



## THE VIEWS OF AMAKRWALA ON THE USAGE OF *UMQOMBOTHI* AND COMMERCIAL ALCOHOL DURING THE INITIATION CEREMONIES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Alcohol has been used in many African countries like Tanzania and Kenya to celebrate important cultural ceremonies for many decades. In the context of amaXhosa, they use both umqombothi (traditional beer) and different types of brandy to celebrate ulwaluko (initiation process). The use of umqombothi and commercial alcohol by initiates during the initiation is integral to the initiation process of amaXhosa. This paper therefore presents the findings on the views of amakrwala (new initiates) on the usage of umqombothi and commercial alcohol during the initiation ceremonies. A qualitative research approach was employed using an exploratory-descriptive and contextual design sampling 16 amaXhosa young men between the ages of 18 to 24 years who recently graduated from ulwaluko. Semi-structured telephonic interviews were conducted. Themes such as different rituals practiced by amaXhosa, meaning of umqombothi and commercial alcohol use, and recommendations based on alcohol usage in ulwaluko by amakrwala emerged in the study. Both umqombothi and brandy use during ulwaluko was viewed as good practice by amakrwala. However, they emphasised that guidelines should be put in place to monitor responsible drinking. Based on these findings, it can be concluded and recommended that there should be guidelines on who, how and when alcohol should be used during the initiation ceremonies, and for what purposes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Alcohol abuse, ulwaluko, amakrwala, umqombothi, initiation ceremony.

## INTRODUCTION

Myadze and Rwomire (2014, p. 4) mentions that alcohol is used in cultural ceremonies throughout the world. In Sub-Saharan Africa, alcohol is used to celebrate different ceremonies which includes marriages, religious ceremonies, and funerals (Ferreira-Borges et al., 2017, p. 4). In most African countries drinking is portrayed as a symbol of success and heroism (Ferreira-Borges et al., 2017, p. 4). In South Africa, a study conducted by Nyembezi, Sifunda, Funani, Ruiters, Van Den Borne and Reddy (2010, p. 105) found that 54.4% of the participants indicated that they drank alcohol during their initiation ceremonies as their culture required them to do so.

Initiation rite is one of the most significant ceremonies practiced across the African continent (Hunter, 1936, p. 165; Van der Vliet, 1974, p. 229; Ngxamngxa, 1971, p. 185).

In most communities practising the rite including *amaXhosa* ethnic group in South Africa, this practice marks male adolescents' transition from boyhood to manhood. Legally, every young Xhosa male at the age of 18 years old is expected to undergo this ritual in order to be respected and be accepted as a true man (*indoda*). From the beginning to the end of the initiation process, *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol play significant roles to mark certain cultural meanings which will be explained under the findings section. However, anecdotal information on the ground suggests that both *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol is part of the contemporary initiation rite. This is because none of these types of alcohol were part of the original cultural practice as milk was used to take priority as an integral part of the initiation rite since communities did not have *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol at their disposal. It is also worth noting that *ulwaluko* has been practised for many years. It is viewed as a course during which positive behaviours are taught by *amakhankatha* (initiates' guardians) to the initiates during the separation (celebration day for the soon-to-be- initiate), transition (*umojiso* or meat tasting on the 8<sup>th</sup> day in the initiation school), and incorporation (*umgidi* or the graduation day of the initiate) phases of the initiation rite as they graduate to behave morally and ethically in their communities (Ntombana, 2011, p. 631). The figure below shows the phases of *ulwaluko* that an initiate must undergo in order to be recognized as 100 percent complete man.



**Figure 1: AmaXhosa phases for boys' initiation (*ulwaluko*) (from Ncaca, 2014, p. 73).**



Boys need to travel on this journey for them to be accepted as mature men in their communities (Ncaca, 2014, p. 73). Gogela (2017, p. 48) is of the view that anthropologists such as Jean La Fontaine (1985), Victor Turner (1966; 1969) and Arnold van Gennep (1960) are known for their major contribution to the development of theories on rites of passage, more especially in *ulwaluko* transition phases.

While undergoing initiation, initiates are expected to acquire knowledge about culture, clan identity, moral behaviour, manhood (*ubudoda*) and male responsibilities (Ntombana, 2011, p. 631). At the end of the initiation ceremony, initiates undergo the process of *ubukrwala* which is known as an important phase of the manhood making process (Kheswa, Nomngcoyiya, Adonis & Ngeleka, 2014, p. 2789).

Alcohol used during the ceremonies can be any beverage in the form of whiskey, beer or wine and it is used to show hospitality to the visiting guests during social gatherings or any important cultural or special ceremony (Getachew, Lewis, Britton, Deressa & Fogarty, 2019, p. 121). In the context of *amaXhosa*, *umqombothi* is a homemade traditional beer fermented with sorghum, yeast and maize that is used during the traditional ceremonies (Tshongolo, 2013, p. 122). McAllister (1985, p. 1221-1235) states that *umqombothi* plays a significant role when *amaXhosa* perform other cultural ceremonies outside *ulwaluko*, such as *ukwazisa umzi* (new homestead introduction to ancestors and the community) because *umqombothi* is integrated with the purpose of connecting with ancestors to attract or receive their listening ear for divine blessings and continuous protection. Ntombana (2011, p. 97), however in his study conducted in Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape found that commercial alcohol such as brandy and beer were used by initiates' caregivers during the initiation ceremonies and the meaning of their use was not clear.

During the initiation ceremony, initiates learn about the code of conduct or etiquette about drinking commercial alcohol or *umqombothi*, and the importance of self-respect on when and how to drink alcohol (Kheswa et al., 2014, p. 2794-2795; Ntombana, 2011, p. 97). For example, during *umgidi* ceremony family members and neighbours make various kinds of contribution which include bottles of brandy, cases of beer, groceries, and money. Contributions are usually made in such a candid manner to ensure that the hosts are fully aware of contributors during the ceremony in order for them to return the favour (Ntombana, 2011, p. 97).

Similarly, in other African countries like Tanzania and Kenya, both traditional beer and commercial alcohol are used to celebrate important occasions such as marriages and successes of harvests (Setlalentoa, Pisa, Thekisho, Ryke, & Loots, 2010, p. 11). However, in Kenya and Tanzania there are guidelines that govern the drinking behaviour in the cultural ceremonies (Setlalentoa et al., 2010, p. 11).

Abraído-Lanza, Armbrister, Flórez and Aguirre (2006, p. 1342) highlight that as a result of acculturation individuals adopt the attitudes, values, customs, beliefs, and behaviours of another culture. In the context of this study acculturation occurs when commercial alcohol is used more in urban and semi-urban contexts than when it is used in rural contexts. The way that commercial alcohol is used more than *umqombothi* during the initiation ceremonies of *amaXhosa* can be influenced by modernization and urbanisation. Morality, style, and the dress code of 2017 to 2018 have influenced *amakrwala's* uniform which is now different to the uniform of 1990 to 2000. This is a confirmation that times have changed. On the other side Pahl, Pienaar, and Ndungane (1989, p. 194 cited in Ntombana, 2011, p. 634) oppose this view



as they alluded that culture or *isiko*, is an eternal covenant that cannot be changed by times. In addition, Mauricio et al. (2014, p. 365) emphasize that it is expected that cultures will play a huge role in terms of shaping people's behaviour towards traditional beer or use of alcohol, misuse, and sobriety. Mauricio et al. (2014, p. 365) further maintains that cultures influence the ways people think, and it is probable that people will use traditional or commercial alcohol to feel part of the cultural group (Mauricio et al., 2014, p. 365).

Given the cultural context that highlights the significance of integrating alcohol during the *amaXhosa* cultural ceremonies; the current paper explored the usage of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol integration during the *amaXhosa* initiation ceremonies from the perspective of *amakrwala*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As explained in the introduction of this paper, there are two forms of alcohol used during initiation ceremonies, namely commercial alcohol such as brandy and beer, and the traditional form of alcohol such as *umqombothi*. Both types of alcohol were explained in the preceding sections, and they will be discussed interchangeably in this section. For the sake of this paper, the authors will briefly highlight the meaning of commercial and traditional alcohol use from broader context to *amaXhosa* context during the traditional ceremonies to situate this paper into a wider context.

Even though there was a paucity of literature focusing on initiation ceremonies and alcohol use it was found that, in the United States of America commercial alcohol was viewed by adolescents as a substance that changed a person's behaviour for the worst (Sobell & Sobell, 1978). On the other hand, some adolescents viewed commercial alcohol use as a way of coping during stressful situations (Sobell & Sobell, 1978). Wang, Newman and Shell (2016, p. 1) found that in Wuhan drinking alcohol was both a normal part of the daily diet, especially in rural areas and an important part of rituals, business occasions, festivals and special events. Here, moderate drinking during important occasions is encouraged but excessive drinking is discouraged through various social sanctions (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1). The socio-cultural theory explains this as the "dynamic interdependence between individual and social processes in the construction of knowledge" of why and when drinking alcohol is culturally and socially expected (Polly et al., 2018, p. 1).

African societies have been brewing traditional alcohol using sorghum (Nugent, 2017, p. 1) to mark important celebrations. For example, Zimbabwean traditional sorghum beer called *chibuku*, Nigerian traditional sorghum and "maize beer called *ogi* and a trio of traditional Zambian non-alcoholic beverages called *mabisi*, *munkoyo* and *chibwantu*" are used to celebrate special cultural ceremonies such as an initiation ceremony and celebration of successes of harvests (Mokoena, 2017, p. 3). These drinks are treasured by African people for nutritional purposes and cultural practices. Thus, African families still provide *umqombothi* during ceremonies like traditional weddings as a treat for their guests (Mokoena, 2017, p. 3). Mshana, Wambura, Mwangi, Mosha, Mosha and Changanlucha (2011, p. 1114) also conducted research in the Tarime district of Tanzania and found that during the graduation day of male initiates, a local brew called *Togwa*, as well as commercial alcohol, was consumed by the initiates and all people attending the ceremony as a way of celebrating *ikrwala*'s



homecoming. The initiation and subsequent celebration can thus be viewed through the socio-cultural theory's principle that learning how and when to use alcohol originates from social, historical, and cultural interactions (Polly et al., 2018, p. 57).

This is similar to the context of *amaXhosa* where, during ceremonies such as unveiling of the tombstone and *ulwaluko*, all the family members are encouraged to drink traditional beer to show respect to ancestors (Monyela, 2017, p. 3; Tshongolo, 2013, p. 122; Bongela, 2001, p. 13). On this note, Mpanza and Govender (2017, p. 111) are of the view that most children are introduced to drinking during such cultural ceremonies. Through the process of acculturation (Santelli, Abraido-Lanza & Melnikas (2009, p. 4) which is the key element of socio-cultural theory, young people are influenced by the Western views on the preference of Western alcohol more than traditional alcohol because some men would prefer expensive modern bottles of beers than *umqombothi* during traditional ceremonies (Taylor, 2017, p. 7).

The study that was conducted by Prusente, Khuzwayo and Sikweyiya (2019, p. 9) at Ingquza Hill Local Municipality in Lusikisiki found that the pressure for initiates to use commercial alcohol was mainly motivated by *abafana* in and after the initiation ceremony. In this study some of the *amakrwala* revealed how through the process of cultural socialisation (Notole, 2016) they were introduced to both *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol by *amakhankatha* with a belief that a traditionally initiated *ikrwala* should prove his strength of being a man by doing things such as drinking brandy and beer (Prusente et al., 2019, p. 6-7). Prusente et al. (2019, p. 9) further argued that traditionally circumcised men use brandy as a way of demonstrating their manhood, to show that they are 'real men' compared to medically circumcised men. In their recent research writings on *ulwaluko*, Ntombana (2020), Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe (2021), and Mpateni and Kang'ethe (2022) identified that the misuse of substances including commercial alcohol and *umqombothi* by *abakhwetha* (initiates) and *amakhankatha* (traditional guardians or caregivers) has a negative influence in the behaviour of newly initiated men today. However, Ntombana (2020) believes that the current state of initiation rite being characterised by *umqombothi*, and commercial alcohol is the reflection of society and communities practising the rite.

The studies above have shown that for *amaXhosa*, *umqombothi* is more than just a beer. This beverage is used as a means of celebrating the return of initiates. It signifies a central role in the process of appeasing the ancestors. The following section will show the relevance of the socio-cultural theory as a framework that guides our argument in this paper.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The socio-cultural theory was used in the study to conceptualize the use of alcohol during cultural ceremonies. This theory was coined by Lev Vygotsky in the year 1930 and it explains that the surrounding culture of a person influences their cognitive development (Lantolf, 2000, p. 27). According to Lantolf (2000, p. 27), Vygotsky proposed that cognitive development could vary among cultures. For instance, the progression of change in a Western culture can differ to that of an Eastern culture (Lantolf, 2000, p. 27). Kang'ethe and Nomngcoyiya (2014, p. 461) believed that indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in the belief system that people are the experts of their own cultural systems and practices. This theory was deemed relevant to



the study because the indigenous knowledge from the views of *amakrwala* on the meaning of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies were generated.

Several scholars (including Pauw, 2008; Mbiti, 1975; Mayer, 1971 cited in Ntombana, 2011, p. 112) agree that African cultural traditions are not static because the new lifestyles have a strong influence on the practices of these traditional ceremonies. In support to the notion of cultural differences put forth by Pauw (2008) and Ntombana (2011), anecdotal evidence shows that some changes exist in the dress code and language used by the *amakrwala* compared to the dress code or language of the yesteryear among the amaMpondo regions. Furthermore, even though initiation ceremonies, *umgidi* to be specific, continue to follow the same former principles and norms of *amaXhosa*, there is a huge difference between rural, semi-urban or townships and urban initiation graduation ceremonies. To confirm that culture is dynamic, Nyembezi, Sifunda, Funani, Ruitter, Van Den Borne and Reddy (2010, p. 105) found that in South Africa, 54.4% of the research interviewees in their study indicated that they drank alcohol during their initiation ceremonies as their culture required them to do so, and this was not a case in the past. This is the case in the current study since the majority of the participants indicated that they are expected to drink *umqombothi* during *ulwaluko* as a way of communicating with the ancestors. Commercial alcohol was indicated as an additional beer that is there to attract more people to attend *umcimbi*, otherwise it has no cultural significance, the only thing that will happen, people will stop coming to your ceremony if commercial alcohol is lacking or absent.

### Three stages of Rites of Passage as concept of Socio-cultural theory

One of the earliest Anthropologists, Arnold Van Gennep (1960) devised the concept of rites of passages. According to Van Gennep's (1960) Theory of Rites of Passage, there are three stages of life that human beings undergo in their development. The rites of passage are meant to explain the various stages of human development that all societies undergo, rites such as traditional marriages, *imbeleko* (introduction ceremony of newborn baby to ancestors), and death. These are the separation stage, transition stage and incorporation stage (Van Gennep, 1960).

How alcohol is used has become an important fragment of the Xhosa male initiation. Alcohol is mostly used at the beginning and ending to note the ending phase of boyhood and to celebrate the beginning of manhood. Consequently, alcohol is used mainly at the separation stage when the initiates are taken into initiation and at the incorporation stage when the initiates become *amakrwala* (newly graduated initiates) and are incorporated back into society as newly-initiated men. The researchers have dwelt more on the incorporation stage since it is more relevant to the present study's focus, given that the study's participants were *amakrwala*.

Monyela (2017, p. 19) describes the incorporation stage as a stage where initiates are incorporated or prepared to return to their families after completing their initiation ceremonies. It is during the *umgidi* ceremony that *amakrwala* receive sermons and speeches on how they should behave as newly initiated men in their societies. Monyela (2017, p. 19) adds that during the *umgidi* celebration, a new identity is officially ascribed and attached to *amakrwala* that they are, '*oobhuti abatsha* or newly graduated men'.



Based on the different views posed by *amakrwala* in the current study, the researcher is of the view that acculturation to Western customs by *amaXhosa* influences the significance of initiation ceremonies in a sense that *amakrwala* abandon their Xhosa culture and learn Western culture in terms of how they dress during their *ubukrwala*. This has an impact on Xhosa culture because now that *amakrwala* are no longer walking barefooted with rags/blankets on their shoulders there seem to be more focus on expensive brands such as carvellas and navadas.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to the Western Cape Alcohol-Related Harms Reduction Policy Green Paper (2016, p. 2) alcohol has been reported as the most commonly abused drug countrywide, and in addition to this, in 2013 alcohol was ranked as the third leading risk factor for death and disability in South Africa (The Western Cape Alcohol-Related Harms Reduction Policy Green Paper (2016, p. 2)). It was also found that alcohol harm lives, impairs communities and limits socio-economic growth (The Western Cape Alcohol-Related Harms Reduction Policy Green Paper, 2016, p. 2). This is agreed by Corrigan and Motzopoulos (2013, p. 103) and (SAMA, 2019, p. 1) that South African drinkers rank in the top five riskiest drinkers in the world, with approximately 33% to 40% of drinkers consuming alcohol at risky levels such as drink and drive habits, interpersonal violence and patients admitted in trauma units in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban since 1999 to 2001 had injuries with a blood alcohol concentration greater than 0.05 g/100 ml. As a result of these risk factors there were measures put in place to curb alcohol abuse in South Africa such as increasing the legal age drinking to deter minors and youth from accessing alcohol, a ban on alcohol advertising, and enforcement of drinking and driving laws (SAMA, 2019, p. 1).

Based on the literature reviewed, the initiation ceremony potentially serves as a protective factor for teaching young men a code of conduct and this may extend to how they view and use *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol during the initiation and in the future (Gwata, 2009, p. 15). The literature showed that among the *amaXhosa* the initiation ceremony plays a significant role in transforming the *amakrwala's* mind-set about commercial alcohol use and understanding their development or maturity to act morally in society. Furthermore, *umqombothi* during the initiation ceremony among the *amaXhosa* is incorporated with the purpose of connecting with ancestors to attract or receive ancestors' listening ear for the divine blessings and continuous protection for the initiate or newly graduated initiate (McAllister, 1985, p. 1221-1235).

However, on the other hand Ntombana (2011:257) in his study conducted in Libode, Mdantsane, Whittlesea and Cala found a trend of abusing commercial alcohol during *ubwaluko* festivals by young people. Ntombana (2011, p. 258) also found that initiates' caregivers brought beer and brandy to mix with *umqombothi* in the initiates' lodge during the initiation ceremony in the bush. This study found that during the initiation ceremonies commercial alcohol usage was more predominant in Mdantsane and townships such as Whittlesea and Cala (Ntombana, 2011, p. 258). Based on what was found by Ntombana (2011) it is clear that practices at initiation schools have lost the initial intended purpose of inculcating positive behaviors to the initiates and *amakrwala*.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative study which was exploratory-descriptive and contextual in design. The study employed a non-probability purposive-criterion based technique to sample 16 *amaXhosa* young males between the ages of 18 to 24 years who went through the initiation ceremony between June 2017 and December 2018. All the research participants completed their initiation course in the bush within 3 to 4 months.

The empirical part of the study was conducted over six months between July to December 2020 in Thembaletu community, George, Western Cape Province. Due to COVID-19 pandemic regulations, the interviews could not be held face-to-face. Therefore, sixteen individual, semi-structured, telephonic interviews were conducted and audio recorded.

Thematic data analysis was used to code and generate themes deductively. The data gathered was transliterated then read to record data understanding. This was followed by a step-by-step method to analyse each participant's responses to each question then differences and similarities were identified. Through analysis meanings, interrelated concepts and relationships were searched. The coding process categorized notes to create themes, patterns, and categories to organise and interpret information gathered (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 8; Engel & Schutt, 2005, p. 380; Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003, p. 1-6).

Various data verification strategies explained briefly below such as credibility, neutrality, transferability, and dependability were employed to ensure trustworthiness as explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility meant that the findings from the views of the *amakrwala* on the meaning of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies were carefully transcribed and stored as written transcriptions representing the interviews (Anney, 2014, p. 276). To ensure neutrality, the principal researcher upheld fairness by probing queries which addressed participants' views of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremony. Since transferability is concerned with the applicability of one's study to other situations (Shenton, 2004), for the current study, findings were reviewed and can only be applicable to studies of similar nature and topic. The research supervisors were playing active part in the data collection phase by reading all the transcripts which ensured data verification (Barusch, Gringeri & George, 2011, p. 12). An independent coder coded the data to enhance external dependability. The principal researcher also discussed the data analysis with the research supervisor's thereby increasing dependability (Anney, 2014, p. 278).

## ENTRY TO RESEARCH SITE AND PERMISSION TO RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

The research was conducted in Thembaletu, a community situated in George. Two ward councillors granted permission for the principal researcher to conduct the study and later introduced him to few *amakrwala* who then made snowball referral for other prospective participants.

In this study there were no mandatory reporting obligations, however, after the study was concluded, the principal researcher provided ward councillors with a written summary of the study's findings, to show accountability. Due to COVID-19 pandemic regulations, traditional leaders did not participate in the process of recruiting the participants and therefore, were not provided with the written summary of the study's findings. None of the traditional leaders were identified by the ward councillor or principal researcher to speak about the purpose of the study.





However, at the time of writing this paper, the plan was to brief them about the findings and recommendations of the study during *iimbizo*. Therefore, they were not privy to the identity of the individuals who were included in the study. Consent forms were explained and signed via *WhatsApp* and telephonic calls with the research participants.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from all relevant institutional bodies (H20-HEA-SDP-004). As explained by King (2010, p. 99), ethics consider the competence of the researcher and participant rights to privacy or anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation. In addition, the principles of code of ethics as contained in the Belmont Report (1978, p. 7) guided the researcher in ensuring that participants were respected, and they were given the opportunity to choose what they wished to share during the research interviews.

In the above ethics confidentiality, informed consent, privacy and anonymity and voluntary participation were employed in the study.

During the research interviews, undue influence from external sources such as traditional leaders and initiates' caregivers was avoided by withholding details about the date of interviews and identifying details of the participants. Participants were protected against any possible risk of harm. For example, traditional leaders did not assist with the recruitment process as explained above, but ward councillors referred a few participants to the researcher who met the inclusion criteria via *WhatsApp*.

However, after the study was concluded the researcher provided ward councillors overview of the study's results to show accountability. During the interviews participants were only referred to by Mr X or Z and the transcribed interviews were anonymised by assigning participant numbers.

Culturally, initiation rites, customs, and practices among *amaXhosa* are secretly and sensitively protected and not easily shared with anyone. However, the researcher did not observe any discomfort or psychological and emotional effects as the result of questions posed to the participants. To ensure that there was no harm to the participants, the principal researcher informed them that he had also undergone the initiation process in 2006, and that he would not ask questions about initiation process, but that he was only interested in understanding their views on the meaning of alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies.



## RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the study seven themes emerged and theme one focused on the ceremonies or events where *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol was used. Theme two discussed the significance and purpose of alcohol in the initiation ceremonies. Theme three presented the findings on the comparison between *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol. Theme four presented the findings on cultural shift and modernisation. Theme five described men's behaviours as a result of alcohol use in *imigidi*. Theme six discussed the consequences of alcohol use or abuse as shared by *amakrwala*. Theme seven presented recommendations on *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use in *ulwaluko*. However, the current paper focuses on theme two as explained above.

One of the research participants indicated that he went through the Christian initiation ceremony which also took place in the bush but did not integrate alcohol therein. Consequently, he experienced stigma and discrimination by other *amakrwala* and *abafana* during initiation ceremonies and during *indlu yesibane*<sup>1</sup>. Gogela (2017), Monyela (2017) and Gwata (2009) held similar views that even the initiates who underwent medical male circumcision experience the stigma and exclusion in the in *indlu yesibane* by *abafana*. Molobela (2021, p. 3), also noted induced pressure on *amakrwala* to conform to ideals such as buying alcohol and abiding by the rules as set out by *abafana*, rather disrupted *ulwaluko*. This triggers a researcher's curiosity to ask the rhetorical question of why someone who has undergone the Christianity initiation route should be stigmatized? Isn't maybe now the time to change things since it was highlighted by other scholars such as Ntombana (2011) that culture is not static? Maybe the attention of initiation ceremonies currently is more on alcohol presence than the teachings to be poured on *ikrwala*. The other fifteen participants indicated that they drank *umqombothi* during *umgubho*, *umojiso* and *umgidi* as a way of respecting their ancestors. They mentioned that during their *imigidi* it is when more *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol such as brandy and beers were used to celebrate their homecoming. Similarly, the incorporation of alcohol in these three phases is found in the writings of Van Gennepe's (1960) Theory of Rites of Passage as discussed in the preceding section.

The discussion below briefly presents the findings about the usage and purpose of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol during the initiation ceremonies from the perspective of *amakrwala*. The main finding is that the majority of the participants' favoured Western alcohol and labelled it as 'modern *umqombothi*' and according to *amakrwala*'s views, '*umqombothi* is for older people and is outdated to be used by youth'.

### ***Amakrwala*'s views on the significance and purpose of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies**

The major finding from the participants is that *umqombothi* is 'a significant beer to conduct *isiko*' while commercial alcohol is perceived as 'sweets' with less or no meaning during *isiko*. Some of the *amakrwala* in the current study had the view that it is good to preserve the dignity of *isiko* regardless of the changing times, because each and every nation is unique by its own culture, language and dress code. The majority of participants perceived *ulwaluko* without

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<sup>1</sup> *Indlu yesibane* is exclusive ceremony attended by initiated men only. The celebration is meant for men to teach *ikrwala* how to be a man.



alcohol use as a ‘joke’ or an ‘incomplete ceremony’. Below are a few excerpts to substantiate why the use of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol is important during *ulwaluko*:

*Inkwenkwe phambi kokuba ihambe iyokoluka ikhaya liye liqale lilungise izinto ezingenzekanga enkwenkweni, iinto ezifana neembeleko, ngoba iminyanya kufuneka yazisiwe. Eeh umqombothi ke ingakumbi uyinto edibanisa inkwenkwe nezinyanya ngokomoya ukuyicelela inkuselo ehlathini. [Prior to undergoing the initiation ceremony, the boy’s family is required to perform any outstanding rituals, such as imbeleko, as a way of communicate with ancestors. Therefore, umqombothi is a beer that connects spiritually a boy with his ancestors, to urge their divine protection in the bush.]* (Participant 1). The same sentiment was made by Trapido (2020, p. 1) that most societies use alcoholic beverages to celebrate their ceremonies (Trapido, 2020, p. 1). Similar conclusions were drawn from the study conducted by Simelane-Kalumba (2014, p. 109) that during the custom of *ukutya utsiki* (which is the introductory phase of *umakoti*), *umqombothi* is integrated to introduce *umakoti* to the ancestors and used for the purposes of teaching her the rules and laws of her new home and status in a process called *ukuyalwa* (Simelane-Kalumba, 2014:109). Adekeye et al. (2020, p. 1) found similar views in Nigeria where drinking alcohol marks important rites of passages such as naming ceremony for babies, marriages, and birthday celebrations for young people. Another participant in the current study was of the view that *isiko* is *isiko* by the integration of alcohol therein as shown in the excerpt below:

*In order for isiko to be 100 percent complete, an animal should be slaughtered. The remains of umqombothi (or iintsipho) are used as a drinking source to the ancestors. Traditionally, in ulwaluko we don’t have Western alcohol such as commando brandy, but modernisation and transformation led to Western alcohol use in ulwaluko.* (Participant 2).

This indeed shows that culture is not static. Modernisation and the fourth industrial revolution attest that *amasiko* will change at times but perhaps people must not totally shy away from their roots because culture is preserved by sticking to one’s roots, despite the changing times. This practice of preserving one’s culture can be viewed in the framework of acculturation, as explained by Zambrana and Carter-Pokras (2010, p. 20). In line with the views of the authors, Lev Vygotsky’s (1930) socio-cultural theory was used to contextualize these research findings.

As shown in the above excerpts, there were opposing views on the significance and purpose of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during *ulwaluko*. Of the sixteen participants, thirteen participants were in favour of the significance of alcohol while three participants, were against alcohol use during *ulwaluko*, both *umqombothi* and Western alcohol.

One of the participants shared that he realized that after graduating in the initiation school he would now have to change his behaviour and attitude to life, and act like an adult. The extract below concurs with the above-mentioned finding:

*Umqombothi is for celebration for joy purposes, but seeing the way that is being used nowadays I think now people lost the reason or the actual purpose of brewing umqombothi, and when people get drunk you can’t control their behaviour, you know? And so, my view on these things is that basically it’s wrong the use of alcohol.* (Participant 11).



### Significance of *umqombothi*

In this research study, all participants described *umqombothi* as a significant beer used during the initiation ceremony. Participants perceived *umqombothi* as a prerequisite of any *umcimbi*, because it brings significance to the culture of the *amaXhosa*. Some participants described the meaning of *umqombothi* use during initiation ceremonies. For example, one participant was of the view that *umqombothi* is a traditional beer that must be treated with respect but that nowadays it is used for pleasure. He argued the actual purpose of *umqombothi* use to-date, is lost. However, another participant disagreed with this notion as he perceived *umqombothi* as a good thing to use because a galvanized beaker of *umqombothi* accompanies teachings of *abafana* to *ikrwala*. For example during *ulwaluko*, *abakhuluwa* (men) bring a galvanised bucket used to drink *umqombothi* which is put in front of *amakrwala* or *abakhwetha*. They then explain the lessons, i.e: the first beaker is meant for washing away your boyhood sins in the river, the second beaker is for teaching you how to dress in *ubukrwala* clothes and their meaning, and the third is for welcoming or introducing you as a new man to the family and community at large. Another participant thought that fermenting and brewing *umqombothi* during the ceremony granted dignity. With the presence of *umqombothi*, the *ikrwala* therefore felt proud about his culture more especially when he saw his homestead full of people, and he knew that people would advise him and affirm the manhood teachings.

Despite the use of *umqombothi* in *ulwaluko* there has been a shift of the meaning in its use, such as commercializing it. For instance, Londani et al. (2019, p. 50) and Simatende et al's (2015) both agree that in Black communities' alcohol is brewed for many reasons such as making profit due to poverty and lack of job opportunities. The results of this study confirmed that unemployed breadwinners were more likely to brew alcohol than employed main income earners in the household. In other words, this study shows us a shift of brewing *umqombothi* freely for ordinary people to commercialize it because of poverty in most Gauteng Townships (Londani et al., 2019, p. 50).

In the current study some *amakrwala* mentioned that the purpose of using alcohol in *ulwaluko* is for teaching purposes as shown in the extract below:

*I see the use of umqombothi in the initiation ceremony as a good thing my brother because it accompanies teachings to ikrwala. For instance, abakhuluwa presents different beakers of umqombothi for different reasons such as washing umkhwetha in the river, dressing ikrwala, introducing ikrwala to his family, and offering to the community that they can celebrate ikrwala's home-coming. (Participant 13).*

This shows that some *amakrwala* see the need of integrating *umqombothi* in *ulwaluko*, more especially during the teachings imparted on *ikrwala* by *abafana*. Booii and Edwards's (2014, p. 1) study portrayed similar findings that during the ceremony of *intlombe* or the dancing ceremony, *umqombothi* and white brandy (Smirnoff) was used to ask ancestors for their divine protection to *umkhwetha* or *igqirha* throughout the process of *ubugqirha* training. In addition to this, Lotusdrifter (2013, p. 1) explains that *umqombothi*, a bottle of gin and boxer tobacco when integrated with *impepho* is beneficial for someone's ancestors. By using these resources, ancestors can offer blessings to the new initiation graduate, such as being promoted at work (Lotusdrifter, 2013, p. 1). In Zimbabwe as well traditional alcohol was used "in social interactions as a trade product and as a sacred drink" (Marcia & Rayna, 2010, p. 80).



### Use of *umqombothi* is not compulsory

There were opposing views in this research that *umqombothi* was a compulsory beer to be used in *ulwaluko*. Five participants felt that there was no need to integrate *umqombothi* in the initiation ceremony. These participants believed that *umqombothi* brewing and commercial alcohol use was a waste of money; money that could be invested in *ikrwala*'s future and education. In contrast, the rest of the participants argued that '*a ceremony is incomplete without the use of umqombothi. Isiko is isiko by brewing umqombothi*'. These opposing views should be acknowledged to accommodate both views, if possible, because this might be a signal that times have changed, rituals need to be revitalized based on emerging trends and developments. Below is the participant's view that showed that *umqombothi* was not compulsory in *ulwaluko*:

*I would say that it's really unnecessary to use umqombothi or any sort of alcohol during umgidi. I think in my side they over do things because they try to impress the neighbourhood; because if this ceremony is for celebrating ikrwala's home-coming the foundation and centre of attention must be on teaching him manhood not alcohol use. For instance, in these days most initiation graduates end up with no enough resources since all the money was invested in umgidi's preparation. (Participant 7).*

Based on the above finding the researcher is of the view that older people who know *isiko* must first educate initiates with or without *umqombothi*, so that *ikrwala* will remember teachings more than the amount of *umqombothi* used during his *umgidi*. For instance, van Gennepe's (1960) model below demonstrates different phases of *ulwaluko* which the researchers argue need to be paid more attention than focusing on alcohol consumption.

### Commercial alcohol

The study aimed to compare and contrast findings from *amakrwala* on the significance or use of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol in the initiation ceremonies. It was found that mostly during the interviews, participants were confused about the term 'commercial alcohol' or '*utywala bentengo*' but it was clear and easy to understand when the researcher used the term 'Western alcohol' or '*utywala baseNtshona okanye obomlungu*'. However, some participants had different views including that commercial alcohol originated from migrant and domestic labour; that it serves to complement *umqombothi*, it is used for celebrations and to have fun. Other participants lacked information on how commercial alcohol became part of the *amaXhosa* initiation ceremonies. The researcher found that participants lacked knowledge about the history or the origins of commercial alcohol among *amasiko amaXhosa* but, the majority of them perceived commercial alcohol as '*a modern umqombothi*' because '*umqombothi is out-dated, dirty in colour and old-fashioned*'. Below is a quote from one participant in support of this view:

*From what I've heard from elders, the origins or genealogy of brandies among amaXhosa originates from our forefathers who were working in the farms under Boers. When they come back home during holidays, they were rewarded with brandies which were drunk together with umqombothi. These brandies are known as 'sweets from White people or bosses. Umqombothi galvanized beaker is therefore brewed with the purposes of thanksgiving for labourers' home-coming, together with cigar (boxer or sniff) and says that, 'these are the sweets from employers. That's how it arrived in amaXhosa ceremonies. (Participant 16).*



These findings are in line with what was highlighted by McAllister (1985, p. 1221) that *umsindleko*, shared similar views that commercial alcohol originated from migrant and domestic labour. This was agreed by *amakrwala* that some of their grandparents worked in wine farms and were rewarded with wines by their employers during December holidays. Jacobs and Steyn (2013, p. 114) explain that in South Africa commercial alcohol in traditional ceremonies originates from domestic labour where farm workers received alcohol as Christmas gift from their employers.

In connection with the history as stated by P16, when asked about the meaning of commercial or Western alcohol use in *ulwaluko*, P16 stated that his view or understanding was that there was an overuse or unnecessary use of *utywala*. On the other hand, P11 explained his view regarding this history as follows:

*“That’s funny enough now because I’ve got a joke around that, aam someone else asked o’ right uuh if your granny was not in good terms with White people right. Because okay not that I’m raising the issue of apartheid or anything but someone wanted to mention that if your grandfather did not like White man how did or can he allow Duke Viceroy in his kraal? How can he bring Richelieu in his kraal? So okay for me that has been interesting. So aam to answer this question my friend said that was in the past, now things have changed.”*

As shown earlier participants mentioned that most people praised and preferred brandy nowadays because times had changed, and people expected brandy not *umqombothi* in the initiation ceremonies. *Umqombothi* was perceived as an out-dated beer for elders but not for young people:

*P3 “This bottle of brandy is preferred by most people in these times of changes, because people watch TV and listen to the radios the adverts of Viceroy brandy, which then they automatically expect to be served in the ceremony. Umqombothi is scarce or a rare beer nowadays. People lose interest in umqombothi drink, therefore as a host you must buy more commercial alcohol which is liked by more people.”*

Michael, Matthews and Nelson (2011, p. 1) in their study found that alcohol such as wine or beer is strongly preferred by most youth compare to sorghum-made beer. This therefore shows that youth prefer commercial alcohol in general and also during *imicimbi* or social gatherings as opposed to traditional beers.

Based on the finding above it seems that more people use commercial alcohol without even showing interest to know how it became part of *amasiko akwaXhosa*, and it overtook *umqombothi* since more youth were reported by *amakrwala* that they perceive *umqombothi* as beer for older people. As a social worker working in the field of substance use, I am of the view that this is worrisome because more young clients report that during the screening, they were introduced to alcohol by their peers during *imigubho* and *imigidi* of their older brothers.

### **Commercial alcohol serves to complement *umqombothi* (perceived as sweets)**

As discussed in the sub-sections above, the participants felt strongly that commercial alcohol was treated or taken as ‘sweets’ in *ulwaluko*, with no significant cultural meaning attached to it. Ten participants in the study commented that commercial alcohol was good and relevant to use in the initiation ceremonies because of its significance in the naming of *umkhwetha*, *ukuyala ikrwala*, teaching *ikrwala* the three-by-three rule, the cleansing of *umkhwetha*,



thanksgiving to the initiates' caregivers and brandy '*is the modern beers for celebrating in umcimbi*'. However, the other six participants felt that commercial alcohol had no value or significance in *ulwaluko* or any other *amaXhosa* ceremony; they are just 'sweets for fun and entertainment purposes. In addition to this, they believed that if they were given the chance to have initiation ceremonies for their future sons, they would not use any alcohol in *ulwaluko*. Below is the extract that supports that commercial alcohol is perceived as sweets that accompany *umqombothi* in the initiation ceremonies:

*Utywala besilungu esiXhoseni ndingathi yimboleko kuyafakelelwa kulaa mqombothi njee uchatha. [I can say that Western alcohol is a borrowed beer to spice up umqombothi of amaXhosa.]* (Participant 6).

*Umqombothi beaker needs company, those sweets. There is a bottle of brandy to build initiates' lodge. This is where Western alcohol starts to work. When abafana accompany initiate to the river cleansing a bottle of brandy is needed to accompany them.* (Participant 16).

Based on the above findings the researcher can conclude that despite the cultural shift and modernisation in *ulwaluko* there should be *iimbizo*'s (community gatherings) and round-table conversations between older initiated men and soon-to-be-initiates, caregivers and new graduates, to explain why alcohol is part of *ulwaluko*. What can happen in *isiko* if alcohol is not part of it? By answering these questions, the dignity, relevance and value of *ulwaluko* will be preserved for many decades to come by *amaXhosa* ethnic group.

Since the participants mentioned that commercial alcohol is a beer for fun there is a need of rechecking its necessity in *ulwaluko*, especially that some studies have shown the dangers of using commercial alcohol in cultural or social celebrations. For instance, Morris, Larsen, Catterall, Moss and Dombrowski (2020, p. 1) found that in the United Kingdom, the pressure to drink alcohol by young adults is high as some of them are coerced or bullied to drink alcohol during their orientation at universities. Those who don't conform to bullying tend to be socially isolated in the university residences. This was the case in Nigeria where socio-cultural factors such as peer influence in university and parental drinking results to alcohol use among youth of both genders (Adekeye et al., 2020, p. 1).

## DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the above findings, one can note that *umqombothi* is a vital beer among Xhosa people to serve as a spiritual connection with ancestors. Other scholars (Ndandani, 2015, p. 122; Michael et al., 2011, p. 1; Ntombana, 2011, p. 97; Bongela, 2001, p. 126; McAllister, 1986, p. 1221) also wrote extensively sharing the same sentiments. However, there was an interesting comment made by some *amakrwala* that, if one did not use *umqombothi* during his traditional ceremony, nothing goes wrong in *isiko*. They perceived *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use as a waste of money, money that should have been invested in the education of *ikrwala*. This argument was also put forward by Monyela (2017) and Gwata (2009) that *ulwaluko* is '*a phase of taking responsibility as a man or role changing*'. The researcher concurs with their views because he observed in his rural area how young people behave after drinking alcohol, how money is spent when brewing *umqombothi* and buying beers for initiation ceremony, and how fashionable or competitively has *ulwaluko* been made nowadays, as compared to the past eras.



Another trend that can be deduced from the findings is that most participants were not aware why ancestors needed *umqombothi* in the ceremonies, but they mentioned that in the manhood code there was a phrase that said, “*Indoda ayibuzi iyenza qha,*” (*A man doesn’t ask, he just acts*) and also a phrase of, “*Imfundiso zabakhuluwa bam*” (*Teachings from my older brothers or caregivers*) (Ndandani, 2015, p. 122). This showed a lack of education from *amakrwala* from the elders who knew the history or secrets why *umqombothi* is a beer to communicate with ancestors. This posed the question of; *what about those who don’t believe in ancestors? Do they get punished by ancestors if they did not integrate umqombothi in ulwaluko?*

The findings of the current study further showed that commercial alcohol was good and relevant to use in the initiation ceremonies because of its significance to the naming of *umkhwetha*, *ukuyala ikrwala*, teaching *ikrwala* three-by-three rule (Daweti, 2020, p. 1). Its relevance also links to the cleansing of *umkhwetha*, the use of brandy as a beer that honour the first initiated Xhosa man *uSomagwaza*, thanksgiving to the initiates’ care-givers and brandy viewed as ‘*the modern beer for celebrating umcimbi*’ (Prusente et al., 2019, p. 6; Mlisa, 2009, p. 136). However, the other participants considered that commercial alcohol had no value or significance in *ulwaluko* or any other *amaXhosa* ceremonies; they were just ‘sweets for fun and entertainment purposes’ (Hlangwani et al., 2020, p. 3).

In addition to this, these participants were of the notion that if they were given the chance to have initiation ceremonies for their future sons, they would not use any alcohol in *ulwaluko* (Douglas, 2013, p. 125). The participants’ thoughts were also similar to those by S. Sesanti (2020), an Anthropologist in a radio interview on 07<sup>th</sup> November 2020 with N. Mndende at Umhlobo Wenene FM who confirmed that, a traditional ceremony is a ceremony by a belief in word not by the presence of meat and alcohol.

Pahl, Pienaar and Ndungane (1989, p. 194 cited in Ntombana, 2011, p. 634) expressed the view that *isiko ngummiselo osisigxina* or a custom “is a permanent covenant that does not and cannot change,” and it appeared from the findings that initiation ceremony was one of the oldest ceremonies that cannot die out among *amaXhosa*, as it has been practiced from generation to generation. However, most participants expressed the opinion that if someone could do *ulwaluko* without integrating *umqombothi* or commercial alcohol, no one would attend that ‘boring’ ceremony. Similar findings were deduced from the other scholar’s studies (McBrien, 2016, p. 3; Douglas, 2013, p. 125; Nyembezi et al., 2010, p. 105). This shows that times had changed, *umqombothi* is no longer the centre of attention in *ulwaluko* but an alcoholic drink for older people, while commercial alcohol is perceived by *amakrwala* as a modern *umqombothi* which is relevant and fashionable to the youth (Feltmann et al., 2019, p. 1). Based on the above findings *ulwaluko* and alcohol is and will always be part of *amaXhosa* legacy, but what is deemed as a need is to revitalize how men behave during the initiation celebrations.

The results of the study (Magodyo et al., 2017, p. 343) “reflect the fluidity of masculinity as reported in literature. First, in some of the participants, *ulwaluko* created an idealised masculine identity that was chiefly characterised by upholding ritual teachings and yet the same men were burdened by a prescriptive set of masculine role expectations. Second, through self-reflection and critical engagement, some men contested *ulwaluko* resulting in the creation of rival masculinities and thus the study created spaces to rethink masculine identities” (Magodyo et al., 2017, p. 343).





## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The study findings implied that both *amakrwala*, cultural leaders involved in initiation schools and caregivers involved with young Xhosa men pre and post initiation regarding substance use are aware that alcohol must be part of *ulwaluko* to mark important milestones from boyhood to manhood, even though more awareness and education is needed to explain the cultural significance of integrating commercial alcohol and *umqombothi* therein, since most *amakrwala* in the study struggled to explain why *umqombothi* must be part of initiation except the purpose of communicating with ancestors.

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Almost all the research participants in the study felt revitalized and honoured to be given a chance to voice their opinions on the meaning of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies. They mentioned that studies of this nature were so scarce it was important that they be conducted as they revived the culture of the *amaXhosa*. Studies such as these serve as a tool to preserve the cultural heritage and dignity of the *amaXhosa* initiation ceremonies and alcohol use therein. The study as well adds to the body of knowledge on the phenomenon and makes concrete recommendations for further research.

## CONCLUSION

This article discussed the views of *amakrwala* on the usage of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies. From the literature as well as the results of the research, it is clear that *ulwaluko* is one of the oldest rites practiced by *amaXhosa* to mark transition of boys from boyhood to manhood phase, and alcohol has been part of these ceremonies to celebrate the homecoming of *ikrwala* during the graduation ceremonies. The results show that there has been a domination of Western culture in *ulwaluko* during *imigidi*, and *umqombothi* is perceived as old-fashioned and out-dated beer by youth which is labelled as ‘a beer for older people’, while brandies are seen as ‘a cool and relevant alcohol to conduct *imicimbi*’. This clearly shows that despite the eternal covenant of *ulwaluko*, alcohol use seems to be the focus and forefront while minimal manhood education with reference to alcohol use is offered to the initiate and *ikrwala*. In the study, most participants did not know or knew little about why *umqombothi* is part of *ulwaluko*, and what can happen if *isiko* cannot integrate *umqombothi*. However, it can be concluded that even though most *amakrwala* knew less about the significance of the alcohol use in *ulwaluko*, their contribution made a huge difference in the field of indigenous knowledge systems.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, the researcher is of the view that the study could have benefitted more if the sample included few caregivers, older initiated men, and traditional surgeons (*iingcibi*) to help answer the research question.



It was also a limitation to do the study only in a semi-urban area, and it was going to benefit more if *amakrwala* in rural areas were interviewed, as well if a balance was considered between rural and urban setting initiations. It is therefore recommended that future research should focus more on exploring the meaning of *umqombothi* and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies from older people's perspective. In addition to this recommendation, the researcher feels that in the initiation ceremonies there should be a clear explanation by elders as to why *umqombothi* must be included, because one of the research participants, P16 indicated that he knew a few successful men in the Township who had undergone initiation ceremonies without integrating *umqombothi*, brandy or beer.

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