in God supercedes his belief in the ancestors. This is evident because he built an altar for God instead of the ancestors. Although his use of indigenous material is very Africanised in terms of the indigenous African wood and the stones that he normally uses, he depicts Christian subject matter instead of building an altar for the ancestors who, in African tradition, are believed to be messengers between the living and God. In this artwork, Hlungwani suggests a direct human communication with God bypassing the ancestors. Matthew (3:9) says "... and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to rise up children to Abraham from these stones". Therefore, it can be assumed that the stones in Hlungwani's *Altar of God* (1984), (figure 8) could represent believers of God as descendants of Abraham. This makes the stones into sacred objects that have a significant meaning in the Christian faith.

Johannes Maswanganyi who was born in 1948, was taught woodcarving by his father, and started by making functional objects like bowls and spoons. After Maswanganyi witnessed Tsonga *nyamisoro* dolls, with removable heads that are hollow inside for the storage of traditional *muthi*, or medicines used for healing, displayed at the Tzaneen Museum, he started to make his own version of these dolls. Today his art can be found in many museum collections (Williamson 2009:68). Maswanganyi's combination of Christianity and African traditional belief can be seen in one of his prominent sculpture entitled *Jesus is walking on the water* (1994), (figure 9).

¹⁰ <http://www.artthrob.co.za/04dec/reviews/sang.html>

According to Williamson, *Jesus is walking on the water* (1994), (figure 9) is a complex large-scale wooden tableau with an assertive Christ figure striding strongly toward the viewer. Maswanganyi expresses a faith in the power of God that is obviously Christian. But in his *nyamisoro* doll sculptures, he creates objects for the supplication of those who put their faith in the *nyanga*, or traditional African healer (2009:68). In the Bible scriptures, Jesus walked on water and called for his disciples to join him but they were reluctant and afraid. This was a test of faith for the disciples, but they failed. This means that, when trusting in Christ, it must be done with full faithfulness and people must not place trust in *sangomas* and traditional healers.

When Jesus called for Peter to join him, Peter started to walk on water but he eventually withdrew because of his doubt. This reflects that those who believe in Christ have to keep their faith by focusing their faith only on Him, not on the waves and storms of the troubles that this world brings. This kind of faith contrasts with the faith of those who believe in *sangomas* and traditional healers who Maswanganyi represented in his *nyamisoro* doll sculptures.

Maswanganyi's work explores both Christianity and African traditional religions although he does not see them as contradicting each other even though, in the Bible (as mentioned in section 3.3) it says that this kind of belief is regarded as a form of idolatry.



Figure 9 Johannes Maswanganyi. Jesus walking on water (1985)

Another South African artist exploring Christianity in his work is Wim Botha, who constructed a figure of Christ in a crucified pose but without a cross. In this work, entitled *Commune: suspension of disbelief* (2001), (figure 10), Botha carved stacks of Bibles bolted together with a threaded bar.

Catholicism distinguishes itself from other types of Christianity through the belief in transubstantiation, that the wafer and wine in the Eucharist ceremony actually becomes the body and blood of Christ. The notion of transubstantiation holds far more compelling possibilities than mere symbolism for creative endeavours ever could (Williamson 2009:96). Christ

on the cross is where Christ was believed to have conquered and defeated the devil so that people who believed in Jesus were to be free from sin and to enter heaven where they would receive eternal life and have their name written in the book of life through acknowledging that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour. When Botha suspended Christ in a crucified pose, this placed the figure between two dimensions. It is not clear whether Christ is ascending to or descending from heaven, whether he is transcending to become a Holy Spirit after crucifixion or if he is ready to be taken to his grave where he will rise again on the third day. Williamson explains that this work, while

lassoing the notion of transubstantiation, Botha's *Commune* becomes an aesthetic take on the phrase "the Word made flesh." Language is present yet muted in this work; the medium through which the Christian message is communicated, the printed Bible page, becomes the base unit for the sculpture. One form of existence gives way for another, as a very real transmutation takes place (2009:196).

Graffiti is also a form of a "word" that has come to signify flesh, a physical being. Graffiti tagging becomes an embodiment of the writer's self-imposed identity just as Botha's artwork explores the Bible as a source of creation. John 1:1 says that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", therefore every creation including humans is considered a manifestation of God's Word and of the Word as God. This creation of man can be seen in the book of Genesis 1:26 where it is stated:

... then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

Botha's *Commune* (2001, (figure 10) depicts this manifestation of human form from the Word of God by carving it from the Bible which makes a human figure a sacred form or a mediator for God's Word.

There are five Biblical verses that have been captured stating the human body as a temple of God listed below:

- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are"
- 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him"
- Ephesians 2:19-22 "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord"
- 1 Peter 2:5 "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"

According to Goodman (2005-2008:49),

scientists tell us that there are certain basic instructions responsible for the proper function of the body. They say there is a unit that "holds" or keeps all this information used in the development and functioning of all known living organisms. It is the blueprint of life. It is known as the DNA.

Based on the above biblical scriptures that stipulate the human body as a

temple of God it can be said God is also in the DNA as his Word. If the notion of God as a Word can be looked into in a deeper level as it is further mentioned in the Bible that “He is before all things, and by Him all things consist”.



Figure 10 Wim Botha. Commune: suspension of disbelief (2001)

For Goodman, as it has been cited in John 1:1, the further she looks for a deeper meaning of the relationship with God as a Word and the human

body, she stipulates that “the Bible makes us to understand that in the beginning certain words were coded or programmed into mankind by the Creator Himself” (2005-2008:49). For Christians, this explanation has a profound meaning although other people who have other beliefs, such as Charles Darwin (1809-1882), would contradict it. The BBC History Channel said that Darwin’s book titled, *On the origin of species by means of natural selection* (1859)

was extremely controversial, because the logical extension of Darwin's theory was that *homo sapiens* was simply another form of animal. It made it seem possible that even people might just have evolved—quite possibly from apes—and destroyed the prevailing orthodoxy on how the world was created¹¹.

Darwin’s theory of evolution through a process of natural selection fails to explain the development of a soul and why apes exist if humans are an evolution of such species. The abovementioned artists’ examples deal with Christianity and African traditional religions as a thematic concern. It serves as a brief indication of how the theme of Christianity and African religions has manifested in contemporary society and visual art. This study is concerned with a diasporic mind state that can be evident in some members of Xhosa speaking people of the Eastern Cape Province who are in the diaspora and other African traditional societies who are experiencing this diasporic mind state. It is believed that this diasporic mind state is caused by the tension and confusion experienced between Christianity and ancestral veneration as a practice of African traditional religion because of the many Xhosa speakers who convert to Christianity due to parental upbringing or moving away from home. Part of this confusion and diasporic

¹¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/darwin_charles.shtml)

mind state is a result of parents enforcing ancestral veneration during enculturation. The artists described above reflect this dilemma as some embrace both practices while some choose one or the other which, in my opinion, results in the diasporic mind state. This is the foundation of the comparative analysis of artworks by Nicholas Hlobo and Bill Viola.

4.3 XHOSA ANCESTRAL TRADITION IN THE WORKS OF NICHOLAS HLOBO AND BILL VIOLA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

According to Bae (2007: 26)

as seen in their identity, being linked to the Supreme Being, ancestors also play a role as intermediaries or mediators between God and their descendants.

The artists Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo have been selected for this study because the concept of intermediaries manifests itself in various ways in their artworks. Although the artists were born in different cultures and places that have influenced in their art making, the fragments of Xhosa ancestral tradition manifest in both their works. The interrelationship between the key concepts that were identified in this research, namely identity, culture, and narrative in relation to Xhosa ancestral tradition and Christianity has been used as a framework for the comparative analysis of these artists.

In the following discussion, it is shown that the selected visual artists, Bill Viola and Nicholas Hlobo, use various methods and materials of art-making to reference their artworks but, according to the framework drawn for this research, both Viola and Hlobo have made use of a mediator, Viola used water and Hlobo made use of a kraal. Both the water and the kraal are forms of altars that mediate between the ancestors and the living in Xhosa ancestral tradition. The relationship between humans and the ancestors

affirms the need for a mediator as discussed in Chapter 2. Both the installation artworks by Viola and Hlobo could be considered as a metaphor for this relationship. By comparing and analysing these two installations artworks I hope to establish common ground where they shed light following question:

How can diaspora become a metaphor for the spreading of common elements that form part of cultural belief and the formation of new evolving identities that are not limited by ethnicity, geographical space, religion and society?

4.4 VISUAL ANALYSIS OF ART WORKS OF SELECTED ARTISTS

Ocean without a shore (2007), (figure 11) is a video and sound installation artwork created by Bill Viola originally commissioned for the 2007 Venice Biennale and was first exhibited in the 15th century Church of the Orafonio San Gallo, which is a short distance from the Piazza San Marco. The work has been exhibited in many different international art spaces and is now part of Pennsylvania Academy's permanent collection.

As I was wondering what created the diasporic state that I observed in others and now experience as a Xhosa male in the postcolonial history of South Africa in the global world, I realised that my identity was challenged by contradictions between culture, religion and society which results in this diasporic state. I believe Viola's installation work *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 11) sheds light on the connections between humans that occur beyond our cultural and demographical boundaries.

Analysis of an artwork like *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 11) without a real encounter with the physical artwork can be challenging. In artworks such as installation art, physical experience is important as it serves as a mediator between the artwork, its message and the experience

of the viewer. Visual aids such as Youtube, images from art books and the internet, while they are not a substitute for the physical experience of the artwork, give an idea of the universality of human belief about experience of transience.



Figure 11 Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007 High Definition colour video triptych, two plasma screens, one screen mounted vertically, six loudspeakers (three pairs stereo sound)



Figure 12 Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007 High Definition colour video triptych, two plasma screens, one screen mounted vertically, six loudspeakers (three pairs stereo sound)

Looking at the videos and carefully observing the images of *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 12), gives a feeling of a sacred experience. The lighting has been dimmed to create an atmosphere that suggests a spiritual presence. The whole interior architecture of the church has become part of the artwork, resulting in the viewer walking inside the artwork.

Watching videos of this installation work and images from it reminds me of a Xhosa ritual called *imfukamo* that is done by *igqirha* (a traditional healer) who is chosen by a family. The family will be asked to enter a room covered with grass on the top and the bottom and are supposed to spend one or more nights inside the room which can be inside the house or in a hut that is temporarily built inside the yard. We once did this ritual in my family; we were told we are being introduced to *uMakhulu* a great mother ancestor. We had to stay for a night in our dining room which was turned into a

spiritual space by altering its surroundings.

Bill Viola has altered the space in the cathedral in his own way but the atmosphere resembles that of *imfukamo*. During the period of *imfukamo* it is believed that the ancestors will try to communicate with members of the family. The ghost like figures that appear and disappear in Viola's artwork resemble the idea of *uMakhulu* and of the ancestors who are believed to reside inside the kraal or under the water.



Figure 13 Bill Viola. *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007 High Definition colour video triptych, two plasma screens, one screen mounted vertically, six loudspeakers (three pairs stereo sound)



Figure 14 Bill Viola. *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007 High Definition colour video triptych, two plasma screens, one screen mounted vertically, six loudspeakers (three pairs stereo sound)

The architectural design of the walls becomes a background to the three plasma screens where a series of figures come from a dark background and go back to where they came from. These plasma screens are mounted on three standing altars that form a triangular space. Two face each other and one stands on its own, leaving a space in between as if it were a space for prayer, sacrifice or meditation; a space where the presence of the ancestors could be experienced. Complementing this immersive experience is the sound of water that becomes enhanced when these figures go through it. In my experience, during imfukamo, the family had to remain silent for the night and then went to a river carrying gifts such as traditional tobacco, beer and beads to throw in the river. It is believed that these gifts are taken by the ancestors if the ritual was accepted by the

ancestors or rejected if something was not done properly in the period of the ritual. Therefore, the element of water in Viola's work is used as a mediator similar to that which happens in my culture.

This overlap is also evident in Hlobo's work *Umthubi* (2006), (figure 18) in which a kraal is used as a mediator. The kraal in Xhosa culture is believed to be a house of ancestors where the family can go and communicate with its ancestors. Not everyone is allowed to enter a kraal of the house especially on the female side. The kraal plays a role of spirituality and masculinity in my culture as it is also used to keep livestock. The more livestock you have, the more man you become. Hlobo challenges this notion of masculinity and spirituality that is a result of his Xhosa culture and his own identity. I believe Hlobo was experiencing the same diasporic state that I am experiencing by challenging his culture. Hlobo brought a sacred space to public space. This act resembles cultures spreading or people moving and being mixed with other cultures while still carrying the attributes of their own culture. This diasporic state is discussed in section 4.2 with the work of Hlongwane *The altar of God* (1984), (figure 8) because it was a site specific installation art work that acted as a sentimental work in the community. The installation work was moved into a gallery space, taking it completely of its original context. The white space of the gallery with its modern technology and its architecture now dominates this sacred space while it becomes part of the installation work at the same time.



Figure 15 Image of a kraal at eZinkomeni near Mdantsane. (Photo by Z Nkosinkulu)



Figure 16 Image of a kraal floor at eZinkomeni near Mdantsane. (Photo by Z Nkosinkulu)

In Viola's work, the element of architecture and design on the altars visually enhances the sublime sacredness of hidden presence. Depending on which narrative the viewer chooses, the artwork is suspended in between a tomb and an altar, where life begins or ends. Behind the altar which is standing alone, showing the figures on the plasma bigger than the two altars facing each other, are two marble sculptures that resemble Biblical figures. I would estimate the sculptures to be around 50cm high, one resembles Mary, the Virgin, and the other resembles a male figure, possibly one of the apostles. These sculptures serve as custodians of this space, as if witnessing the viewer while watching the screens, representing something bigger than ancestors; something closer to God. The sculptures are done in a classical style which resembles the figures painted in by artists like Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael. This brings an old style of art together with new ways of art making, such as a contemporary installation work of Hlobo and Viola.



Figure 17 Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007 High Definition colour video triptych, two plasma screens, one screen mounted vertically, six loudspeakers (three pairs stereo sound

The interior includes the floor as part of the artwork. The floor is a grid of dark and light tiles, a pattern that enhances the patterns on the bottom of the altars. Patterns have been associated with ritual practices and sacred designs. These patterns create a visual dialogue that reminds the viewer of sacred spaces. In some rituals and sacred spaces in different cultures, women are not allowed to enter, like the kraal that Hlobo has used in Xhosa culture. But Viola's artwork speaks to both male and female of any cultural background.

In Viola's installation, the light shines only on the altars leaving the corners of the room dark. The light creates a focal point around the altars while enhancing the presence of the divine. The altars frame the plasma screens resembling altar pieces done on the interior walls of cathedrals and

churches. These altarpieces can be closed or can be painted directly on the wall with pigments and decorated with gold-leaf, depicting stories from the Bible like those in Viola's artwork.

The altars in Viola's work also resemble those sacred altarpieces because they speak a sacred language that alludes to something greater than human beings. In Viola's work, these altars have become a doorway for our ancestors to visit us and go back. They become like a window to another world. Confronted by these figures that appear and disappear, one is left with memories of their loved ones, wondering where they are, what are they doing and if they are trying to reach out. The disappearance and reappearance of figures in Viola's video appear in a constant gaze that appears to be trying to say something. Both the figures on the plasma screens and the sculptures are watching the viewer as they are being watched. They speak of surveillance and self-surveillance. The screens themselves become the eyes of the ancestors that are watching us as we are watching them.

According to Anthony (2007:3),

when you look in the mirror you see not just your face but a museum. Although your face, in one sense, is your own, it is composed of a collage of features you have inherited from your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on.

Similarly to the ancestors in Viola's plasma screens and the hidden surveillance presence of ancestors in Hlobo's kraal, my practical work will also carry the surveillance aspect of the ancestors. The performative act of figures in Viola's screens that disappear and reappear is further extended by the shadows on the floor of the gallery cast by the exotic and indigenous wood that Hlobo uses to construct the kraal. These shadows

can also be seen as a metaphor for the ancestors as their spirit is believed to reside in the kraal.

Our ancestors remind us of who we are; they carry our culture and heritage. How we live and relate to things and how we interpret them is based on our culture which is best known by our ancestors. Therefore, the role of ancestors is acknowledged in many different cultures across the world. Viola's altars resemble another aspect that is believed in my culture, a mirror. In my culture, the *sangoma* have a procedure called *isipili* (mirror), where they ask their patients to drink an *umuthi* and look into a mirror. This is normally done when people want to know who bewitched them, with what how and why they were bewitched. The client can then vividly see the faces appear in the mirror as if he/she is watching a movie. This *isipili* procedure resembles what is commonly known as voodoo because a client is able to use a needle to poke the person who bewitched them in the mirror. *Isipili* is a special procedure and not any *sangoma* can do it. In most cases, it is done as a form of revenge and for secret investigations that involve bewitchment.

Viola's plasma screens give an experience similar to that of the *isipili*. The whole experience becomes a moment of looking into the past expecting some kind of knowledge or some form of assistance similar to diasporas that constantly look behind to draw from their past knowledge to know who they are. Whether one reads Viola's installation as a form of *isipili*, an altar or a tomb, the artwork becomes a mediator to a new dialogue that allows us to connect from different cultural backgrounds.

Two of the plasma screens are the same size and one is larger. In this larger plasma, Viola shows half figures that are larger than the figures on the two

plasma screens although they are showing full figures. This makes the figures in the larger plasma screen dominant in the foreground compared to the figures on other screens which are standing in front of two sculptures mounted on the wall. When looking at the larger screens, the altars seem very protected by the sculpture in the background.

This installation was first shown in a small room inside an old church. Firstly, Viola, after looking at the space, identified the altars as a starting point of the installation. Then the installation of three plasma screens brought the altars to life. In order to deal with the challenges of creating what was going to show on the screens, Viola made use of hi-definition cameras with a special mirror prism that had to be specially designed for the artwork. Viola became a director as he created his artworks. He used props, a stage set, performance artists, theatrical lighting and sound. In contrast to Viola's use of materials, Hlobo used found materials for his art making, especially rubber inner tubes.



Figure 18 Nicholas Hlobo (2006) *Umthibi. kraal (ubuhlanti)*, wooden stakes, exotic and indigenous wood, pink ribbon, rubber inner tube, wire.



Figure 19 Nicholas Hlobo (2006) *Umthubi. kraal (ubuhlanti)*, wooden stakes, exotic and indigenous wood, pink ribbon, rubber inner tube, wire.

In *Umthubi* (2006), (figure 19) Hlobo used kraal (*ubuhlanti*), (figure 15), wooden stakes, exotic and indigenous wood, pink ribbon, rubber inner tubes, wire, kraal shape, *umthubi* (the title of the work), rubber ball, shadows on the floor and kraal inside the gallery space making a space of spiritual and traditional rituals inside a space of Westernised cultural rituals. Hlobo's use of these materials resembles the crossing of cultural boundaries and interconnectedness as shown by the shape of the kraal that is normally used by Zulu people, and the wood. Hlobo says that

the exotic and indigenous wood is symbolic in a sense. The reason for the indigenous wood is to be in touch with South Africa, where I come from, and the exotic wood, especially the blue gum, makes reference to the history and economic growth of South Africa¹²

¹² <http://www.stevenson.in/exhibitions/hlobo/umthubi.htm>

(2006:4).

This symbolises the diasporic state that this study is investigating. The referencing of other cultural elements by Hlobo while he is exploring Xhosa tradition embraces the notion of interconnectedness through the moving and evolving of cultures.

The title of this artwork, *Umthubi* (2006), (figure 19), according to Hlobo, is about “helping, giving a hand to someone else” . The concept of mediation that has been a common thread in this study which also reaches out to the ancestors as if asking for a hand. The common factors of mediation also suggest the idea that cultures borrow from other cultures. Therefore, identity is a construct of borrowed layers. This means that a person will always connect to something in the past, present or future. Hlobo made use of a black ball made from rubber and placed it outside the kraal while it still appears to be connected to the kraal by a pink ribbon. This idea of separation and connection refers to the diasporic mind state, the subject of this study. It also speaks of being connected to the old culture while practicing others culture and assuming a new identity. The pink ribbon that Hlobo used to turn the kraal into a trampoline is intertwined and woven suggesting that identity is a construct of multiple layers.



Figure 20 Nicholas Hlobo (2007) *Umtubi*. Kraal (ubuhlanti), wooden stakes, exotic and indigenous wood, pink ribbon, rubber inner tube, wire.

The reference to the kraal that Hlobo used for his work is a place where, in the Xhosa culture, ancestors are believed to reside. A kraal is a respected space of the house where access is denied, especially to women. It symbolises masculinity because a man becomes a man by the size of his kraal and therefore, of his herd. Hlobo mocks this space of authority by turning it into a trampoline with pink ribbon. Hlobo further argues that

the stakes have a rhythm that was influenced by the ground on which they were built. On one side they are almost upright, but on the other side they are leaning. They resemble people who are watching over what is happening here; they are like spectators of this game, keeping guard over everything inside the kraal¹³.

¹³ <http://www.stevenson.in/exhibitions/hlobo/umthubi.htm>

The stake on Hlobo's works resembles the figures in Viola's screens that also appear to be spectators of our lives. They speak to the concept of witnesses and the presence of the omnipresence.

I can line this up with the experience I had when I visited Freedom Park in Pretoria. In Freedom Park, there is and *Isivivane* (figure 21) which is a "resting place for the spirits of those who died in the struggle for humanity and freedom" in South Africa. To construct *isivivane*, boulders were collected from the nine provinces of South Africa from a place within the province with historical significance.



Figure 21 Isivivane from the pathway above looking eastwards

Along with boulders representing national government and a boulder representing the international community, these boulders were used to construct the Lesaka, the burial ground where the spirits of those who died in the struggle for humanity

and freedom have been laid to rest. To emphasize cleansing and purity, the centre of the Lesaka is shrouded in mist.¹⁴



Figure 22 *Lesaka in the centre of isivivane at night.*

Looking at Viola's work reminds me of the invisible presence that I experienced at the *isivivane* because the *isivivane* (figure 21), is also filled with the energy of invisible spirits. The symbolism and meaning behind *isivivane* (figure 21), is in line with Viola's subject matter and symbolism in his artwork. The screen of steam blown by wind in different directions resembles the misty background that Viola's figures seem to emerge from behind the curtain of water.

¹⁴ http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Africa/South_Africa/Gauteng/Pretoria-2217491/Things_To_Do-Pretoria-Freedom_Park-BR-1.html

The nine boulders of *isivivane* (figure 21), their presence as observers of the burial resemble Viola's altars. The presence of the altars in *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 14) represents a divine presence. These sacred spaces allow us to mediate towards our ancestors and reminds us that we are connected to our cultural background. Although Viola's work is an inside installation art and *isivivane* (figure 21), is created, not as an art piece, but as a symbol for the burial of spirits. It is its symbolic presence and metaphoric connections based on different cultures in South Africa that take it to a single dialogue. These artworks and memorial installations allow our ancestors to mediate with the present. With these symbolic structures, we are able to experience their presence in an immersive way. When leaving this kind of space, I am left with a sense of spiritual upliftment.

Viola's figures look like ghosts emerging into reality and then disappearing back into the dark side through the curtain of water that acts as a mediator for these figures. After emerging into full colour, they try to speak or give signs or pass messages. They beckon in slow motion as if they were missing us or they wanted to say something to us. Their facial expressions and body language gives a sense of the body as a mediator.

The boulders of *isivivane* are tilted inward and yet they also speak a particular language, as if they are simply gazing, standing there in a circle as if just watching over the burial. The boulders wait in a gaze as if they are expecting those who are dead to rise or as if they are waiting to show them a threshold to pass. Also the boulders resemble people in mourning of the dead during the funeral, or people as witness to a space of rituals or custodians of those who are dead.

4.5 CONCLUSION

It has been discussed how the themes of Christian and African tradition are explored in contemporary South African visual art. Some artists choose to combine both Christian and African traditional themes in their work. These artworks serve as lenses to analyse Viola's and Hlobo's work. During the comparative analysis, a common thread became evident between Viola's and Hlobo's work along with *isivivane* in Freedom Park when seen through the lens of Xhosa ancestral traditions. These threads are about a search for transcendence.

Concepts such as mediation, looking back and the experience of transience are a common factor between these artworks that demonstrate how cultures are interconnected and borrow from one another. Also, the notion of diaspora can be adapted as a metaphor for culture transience. It also becomes evident that artworks can facilitate the experience of transience and reflect on the concept of mediation that is embraced in Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Tsonga and Basotho cultures South Africa.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself

Franz Fanon

The need to have an identity is one of the most common characteristics humans share. Society also contributes in this aspect of attaining identity by equipping us with language and concepts, however, society relays superficial categorisation and labeling of people. Some people feel pressurised to belong to their particular/original cultures while others feel they should have a right to assume a particular cultural identity outside their traditional roles. In contemporary society, it has been hard for some people to adapt due to the fast changing world that strives for globalisation. This study was prompted by the feelings of dislocation and displacement due to cultural transience because culture is a source of identity. Our identity feeds from our culture, therefore, we are what we do.

This study began by stating objectives in order to shed light on the purpose of this research. This study was highly influenced by a position I found myself in which was the feeling of being dislocated and confused from being brought up between Xhosa ancestral practices and Christianity. The contribution of globalisation to identity construction has both positive and negative effects. It creates divisions between people of the same culture because some want to preserve their culture and traditions while others want to change or integrate. Globalisation offers more opportunities for those people who want to assume new identities. However, there are still those who feel the need to honour their ancestors because they believe they owe it to them. According to Anthony,

In traditional societies, where life is still structured around family, extended kin, and the village, people often are more conscious of the

debts they owe their ancestors, even of the power of their ghosts and spirits. Zafimaniry women in rural Madagascar weave complicated patterns on their hats, which they learned from their mothers and aunts (2007:4).

In Chapter 2, it was discussed that identity is constructed through many different kinds of factors such as group affiliation, encounters with artworks, symbols, land and narrative. The interaction between key concepts and Martin Buber's concept of *I AND THOU* also affirms that identity is constructed through place and interactions with other human beings, including the rest of creation. Through Buber's lens of *I AND THOU*, I saw a need for human beings to be connected to something external that is beyond human boundaries. To be connected to ancestors and to take a particular identity affirms the need to belong. This study is my small contribution to the field of Xhosa ancestral traditions research and contemporary visual art research in the field of human sciences. I believe it might uncover other gaps that were not covered in this study, for future research.

This is my first step of placing Xhosa cultural tradition and practical knowledge at the same table with other knowledge. People change and grow old with time and traditional knowledge perishes. In order to have a rich and inspiring reservoir of models of reality, we need to protect our diversity of cultures. My attempt in this dissertation is to present my experiences of Xhosa culture, specifically ancestral traditions, from an insider point of view. Other knowledge is recorded but in a manner that favours the Western side of the story. One of the effects of colonialisation is the dislocation of the historical and cultural context of the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape. Even today, the fight for traditional cultures has to do with telling a story from the decolonised point of view. During the course

of this study, Viola's and Hlobo's installation artworks were used to align my experience of Xhosa ancestral practice and Christianity with universal knowledge.

Chapter 1 outlined how the use of diaspora as a metaphor and autoethnography as methodology contributed to reach the objectives of this study. During the course of this study, it was established that Bill Viola's video installation work *Ocean without a shore* (2007), (figure 17) and Nicholas Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006), (figure 18) installation artwork exhibited human interconnectedness when viewed through the lens of Xhosa ancestral practices. Cultural elements of the Xhosa people such as mediation overlap with other South African cultures and there are universal symbols of mediation. Diaspora can be viewed as a metaphor of how cultures evolve to ensure their survival and how globalisation contributes to the feelings of disconnectedness or displacement. On the other hand, globalisation can be utilised to spread knowledge about the diversity of cultures. Diasporic experience and the integration of objects from other cultures form part of contemporary cultural identity which exhibits cultural interconnectedness.

The scope of this study focused on common factors such altar, water, art, body, belief systems and Xhosa ancestral traditions that, I believe, have influenced my identity. The freedom of expression offered by autoethnography allowed me to find a place for my personal experience and knowledge as a Xhosa African man in the universal knowledge. Although autoethnography is regarded as potentially biased, I believe my research has a place in contemporary knowledge especially in the age of multiculturalism. The diasporic mind state which I experience in contemporary society, is partly the result of globalisation and

multiculturalism. It was discussed in Chapter 2 that identity is very complex issue and is continuously influenced by and constructed through many different aspects of personal and cultural histories.

By analysing Bill Viola's and Nicholas Hlobo's installation artworks, I hoped to shed light on some human universals that we can embrace as differences that unite us beyond cultural and demographical boundaries. By comparing and analysing Viola's and Hlobo's artworks from a Xhosa cultural point of view, I was able to highlight the human need to experience transience. They also highlighted that it is through those moments of Buber's human relational experience and the experience of transience that we find connection. The connection between Viola's and Hlobo's works display a meeting point of cultures during transience. Through the elements such as altar, kraal, symbolism and belief system, the artworks exhibit elements of Xhosa ancestral belief system although the artworks are based on different themes. These themes are also evident to the Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Tsonga, and Basotho ancestral belief systems. They reflect the same thing but in different ways. Mediation is embraced in almost all traditional cultures in South Africa but is approached in different ways. All the traditional cultures in South Africa share the same need to believe and acknowledge something greater than human experience.

The notion of diaspora was adapted for this study to be used as a metaphor for a mind state and the spreading of culture. The spreading of diaspora is a symbol of evolving culture because, for diaspora to happen, movement, dislocation and displacement has to happen. The concept of diaspora describes identity as if it is something fixed and static. Concepts such as dislocation, displacement and disorientation are always connected to diaspora. This is a way to acknowledge the transience that has become

our adaptable experience. Diaspora becomes a way of acknowledging the past life that existed. Diaspora is a sign of a past identity and a beginning of the new identity based on past experiences. People normally look back to their past when they are rebuilding their identity in new lands or after a psychological shift because dislocation is psychological. It is the psychological side of dislocation that motivated the need for this study. Through globalisation and introduction of new cultures, psychological dislocation is likely to happen.

In the age of globalisation, technology has made the spread of cultures truly boundless. However, this spread of ideas is not always accompanied by the physical interaction between people. The physical contact is limited due to the virtual cultures adopted on the internet. People interact more with their cellphones and tablets than conversing with another human being. Globalisation brought solutions as well as problems. Like any other thing, I believe it always depends on intention whether something is good or bad.

Cultural identity is not constructed in isolation and is not immune to influence by elements of other cultures across the world. The elements of Xhosa ancestral tradition that are evident in both Viola's and Hlobo's works are also evident in other cultures in South Africa displaying a strong interconnectedness because no human being can do everything on their own. We always need an extra hand to push us through and point us to the right directions in life. The artworks of Viola and Hlobo show that artworks can serve as pointers and as a way of looking back. According to Anthony "archeology, history, genealogy, and prayer are the overflowing drawers into which we throw our thoughts of earlier generations" (2007:00). My practical work also serves as a pointer and as a way of looking back

because it is my interpretation of cultural transience from generation to generation. For the construction of my practical work I have adapted elements such as *ishweshwe* fabric, stitching, plastic, beads, starching, fire, stenciling and layering of visual metaphors because they formed a thread between the artworks and the Xhosa ancestral traditions.

My practical work promotes a need for the visual reflections about Xhosa belief systems. The work pertains not only to preserving the Xhosa ancestral practices but also to question them. It looks into South African art practices with reference to the influences of cultures and systems of power in the past and now. Since South Africa has been a place of cultural interactions and influences through colonisation and globalisation that made it what it is today, studying these cultural relationships is important because it opens self-reflective analyses of why things are the way they are. My self-reflective analysis, influenced by autoethnography methodology, is presented in the catalogue that accompanies my exhibition. In my artist catalogue, I describe my art practice in detail and the way it has been influenced by my theoretical research. Through connecting the practical and theoretical research, through questioning my cultural belief systems, while, at the same time, trying to safeguard it from disappearing, I have been pushed onto the path of continuously reinventing myself anew.

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