Shaping Self Through Ceramic Sculpture:

Representing Anxiety in the Rural Black Queer Experience

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Abstract

I am a ceramic sculptor. I make use of clay that I have sourced from Joza, the Makhanda location, and Cofimvaba in a rural area called Magwala. I process this clay and then use it to create a visual and tangible representation of the anxiety I experience as a queer black woman living in South Africa. Unongayindoda is a word that has been used by isiXhosa speaking people in my village to call me ever since I was a child. This is a word that I have chosen to own, in much the same way that some people have chosen to own the word "queer."

My experience of being unongayindoda has had an impact on my mental health, and the process of digging clay, processing it for use and then using it to create my work has become very therapeutic for me. My work's primary aim is to explore the use of clay as a representative embodiment of anxiety in my work as a rural black queer sculptor who identifies as unongayindoda. The thesis component of my work is a qualitative study informed by autoethnography, practice and art-based research.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Table of Contents

List of illustrations

Fig.20. Phila Phaliso. *A bisque fired sculpture in studio* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.21a. Phila Phaliso. *A bisque fired sculpture in studio* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.21b. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Ezona Njokweni.)

Fig.22a. Phila Phaliso. *Bisque fired sculpture in studio* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.22b. Phila Phaliso. *Broken pieces put together in exhibition space* (2024), ceramic, steel, plaster and strips of bag. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.23a. Phila Phaliso. *Sculpture in progress in studio* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.23b. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Viwe Madinda.)

Fig.24a&b. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture* (2019), ceramic and copper oxide. Installation view. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.24c. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Viwe Madinda.)

Fig.25a&b. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture in studio.* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.25c&d. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* (2024), ceramic with copper oxide, steel, plaster and strip of bag. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Sikhumbuzo Makandula.)

Fig.26a. Phila Phaliso. *Leather hard sculpture in studio* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.26b. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Ezona Njokweni.)

Fig.27a,b&c. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture in studio* (2022), work in progress. (Photograph by Viwe Madinda.)

Fig.27d. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument. (Photograph by Ezona Njokweni.)

Fig.28a. Phila Phaliso. *Dry sculpture in studio* (2022), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.28b. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture in pieces in studio* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.28c. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument – New Gallery. (Photograph by Viwe Madinda.)

Fig.29a&b. Phila Phaliso. *Leather hard masks and stone fired masks in studio* (2022), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.30. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Ezona Njokweni.)

Fig.30a&b. Phila Phaliso. *Leather hard mask and stone fired masks in studio* (2022), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.30c. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired masks in studio* (2022), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.31a. Phila Phaliso. *Pieces of broken sculpture in studio* (2019), work in progress. (Photograph by Phila Phaliso.)

Fig.32. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Ezona Njokweni.)

Fig.33. *Phila putting a sculpture together*. (Photograph by Sikhumbuzo Makandula.)

Fig.34. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery. (Photograph by Ezona Njokweni.)

Fig.35a. Phila Phaliso, Mthunzikazi Mngwana and Sikhumbuzo Makandula. *Abantu Bomdongwe* (2023), video still. (Video by Sikhumbuzo Makandula.)

Fig.35b. Phila Phaliso, Mthunzikazi Mngwana and Sikhumbuzo Makandula. *Abantu Bomdongwe*. (2023), video still. (Video by Sikhumbuzo Makandula.)

Fig.35c. Phila Phaliso, Mthunzikazi Mngwana and Sikhumbuzo Makandula. *Abantu Bomdongwe* (2023), video still. (Video by Sikhumbuzo Makandula.)

Fig.35d. Phila Phaliso, Mthunzikazi Mngwana and Sikhumbuzo Makandula. *Abantu Bomdongwe* (2023), video still. (Video by Sikhumbuzo Makandula).

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Chapter one: Introduction and context

1.1. Introduction

This thesis serves as critical engagement with my body of work: *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda* which seeks to explore my shaping of self through ceramic sculpture as a rural black queer woman who experiences severe anxiety as a direct result of my lived experiences. This thesis is written in the first person, and I deliberately choose to write myself into this work.

I am a ceramic sculptor. I make use of clay that I have sourced from Joza, a location in Makhanda, and Magwala, a rural area in Cofimvaba. I process this clay and then use it to create a visual and tangible representation of the anxiety I experience as a queer black woman living in South Africa. I define my anxiety as queer anxiety to emphasise that the anxiety I experience is directly related to my lived experience as a queer black woman. I create life size sculptures of distorted human figures and masks with the clay using the coiling technique, one of the oldest methods of creating sculpture. I also use found objects to shape and add texture to the sculptures.

Clay is a practice from my childhood growing up in Magwala. As children, we used clay to create toys. Not everyone had the money to buy toys so this was the one way that everyone could have a toy to play with. Magwala is a lali (village) next to the small town of Cofimvaba in the Eastern Cape. I have found that some people living here are at times rigid in their beliefs, whether those are religious or traditional beliefs.

Unongayindoda is a word that has been used by isiXhosa speaking people in my village to call me ever since I was a child. The word made me feel different but also close to utata wam (my father). Unongayindoda is a word that I have chosen to own, in much the same way that some LGBTIAQ+ people have chosen to own the word queer. Mbungwana quoted in Motinyane (2022: 92) expresses

> "How society justifies the abuse of queer people, because oonongayindoda, abanto, ababantu, oonongayindoda are not seen as human, they are seen as things."

In my experience, it was always unongayindoda, one who behaves like a man, dresses like a man, wants to be a man, prefers men's chores. Matebeni (2021: 566-7) describes unongayindoda as

> "An expansive term that makes it possible to illustrate how a host of factors, including, language, character, visibility, aesthetic and form make space for new categorization and conceptualization."

I identify as unongayidoda, and I am making sense of this identity day to day as a sculptor.

My experience of being unongayindoda has had an impact on my mental health, although the Magwala community does not believe mental health issues really exist. The traditional people associate mental health issues with witchcraft, and the religious associate it with demon possession. While some people associate mental health with madness in English, I translate mental health as meaning dis-ease, not madness. Emaxhoseni apho ndikhule khona (where I grew up), you will find people consulting with a sangoma or a reverend for their mental health issues but seldom with western health professionals. This can be because they view psychologists as izinto zabelungu (white people things) or believe that the traditional healing process works (Mzimkhulu and Simbayi 2006; Gwala 2021).

The process of digging clay, processing it for use and then using it to create my work has become very therapeutic for me. In the years that I have done ceramics in university, working with clay is a form of therapy in dealing with nightmares and lack of sleep. The studio has become my first home and home my second because of how comfortable and calm I am when in my studio (Yi 2010; Berman 2013). My research explores the connection between my work with ceramics, my anxiety, and my position within amaXhosa culture as unongayondoda.

1.2. Research goals, objectives and questions

The primary aim of this research is to explore the use of clay as a representative embodiment of anxiety in my work as a rural black queer sculptor.

1.2.1. Research objectives

1. To explore the representation of mental health in the black queer community in rural areas and in contemporary art.
2. To explore the ways in which ceramic sculpture is a therapeutic medium for ixhala lika nongayindoda.

1.2.2. Research questions

1. How can ceramic sculpture be used in the representation of ixhala lika nongayindoda (black queer anxiety)?
2. How can ceramic sculpture be used as a therapeutic medium for ixhala lika nongayindoda?

1.3. Research design

This study is a qualitative study because it seeks to "describe and explain" my own "experiences, behaviours, interactions and social context" in relation to my identity and my art (Fossey 2016: 717). It is methodologically informed by autoethnography, practice and art-based research. The work is an attempt to make the internal emotions external through sculpture. Candy (2006: 3) explains that this methodology works to "gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of practice." Practice-based research places emphasis on "creative outcomes" such as, in the case of this study, a body of ceramic sculptures that depict rural black queer anxiety in the form of an exhibition. Skains (2016) states that a primary element of practice-based research is self-observation, which this study draws on in addition to autoethnography.

Autoethnography is a methodology that is "deeply connected to the stories told by the body, particularly pathologized bodies" (Ganon 2006: 476). Autoethnography makes possible "politicized, practical, and cultural stories that resonate with others and motivating these others to share theirs; bearing witness, together, to possibilities wrought in telling"

(Adams and Jones 2011: 111). This study is about my experiences of being a black queer woman growing up in a religious and traditional rural community. Each work in the series is more personal and emotionally charged than the last. It asks that I revisit memories, and through this I show how I build my character over and over again through this work.

Autoethnography as a method or approach helps with writing the self: using artistic methods in the investigation of individual cultural identity. Suominen (2003) uses an art-based autoethnographic study, studying her life through photography and creative writing. She explains the process as an "active re-creation of self" that has made and changed how she sees herself and how she represents herself (Souminen 2003: 2). The words she uses to describe her relationship with the camera are similar to words that I have used to describe my relationship with clay – especially the idea of recreating the self through process. Art-based research takes the art process and makes it part of the research, it uses practice as a mode of research.

This thesis will present the conceptual and reflective aspects around my work titled *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. In chapter two I will discuss the concepts of interest to this work and that have informed my thinking. Chapter three will follow with a discussion of the work of those who have influenced and informed my practice and thinking around my own making. In chapter four I present my body of work, discuss the process, and the masks and sculptures themselves. Lastly, I will conclude with final reflections of my work.

Chapter two: Concepts of interest

2.1. Introduction

In seeking to explore ceramics and black queer anxiety, I draw on a few core concepts, namely queer theory, standpoint theory, and practice and art-based research.

Queer theory makes it possible for me to position my work in relation to my identity and my experiences of ixhala as someone who identifies as a queer black person. It enables me to explore and express my experiences as unongayindoda in social spaces, institutions, and my community. Queer theory "critically examines the way power works to institutionalize and legitimize certain forms and expressions of sexuality and gender while stigmatizing others" (Ruhsam 2017: 01). It is this that gives me the theoretical grounding to engage with the way society – and my community – have impacted on experiences of being unongayindoda.

Standpoint theory also supports this in that it creates space for me to work from my "standing point" in the world and to use this and related experiences to inform my work (Harding 2004: 257). With standpoint theory I can express my point of view and my perspective of my social encounters. As Harding (2004: 11) writes "standpoint places emphasis on the lived experiences of the marginalized, and through this advances knowledge about lived experiences" similar to my own. I believe that my lived experience and how I deal with ixhala lam (my anxiety) can bring knowledge to my community.

Lastly, practice and art-based research enable me to speak to my work, to the use of clay as an expression of my identity and desire to heal through shaping the self - my self - through ceramic sculpture. Practice and art-based research enables me to share knowledge by means of "practice and the outcome of the practice," (Candy 2006: 03) as I work to make the internal emotions of my severe anxiety external through sculpture.

I experience severe anxiety, which can disrupt my sleep. I have nightmares that are filled with monstrous characters, that are a manifestation of fear. Traumatic things have happened to black queer women in South Africa some of this Zanele Muholi and other artists have documented. Being a black queer woman from rural Magwala, Cofimvaba South Africa can be terrifying. Most rape cases are not reported and when they are reported there is little or no justice at all (Meel 2008). The prejudice and discrimination that black lesbians

face invites fear (Tshisa and Van der Walt 2021), and this has a heavy impact and is responsible for most of my anxiety.

In this chapter I discuss a few concepts further, namely the tension between western and African queer identity; language and naming; and queer identity and anxiety.

2.2. Queer: Western vs African queer identity

Queer is "often used as an umbrella term by and for persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, and/or transgender, or by and for individuals who use the term as an alternative to LGBTI labels" (Gieseking 2008: 737). I understand queer as different, marginalized, "differing from the norm or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange" (Gieseking 2008: 737). I am usually the strange one in a room. Queer theory, one of the theories I draw upon for my study, creates space for "other ways of thinking and talking about identity beyond simple binaries especially in fighting homophobia and transphobia" (Gieseking 2008 737-8). This includes speaking about the experience of being unongayindoda, which is not so easily described in English, but is the best word available to describe my lived experience of being a queer black woman in South Africa.

The concept of western queer identity does not fit well with African queer identity, it is too limiting and does not capture the full lived experience of what it means to be a queer African. It barely touches the surface of this experience. Western queer identity has been criticized for not capturing African queer lived experiences (Nyanzi 2013: 61). While the advancement in western LGBTIAQ+ rights has inspired similar rights-based work in Southern Africa, it has also resulted in "a homophobic backlash that has made life more rather than less difficult for sexual minorities in many African countries" (Mc Allister 2013). This is because LGBTIAQ+ identities are often seen to be western constructs and viewed as something brought to Africa by the colonizers (Mc Allister 2013).

I choose to draw on an African understanding of queer identity to guide my thesis because of the space it makes for diversity, the space it makes for my personal lived experience in my personal contexts. And, even then, within this expanded space, there are questions:

> uyintontoni? (What are you?)
>
> ndingumntu (I am a human being)
>
> ndikubize ntoni, bhuti okanye sisi, okanye bhuti sisi? (What should I call you, he or she, or heshe?)
>
> ndibize ngegama lam (call me by my name)

The questions above are questions that I get asked and when people ask me these questions, I also want answers to these questions.

Ukuhluzelwa ngaphandle, an outsider inside my rural community**.** There are those within our borders who are still outsiders. Black lesbian women are often still refused entry into the nation's most public spaces and are punished for their same sex desires and relationships. Muholi (2004) in an interview said that

> "The realities and experience of lesbian-identified women, such as those living in and around townships, are still overwhelmingly dominated by a set of intersecting race, classed and hetero gendered politics that blur the lines between our apartheid past and our new constitutional democracy."

What Muholi said resonated with me. It felt like it spoke to the reality of my life as unongayindoda. Her thinking around race is also important to me because my experiences are different from those of white lesbians, for instance. In South Africa, black lesbians experience some of the highest rates of violence and we are then doubly harmed by institutions when we try and report this violence. As Muholi says, this "post-assault victimization by state institutions and representatives carefully shapes how and whom we will choose to speak about our lives" (Muholi 2004: 117).

Muholi's thinking around language is also influential to my work. I find English to be a difficult language to express myself in. Muholi (2004: 117) describes it as, she "had to learn a foreign language to her, to present her knowledge in a manner that is more familiar to the colonizers than the colonized." I have also had to learn this foreign language not only to

present knowledge but also to figure out what it means to feel the way that I do, in terms of being attracted to women and what it is I should call myself and identify as. I have been using the words, queer or lesbian, to identify as, without asking myself what they mean to me and if I want to be called by them.

I use a foreign language to understand myself and help others understand me. Now that I know all these English words, I want to go back to the drawing board. Godoy (2022: 42) describes Muholi's work as "allow[ing] viewers to explores their complexity and re-contextualize them from a black queer perspective." For me it is not enough to re-contextualise from a black queer perspective only in a foreign language. I want words and names that my Nguni people will understand at the same time, names that will not feel like an insult to me. I think most of it is because we cannot articulate or use our own language to describe or identify ourselves. Which leads me to language and naming, as key concepts in my work.

2.3. Language and naming

African queer identities and queer experiences are not fully explained by western queer identity language choices. South Africa has 11 official languages and different religious and cultural beliefs. Western queer identity naming is in English largely and this limits the understanding of African queer identities and experiences. English is not South Africa's language it was imposed upon South Africa by the arrival of the British in 1806 (Silva 1997: 01). For instance, 'lesbian' in English does not fully capture what it means to be a black queer woman in South Africa, while in isiXhosa there is no direct translation for the word.

In my work and in my thesis, I choose to use my Nguni language when English words are not enough, when it comes to explaining who I am to my Nguni speaking people. There have always been homosexuals in my community. Sometimes, I like to think they were not hiding, it's just that it is not exactly something that is talked about. For example, in my family no one introduces their partner to the family unless the partner has asked for a hand in marriage. Part of what makes it a Western idea is how everyone wants to talk about it, such as the idea of 'coming out'.

Coming out is a largely western idea - not homosexuality itself - but the concept of coming out. The only time my parents want to know who I am dating is when they get a letter from oonozakuzaku (parents in-law). This is not to say that discrimination and hate towards the LGBTIAQ+ community does not exist, just that queer identity is thought of and treated differently to that of western thinking around queer identity. As Matebeni (2021:566) says "African local realities are overshadowed, to the extent that an analysis of gender and family from an African context is very limited or understood through a western paradigm." I understand this as African families are very different from Western families in the way they live, their language, and how they express themselves. There is not much talking about sexuality and sex in most families. There aren't many people writing their own stories in my village, hence the African context limitation that Matebeni speaks of.

Writing our own stories allows us to write them in our own language and experience. Writing in my own language while trying to figure out what the translation for queer or lesbian is becomes a challenge. I find that in isiXhosa, when using English words to describe yourself, what you say you are becomes invalid or western because it is seen to be a western concept.

In English, especially when you struggle to speak or write in the language, you notice that people that know it listen to how you say your words and how you put your sentences together on paper rather than listen to what it is you are saying, so you lose your audience from the start. Bulawayo (2013) says it in a way that resonates so deeply with my lived experience:

> "The problem with English is this: You usually can't open your mouth and it comes out just like that – first you have to think what you want to say. Then you have to find the words. Then you have to carefully arrange those words in your head. Then you have to say the words quietly to yourself, to make sure you got them okay. And finally, the last step, which is to say the words out loud and have them sound just right. But then because you have to do all this, when you get to the final step, something strange has happened to you and you speak the way a drunk walk. And, because you are speaking like you are falling, it's as if you are an idiot, when the truth is that it's the language and the whole process that's messed up."

I am making the choice to write in a way that is accessible so that others do not have to struggle when reading my thesis. As Matebeni and Mbisi (2015: 03) write “language, naming and words can be deeply political.” Choosing to write in this way is political for me. In some instances, the words available to me to describe my experience are in isiXhosa, and I will incorporate them into my writing because isiXhosa asitolikawa (isiXhosa cannot be translated). Often translating from isiXhosa to English does not do justice to what is being explained. In order for my work to reach as many people as possible, I will use the language that the people of my community understand when writing about ixhala (anxiety) and queer identity.

When it comes to words and identifying myself, my sexuality, I feel like I was forced to figure out who I was and what to call myself while I was still figuring it out myself. Language can change how people see you and how they act around you. The pressure of finding yourself, who you are yenza ixhala (causes anxiety). I am still finding myself in these words. I have a sense of self, but I feel as though I have not found the right words to describe or identify as. I did not grow up knowing the word “lesbian” or “queer”. Unongayindoda on the other hand is a word that I am familiar with, and therefore it is this word that I describe myself as and will use in the writing of this thesis.

2.3.1. Call me unongayindoda

The decision to use unongayindoda came from me trying to find a name that is familiar to not only myself but my rural community as well. Unongayindoda “carries layered meanings that are not just about gender” (Matebeni 2021:569). Unongayindoda roughly translates into English as “a woman who is man-like in her looks or gender expression”. This feels like my experience. Other than this, there are no words that I could use to call myself other than my name.

Unongayindoda “is a Nguni term for (gender) fluidity” (Matebeni 2021: 565). I grew up called this word, it made me feel accepted. Until I realised it did not have anything to do with acceptance but likeness. The word was not used to insult or upset me, it felt like a nickname. The word was not used because I am woman that is attracted to women, it was used because I was seen as a woman who wanted to be or looked like a man qha (only), it

had very little to do with my sexuality. I was going to get married and have kids just like abanye oonongayindoda elalini (other nongayindodas in the village). The word also made me feel close to my father because people would say it and have comments like akasafani notatakhe (she looks like her father). Little did I know this was a nice way of telling people that they were ugly.

Unongayindoda "carries layered meanings that are not just about gender" (Matebeni 2021:569). Nicholas Hlobo (2006) shows us that the word is not only directed to women in his piece *Unongayindoda*. He "unglued women from nongayindoda, making room for free flow of movement within this category" (Matebeni 2021: 572). I have found that there is also an expectation of how unongayindoda should carry herself. The kind of clothes she wears, the tone of her voice, the way she walks.

> I thought it came with ukujamzela (A gangster walk)
>
> I thought it came with istrarhela, nehempe etshek, ne all-star (a beanie called istrarhela, a check striped shirt, and an all-star shoe)
>
> I thought it came with a deep voice namabele angabonakaliyo.

I have met oonongayindoda that have placed themselves as judge and jury of how I should behave. People that have commented on how I am not "indoda" (a man) enough to call myself unongayindoda. And heterosexual people who do not care of ubunogayindoda bam (my experience of being unongayindoda) as long as I give birth to their children.

2.4. Queer identity and anxiety

Anxiety feels like itilongo yasengqodweni, uvalo olungapheliyo ubusuku nemini (the mind imprisoned, in an endless anxiety). Anxiety is defined as

> "The total response of human beings to threat or danger. Each experience of anxiety involves a perception of danger, thoughts about harm, and a process of physical alarm and activation" (Moss 2002: 1).

My day-to-day queer lived experience looks like: me not walking on certain streets, avoiding conversations with strangers, avoiding certain shops, restaurants, taxis or cabs, avoiding wearing certain clothes in certain spaces (ceremonies and events in general). This is directly

linked to my experience as a black queer woman in South Africa. Traumatic experiences linked to my queer identity include: contact with police, robbers, strangers, friends and family members. I now have to read people who are in my life, try to find if they will or will not hurt me. Try to find spaces that are safe for me. All this creates paranoia and anxiety. When I speak of anxiety ndithetha ngovalo, ixhala, amanwele, amaphupha amdaka, iinarhmani, amaphupha anamaxhalanga ameva namatyolo, umbilini ongapheliyo mihla nezolo (I speak of different kinds of anxiety, raised hair on the back of the neck, bad dreams, sleep paralysis, dreams with vultures, thorns, bush, nausea brought on by anxiety).

I have met my fair share of scary, be it a cousin wanting to sleep with me at the age of ten, a friend endicofacofa ndilele (touching me in my sleep) after a night out, a school that forced me to wear dresses to stop me from thinking I am a man, a police officer locking me up overnight and charging me with drinking in public while sober, or a thief sticking his rough textured fingers in my vagina claiming to look for my phone. In all these instances anxiety and the fear of the unknown kept me silent.

In trying to find ways to deal with ixhala (anxiety), I have found myself in various places that also do not welcome ubunongayindoda bam (my experience of being unongayindoda). The church is supposed to be safe and welcoming space where there is no discrimination or judgement, but mna ndingena ndibizwe umntana onamdimoni, onamanyala, onezothe ixhala lam liyaqatsela kunoba liphele (I enter and I am called a child possessed by a demon, disgusting, and then my anxiety gets worse). In some isiXhosa rituals and ceremonies, I am this woman who is forced to wear dresses and then works from oomama ukuyotsho kwintombi, ebafaneni ukuyoqina kootata (from mothers to daughters, from fathers to sons), comes time to eat andinandowo (I have no place). I am not woman enough to eat with the women and I am not man enough to eat with the men. Suddenly I have no place in my own home.

This sense of feeling out of place is everywhere, at a workplace, at a club, at a friend gathering, at school, at a taxi rank inside the taxi on my way to the spaza shop or at a clothing shop. You can almost feel the eyes looking at you, you can hear the whispers and then someone says something negative. Constantly trying to find a comfortable space can drive you to ukubalilolo (a loner). Unongayindoda experience this isolation, not of their own doing but it can mean that they struggle “to engage and connect with others” (Vargas et al

2020: 497). The way my community treats me makes me anxious. I find social gatherings uncomfortable because there is always one person – or more - that will make me feel uncomfortable and out of place. So, I isolate myself at times to prevent being isolated by others.

Amagama aphuma emilonyeni yabantu endibathembileyo, endikhule nendikhule phambi kwabo (words that have come out of people that I grew up with, people I grew up in front of):

khawuze ndikwange (come give me a hug)

khawuze ndiphuze (come give me a kiss)

khawuyibambe (touch it)

khawuze ndiyikhothe (lick me)

khawuze ndiyibambe (come let me touch it)

ndizoyifaka kancinci, awuzoyiva noyiva (I'll put just a tip you won't feel it)

bendicing'ba uyandithanda, sukwenza ngathi awuyithandanga (I thought you loved it don't act like you didn't like it)

amagama aphuma emilonyeni yabantu esibathembileyo (words that come out of the mouths of people that we trust)

ubuphi? (Where were you?)

ubufunani ndgeloxesha pha? (What did you want at that time?)

ngabani ixesha? (What time?)

ubunxibe ntoni? (What were you wearing?)

umenzeni? (What did you do to them?)

It is not easy to report when something happens to you, be it harassment, assault, rape, or any kind of abuse. You get drilled with questions and you start thinking maybe it is your fault. This is worse for children who have not found their voice. These questions are not questions that are asked only at the police station, the first person you trust with telling your trauma to asks these questions, be they a neighbor, a friend, a family member uthi ufika e police station nawe awusaqinisekanga ngokuchaza (when you arrive at the police station, until even you are not sure of what happened to you). The police can allow their

opinions to come before the law at times, “sexual violence is often brushed under the carpet by officials” (Clarke 2015).

They are influenced by their masculinity which is linked with power, dominance, and control (Ndlovu and Tanga 2021: 75). You can see it in the terms such as indoda yoqobo (a real man), indoda emadodeni (a man among men), or indoda ebuthathaka (a weak man). These men are in the police force too. There are men who rape women, from children to grandmothers. Old men marrying children claiming God chose them. Men raping amatwasa (sangoma initiates) or abakwetha babo (boys undergoing initiation) claiming it is what the ancestors want. Patriarchy has men thinking they own women (Uchendu and Edeagu 2021: 1).

Ixhala lam (my anxiety) comes from the past, the present and everyday experiences as a black queer woman in South Africa. Hearing about hate crimes: there are too many people close to me that have been sexually violated by their friends, co-workers and close relatives. Hearing about women getting raped and killed, seeing police turn a blind eye because they themselves are homophobic and condone hate crimes.

Rejection and discrimination from some family members and members of my society isolates me. There is nothing wrong with going home and being a child but there is something wrong with going home and having to act differently from who you are. One of my mother’s friends once stopped me to tell me that I was beautiful the way I was and that I should not let the “trend” of being a lesbian influence me because I will make a beautiful wife with beautiful kids. I have met so many strangers that told me to stop trying to be or pretending to be a man. Growing up I spent so much time wishing I was a man just so I could feel a sense of belonging and safety.

I did not want this body because it did not align with who I was attracted to. I spent much time wondering why I had a body that was not strong enough to fight off men. I wanted to be a man so that I would not feel like there was something wrong with me being attracted to women.

I do not want this body,

these boobs

this vagina,

these hips,

and this ass.

I only wished to be a man so that I would not be considered abnormal, crazy or an abomination, so that I would not feel like igqwirha (a witch), or ndithakathiwe (bewitched), okanye ndinamadimini (demon possessed). I walk around with the fear of knowing that andifunwa (not wanted), I am not wanted, nexhala (and time) of knowing that half the people I meet in a day bandifuna ndidlwengulwe (want me raped), okanye ndithandazelwe okanye ndifile (prayed for or dead).

When it all feels too much, I turn to clay.

2.5. Conclusion: Healing queer anxiety through clay

I have found clay to be healing to my anxiety, taking my shoes off walking on the soil bare foot, ukugcampuza edakeni (walking in mud and clay barefoot), ukomba ngomhlakulo (digging with a spade), feeling the different textures of clay in my hands and creating something with the clay is healing.

Digging clay and processing it myself is my form of liberating my mind. It has become more than just digging clay as it is also about digging emotions, reliving or revisiting experiences in order to heal. The release that I feel during the digging is significant, the vibration that happens between my hands, my body, the spade and soil is unmatched.

My sculptures are the way in which I speak or express everything that replays in my mind. I create distorted figures that walk around in my mind like they own it. These figures are also my 3-dimensional representation of ixhala (anxiety). I feel like these creatures have been hiding in my mind, they made my head their closet and now that I am bringing them to light in the form of sculpture, I am regaining control of my sanity and my thoughts

Other sculptors and artists have done similar work, Alice Nongebeza healed through iingqayi (decorative vases); Zanele Muholi through photography; and Mthunzikazi Mbungwana through imibongo (poetry). It is their work that I feel a sense of belonging to because, although our lived experiences are not the same, some are similar, and I find myself here when encountering their work. What follows in the next chapter is a discussion of the work of artists that influence and inform my own work.

Chapter three: Work that inspires

3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on those who have influenced and inspired my work. My work is largely influenced by Alice Nongebeza, Zanele Muholi, Mthunzikazi Mbungwana, and Buhlebezwe Siwani. These artists have shaped my way of thinking in various ways. They have influenced the way that I have produced my practical work and written this thesis. They helped shape an opinion of my own, through their work, their lived experiences, techniques and use of material - especially the South African black artists. As a South African myself, I relate to their work, even if they work with different mediums such as photography, poetry, performance art, and animation. In this chapter I write about what draws me to their work and in part how my work relates to their work.

3.2. Alice Nongebeza

Alice Nongebeza was an isiXhosa potter born in 1928 of Mpondo background from Ports St Johns in the Eastern Cape (Steele 2007). She started creating ceramics after having dreams that told her to make pots and where to get clay while grieving the death of her two sons. Nongebeza used clay as a coping mechanism, a medicine, to help her through her darkest time. Udongo ndilibiza iyeza lam (I call clay my medicine), as up until now it is the one thing that keeps me calm through my anxiety and I am able to express myself through it.

Nongebeza used the old way of firing clay which is done by creating a big wood fire and putting the pots in between the fire. She would get her clay from “a valley near the sea which takes two hours by foot” (Steele 2007: 81). This reminds me of my own journey to gather my clay for my work. Nongebeza also made use of the coiling technique to create her work, this attracted me to her work, and I have opted to use the same technique for my own.

Fig.1. *Nongebeza at her home studio* (2007), photograph by Dr John Steele (Available at: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural(2007).pdf (Accessed: 31/01/2024)).

Fig.2. *Nongebeza and extended family with friends digging clay which is then carried up the hillside to the road*. (2007), photographed by Dr John Steele (Available at: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural(2007).pdf (Accessed: 31/01/2024)).

Fig.3. *Wedged clay ready for use*. (2007), photograph by Dr John Steele. (Available at: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural(2007).pdf (Accessed: 31/01/2024)).

Fig.4. *Treasured burnishing stone.* (2007), photograph by Dr John Steele (Available at: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural(2007).pdf (Accessed: 31/01/2024)).

Fig.5. *Extended family and friends engaged in pounding the clay into workable consistency.* (2007), photograph by Dr John Steele (Available at: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural(2007).pdf (Accessed: 31/01/2024)).

Fig.6. *Nongebeza clay storage system in galvanized iron containers that are stacked on top of each other, the whole pile being covered in plastic to avoid evaporation when not in use*. (2007), photograph by Dr John Steele (Available at: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural(2007).pdf (Accessed: 31/01/2024)).

I am largely drawn to the work of Alice Nongebeza because there is something in her work and in her life that resonates deeply with me. I am drawn to her process where she sources her clay, how she stores it before using it, the found objects that she uses as tools to decorate iingqayi (decorative vases), her firing process and how it contributes to the outcome of iingqayi. I am also intrigued by how she involved her children and grandchildren in the process, passing her skills from one generation to another.

I like the fact that she works with what she has. I noticed that she uses her home space as a studio and does not have everything a normal studio would have such as ceramic tools, carving tools, shelves for the finished work or a kiln. She uses her own furniture, tables, benches, ibafu yencence (imapala galvanised bath). She also uses found objects as tools to carve, make the iingqayi and decorate iingayi zakhe. For example, she uses rocks and stones or the back of a spoon to make iingayi zakhe shine like they have been varnished. She uses smoke firing to get the dark, gray, white-ish colors that the smoke adds to iingayi. She doesn't add any other elements in her clay soil process other than water. I find the process very interesting as it is similar to mine.

I feel that we are similar in more ways than one. We are both abantu bomgquba (Nguni people) born from the Eastern Cape lalis (villages) generations apart. We use the same technique when creating our work, hers in ingqayi and mine in sculpture. We also both use clay as a healing source helping us deal with our lived experiences.

3.2. Zanele Muholi

Zanele Muholi is a South African artist, a photographer and LGBTIAQ+ activist. She is the co-founder of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW): an organisation that gives support and shelter to black lesbians. Her work has had a significant impact on LGBTIAQ+ rights in South Africa. Her work has helped inform South African people, and helped several queer people find themselves, their space, place and voice in the country (Dillon 2017).

Fig.7. Zanele Muholi. *ID Crisis* (2003), photograph by Zanele Muholi (Available at: https://www.walthercollection.com/en/collection/artworks/id-crisis (Accessed: 31/01/2024).

The image titled *ID Crisis* shows a semi-naked woman in a dark room, standing next to a window that brings in light showing the woman binding her breast with a long bandage. She focuses her attention to these bandages "as the composition leads the viewer's eyes to the half-covered breasts" (Godoy 2021: 41). This image speaks to me and my own journey with identity in that before I experienced puberty, I did not know or feel that I was different from my playmates, I was umjita (one of the boys). But the growth of my breasts took this away from me, and it brought with it fear because there is a switch that happens immediately when boys and men realise that you are no longer one of them. You become prey, and with this comes anxiety.

I experienced a deep loss at this time, as Fagot and Leinbach (1989: 664) writing about gender and childhood, describe that it is through how our peers relate to us that we understand ourselves. My body changing altered my relationship with my peers and with my gender. This is why this image of Muholi's is so powerful for me, as it tells the story of being a chameleon in order to avoid discrimination and abuse.

It was the same with menstruation. I felt like a target as soon as it started. Keeping menstruation, a secret was another thing that made me anxious because

> “Menstrual blood and a young woman’s menses culturally marks her as sexually available, but also as sexually irresponsible, possibly dangerous if she is not controlled by the men in her life, by her culture and religion” (Muholi 2009: 1).

I had this secret to keep every month, going to school was a daunting task. I started worrying about cleanliness, ukucofwa (getting touched, getting raped and what it meant to be a woman).

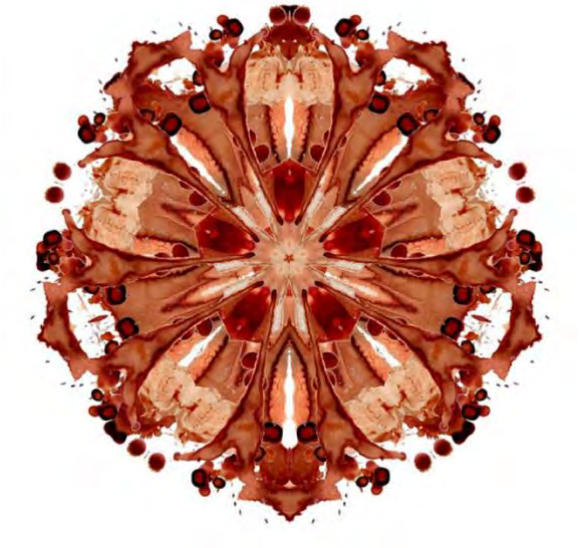

Fig.8. Zanele Muholi. *Isilumo siyaluma.* (2011), (Available at: https://www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/period-pains. (Accessed: 01/02/2024).

In *Isilumo Siyaluma* Muholi tries to express the “fragmentation” that happens “between body and self” when women are on a menstrual cycle or have been torn and raped using their own menstrual blood (Muholi 2009: 4). Searching and finding that I am queer was very difficult to accept and made me very anxious. My anxiety started at an early stage, realizing I was not a boy, having to wear dresses, and hitting puberty differently from boys (growing different body parts from boys and menstruating). My anxiety emerged in those moments where I realised I was different, that I was queer.

Muholi as a black queer woman expresses her lived experiences in ways that resonate with my own lived experiences as unongayindoda. Her work was one of my first encounters with art where I found myself reflected back to me. It is this experience that I wish to be able to show through my own work.

3.4. Mthunzikazi Mbungwana

Mthunzikazi Mbungwana is a poet, she tries to find herself and heal herself through poetry, storytelling, teaching and lecturing. Here I unpack her poem titled *isipili sokuqala* (first mirror). Kwaye ke isixhosa asitolikwa (I cannot translate this poem; I do not know why she wrote it or what was happening when she wrote it). I will only write what I hear and feel when I read it and how I relate to it. Unpacking this poem helps me show one of the reasons for my anxiety.

During the African Feminist Conference 2023 Mbungwana read a poem that I felt explains my relationship with the space where I mine for clay, as well as with the clay itself. It reads as follows:

> ndiyifumene indawo endaziyo (I have found a place that knows me)
> ngenyama nangomoya (in flesh and in spirit)
> engandikali ngasini (it does not discriminate)
> enganditshisi ngamagama (that does not burn me with words)
> engandingwabi ngazanyeliso (that doesn't bury me with instructions)
> apha uloyiko lam luyabhanga (here my fear disappears)
> umoya uthuthuzeleke (my spirit is calm)
> ubuqu bam bubhiyozelwe (being me is celebrated)
> isingqala sam sibhodliswe (when the tears stuck in your throat are released)
> umoya wam unolonwabo (my spirit is happy)
> ucwangco lundsongele ngemfudumalo (order has me wrapped around its warmth)
> apha ndimnye nohlaba (here I am one with the soil)
> ndimnye namanzi (I am one with water)
> ndimnye ngodongo (I am one with clay)
> ndingumntu (I am human)

The way that can work with clay, the way that I am able to create and make anxiety visible with clay. How I am able to use clay to calm my nerves or anger, smashing it, walking barefoot in it, letting it dry in my hands, I feel as though I have a relationship with clay, it doesn't verbally speak to me, but it speaks to me and understands me, I am one with clay. Ndingumntu (I am human) these words mean so much to me. I had people calling me a thing for so long I started to believe it. The words "I am human" mean something to me because I now see myself.

Mbungwana's work is influential to my own in that it speaks to my lived experiences and my sense of place and belonging.

3.5. Buhlebezwe Siwani

Buhlebezwe Siwani is a South African artist and the 2021 Standard Bank Visual Arts winner whose "work interrogates the patriarchal framing of the black female body and black female experience within the South African context" (Siwani 2021: 1). Siwani has an exhibition titled *Iyeza*, this exhibition is "around traditional methods of healing" it speaks about water, soil, natural plants and everything that comes from the ground as medicine.

Fig.9.Buhlebezwe Siwani. *'iYeza'*. (2023), soil, grass, colored woolen ropes and wood. installation view: courtesy of Standard Bank Gallery (Available At https://artthrob.co.za/2023/04/03/inviting-good-spirits-buhlebezwe-siwanis-iyeza/ (Accessed: 31/01/2024)).

The Xhosa-English Dictionary (date) defines Iyeza in this way:

> "Iyeza is a medicine; a mixture, or any substance (usually derived from plants and animals) that can be used to heal or to harm (both physically and spiritually). Derived from the roots iya(go) and iza (come). Iyeza in the broad sense is a substance that is meant to ward off ill (including evil) and invite health and well-being (including good in a spiritual sense."

Nyanga 2023 writes that Siwani (2023) says that "the land and water is healing on its own, it is medicine, it breeds medicine," and that it is about "healing our spirits, the spirits of our ancestors and recognizing the power in what our land has gifted to us so that we can heal" (Siwani 2023 cited in Kim 2023).

While her focus is not on clay, it is on land as a whole, and it is interesting to me how she speaks of the healing part of it. Something really does happen when I interact with nature whether it is taking off my shoes and putting my feet in water or mud or soil. Something happens when I interact with clay. Like Siwani, this is where I find healing, in the land, through clay.

3.6. Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have presented the artists and their works that have influenced, inspired and informed my own work. They are influential for the following reasons: Alice Nongebeza's lived experience as a grieving mother, her technique and her clay process before creating; Zanele Muholi's experiences and the stories she tells through camera lens, her stories and queer people stories; Mthunzikazi Mbungwan's lived experiences as a queer person or unongayindoda, unolali (a person who has lived in rural areas) and how she heals through poetry and helps people like myself heal when reading her work; and Buhlebezwe Siwani's interaction and relationship with nature (umhlaba, amanzi, iindonga njalo njalo) and how she uses it to heal herself and others. Considering the concepts of interest presented in chapter two and the work that inspires my own presented in this chapter, I will now move on to discuss my own work, *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*.

Chapter four: *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my body of work titled: *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. *Ixhla Lika nongayindoda* is a work that consists of clay (in its unrefined and processed state), ceramic sculpture and ceramic self-portraits. It makes visible ixhala through both ceramic sculpture and ceramic self-portraits. It discusses moments and courses of ixhala lika nongayidoda. It also speaks to how the processing of clay helps heal or calm ixhala. Considering that this is practice-based research, I include my process in the discussion of my work here. In my installation, the process is made visible and incorporated into the exhibition.

The medium that I use to create is umhlaba (land/soil) mixed with amanzi (water) to make udongwe (clay). Clay is used for different things in my community, amagqirha nabakwetha baliqaba ebusweni okanye umzimba wonke (traditional doctors and initiates cover their faces and bodies in clay) during initiation time to protect them from evil spirits. It is also used as sunscreen and wall paint; it is used when planting and making bricks to build a house. I am pleased that I got to use it for my personal benefit which is creating and expressing myself. I also get to use it to heal amanxeba am, my pain, my anxiety just by touching it, feeling it and walking on it.

One cannot build or create a sculpture with soil alone; soil only becomes clay when it is mixed with water, and clay is just clay when there is no one to create something with it. I use clay as a medium partly because it is accessible, it is not far from where I live ezilali (the village) and in Joza. I have had a relationship with clay for a long time, at this point umoya wam mnye nodongo (my spirit is one with clay). This chapter makes the link between my process and my life experiences as unongayindoda, with every step and stage of clay processing. In this chapter I present my work in four parts: ukucubungula process; masks; figures; and broken pieces.

4.2. The body of work

4.2.1. Ukucubungula: Process

The following section speaks to my process, from gathering clay through to shaping, making and recycling the broken pieces of my sculptures.

4.2.1.1. Ukukhangela iyeza: Looking for medicine

My process started with looking for clay soil. The search can be exciting, energy draining, and frustrating as I looked forward to finding the right clay. I call it ukukhangela iyeza nempilo (the search of medicine and wellbeing), the willingness to go or walk through uncomfortable, sometimes dangerous, spaces to find impilo (wellbeing), a sense of peace and ease. The willingness to heal, to keep calm and relaxed. Finding clay was challenging, I had to try many places. The first place I saw in Makhanda to source clay was on the side of the R67 road, with cars going up and down. In the end, this place proved difficult to source clay soil. I found another place ngapha kwe (passed /after) Amazwi Museum. This place was in front of a white man's house with a big dog that would bark nonstop. I then found another place to source clay that was on the R350 on the way to Bedford. This place was on the side, but I realized that it was used as a garbage dump, so it had people moving in and out all the time. I felt unsafe here. Another was next to a forest and with that one I stopped going because it is where initiates from the location go - women are not allowed in such spaces and I respect that. Finding clay soil was hard but eventually I found the clay mine, and I just felt right at home.

4.2.1.2. Indawo yam: My place

Fig.10. *Makhanda mining (pty) remaining extent of the farm Brakkenfontein no 243, Albany magisterial district, Eastern Cape province*. (2022), (Available at: https://www.greenmined.com/projects/Makhanda_Mining/Final%20BAR%20-%20Makhanda%20Mining%20%28Pty%29%20Ltd%20S102%20Application%20-%20EC%2030-5-1-2-2-0056%20MR.pdf. (Accessed: 02/02/2024)).

ukufumana impilo kunzima (finding healing is hard)

ukufuman iyeza kunzima (finding medicine is hard)

ukufumana indawo yam (finding my place)

The clay mine, I found the place so peaceful. Walking in I could see clear skies, feel the wind on my face, hear bird sounds, and silence that was not terrifying but calming. I felt like I was back home in the lali (village). But much as the place is peaceful inside before entering, it feels scary, dangerous and far from people. I am a woman; an isolated place is a dangerous place, a place where I could be raped and killed. The place has warning signs outside that warn you against being there. I am always willing to go through that scary moment because inside the mine is where I find iyeza lam (my medicine) and peace. When I am there, I forget about everything: “uloyiko nexhala liyabhanga” (fear and anxiety disappears) (Mbungwana 2023).

Fig.11. *Danger sign outside the clay mine*. (2023), clay soil (photograph by Sikhumbuzo Makhandula).

These signs are a reminder of how I am not allowed access to the land of my ancestors, it also reminds me of how I am not allowed to enter certain spaces without feeling out of place. Being looked at or told I do not belong, be it because of the colour of my skin, the clothes I wear, or my queer identity, among many other attributes.

There more I kept going to the mine, the more I realised that there was something very calming about walking barefoot on the soil and muddy areas. Sandi Schwartz (2022) calls it earthing, also known as grounding. Earthing has become part of calming myself down ukuthomalalisa ixhala lam (calming anxiety down), part of something I look forward to doing when I get there.

Walking frees me and I feel unconstrained, I feel like I've unburdened myself. Schwartz (2022) says that it "improves our senses" as our feet touch the multiple textures on the ground, allowing us to "experience our world in a brand-new way." She speaks of how walking barefoot brings with it a mindfulness that can bring peace and regulation to our bodies (Schwartz 2022). This has been my experience the more I engaged with clay soil. An experience I share as part of my exhibition.

Process matters to me; it is not only an adventure but a preparation for work. I find the process necessary because of my need to detach from the outside world when in the studio, and when I start building or creating sculpture. It helps me focus, centre myself and connect with clay. Each person has something that they do in preparation for work. Some musicians have rehearsals before performances, athletes train before big races, there are even preparations like smoking, drinking, drinking coffee, meditating, praying, and so forth before

work. Process also helps with my thought process, what to create, how, when and where to start.

4.2.1.3. Ukuxova uxuba ukumba nokubanakalisa ixhala: Wedging, mixing, making anxiety visible

My process happens in studio. The studio is one of my escapes from ixhala (anxiety). I am in my own world; I isolate myself from anxiety. It is isolation except not the one that makes me feel alone and excluded. In these four walls I am my own master, time does not exist. I am in my own illusion, I have created it, I own it so it does not drive me crazy. It does the opposite; it keeps me calm. Yihamile emane igcimfiza isikholwane kwi ixhala: emlonyeni, emadolweni, ezandle, emehlweni nasezindlebeni (It is a hammer that repeatedly hammers a nail on anxiety).

Fig.12. *Clay soil in a bag in studio*. (2021), clay soil (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.13. *Clay with water looking like umqombothi (Traditional beer) in studio*. (2021), clay (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Ukudibanisa amanzi nomhlaba nokuhluza amatye (mixing clay soil with water and sifting stone). There is a sound that the soil and water make when put together. Immediately after pouring water into the soil I hear the sound similar to a sound that umqombothi obilela ukuhluzwa (African beer boiling to be sifted) makes. There is also an earthy smell that has a similar smell to rain on soil after a storm. It is like water breathes life to the soil. I always give it a minute, allowing the water to smooth over and soften the soil making it easy to separate the rocks. The unity of water and soil births clay. While I mix the water and soil together, I also search the rocks with my hands. The soft, watery and tender texture makes it easy to find the rocks.

This sifting and separating also happens in my thoughts as I try to find the right words to call what I identify myself as in my Nguni language. Lwando Scott (2023) speaks about how "growing up" there was no "no language to talk about sexual identity," how there was "no concrete articulation of" his "gayness as a sexual identity." LGBTIAQ+ issues are a challenge and issue already; it does not help when trying to discuss queer issues with Xhosa people. People have often argued that because there are no "specific terms'' for LGBTIAQ+ in Xhosa that it then means that it is a Western idea (Scott 2023). In isiXhosa there is only a description of the word lesbian which is intombi ethandana namantombazana (a woman that dates woman) instead of a word. Even unongayindoda is a word used to describe how a person looks and not their sexual identity.

As I sift and separate, I think about what umhlaba namanzi (land/soil and water) means to my community. What the struggles of umhlaba namanzi (land/soil and water) have been for black people in South Africa. Making of clay is deeply political for me because it connects me to the larger conversations in South Africa about land and access to clean water. I purposefully use 'land/soil' combined as the English translation for umhlaba as a way to show the deep connection between land and soil, and what this means for me as a sculptor. Umhlaba (land/soil) is a delicate conversation in South Africa as South Africa has "suffered a long history of colonization, racial domination and dispossession that resulted in a lot of land being" owned by white people (Rugege 2004: 1). Access to clean water is also a significant problem in South Africa, especially in rural areas. Water is "not only an important medium for physical survival, and indeed life on earth, but also for human spiritual, psychological and social wellbeing" (Bernard 2013: 138). Rivers in my village are starting to

dry up, access to water from taps is becoming low. Makhanda has had water issues ever since I moved here. These are the issues that cross my mind when I have both these elements in my hands.

After sifting and separating I let the clay dry to leather hard in old used moulds.

Fig.14. *Clay drying on mould in studio*. (2021), clay (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.15. *Leather hard clay*. (2022), clay (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Ukuxova is a “Xhosa word meaning to prepare dough for home baked bread” this process is similar to the wedging process (Mokgadi 2020). The images below show these similarities, one shows how dough is wedged and the other shows how clay is wedged.

Fig.16. *7 mistakes every beginner makes when baking bread.* (2020), dough (Available at: https://www.eatthis.com/bread-making-tips/ (Accessed: 02/02/2024)).

Fig.17.*Do you have to wedge clay when you are hand building?* (2021), clay (Available at: https://thepotterywheel.com/wedge-clay-when-you-are-hand-building/ (Accessed: 02/02/2024)).

Ukuxova udongwe (wedging clay) is the step that comes after sifting and separating rocks. Wedging clay helps with getting rid of bubbles and lumps, “it softens the clay and distributes moisture evenly” making it easier to work with it (Fern 2023). This is a process that most potters and clay sculptors go through before wheel throwing and building and creating the work. Wedging also helps to prevent breaking when the finished product is put in the kiln.

Wedging is a repetitive movement. Ifana nokuxova intlama okanye ukurhaya umbona (it is like kneading dough or thrashing corn). Ndide ndifumane isingqi (I even find rhythm) just doing this over and over again until the air bubbles, and the hard and soft clay parts have been mixed together making it evenly textured. Until any unwanted and uninvited thoughts are worked out of my mind. Thoughts like: I go to sleep worried about someone breaking in; I wake up worrying about what I have and don’t have; I meet a reckless driver and I worry about my safety; someone steps on me and gets more upset than me, and ixhala shuts me up in that moment, leaving me fuming the whole day thinking about a moment that I can’t go back to. This is the kind of negative energy wedging lets out.

> Ixhala (anxiety) is a creeper
>
> Into nje enezimbo zikatikoloshe okanye isiporho (a thing that has a style of tokoloshi and a ghost)
>
> Linemaniyeka (anxiety comes and goes)
>
> Yinto nje esoloko ifika ungayimemanga (it is a thing that comes uninvited)
>
> ungayilindelanga, kwaye ungayifuni (unexpected, and unwanted)

Yinto nje enezothe (a thing that is disgusting)

Eyenza umvandedwa (makes you sad)

Ixhala (anxiety) is a creeper, it attacks in moments of doubt. It attacked when I realised I was attracted to the same sex. Ixhala (anxiety) crept in because I had never seen a same sex relationship and when there were rumours about it, it was frowned upon. And every time that I had to xa kufuneke ndiplite intombia (when I had to ask a girl or woman out), this was a moment of ixhala because, I am not just a man asking a girl out, I am a girl asking a girl out which comes with multiple forms of rejection and hatred. Ixhala shows up every time I have to tell someone that I am attracted to the same sex or in a relationship with the same sex (feels like a constant coming out). Every time I walk into any space that does not have anyone that looks like me or talks like me. Ixhala is always with me except for when I am with the clay.

4.2.2. Ubucule: technique

In terms of my ubucule (technique), when building my sculptures I use slab-building and coil building techniques but mostly the coiling technique. Slab building involves spreading clay evenly, cutting, folding and bending it to the shape that I want (Kunstler 2023: 01). I have used slabs in the small legs that I have created.

Fig.18.*How to coil build clay from small to monumental.* (2015), clay (Available at: https://ospreystudios.org/2015/11/06/how-to-do-coil-building-from-small-to-monumental/. (Accessed: 02/02/2024)).

I am more interested in the coiling technique, and I use it more because it is an ancient technique estimated from “coiled pots created in Jomon between 8000 and 12000 years ago” (Fern 2013). It is also a technique that artists such as Alice Nongebeza used and carried on using in the Eastern Cape. Coiled pottery or sculptures are stronger than slab built or other techniques when working on a large scale. This is especially important for my work as I work with larger pieces. It is also a technique that came “before the existence of throwing wheels” that oomama basezilalini (mothers of the village) use to make iingqayi (vases) because of not having the wheel or electricity.

I have used coiling and slab building when creating or building my figures. This requires building bit by bit so that the clay does not collapse. It is like building a brick house; one cannot build a brick house in one day. The existing clay must be leather-hard in order to continue adding more clay. For it not to collapse you leave it dry a bit, the following day you start building again. There is something about this here that resonates with healing for me.

I use a large body form to express what my mind goes through in these sculptures. But my sculptures are hollow inside, sort of like a cave - the feeling of emptiness comes to mind. The constant anxiety that comes after the questions like: what are you? Elaxhala loba nam andiyazi (the worry that even I do not know the answer to that question).

Fig.19.Phila Phaliso. *Hollow inside of a sculpture in studio*. (2021), clay (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

I find it interesting that clay can be many things: watery; soft like a sponge; like soft leather that can bend. When it dries it becomes sensitive and easily broken and can no longer bend. It can withstand extreme heat without melting, and instead of melting it becomes hard as a rock the higher the temperature goes. This is similar to the life cycle. I am in the womb, then born, then I keep evolving physically and mentally with every challenge of life until I die.

When I die, I am buried kuthwa uthuthu ethuthwini (ashes to ashes dust to dust) meaning lento ingumntu isuka emhlabeni ngoko ke ibuyela emhlabeni (this thing that is a human is from the soil therefore it goes back to the soil).

4.2.3. Figures

During the processing of clay, I had time to think about what I wanted the sculptures to look like. I thought about ixhala, what it feels like to me, what it could be like in 3-dimension. How I could best throw it out like amanzi amdaka (dirty water), how I could strip it naked and lay it bare. I almost wanted to do to it what it does to me. I thought about moments where it catches me.

Ixhala is there when I am worried about failing myself, my family and the people around me. When I am worried about gaining and losing weight, money, career. Ixhala is there when I should be fighting for myself physically or verbally, it tells me “You won’t win”. It makes me abnormally worried about my life and safety. South Africa is supposed to be a queer tolerant place, there is the law, there are allies but there are also homophobic people and people who are creepers iingcuka ezombethe ifele legusha (wolves covered in sheep’s clothing). Men that lurk in the dark waiting to be alone with you to show how they really feel. “Trust no one” my anxiety says. Mzuzwana mzuzwana lithi fihla loomzimba, fihla loomabele (minute by minute ixhala says hide that body, hide those breasts). Amadoda angcinga zimdaka namandla egeza ahlala kulamthi ugqutha kuye xa usiya eskolweni (men with dirty thoughts and muscles stay at that tree that you pass by when going to school). Ahlala phantsi kwala blorho ugqitha kuyo xa usiya ku my friend esphaza (they stay under that bridge that you pass by when going to the spaza shop). Ahlala kulandlu imdaka pha ecaleni kwala tarven usela kuyo (they stay in that abandoned house next to the tavern that you drink in).

> Ixhala makes me feel spineless.
>
> Fike kusithwa awunamqolo, kum (next thing they say you are spineless, to me)
>
> Fike kusithwa uligwala, apha kum (next thing they say you are a coward, here to me)
>
> Fuke kusithwa usismumu awukwazuthetha, awukwaz’uzimela, (next thing they say you are a mute; you can’t talk, you can’t stand up for yourself)

> Awukwazuzithethelela, awukwazuzilwela, apha kum (you can't speak for yourself, you can't fight for yourself, here to me/in my face).

Ixhala makes me feel spineless, and so my figures have no spines, they look almost pulled out. You can see traces of the spine on their backs or on the side. Ixhala makes me feel helpless; hence none of the sculptures have arms. For me not having arms feels like not having control, not being able to create, feel or touch anything. A moment of helplessness comes when I have no control over something, when I am not able to speak up for myself or fight for myself. Sometimes I cannot think for myself; hence some of the figures have no heads. A feeling of constraint, because the sculptures have no arms, and some figures look almost like they have a restraining jacket on.

Some of the figures are fragile, you see it in their legs, in the cracks there. These are sculptures that I made in the beginning when I was feeling more fragile myself. Fragile legs are also something that can easily crumble and crash. As these figures are my representation of ixhala, I wanted to show that it does not take control at every moment in my life litshona livela (comes and goes). You will see that the more I made these figures the more they started taking more of a human shape than a distorted one. This suggests the movement from ixhala to healing.

Ukucinezeleka (being suppressed): there are visible hands and prints of hands violently grabbing at or inflicting pressure on some of the figures: on their faces, stomachs, mouths, ribs, and both sides of their heads. Anxiety can make me feel like I have multiple stab wounds; hence the holes in one figure's stomach, a squashed breast and the cut that runs from breast to the stomach. If you have ever been roughly pinched or punched on your breasts, you understand this feeling. If you ever hit a corner of a table or bed with your little toe, you know this feeling: it is a rush of pain and anger, your eyes fill with hot tears and your armpits sweat. I try to show this in my figures.

Fig.20.Phila Phaliso. *A bisque fired sculpture in studio*. (2019), ceramic (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.21a. Phila Phaliso. *A bisque fired sculpture in studio*. (2019), Ceramic (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.21b. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photographed by Ezona Njokweni).

Fig.22a.Phila Phaliso. *Bisque fired sculpture in studio.* (2019), ceramic (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

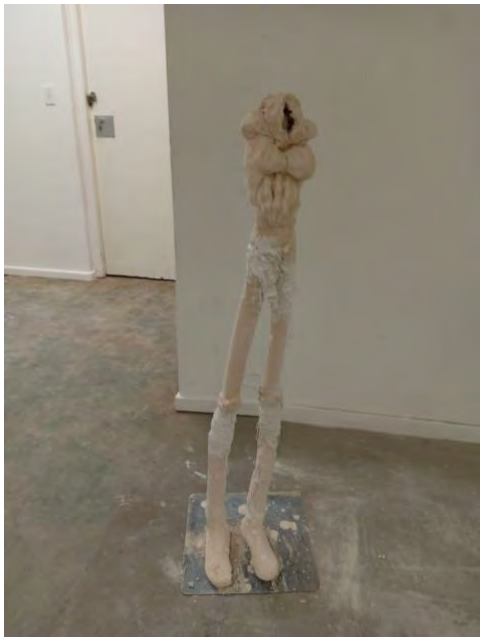

Fig.22b. Phila Phaliso. *Broken pieces put together in exhibition space*. (2024), ceramic, steel, plaster and strips of bag (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

While exploring what ixhala looks like for me, I thought of what it feels like. It is like having a blanket covering me from head to torso. Feeling claustrophobic, not being able to see where I am going and feeling the darkness inside the blanket consuming me and closing in, struggling to breathe. The fear of losing air gave me the idea to do this figure, Figure 23a.

Fig.23a.Phila Phaliso. *Sculpture in progress in studio.* (2019), clay (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.23b.Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic, copper oxide and steel. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photograph by Viwe Madinda).

In this figure my thoughts were ukuhlinzwa (disembodying/butchering). I was reminded of Muholi's *Isilumo siyaluma* work where she uses menstrual blood as a medium. She uses it in order to express the pain and loss she feels hearing about and witnessing the pain of curative rape that many of the girls and women in her black lesbian community bleed from the vagina and their minds (Nel 2011). This is my interpretation of ixhala that comes rushing through when hearing and witnessing these acts of violence, rejection and pain. Pain that I go through every month when I have isiluma (period pain). When you go through isiluma (period pain), ixhala (anxiety) creeps in, I have extreme sensitivity and aggression because I am almost not allowed to express the mental strain and physical pain I go through.

Fig.24a&b. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture*. (2019), ceramic and copper oxide. Installation view: (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.24c.Phila Phaliso. (2022), *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic, steel and copper oxide. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photograph by Viwe Madinda).

Figure 25a has a head that has a nose with hollow eyes and a hand violently grabbing the mouth and a scar across where the eyes should be. A reminder of a feeling of restriction, of being silenced by ixhala. Ixhala can also make you blind to the things that happen around

you. This is also a reminder of a feeling of strain deske ube namathanda (until you have scars or cracks).

It brings with it a feeling of wanting to stay in the dark, not wanting to be seen and not wanting to see myself for who am. I have spent most of my life not looking at myself in a mirror. I have also spent most of my life not wanting to be photographed. I remember I used to literally cry when came the time to take pictures, and as a result my eyes are red in all my teenage images.

Fig.25a &b. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture in studio*. (2019), ceramic with copper oxide (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.25c&d. Phila Phaliso*. Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic with copper oxide, steel, plaster and strip of bag. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photographed by Sikhumbuzo Makandula)

This figure, Figure 26a, has a small head that looks squashed, a neck that looks swollen and forced to the body. A spine twisted to the side, thighs that look swollen and forced into the knees, above the joints. When I started gaining weight, I started feeling heavy and swollen, I felt like all the fat was thrown onto my bones and that my body could not take the weight.

Fig.26a. Phila Phaliso. *Leather hard sculpture in studio.* (2019), clay (photograph by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.26b.Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic and steel. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photograph by Ezona Njokweni).

Inyawo zinodaka is directly translated as the feet are muddy. It can mean being stuck or trapped, it can also mean having been through a lot, having experienced a lot of hardships. I felt bound, stagnant, and worn out, like I was drowning in muddy water. The sculpture shows a female with breasts, and isishwapha (a flat, small bum). It is a figure of a woman that looks worn out. The figure appears to be trapped or sinking. They look like ibethelelwe intamo ayibonakali (like it has been hammered, the neck is not showing), the bums look worn out and lomzimba (this body) has been through a lot.

Fig.27a, b & c. Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture in studio*. (2022), ceramic (photograph by Viwe Madinda).

Fig.27d.Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument (photograph by Ezona Njokweni).

My work started from a place of distortion, and so did my mindset. Slowly the work moves towards where you can see a human body. I have been feeling like I am reaching a point where anxiety does not attack as often as it used to, as it did when I first I started with the sculptures. Through this work I am trying to show the building and healing that has been happening. The figures have become more resolved towards end; the pieces can be put together like a puzzle.

Fig.28a.Phila Phaliso. *Dry sculpture in studio*. (2022), clay (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.28b.Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired sculpture in pieces in studio.* (2019), ceramic (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.28c.Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda.* (2024), ceramic, clay soil and steel. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photographed by Viwe Madinda).

4.2.4. Masks

My body of work includes a series of masks. These are not just portraits of myself, but rather they are an externalization of my state of mind. They represent different aspects of me, different faces for different versions of myself. You may see my face, but you do not see that I am suffocating with anxiety. These masks represent this anxiety that is always with me but never seen. I wanted the masks to have my features, no matter how distorted. With these masks I imagined the visible and hidden reactions, feelings and expressions that I have. My friends always say that my facial expressions are loud, that they can almost tell how I feel in a situation by just looking at me.

The masks are a representation of what is behind a brave, smiling, laughing or calm face. That feeling when forced to smile when you would rather scream. The masks show suffocation, constraint, brokenness, loneliness, sadness and the desire to remain hidden

behind closed eyes. In most moments of ixhala I have put a brave face on, these masks represent the feelings behind the brave face.

To make the masks I made a mould of my face, using moulding silicone which, once it dries, picks up every detail of my face. The masks were produced by pressing clay into the silicone mould. I distorted the masks using found tools such as plastic, an orange fruit bag, stones, a fork, wire, small wood cuts from a tree and so forth for texture.

Fig.29a&b. Phila Phaliso. *Leather hard masks and stone fired masks in studio*. (2022), ceramic (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

Fig.30.Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic with copper oxide. MFA exhibition installation view: Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photograph by Ezona Njokweni).

The masks remind me of ilovane (chameleon). I am a different person to different people and in different spaces. I have had different experiences wearing different masks every day. People use masks to hide how they really feel or what they look like, some gain power and confidence when they put the masks on. They also use masks to blend in, I get to be a chameleon in a way with a mask on.

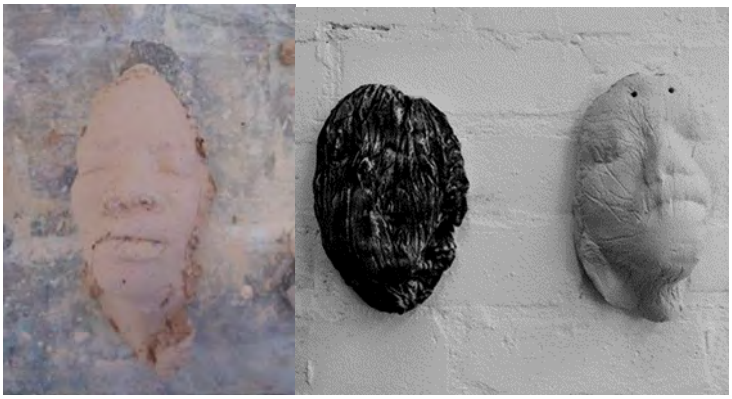

Fig.30a&b. Phila Phaliso. *Leather hard mask and stone fired masks in studio*. (2022), ceramic with copper (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

I use these masks to show the pain, anxiety and frustration inside of me. These masks also represent the different masks that other people put on when I am around them, as well as the different masks that I put on with each person and space. For example, how I am around my family is different to how I am around my friends or in a room full of strangers, colleagues, peers, older and younger men and women.

Fig.30c.Phila Phaliso. *Stone fired masks in studio.* (2022), ceramic with copper oxide (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

4.2.5. Amaqhekeza aphukileyo: Broken pieces

The first sculpture that broke, broke right in front of me. I was already having a bad day, I got off the phone, put one piece of clay down and the sculpture fell. I had planned to stay up all night working in the studio but after that I packed my things and left. These broken works are still part of my process, part of my work, part of my healing.

I have included in my work a mixture of broken pieces and dry pieces of clay that fell out during the creation of the sculptures and masks. There are also broken pieces of already fired work. There are broken sculptures that I made a choice not to mend together, and there are those that I did mend. This speaks to the headspace that I was in at the time, the impatience and anger of seeing something that you have worked on for weeks broken and just giving up on it. It speaks to my relationship with clay. My reaction to clay and to challenges in life are similar.

Fig.31a.Phila Phaliso. *Pieces of broken sculpture in studio*. (2019), clay (photographed by Phila Phaliso).

Fig. 32. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhal Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic clay soil. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photograph by Ezona Njokweni).

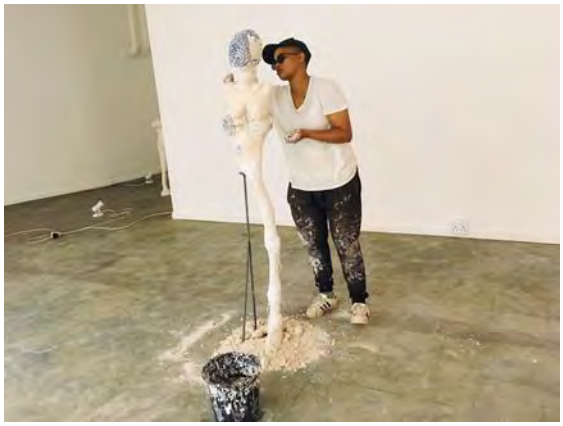

Fig.33. *Phila putting a sculpture together*. (2024), ceramic with copper oxide, steel and plaster (photograph by Sikhumbuzo Makandula).

Ukuwa uvuka (falling and getting back up) these pieces are a reminder that there is nothing wrong with being broken. There is always a way to get back up, piece yourself back together. It also shows that some pieces can never be put together, and this is symbolic of that which cannot be healed but must be felt and acknowledged.

Clay commands patience and a clear relaxed mind. Every broken piece has a story, a time of the day in studio, and each is a part of the artwork that holds its own memory and feeling. This is all part of my lived experience that I am trying to portray in this body of work. I was able to recycle, reuse and mend most of the work, which speaks to the process of working with clay but also the process of healing.

Ukusebenzisa udongo esele lisetyenzisiwe kwakhona (recycling what is broken). Sadly, the road to healing inamagingxigingxi (is challenging) and this process shows that. When the work breaks, it teaches me a lot about my character, my will, my patience, my anger, how long it takes me to get back up, how long it takes me to figure out how to get over it, and how to manage my anxiety. The feeling of work breaking is the same as the feeling you have when a child falls off the bed. This process reminds me of how I am able to pull myself together after a panic attack or how I pull myself together to get out of my house everyday having the social anxiety that I have. Sometimes I start over which also teaches me not to be scared when my life or plans start falling apart. It teaches me how to start over. A dry sculpture that breaks before firing can be crushed and mixed with water again and so the process of building starts again. Even the sculpture that is broken can be mended, giving it character.

4.2.6. Installation elements

There is only one entrance into the space. One entrance means one way to get out. When you dig a hole there is only one way out of it. There is clay soil on the entrance floor, through this I am trying to bring some of the mine into the space, I am trying to bring the feeling of the mine into the space.

On the wall of the space there is text, the words are from the autoethnographic writing in my thesis.

> “Unongayindoda akamntu’
>
> Yinto! Akayontombi, engengomfazi, engeyondoda
>
> NguNongayindoda”.
>
> Mthunzikazi Mbungwana

> Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda liqala mhla
>
> umakhulu esithi vala loomilendze.
>
> Intombi ayibhentsi.

These words do not only belong on paper, but they also needed to be part of the installation, to bring an emphasis to *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. I chose to use text instead of reading them out loud or making a recording. I imagined what throwing these words out to another person would feel like and what it would feel like receiving them. These words on the wall also give the viewer a breather from the figures and putting them as part of the exhibition helps lose their hold on me.

Fig.34.Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2024), ceramic. MFA exhibition installation view: 1820 Settlers Monument-New Gallery (photograph by Ezona Njokweni).

The lighting is focused on the figures to highlight their shadows, thereby making ixhala more visible. The shadows heighten a sense of anxiety, as “a shadow is an image that isn’t there” (Cole cited in Feher and Rice 1988: 638). I understand this as something that follows me everywhere, something that I cannot touch but is ever-present. Shadows move with people and objects, they “cannot move by themselves” (Morujao 2020: 17). Like ixhala (anxiety), shadows are creepers or uninvited accomplices.

There is a video of the clay mine, it shows the beautiful sky and the landscape of where I get clay soil. The audio of the video invites the viewer to a separate room with the video. Simpiwe Dana has a song titled Firedbrand, this video captures only the beginning of the song where she sings “Andingeke ndilingene izulu”(I will never enter heaven). Which speaks how I have been told countless times that I will not enter heaven if I continue being unongayindoda.

The song stops and then Mthunzikazi Mbungwana and I have a converstion about our experiences and what seems to expected oonongayindoda by society. Things that we find uncomfortable and are a source of ixhal lika nongayindoda. It also shows our interaction with clay in the space the peacefulness of the space.

Fig.35a. Phila Phaliso, Mthunzikazi Mngwana and Sikhumbuzo Makhandula. *Abantu Bomdongwe.* (2023), Video still (video by Sikhumbuzo Makandula).

Fig.35b. Phila Phaliso, Mthunzikazi Mngwana and Sikhumbuzo Makhandula. *Abantu Bomdongwe*. (2023), Video still (video by Sikhumbuzo Makandula).

Fig.35c. Phila Phaliso. *Ixhala Lika Nongayindoda*. (2023), photograph (photograph by Sikhumbuzo Makandula).

Fig.35d. Phila Phaliso, Mthunzikazi Mngwana and Sikhumbuzo Makhandula. *Abantu Bomdongwe*. (2023), Video still (video by Sikhumbuzo Makandula).

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter speaks to my work: the process, the figures, the masks, and the broken pieces. In this chapter I have shown the work that I have done and how it relates to my experiences. I have tried to show how ixhala (anxiety) consumes me at times, makes me feel spineless and helpless. I have also tried to show how ceramic sculpture makes it possible for me to let go of ixhala (anxiety). Someday, I would like to find a means to show my work in my village, I would like to see how people receive the work, what it means to them and how they feel around the figures, the masks and the broken pieces. I want to continue to find ways of representing mental health in ways that are accessible to others, ways that can shift the stigma around mental health.

Chapter five: Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

In this thesis I sought to explore the use of clay as a representative embodiment of queer anxiety in my work as a rural black queer sculptor. Through exploring key concepts, artists that influenced and inspired my work, I brought these into conversation with my own work of making queer anxiety visible through clay. The practice-based autoethnographic approach for this thesis made it possible for me to explore my experiences of being a black queer woman growing up in a religions and traditional rural community. Each work in the series is emotionally charged as I explore my lived experience.

In seeking to explore ceramics and black queer anxiety, I drew on a few core concepts, namely queer theory and standpoint theory. I discussed the tension between western and African queer identities, the difficulty of language and naming with regards to queer African identity, as well as mental health, and the core concept guiding this research: the healing of black queer anxiety through clay. I also presented the work of the artists that have helped to shape my own work by showing me what is possible in way of representing my lived experiences. These artists included Alice Nongebeza, Zanele Muholi, Mthunzikazi Mbungwana, and Buhlebezwe Siwani.

5.2. Making visible black queer anxiety

My work firstly sought to explore how ceramic sculpture can be used in the representation of unongayindoda queer anxiety. The work shows my imagined representation of ixhala lika nongayindoda through process, figures, and masks, and is also inclusive of the broken pieces.

Anxiety, in general, is a feeling that cannot be touched, smelled, tasted, heard or seen. Ceramics plays an important role in ngeso le nyama (making seen what cannot be seen). The masks and figures, in particular, are my representations of my queer anxiety stemming from my lived reality as unongayindoda. The distortion of masks and figures is one way that I could imagine anxiety to look and feel like. Making the sculptures have the look of a human

form then distorting them, making them look uncomfortable, scared, and twisted, is my way of making this black queer anxiety visible to those who encounter the figures.

5.3. Ceramic sculpture as a therapeutic medium

My work also sought to explore the ways in which ceramic sculpture is a therapeutic medium for ixhala lika nongayindoda. The searching for and processing of clay has been a therapeutic experience for me.

My work shows how I process clay soil in order to create and make visible feelings that are hard to express in words. Makhanda has clay on the side of the road, and it is only used in June and in December during initiation time. Makhanda has clay all round it, but the community does not know how to use it to their benefit financially or the community has no access to the big clay sites around Makhanda.

Umhlaba, amanzi, udongo (clay land/soil, water, clay) is something that my community is familiar with. So, the material I use already makes it relatable. Clay is a material in the walls of the river, emasimini nasegadini in my village, clay is also on the way from Joza to town in Makhanda. My community uses clay for different functions.

Everyone experiences anxiety but I believe that when it is named in a foreign language, such as English, it gets lost in translation. The language that I use, the fact that I am a black woman that grew up in the Eastern Cape and ndingumxhosa mna kuqala (I am umxhosa) is meaningful. I am not just a white man speaking a foreign language, this makes it more relatable to my community. The decorative plates, vases, and molded ceramic sculptures in their living rooms, kitchens and dining areas of the location and village houses make ceramics more relatable.

Everyone knows what ixhala is and what it means, and they know that they experience it at times, some more than others. But when it is named “anxiety”, some people associate it with madness and whiteness. The word “anxiety” hits differently than the word ixhala, when I say ixhala immediately think of uvalo, amnwele, umbilini, umbefu, uloyiko. Much like when I say anxiety to an English-speaking person, they immediately think: worry, fear, distress and so forth.

When I started going to the studio, I was very excited to bring my ideas to life. I was also in a hurry, and so things were collapsing and breaking because I was not letting myself be in the moment. So, I started working on my patience, I started building and taking walks to give the clay time to be leather hard enough for me to build on again. Taking the walks helped me think about my next figures.

5.4. Conclusion: Reflecting on my healing through ceramic sculpture

I believe that this body of work has made visible my black queer anxiety through ceramic sculpture and provided an understandable and accessible way of speaking about black queer anxiety in rural communities.

My work has also moved me closer towards my own healing in that I have a tool and material that I have found. Material that has proven to be useful is ekuthobeni ixhala. When I started the process of this thesis, I was in search of something that works for me. A space that welcomes me. I felt unsafe, insecure and confused, and home could not be this safe space for me because I had not had the talk about my identity with my mother who is a very deeply religious and spiritual woman.

Part of ixhala lam (my anxiety) has been around the risk of being disowned by my parents. I started reading Zanele Muholi's work when I was younger, and I found her work to have meaningful content and concepts. It was through her work that I was able to be informed about what was happening in – and to – the South African queer community. Nicholas Hlobo also shared his experience of being unongayindoda in rural settlements. Their works helped me with accepting who I was and embracing myself, taking up my own space. Learning about the experiences that Muholi's participants had scared me, I became very fearful when it came to being honest with my family because of how religious they are.

Identity is a tricky thing, finding and accepting who you are takes a toll on you when you are not willing to be honest with yourself and the loved ones around you. You almost have to be someone else, and keep up an act which becomes frustrating, and leads to home becoming an uncomfortable space.

While in this process of searching for healing and making my anxiety visible, I managed to be honest with my family in terms of my queerness. I know that if it had not been for this process, I would not have been able to have this conversation with them. The space that I felt to be unsafe to me, home, has slowly become one of my safe spaces during this process.

It was through clay that I was able to ground myself, to let go of anything and everything that would hold me back. Ixhala liyakwazi ukuzifihla, liyonwaba ebumnyameni (anxiety knows how to hide itself, it thrives in the dark). When it is just you and anxiety, anxiety will win every single time. But through sculpture and through writing this thesis, through bringing the anxiety forward and into the open, its power over me lessens.

The texture and feel of the clay in my hands has been a stabiliser and a source of empowerment, I feel connected to life and all the pieces around me. In the studio, I let wet clay dry on my hands, and the sound that my hands make when rubbing them together covered in dry clay is so satisfying, the clay has become a part of me.

> ixhala lifuna ukondlalwa lonekwe stratweni (anxiety must be thrown out into the street)
>
> ndimnye nodongo umoya wam mnye no dongo (I am one with clay, my spirit is one with clay).

6. Reference List

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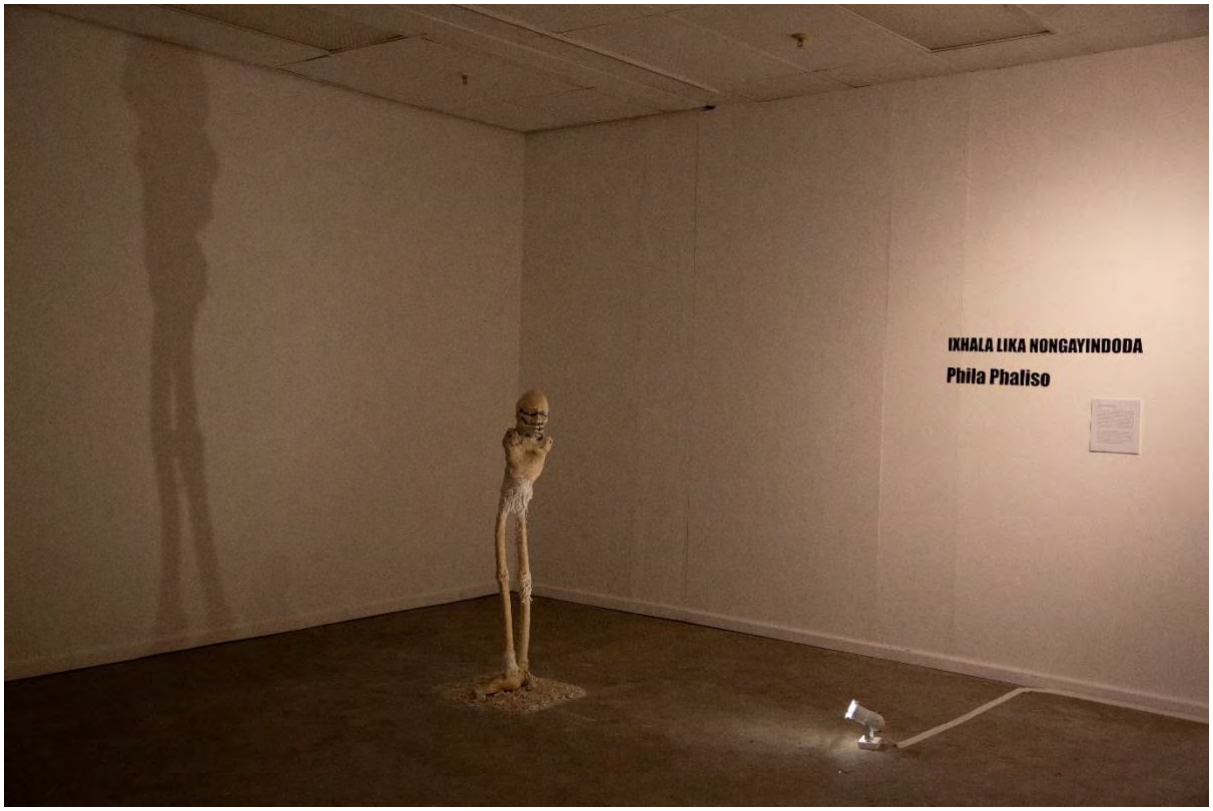
7. Appendix

2024 documentation of the final exhibition ceramic sculpture at the 1820 Settlers Monument - New Gallery, Makhanda, South Africa. (Photographs by Ezona Njokweni, Sikhumbuzo Makandula and Viwe Madinda.)


INKALA LIKA NONGAYINDODA
Phila Phaliso


IXHALA LIKA NONGAYINDODA
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IXHALA LIKA NONGAYINDODA
Phila Phaliso


"Ungayindoda akamuto'
Yiyo! akayontombi, engengomfazi, engeyendoda
NguKongayindoda".
(Mthunzikazi Mbungwana, 2021)