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CREATIVITY AT THE MARGINS:

THE PERFORMANCES OF AN ARTIST

IN THE VENDA REGION OF SOUTH AFRICA

Oren Mark Kaplan

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 1998

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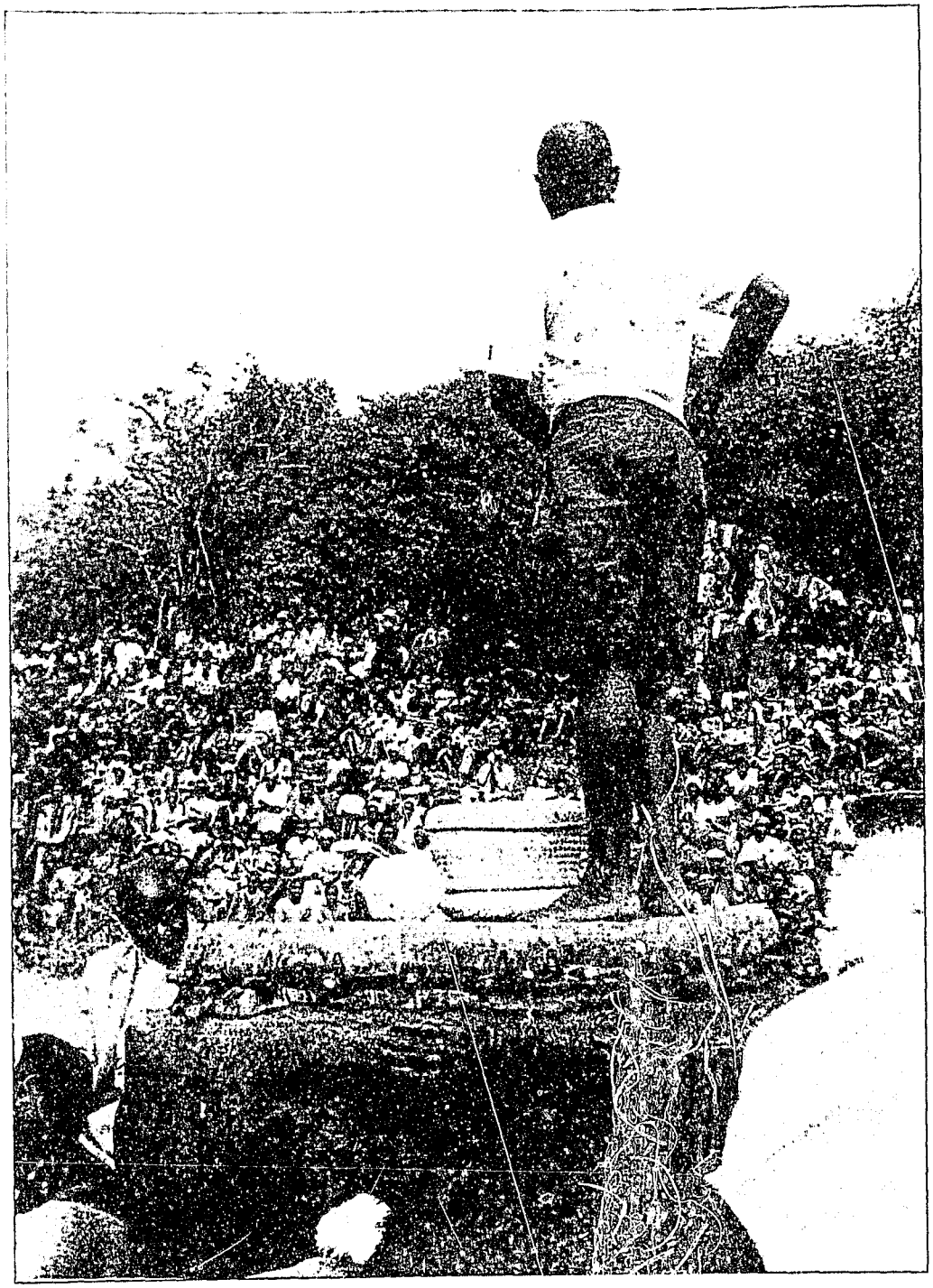
THE PERFORMANCES OF AN ARTIST IN THE VENDA REGION OF SOUTH AFRICA

Oren Mark Kaplan

Degree awarded with distinction on 15 April 1999

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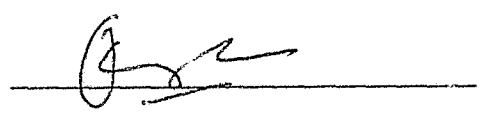


Vho - Muzenga standing on his drum at the Lake Performance

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, nor has it been prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation outside the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Name of candidate: Oren Mark Kaplan

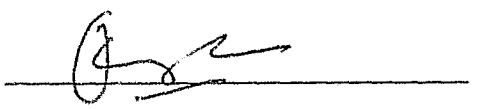
Signature of candidate: 

Date: 23·07·98

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Name of candidate: Oren Mark Kaplan

Signature of candidate: 

Date: 23.07.98

DEDICATION

For *Yamse Amelia Tyalimpi*, who cared about and for me, from the time I was born until her untimely death in December 1997.

ABSTRACT

Vho-Ratshilumela Samson Mudzunga staged three performances between June 1996 and March 1997 in the far northern Venda region of South Africa. The performances included dramatic enactments which were based on mimetic recreations of, what he termed traditional, rites of passage. Thus he staged his own funeral in June 1996 and a traditional Venda wedding in March 1997. He also held a performance at Lake Fundudzi in September 1996. In these performances Vho-Mudzunga acted out scenarios which slid between representations of ritual practices and acts intended to provoke a sense of wonder.

In the process of planning and executing the performances Vho-Mudzunga generated, through symbols, conflicts and narratives, 'images' of the patterns of transgressive, autochthonous and extra-local power. The local context, in an out-of-the-way place in the South African state, proved to be a heteregenous, ensemble of paradoxical relations of power. In a typical mode of contradiction that flowed from this heterogeneity and characterized his actions, Vho-Mudzunga both challenged *and* perpetuated forms of authority and influence.

The penetration of the art-market and the discourse and practice of 'Art' into the Venda region in 1985, was a crucial context for understanding Vho-Mudzunga's contradictory strategies, and, more generally the conditions of marginality which structured experience and identity at the South African periphery. Discourses and practices, emanating from powerful centres, excluded and defined the Venda region and its inhabitants in a way that severely disrupted their experiences of space, history and a sense of self or personhood. The entrance of the art-market into the Venda region in 1985 enabled Vho-Mudzunga, as an artist, to gain access to the material and symbolic power of the prestigious metropolitan centre.

The performances were Vho-Mudzunga's way of engaging and addressing the disruptive effects of marginality. They re-dressed his personal and social experiences of dislocation and reconstructed space, history and personhood in an idealized image under his control. I argue that post-apartheid South Africa provided new and specific conditions for marginal peoples to engage the centre.

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PREFACE

In March 1992, a few days after the white referendum on the Nationalist government's negotiations with the ANC, a car carrying a secretary and her friend. stopped at the Shell Ultra City on the Ben Schoeman Highway outside of Johannesburg, and offered me and my friend a lift to Cairo. She apologised that she was only going some ten kilometres further up the road and decided to add a few kilometres to her journey just to help us on our trip up Africa. She noted our urgency to go north as quickly as possible that day. We were determined to get across the border during this first day of our travels. For north of the Limpopo lay Africa.

South of the border were years of conversations about apartheid ideology which resonated in my mind as some form of cultural theory about South Africa. I recall the 'mantra' a friend of mine, who was active in the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO), repeated to me. 'I am Sotho because I speak Sotho, he is Xhosa because he speaks Xhosa. Do not believe the cultural conservatism of this apartheid regime.' Perhaps, I guess as a Jew, I felt that culture proliferated somewhere beyond the grasp of the state.

One night. on the southern shores of Lake Tanganyika, north of the Limpopo, I had a number of conversations with local fishermen about a local culture. This talk reminded me, in form at least, of what may exist in another South Africa, across the permeable borders of great rivers that separated (in my mind at least, and, in other places, only tentatively, as I would later learn) progressive politics from indigenous culture. In the same town, talking with the same fishermen, the form of my own identity also pursued me.

I returned south of the Limpopo some three years later and decided then to pursue, academically, an interest in the creation of ideology, belief and meaning, which began many years ago, but that took shape north of the Limpopo.

Robert Thornton answered my phone call to the Social Anthropology Department at Wits University and agreed, even though there was no precedent for it, that a "conversion course" in Anthropology was a good idea. He allowed me, with an honours degree in Business Finance, to pursue an inter-disciplinary hodgepodge of quarter-long, term-long and even some year-long courses, to prepare me in a year for post-graduate work in Social Anthropology. This thesis then is the fruit born of that initial creative application of bureaucratic rules for which I thank Robert. In the same vein, Deborah James, pursued the rule twisting and made the necessary arrangements once I decided to pursue this Masters.

My idea was to achieve a "quick Masters" and Carolyn Hamilton, creative and persuasive as ever, presented me with a phenomenon - an event which could be the basis for the type of study I wanted to follow. Rayda Becker, curtator of the University's Gertrude Posel Gallery, assisted us in contacting Vho-Samson Mudzunga, the phenomenon's protagonist, and helped put my research into operation. Despite a schedule which required Carolyn to be in many different places for various lengths of time, her advice, often under less than ideal circumstances, was stimulating when the material and the researcher were tiring, unforgiving when they went wandering, precise when they tried to disguise knowledge in poetics or jargon, and poetic when they drained life from the lives and events under scrutiny. Most of all, Carolyn was supportive and active during some insecure times. I would also like to thank Prof. David Hammond-Tooke for his kind support. Prof. Anitra Nettleton's door was always open to me and I benefited from various conversations with her. The members of our post-graduate reading group convened by Carolyn - Graham Reid and Anne Wanless - read unpolished works, watched field videos and were of great help in testing ideas and making the process of writing-up less tedious and solitary.

My fieldwork was supported by a grant from the Du Plessis Fund for Venda Research. Isak Niehaus provided support and ad ice while I was in the field and was always an important source for consultation and anthropological lore. Likewise. Gotfried Dederen, of the University of Venda, and his family, provided a home in the field and great support for my project and my field fumbles. My friendship with Gotfried made the second half of my fieldwork more pleasurable. Grant, Resheketjoe and "the gnomes" were always hospitable and provided similar relief for me.

The Mudzunga households were the site of great and intense experiences amidst hot and calm days. The women and children of the households gave me their friendship without hesitation. I found peace and warmth sitting with Vho-Denga, Vho-Tshina. Vho-Avhashoni, Vho-Ivy, Vhengani and especially Funanani. The same is true for Adziambei and Maemu when they were home. Dan Mandavha and his friends made me feel part of the cohort of young men. Dan gave not only friendship but time and energy to this project. Vho-Samson Mudzunga allowed me to stay in his home. record and observe his activities. I witnessed first-hand how hard he works and his tenacity to achieve his goals. We did not become friends but I trust this thesis honestly reflects on the period of our lives in which we spent whole days together.

Barbara Rubin read, re-read, edited and re-edited pages, sections and chapters as fast as I could produce them, in a mad rush to get me to America on time. She even seemed interested through most of her attentive initiation into anthropology. Fieldwork is a great reflexive endeavour on all types of social relationships and this acknowledgment is to a friendship based in friendship alone - for its own tremendous sake. Once I was in America, Jane Kimber, via courier and E-mail, photocopied, re-photocopied, bound and rebound, numerous final versions of this thesis.

My family journeyed to East Africa once I had made it half-way to Cairo and they made a point of coming to visit with me and Vho-Samson Mudzunga at his home in

Shanzha village in the Northern Province of South Africa. They provide me with the continuous, intimate knowledge and experience of a supportive and enthusiastic social world, perhaps the deepest source for what is to follow.

NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY AND PUNCTUATION

I have not used the correct diacritics when spelling Venda words in this thesis due to printing constraints. A glossary of Venda words appears in Appendix 2. I have used double quotation marks to indicate direct quotes. In the text, I have often used single quotation marks to emphasise concepts where I am scrutinizing the relationship between signifier and signified.

Figure 1. Area Map

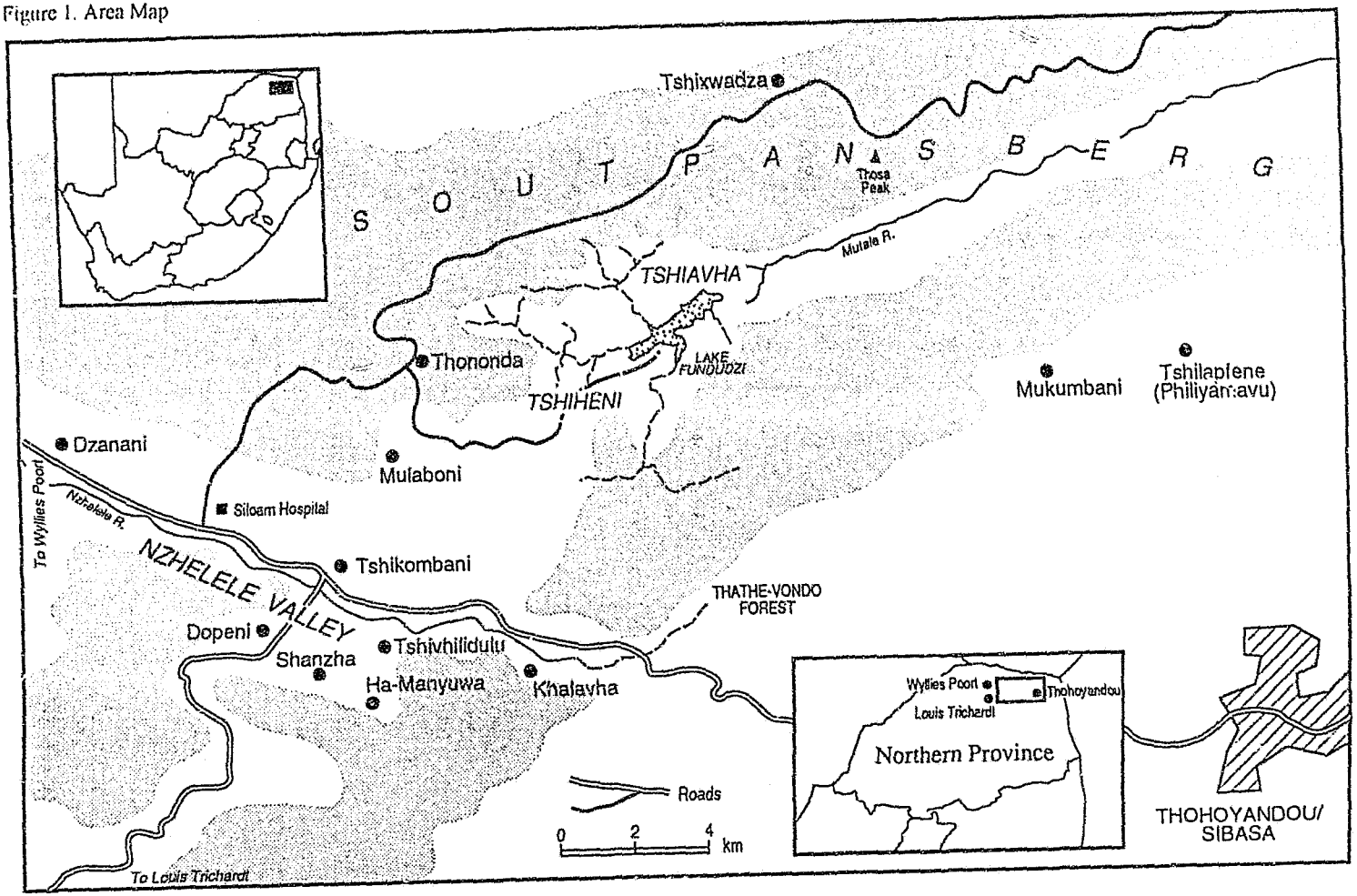


Figure 2. House Map

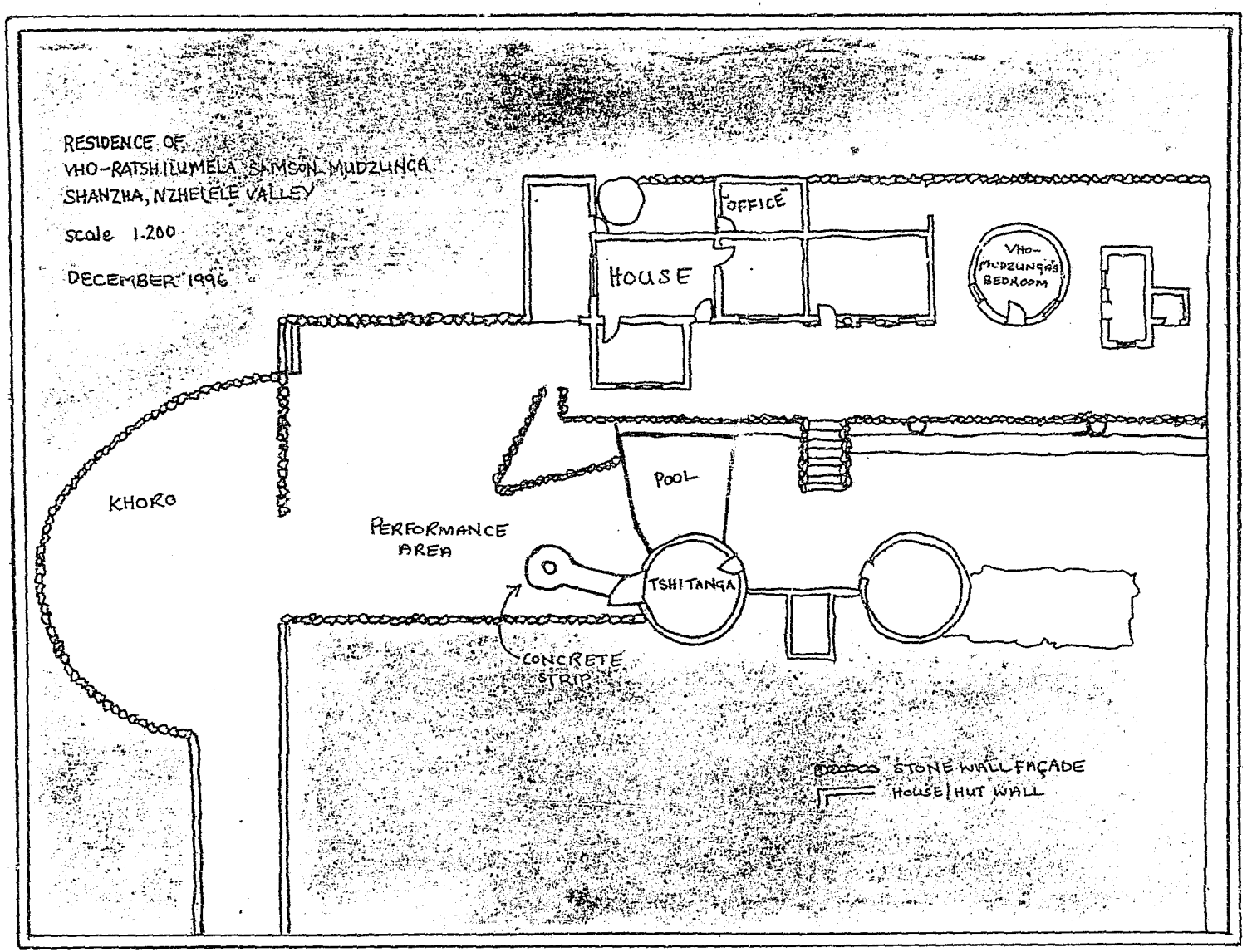
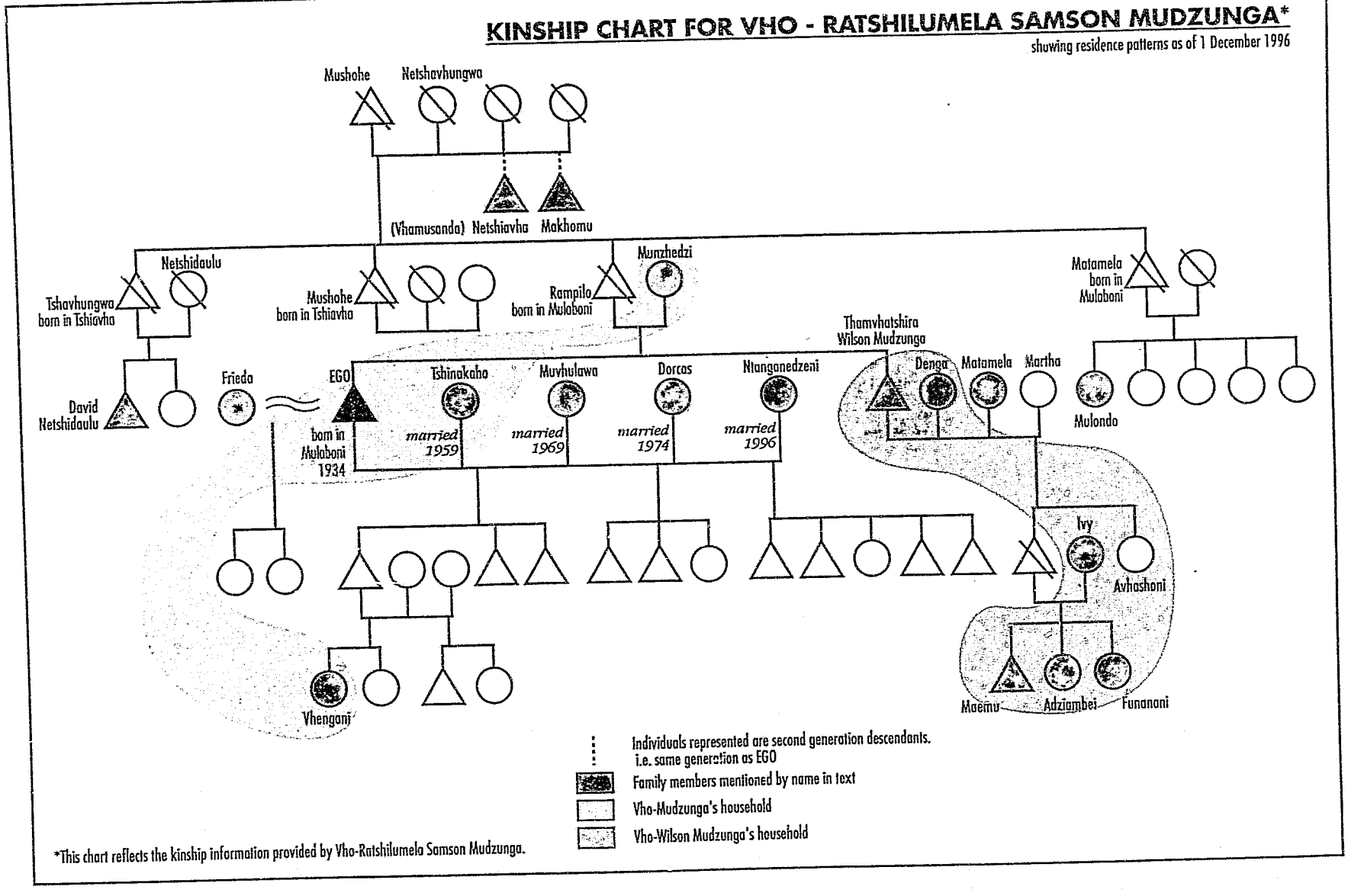


Figure 3. Kinship chart



INTRODUCTION

MUKHUWA YA MUDZUNGA - MUDZUNGA'S WHITE

Creativity At The Margins

In early 1996, Vho-Ratshilumela Samson Mudzunga (Vho-Mudzunga),[1] summonsed his family, friends, local community and visitors from Johannesburg to attend his 'funeral'. On June 29, 1996, at his home in Shanzha village in the Venda region of the Northern Province of South Africa, he 'buried' himself in a *ngoma* drum[2] that he had carved. Family members gathered around his coffin-drum and passed by it in single file, quietly and respectfully paying their last respects to their 'dead' relative. To the strains of the *tshikona* dance, the 'deceased' emerged from his 'grave' and submerged himself in a pool of water.

This was the first of a series of functions staged by Vho-Mudzunga in the Venda region in 1996 and 1997. Vho-Mudzunga held two performances in 1996 and an additional one in 1997. As part of the first performance Vho-Mudzunga enacted a "Venda" burial and I therefore refer to it as the Funeral Performance. He staged the second performance on the 28th of September 1996 at his home in Shanzha and at Lake Fundudzi. The Lake, and the performance there, were central to this event. I therefore label it the Lake Performance. The third performance was presented on the March 8th, 1997, at his home. This performance centred around a wedding and I call it the Marriage Performance.

This thesis is an ethnographic study of Vho-Mudzunga's ritual performances. The programme of each performance included an enacted drama conceived around a rite of

passage, the participation of local dance groups, speeches, food and drink. These were complex cultural and social events. In each one Vho-Mudzunga was the main 'actor'. He incorporated a number of powerful symbols into the performances, including public symbols 'canonized' by local custom, symbols reflective of his peripheral location at the edge of potent discourses and 'personal' symbols of his own invention. Importantly, these symbolic creations revolved around his own woodcarvings. Invariably, he used a *ngoma* drum, which he had carved, as a part of the dramas. These drums established a central site for performative action, public display and hermeneutics, functioned as traditional musical instrument and art-object, and, incorporated Vho-Mudzunga's trans-regional role and status of 'Contemporary Artist' into the performances. The performances were at times confined to the socially sanctioned zone of enacted transgression (Gluckman 1954, Turner 1969, Vail and White 1991). But they also over-stepped the boundary of enactment and realized their potential as social acts that both gained access to and challenged authority. Using the ethnography of the performances, this study focuses on Vho-Mudzunga's agency as an 'artist,' and how, through performance, he engaged with the symbolic configurations of power, history and ambition in the Venda region of South Africa.

My efforts to understand and interpret Vho-Mudzunga's performative engagements with power, history and ambition led to a broader study of creativity, cultural connectedness and marginality. Before I went into the field, I read the written invitations to the Lake Performance and the Funeral Performance distributed by Vho-Mudzunga and I was struck by the hybridity of the texts. They at once evoked and signaled numerous styles and categories. A 'traditionalist,' 'conservative,' 'rural' trope explained the content of the upcoming performances and this was followed by the typically 'progressive,' 'politicised,' 'urban' salutation "yours in arts and culture". The invitations called upon innovation and continuity, they referred to the performances as exhibitions and ceremonies, served as announcements and polemics, discussed tradition in the Venda region and future art exhibitions to be held by the artist in Johannesburg.

Dr. Hamilton's description of the Funeral Performance which she attended, confirmed that the event resembled the invitation - numerous, seemingly incongruous, cultural elements converged in one place. Television documented an 'old' ritual, performed around a new conceptually innovative 'art-object' that was aesthetically and formally connected to 'traditional Venda drums.' The 'ritual' was performed to an audience of local villagers and visitors from distant places. The location, a village in the far-northern parts of the South African state, framed the sense of incongruity.

As I considered this complex and contradictory (to my mind) set of elements, I first decided to establish how real this all was. Was Vho-Mudzunga putting on a show for tourists? How invested was he in these performances? Was there anything at all at stake for him? My initial reaction then to these descriptions of heterogeneity in a distant rural place was suspicion around the authenticity of the social action. Heterogeneity in that distant place seemed to me to signal contamination, some corrupted cultural form, without its own integrity. This is a common starting point for discussions about 'genres of change' that are located in Out-of the-Way places (For example Barber 's (1987) discussion of popular African art.)

A few days later, I ventured into Professor Robert Thornton's office in the Social Anthropology department at Wits University, and, on his desk lay a photograph he had taken, in the course of his own research, of girl initiates on the Lowveld. The photograph showed the girls performing the final public rites of the initiation ceremony - the traditional school for girls. Their attire for this traditional ceremony was striking: they were 'plumed' in brightly-dyed blue feathers, and were wearing mirrors, pens and sweets draped across their chests. They wore plastic sunglasses. All the items had been bought from the local store. Underneath all these commodities, a leather skin apron was visible, underlying the fact that this was traditional gear. Again I was struck by a sense of incongruity. But in this case, the authenticity was inescapable. This was a community sanctioned and recognised traditional practice. Sweets, mirrors, and pens

fitted a community's idea of suitable attire for initiation ceremonies. The sense of incongruity was of my own making and was based in my own assumptions around location and behaviour.

Viewing social relations as in some way structured by processes of peripheralisation helps explain the contradictory heterogeneous elements (symbolic and material, local and extra-local) - illustrated here briefly with reference to the written invitation - that Vho-Mudzunga assembled in a far-off local context. The patterns of power through which Vho-Mudzunga accessed and challenged authority were embedded in interanimating contexts and histories. Vho-Mudzunga's performances presented an opportunity to understand the heterogeneity of the local cultural context and the engagements that marginalized people in distant places make with extra-local discourses and practices. The specific resources and actions that his performative practice used and produced highlighted the local margin as intimately connected to the centre and not as a separate and different opposition to the centre - the alleged encultured space of the Other. The local margin is heterogeneously constituted through copresences and interlocked viewpoints.[4] The study therefore positions both the content of the performances and the practice of Vho-Mudzunga within broader frames that constitute, contextualize and constrain his actions, but which also serve as the basis for the creative re-blending and re-assembly of cultural signs.

The specific end of this *bricolage* (in as much as any specific end can be attributed to cultural acts) was, it seems, an attempt to reconstitute personhood, space and history. These markers of identity had been dislocated by forces which encompassed the Venda region, and the lives of black South Africans in general, through historical periods which included Vho-Mudzunga's own lifetime. These forces of dislocation emanated from powerful centres that imposed ideas and practices to the exclusion of other viewpoints and lifestyles at the margins.

Whereas in the photograph of the girl initiates discussed above the 'incongruity' which struck me stemmed from commodities located in traditional ritual, the 'incongruity' in the case of Vho-Mudzunga's performances arose out of his 'art' practice. The focal object of the performances was a drum that functioned as commodity and indigenous symbol, as innovation and continuity, as symbol of local knowledge and symbol of foreign destinations, as focus of ceremony and exhibition. In this study, I do not argue for a specific interpretation of his art-work. Rather I show how one individual, Vho-Mudzunga, operated within all the different discourses around his art-practice in order to further and facilitate his own personal project. This involved a revaluation of relations and experiences of marginality mediated through local symbolism.

The discourse and practice of art is crucial to this framing of Vho-Mudzunga's performances and my approach to analysing and interpreting them. Prior to 1985 the category 'artist' and the status associated to it was not available to producers of objects in the Venda region. The metropole extended the practices of art into the margins. Notably, then, Vho-Mudzunga used the practice of art to engage his marginality, a practice that was itself an imposed discourse from the metropole. This study documents the discursive creation of the 'artist' by the metropole in the Venda region of South Africa and how this 'imposition' fueled and aided a creative response to the lived experience of being at the margins of power.

Finally, I do not look to the margins in order to expose alternative positions to hegemonic and dominating powers. Vho-Mudzunga's performances do not simply resist imposed forces but embellish and perpetuate them. Rather I find the concept of marginality (Tsing 1993) useful to understand the structural constraints and the possibilities of lived experiences at the peripheries of defining powers. It also highlights what Comaroff termed the "consciousness of marginality" (1985:181) which is moulded through such experiences. I position this study in a similar analytical frame to other

work on the symbolic performances of peripheral people in South Africa, most notably, Comaroff's study of Tshidi Zionism:

> The significance of such movements [Tshidi Zionism] lies in the fact that they are specific responses to a structural predicament *common* to many peripheral Third World peoples; systematic revaluations, mediated by local symbolic orders, of elements of the increasingly global culture of industrial capitalism (1985:13).

Methodology

My aim in this section is to make explicit the methods used in my research to gather data, the type of data I set out to collect and the limitations which I encountered during my research period. I will also show how my methodology comprised not simply a set of research tools but also a set of relationships through which the 'objects' of study influenced the project and I, as researcher, was positioned as an active social player.

Political and Personal Geographies:

The geographical area within the recently defined Northern Province, where Vho-Mudzunga's performances were staged (the Venda region), has historically been associated with the location of Tshivenda-speaking people[5]. Vho-Mudzunga identified himself to me as Muvenda, both linguistically and culturally. Without creating impermeable cultural borders, much of my research fits broadly within a Vhavenda cultural, social and political complex and contributes to the field of 'Venda Studies.' Vho- Mudzunga identified himself to me in various ways throughout the research period, Muvenda being one way.

From September to December, 1996, I lived in Vho-Mudzunga's household in Shanzha village. Shanzha forms part of a range of political entities. These polities map the political geography in which Vho-Mudzunga's performances found their logic.

Since the early 1700s, the region has been home to a number of chieftancies that trace their roots to an original united Venda chieftancy under the chief, Thohoyandou. In 1996-97, the major chiefs in the Venda region claimed to be descendants of the sons of Thohoyandou. The two most prominent chiefs were Chief Mphephu and Chief Tshivhase. Each chief - *khosi* - had a recognized territory in which he controlled the land. Demarcated areas within a chieftancy were ruled by headmen or *vhamusanda* who were loyal to the chief or *khosi*. Their office was hereditary. Thus each village was part of a chieftancy and was ruled by a *vhamusanda* who was loyal to a *khosi*. Shanzha, the residential village of Vho-Mudzunga was ruled by *vhamusanda* Shavhani and was part of Khosi Tshivhase's chieftancy.

Historically, Shanzha also fell into reserve land, set aside by colonial administrations for occupation by indigenous African populations, and declared in the late 1800s in the then Boer Republic of the Transvaal. The system of reserves was perpetuated by British and Union administrations and embellished by successive apartheid governments. The latter regimes demarcated the reserve land in which Shanzha was situated as a Venda bantustan and eventually, following legislation guided by the South African government's policy of separate development, the bantustan became the so-called Independent Republic of Venda. As such Shanzha became part of an ethnically-defined homeland. The homeland government combined the trappings of legislative assemblies with the chiefly rule described above. Its 'president' and 'paramount chief' was *Khosi* Mphephu, the recognized elder son of Thohoyandou, who ruled through a political party called the Venda National Party. Under the homeland system, local government remained in the hands of unelected *vhamusanda*. Internal administration - education, development etc. - was the responsibility of the homeland government. Foreign policy and policing of course remained the South African government's prerogative.

New administrations followed in the wake of the democratization of South Africa and the adoption of a new constitution. The Republic of Venda was re-incorporated into the

South African nation-state. It became part of the Northern Province of South Africa. The Province was itself divided into regions and Shanzha (and the whole of former 'Venda') was part of the Soutpansberg Region of the Northern Province. Government representatives from the Soutpansberg regional offices feature prominently in parts of this thesis.

Finally, there were two other local authorities. Firstly, democratically-minded civic movements operated in villages, mostly in conflict with the village *vhamusanda*. They attempted to control municipal affairs and development. Secondly, the third tier of the new post-apartheid dispensation (national-provincial-local) was the democratically-elected local government structures called Transitional Local Councils (TLC). Shanzha was part of Ward 8 of the Greater Nzhelele\Tshipise rural TLC. The Council's political mandate was the administration of municipal affairs and development. Its jurisdiction cut across the borders of four different chieftancies: Tshivhase, Mphephu, Khakhu and Sinthumule. However its constitution made provision for only one chief to be seconded onto the TLC. Whilst I was in Shanzha, negotiations were still under way to resolve which *khosi* would sit on the TLC.

The following authorities thus constituted politics in the Venda region: The state was formally represented locally by the regional government and TLCs. Other local power-brokers included 'traditional leaders' (*vhamusanda*) and civic organizations.

Vho-Mudzunga's performances were staged at his home in Shanzha. There were four permanent residents who made up this household when I stayed there (see Figure 3) - Vho-Mudzunga; his first wife, Vho-Tshinakaho; their ten-year old grandchild, Vhengani who was the daughter of Vho-Tshinakaho's eldest son[6]; and Vho-Munzhedzi, Vho-Mudzunga's mother. He estimated her age to be over ninety-five years. Vho-Mudzunga lived on the southern side of Shanzha village in the section called Golori. His house was the last row of homes before the mountain. He owned a plot alongside his

brother, Vho-Thamvhatshira Wilson Mudzunga (Vho-Wilson Mudzunga). His brother spent most of his time in Johannesburg but while I was in Shanzha there was a constant and easy thorough-fare between the two households. I came to feel especially comfortable at Vho-Wilson's residence. The household consisted of: Vho-Denga, Vho-Wilson Mudzunga's first wife; Vho-Avhashoni, Vho-Denga's daughter; Vho-Ivy, the wife of Vho-Denga's son who had recently died and Vho-Ivy's children - Maemu (14), Adziambei (11) and Funanani (4).[7]

Vho-Mudzunga's second wife, Vho-Muvhulawa, lived in Phiphidi with two of her three children by him. His third wife, Vho-Dorcas, lived in Johannesburg. Vho-Mudzunga had lived in Johannesburg for thirty years. He was employed, at first, in domestic work, and then took jobs successively with Johannesburg Consolidated Industries (JCI) and Kohler Ltd. During this latter stage of corporate employment, Vho-Mudzunga lived in Chiawelo, Soweto. He maintained a household in the Venda region. He had grown up in Thononda and kept a home there. In 1976 he moved his household from Thononda to Shanzha. In 1988 he was retrenched from Kohler and returned to live permanently in Shanzha. However, he made frequent trips to Johannesburg after his return. (During the period of September to January 1996/7, he made at least four trips.) Through these trips he maintained contact with his Johannesburg network. This network included curators and administrators in the art-world with whom he would meet.

Contact with Vho-Mudzunga:

My contact with Vho-Mudzunga was preceded by other contacts between himself and the academic and art worlds in Johannesburg. On 29 June 1996, Vho-Mudzunga staged the Funeral Performance at his home. The manner in which the Social Anthropology Department (the Department) at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) was made aware of this event is significant. Between 1968 and 1980, Vho-Mudzunga was employed by Johannesburg Consolidated Industries (JCI) as a driver. He maintained contact with this organization after his term of employment with them had ended. A

former student at the Department, Paul Kapelus, was also employed with JCI and, like Vho-Mudzunga, maintained contact with the organization after he left. Kapelus was informed by Bridget Dooley, of JCI's Department of Social Responsibility, of Vho-Mudzunga's plans to hold the Funeral Performance. Vho-Mudzunga had sent a written invitation to Dooley informing her of his plans. This letter was faxed to Mr. Kapelus who in turn faxed the invitation to the Social Anthropology department. He was intrigued by the style and content of the letter. Dr. Carolyn Hamilton, of the Department, who was in contact with the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) and who had also heard of his activities through JAG staff, decided to attend the performance in Shanzha. Members of the art-world, notably from the Johannesburg Art Gallery, were also present. A 'register' was circulated at the event for 'outsiders' to record their attendance and was left with Vho-Mudzunga. Names and addresses were requested on this list. **I did not attend this performance.**

After this event a further letter was sent to the Department of Social Anthropology inviting members of staff to the event to be held on 28 September (the Lake Performance). In August, Dr. Hamilton showed me the letter and proposed the project which would end up as the basis of this research. My discussion with Dr. Hamilton effectively transformed Vho-Mudzunga's letter from an invitation from him to simply attend a performance, to a proposal to him from us to attend the performance as researchers.

As I spent time with Vho-Mudzunga, I recognized that he maintained contacts with various people outside the Venda region and would approach them for help when he required. One example was a film producer who wanted to produce a documentary about 'Venda artists,' and came to Shanzha to meet and film Vho-Mudzunga. Vho-Mudzunga subsequently contacted her in Johannesburg and enlisted her help in selling one of his drums. Generally when he was in Johannesburg, Vho-Mudzunga would visit the Johannesburg Art Gallery, stop in to the Gertrude Posel Gallery at Wits and

probably go to JCI to see his friends there. Besides visiting old friends, this was part of his strategy to promote himself and sell his art work. When he accepted my idea to research his performances, this was within an established framework of contacts that Vho-Mudzunga himself had actively pursued.

My initial contact with Vho-Mudzunga was facilitated through Rayda Becker of the Gertrude Posel Gallery (and to an extent with Nessa Liebhammer of the Johannesburg Art Gallery). The Posel had bought two drums from Vho-Mudzunga earlier in the year. One of these drums was borrowed by the Posel for an exhibition that went to London. Vho-Mudzunga approached the Posel after the drum had returned to the country and entered into negotiations with them to sell the drum. After some negotiation, the Gallery eventually bought two drums from him.

I felt that my research could best be facilitated by residing with Vho-Mudzunga in his home some time before and perhaps after the event. Vho-Mudzunga happened to be in Johannesburg when the research proposal was being developed. Rayda and Vho-Mudzunga met and she proposed to him that I stay in his home in Shanzha and study his performance of the 28th September - the Lake Performance. I did not meet him at this time but a meeting was set up by Rayda for the 5th September between Rayda, Vho-Mudzunga and myself at the University.

I pre-empted this meeting and made a trip to Shanzha village in August. Through Gotfried Dederen, a lecturer at the University of Venda, I was introduced to the artist Richard Mangoma, who was in charge of Ditike Arts and Crafts in Thohoyandou. Richard took me to Shanzha where I met Vho-Mudzunga. Vho-Mudzunga was quite aware of my wishes, probably due to his talk with Rayda Becker, and readily agreed that I could stay with him during September.

The following day I drove Vho-Mudzunga to the village of Tshilapfene to meet with the *tshikona* dance group that would perform at his function. Thereafter he asked to go to a certain garage in Sibasa, so that the chairperson of the Shanzha Civic Organization (the civic of his village) could sign a letter on his behalf. The letter was a request by Vho-Mudzunga to the Regional Government's Tourism and Environment Department to upgrade the road to Lake Fundudzi before the Lake Performance. Part of his motivation in this letter read as follows (I quote at length, without editing):

> Not very long ago, Mr. Samson Mudzunga had a function on displaying the Traditional way of living. He displayed a drum coffin, and showed the old burial Ceremony. That function was displayed to the people from over Seas as far as India, Wits University, England German, USA, Holland and France.
>
> He is still continuing his traditional of the old ways of living. He is stretching his work to end at the Lake Fundudzi. *Wits University Students is now full involved.* This will take place on the 28th September 1996. He requests that the road to Fundudzi be prepared. (My italics)

Clearly, as much as we had been strategising to get Vho-Mudzunga involved in 'my project', Vho-Mudzunga was involving me in strategies of his own. This was a continuing condition of my presence in Shanzha and of my positioning as a researcher in general. My academic outreach was not simply entrenched in the research practices of Western academics but involved a more complex set of relationships outside of my control. These relationships were an important factor of my own research. I aimed therefore to take full cognizance of these and to make them clear throughout my project.

Vho-Mudzunga and I planned to meet back in Johannesburg (at the meeting arranged by Rayda Becker) and depart thereafter for Shanzha, together. We met at Wits and confirmed our arrangements. I took Vho-Mudzunga to the William Cullen Library to show him the theses section. I was concerned that my research was being misconstrued by him as involving the writing of a publishable book for financial gain. I hoped to clarify this by showing Vho-Mudzunga that my end product would be a thesis. We left Johannesburg for Shanzha at the beginning of September from the Johannesburg Art

Gallery, our designated rendezvous. The context of our contacts was at this stage framed by Vho-Mudzunga's own contacts with the commercial art market in Johannesburg. That is, it was through institutions and people, who had viewed and bought his work, that I made contact with him. Vho-Mudzunga was 'an artist' and I was 'a student' - these roles structured our initial relationship.

Research:

The first part of my stay in Shanzha, until the Lake Performance (28 September 1996), was an initial methodological stage. My aim was to detail Vho-Mudzunga's preparations for the performance, to understand the meanings which he attached to his actions, of both preparation and of those planned for during the performance and finally to begin to establish what his motivations were for staging the performance. I therefore wanted to spend as much time as possible with Vho-Mudzunga in the period leading up to the performance. This was rather easily facilitated as I brought a vehicle with me and Vho-Mudzunga was busy during this time 'producing' his event. That is, our days were occupied with all the organizational requirements for staging the event. My services as 'supplier of transport' enabled me to spend most of the day together with Vho-Mudzunga. We spent many days traveling to various family members and other members of his network, securing information and their attendance for the Lake Performance. Thus my study did not develop as a village-based project but rather along the contours of Vho-Mudzunga's network. In reality this completely transcended village boundaries and incorporated complex relations. This complex set of engagements was my research 'field.'

Vho-Mudzunga had requested that I find a 'bakkie' to drive around in, instead of my Toyota Corolla. We had agreed that I would help him get the drum to Johannesburg after the event of the Lake Performance. I was able to secure a 'bakkie' for this purpose. In addition it was easier to help in the production with a 'bakkie' in that it

could carry loads of firewood, people etc. My 'bakkie', Vho-Mudzunga and I became a regular sighting in the Shanzha/Dopeni area.

In this way, I was introduced to the people that Vho-Mudzunga saw as vital to the success of such a performance, by Vho-Mudzunga himself. I became strongly associated with Vho-Mudzunga during this period. The people whom I met during this research phase, to a large extent, encountered me with Vho-Mudzunga and my role or business there was clearly legitimized and motivated by his introduction. In many respects I was not simply his driver but his co-producer. However when I was introduced to these people it was always noted that I was from 'the university in Johannesburg' and I was writing a thesis or 'book' about Vho-Mudzunga. Sometimes my introduction was more general in terms of my aim as people were told I was interested in "Venda culture" - *Sialala ya Vhavenda* or *Mvelele ya Vhavenda*. My close association with Vho-Mudzunga was noted by Shanzha villagers. I came to be labeled by some as *Mukhuwa ya Mudzunga* - Mudzunga's White.

Following the Lake Performance, I decided to distance myself from such direct involvement with Vho-Mudzunga. I wanted to interview the people whom I had met through him (and others) about Vho-Mudzunga's life history, their roles in and understandings of his performances and other broader contextual issues - for example, the political history of the region. I was still living with Vho-Mudzunga during this time and we reached an understanding that I now needed to 'work,' which involved interviewing people, without him being present. Vho-Mudzunga generally accepted this but on some accounts this created difficulties.

Vho-Mudzunga was involved with conflicts with certain individuals as a result of his history in the community and his recent performances. My contacts with these individuals were thus overtly 'politicised'. He however did not intervene with any

contact I wished to have but made his feelings about these people clear to me. I was thus constantly aware of the sensitive nature of various interviews and contacts I made.

The sensitivity of my relationship with Vho-Mudzunga is highlighted by two specific conflicts. Firstly, Vho-Mudzunga's performance at Lake Fundudzi resulted in a conflict between him and *vhamusanda* Netshiavha of Tshiavha. I was introduced to Netshiavha by Vho-Mudzunga himself. My close association with Vho-Mudzunga and his performances positioned me in the middle of the resulting conflict and framed my subsequent encounters with (and attempts at data collection from) Netshiavha and his family. Secondly, Vho-Mudzunga and I had a personal conflict mid-way through my research period and his hospitality to me was temporarily suspended. (After I completed my research, our relationship completely broke down - see Chapter Four). Once again I was clearly involved in strategies and manoeuverings of my research subject(s).

During this second phase of my research, I spent more time with my research assistant and interpreter Vho-Ndondeni Dan Mandavha. Towards the beginning of my stay with Vho-Mudzunga, I asked him if he knew of anyone who could help me with translation during my fieldwork. Vho-Mudzunga suggested Dan. Dan Mandavha had become friendly with Vho-Mudzunga shortly after Vho-Mudzunga's permanent return to live in Shanzha in 1988. He was a school teacher at Tshirogoni Secondary School in Dopeni. This school also serviced many children from Shanzha. Dan was 28 years old and had completed an education degree from the University of Venda in the early 1990s. He lived in the village of Dopeni in his mother's household. At the time my fieldwork, he was building his own house on another plot in Dopeni. He had many close friends in Shanzha and assisted Vho-Mudzunga in various ways with his performances. He translated Vho-Mudzunga's invitations into English and provided translations of the speeches at these performances. Besides his involvement with Vho-Mudzunga, Dan was a well-known personality in the larger Dopeni-Shanzha community. He was an

active Pan-African Congress (PAC) member and had been an activist during his student years against the South African and Venda Nationalist Governments. He was a member of the Dopeni Youth Forum that he helped to form. He was the PAC's candidate for the local government election for Ward 8 of the Greater Nzhelele/Tshipise Council (which he lost to Lufuno Mulaudzi of the African National Congress (ANC)). He provided much voluntary assistance to members of his community. In short, he was a well-respected youth leader in Dopeni-Shanzha.

Dan was thus my second main route of access to local people. His involvement in the community and his friendship with Vho-Mudzunga helped people accept me more easily. Dan was particularly skilled in the subtleties of social contact and maneuvering in this region. I became known as "Dan's friend" during my close association with him in this period. In addition, Dan's friends in Shanzha became both friends and informants outside of Vho-Mudzunga's network. As a young man myself this was also perhaps a more 'logical' positioning of my social status in the village.

It took some time to form a good working relation with him, as at first Dan envisaged his time with me within the framework of the voluntary services in which he generally engaged. My relationship with him was always being negotiated but we continued to reach agreements and compromises throughout my fieldwork. I paid Dan for his work as a translator and field assistant. Our friendship sometimes blurred the strict definition of our time spent together - were we working if I asked him to translate something when we socialized?

Dan's own involvement in his community and with Vho-Mudzunga motivated his own interest in my project. In many ways he was involved in his own 'research' around Vho-Mudzunga before I arrived and saw an opportunity in my work to further his own knowledge and interest. He was curious about Vho-Mudzunga's art-work and as a result he was interested in Vho-Mudzunga's life history and claims on 'Venda tradition.'

Dan was brought up in a Christian home and had had little exposure to 'traditional practices.'

Dan clearly shaped my experiences in Shanzha. My discussions with him were an important part in my intellectual orientation and he nurtured my understanding of the community in which I was living.

Towards the end of my research I also worked with Reverend Herman Seaba. Reverend Seaba was a minister in the Lutheran Church and was in charge of all the parishes in Dzanani, an area to the west of Dopeni-Shanzha. He had been the research assistant of a fellow Masters student from Wits University (Caroline Jeannerat) and it was through her that I came to know him. Initially I looked Reverend Seaba up as a contact-person in the area. I developed a friendship with him and he proved to be a valuable source of information for many issues pertinent to my study. He formally assisted my research on a few occasions when Dan was unavailable or when I thought a 'man of the church' would be a more suitable entree to my 'interviewees'. This was particularly the case when I visited funeral parlours and mortuaries (see Chapter Four).

I took a 'crash' course in Tshivenda before I left for the field. I never developed a fluency in the languagehowever. I could follow the subject of a discussion and could pick up key words that were important to my own understanding of how that subject was being talked about. For full-length interviews I was reliant on a translator. By the end of my fieldwork I could elicit basic information from a person, for example I managed to record kinship details from Vho-Mudzunga's 'new wife' (see Epilogue) on my own.

During the first phase of my research, when I spent time mostly with Vho-Mudzunga, I took field notes based on the various interactions Vho-Mudzunga had during the day and during our semi-formal conversations. These conversations took place largely

around meal times. Breakfast ~ oved to a particularly fruitful time for discussion and questions and I managed to ta_ - record most of these interactions. In addition I planned to do formal interviews with Vho-Mudzunga around his life history in this time. I succeeded in doing a number of formal interviews in this way, during which I videoed, taped and wrote notes. However, as time went on, it became clear that Vho-Mudzunga did not have patience for this form of interaction and preferred a more informal approach. More importantly, he resisted detailing his life in this formal setting and what emerged was mostly a skeleton of his life. Substantial and anecdotal histories emerged as we traveled around the region together. His memory and appetite for talking was triggered by landscape associations and it became clear to me that the more places we visited together, and the more people we met, the richer my data around his life history would become. Thus the formal interviews provided a chronological outline of various histories - employment, residence, education etc. - on which to 'hang' more interpretative stories which made up his life story. I also made use of various observation techniques during this time.

The event at the Lake was perhaps another separate phase of research. Here I was involved in more participant-observation than at any other time. I was given organizational responsibilities to perform on the day as well as being a formal participant in the programme at the Lake as a speaker. I organized for a video to be taken of the event beginning from the day before the event. This video was for my research purposes only. As I was interested in who was in the audience and how they were viewing and understanding Vho-Mudzunga's performance, I arranged for a formal survey to be done of those who attended as spectators. This took the form of a simple structured questionnaire which was filled in with the respondents by various research assistants. The assistants were organized with the help of Dan Mandavha. They were mostly former or current students of his at the Tshirogoni Secondary School. The questionnaire was administered in Tshivenda to Tshivenda-speakers and English to other language speakers. I designed the questionnaire and Mandavha translated it for me

into Tshivenda. Results of the survey and statistic profiles are detailed elsewhere. I also took extensive fieldnotes and photographs during the event.

The research phase after the event was characterised by semi-structured interviewing. I chose this form of interviewing as I required the flexibility which it allows. Generally I planned the subjects/areas which I wanted to cover in each interview. But quickly I discovered that each interviewee had specific knowledge in particular areas or preferred to divulge only certain aspects and I needed to be flexible enough to gain access to this knowledge. In addition, I returned to good informants more than once, which provided a form of control for such semi-structured interviewing. Further control was provided by tape recording these interviews and reviewing then at a later stage. Towards the end of this period I wanted a sample of interpretations in the village around Vho-Mudzunga's status as a woodcarver/artist in line with my aim of understanding various interpretations of Vho-Mudzunga's performative interventions. With Dan's help I conducted a survey around a few structured verbal questions. We employed a strategy of going from household to household in the various sections which made up Shanzha village.

Methodologically most challenging, was my attempt to research and write about the Funeral Performance that I did not attend. Primary sources for this event are three video recordings made at the event. These recordings were made by: 1) Mr. Joe Louw from the Focus department at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC); 2) RBD Productions for SABC's Swahombe/Zwanthesa programme; 3) Mr. Mabannda, the principal at Tshirogoni Secondary School and friend to Vho-Mudzunga. Secondary sources are various people who attended the performance. I viewed Mr. Louw's footage prior to going into the field. I also interviewed some of the people from Johannesburg who had attended the event before I left for Shanzha. I obtained all other information and data around this event once I began my fieldwork in Shanzha.

This presents a problem for my data and my writing. Once in Shanzha I viewed Vho-Mudzunga's tape filmed by Mr. Mabannda along with Vho-Mudzunga and Vho-Mandavha. This experience, as well as data from interviews, was framed for me by events subsequent to the Funeral Performance (29 June 1996), especially those around the Lake Performance (28 September 1996). The symbolism, social dynamics and motivations around Vho-Mudzunga's Funeral Performance were possibly situated in a social/cultural frame quite different from that leading up to and including the following event. This is especially true if we are to regard these performances as forms of social action and if we allow for the possibility that they are quite radical in their intervention. I thus make it clear again that I did not attend the Funeral Performance and that my data, interpretations and writings are **retrospective**.

I approached this project through direct participant-observation and other methods of data collection detailed above including constructing a life history of Vho-Mudzunga. However it became clear to me, through the period of my research, that an anthropological insight into these events required broader investigation. The socio-cultural context beyond the performances themselves and also a clear historical investigation into many of the issues highlighted by my research into the performances, required attention. For example a history of pre-colonial burial practices, a detailed history of the Pentecostal Holiness Mission that was established at Shanzha and more information about Vho-Mudzunga's life in Soweto would have been helpful. An exhaustive contextualisation, however, would have moved my project beyond the scope of a Masters dissertation. I did, however, dedicate considerable time to these areas (e.g. a history of burial practices) and achieved, I believe, a level of knowledge and original data more than sufficient for this particular project. I must note though, that a fuller contextual investigation is conceivable and I had to limit myself to remain within the framework of this study.

Although my research was initiated at the Social Anthropology Department as part of my requirement for fulfilling a Masters degree, the subjects who were involved exercised their own subjectivity and involved me in requirements of their own. My methodology was thus a process framed by a complex set of relationships in which I was both strategiser and strategy. This process forms part of my ethnography. My methodology is not only a conscious system of qualitative research techniques under my control which included interviews, surveys and observation but also a social performance which demanded that I make conscious the conditions of my own sociality within my fieldwork context.

Isak Niehaus, of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University, guided my fieldwork. I maintained telephonic contact with him throughout my fieldwork period and consulted him when I visited Johannesburg during the period of my research.

I have not used pseudonyms in this report. The names that appear in the text are the real names of the people to which I refer. Vho-Mudzunga is a public figure in that his art-work forms part of the permanent collections of national galleries. Reviews of his work and of the performances that are the subject of this thesis have appeared in the public media. The value of research into his work, for him, depends to a large extent on his person being identified with the research. I made my purpose and aim clear to him at all times. I was gathering data to write a thesis. I carried a notebook and tape recorder with me from the instant that I arrived at Shanzha. His direct participation in my research was always voluntary and based on an informal understanding of consent. Once Vho-Mudzunga was identified by name in the thesis, the people around him would be recognizable even with aliase Thus, instead of changing names, I have protected the identity of individuals in instances where I was given information in confidence or in circumstances that an acknowledged research context was not the explicit context of communication.

Thesis Outline

Throughout the thesis I locate Vho-Mudzunga's practice in different times (histories) and spaces (regions). This account of creativity, connectedness and marginality must begin with the particular claims of difference associated with the marginal area. The work here is to detail the symbols that have particular meanings in the Venda region, symbols incorporated into Vho-Mudzunga's performances. These meanings were generated by historical political practices and social structures and were still reflected in the performed contemporary politics and social life in the Venda region during the period of my research. I begin with a description and analysis of Vho-Mudzunga's Funeral Performance with specific reference to the symbols that he chose to use to evoke tradition. The spatial focus here is on 'Venda' and the symbols of 'Vendaness.' The history is an 'old' one, the imagined time of tradition. I take up this description, of the tradition without which there would be no creativity, in Chapter One. Vho-Mudzunga's agency is thus located in 'Venda' and in 'tradition'.

In Chapter Two I detail and analyse a contemporary conflict that arose between Vho-Mudzunga and *vhamusanda* Netshiavha around Vho-Mudzunga's preparations and attempt to visit Lake Fundudzi. The politics of the local margin are opened up by locating Vho-Mudzunga's practice in contemporary time. Tradition remains present but this time not as a throwback to an idealized epoch, but as an important resource in contemporary politics. The conflict identifies patterns of power through which Vho-Mudzunga gained access to resources. The place in which Chapter One located Vho-Mudzunga's agency ('Venda'), 'leaked' its boundedness as negotiations between the protagonists in this conflict proceeded over resources that come from outside the region - in the Venda region symbols of extra-local power were clearly extremely important. Vho-Mudzunga's agency appropriated powers beyond a 'traditional region'.

In Chapter Three I describe how Vho-Mudzunga became an 'artist' and thus was in a position to gain access to the various resources detailed in the previous chapter. Here, Vho-Mudzunga's practice was embedded in national histories of representation generated by the art-world and national politics. Vho-Mudzunga, the 'artist', was a social creation wrought by changes in the meaning of objects and the subsequent status that accrued to their producers. I identify two crucial discursive moments in this respect: the Tributaries exhibition and the dawn of a post-apartheid era. This was the domain of Vho-Mudzunga, the artist. Although now we see Vho-Mudzunga against a national history, the particularity of the Venda region does not disappear. In fact his autochthonous claims are embellished. Thus here the location of his practice in time and place is at its broadest and narrowest.

The performances then were based in, reacted to and embellished various histories, some of which are autochthonous, others imposed from outside. The ongoing politics within and encompassing the Venda region (the structural position of marginality) and the remnants of other histories (the signs of dislocation) were imprinted into the local level and they condition agency there. The performances map a local heterogeneity at the margins of a South African state. Vho-Mudzunga's local self-representation becomes an autoethnography - an engagement with the conditions of marginality, of being the one represented, defined and excluded, and seeking to represent and define himself and his practice. Chapter Four sets out this position with reference to the ethnography presented in the previous chapters and then revisits the Funeral Performance to relocate that performance within the heterogeneity of marginality. Finally, as a potential agent myself of imposing extral-local discourses and practices, of marginality, I discuss Vho-Mudzunga's relationship or engagement with me and show that he cannot be located as a good, passive object of knowledge, characteristic of how many ethnographic subjects have been written. The Marriage Performance occurred only after my extended stay in Shanzha during which time I collected detailed data around the first two performances. I returned to the field for a much shorter stay to attend the Marriage Performance. The

structure of the thesis reflects the time I was able to dedicate to these performances - the Funeral and Lake Performances form the major part of my ethnography. Although I refer to the Marriage Performance in the other chapters, I only discuss it in particular in the Epilogue where it serves to close my argument.

The complex layering of centre-periphery relations, and their mutual embeddedness, structures this thesis. I choose to allow my theoretical analyses to emerge with the ethnographic description of Vho-Mudzunga's agency and the contexts that framed it. As such the thesis proceeds from thick ethnographic descriptions to more abstract discussion. In doing this I have faith that the ethnography itself is unusual and interesting enough to draw the reader through the stories performed by Vho-Mudzunga, in search of an explanation that answers both specific questions about the form of his actions and broader ones about the nature of creativity, the connection of the local to trans-regional forces and the construction of identities at the margins of powerful centres. Throughout I hope to disturb those boundaries that constructed my own assumption about what is and is not a congruous image of 'people' and 'culture' in the outlying places of the world.

1

PLAY DEATH IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE

"Drums are not for ordinary people"
Ratshilumela Samson Mudzunga

On June 29, 1996, at his home in Shanzha village in the Venda region of the Northern Province of South Africa, family, friends, members of the local community and visitors from Johannesburg gathered to attend Vho-Mudzunga's 'funeral'. Vho-Mudzunga 'buried' himself in a *ngoma* drum that he had carved and family members passed by it in single file to pay their last respects to their 'dead' relative, as if the 'deceased' lay in his coffin. Below I detail Vho-Mudzunga's play-death - the public Funeral Performance in which he "act[ed] the part of the deceased" at "a Venda funeral."[1]

This was the first of a series of performances staged by Vho-Mudzunga in the Venda region in 1996 and 1997 and this chapter focuses on this initial function which I have termed the Funeral Performance. My aim is to explore the symbolic idiom of these functions, especially those elements which suggest a creative play on tradition. I take Vho-Mudzunga's claim literally that he was recuperating tradition, and use the ethnographic record to examine his symbolic representation of tradition, with the premise that creativity is measured off past precedent.

The standard ethnographic works, by Stayt (1931), Van Warmelo (1932; 1940), Blacking (1969) and Nettleton (1984), to greater and lesser extents, posit a traditional Venda culture, the same resource in which Vho-Mudzunga positioned his actions. A comparison amongst Vho-Mudzunga's performances, ethnographic literature and observations I made in the field, highlights forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977)

oriented towards status, which through the performances, Vho-Mudzunga associated to himself. But that association was not an unambiguous application of self-evident and uncomplicated symbolic meanings. An unquestioned move from symbolic hypothesis to actual behaviour involves an assumption of intention and repetition - the same actions consistently having the same meanings. But Vho-Mudzunga's symbolic play both alluded to and manufactured numerous possible interpretations. This Funeral Performance was a social action in and of itself and it both reflected on, and created, parameters of consciousness and sociality through negotiation processes.

The aim of this chapter then is to describe the Funeral Performance and to discuss those symbolic elements that evoked tradition. Those elements constituted the local character of the performance. They were not however unambiguous references to consensual collective meanings confined to a geographical place ('Venda') and historical time (tradition). The chapter, in its descriptions and analysis, lays the basis for understanding a local form of knowledge practice while recognizing the need to contextualize Vho-Mudzunga's performances in a broader sense.

The Funeral Performance

Guests who made the journey from Johannesburg described an excited atmosphere upon arrival at Vho-Mudzunga's home in Shanzha.[2] Young boys acted as parking-ushers directing cars below Vho-Mudzunga's property. Other guests arrived at the house on foot. At the entrance to the driveway of the property, an entrance fee of five rands was requested. It is unclear who actually paid this fee, as some guests from Johannesburg went in free whilst others paid. This was probably true of local guests as well.

As guests arrived, the Philiyamavu *tshikona* dancers from Tshilapfene were dancing in the *khoro* or entrance. The *tshikona* is danced by men and boys. The dancers, each

blowing a single horn (*nanga*), dance a uniform stepping movement, in a circle around a cluster of drums. The overall effect is an encircling, rhythmic, stepping movement to the sound of lilting horns and the beat of drums.

At the time of my fieldwork, Philiyamavu *tshikona* were one of the top *tshikona* groups in the area. They had won the prestigious regional competition on many occasions and often featured on the afternoon programme of Radio Thohoyandou. Besides the male *tshikona* dancers, this group also traveled and performed with a group of 'traditional girls' and a single female dancer.

During the dances in Vho-Mudzunga's *khoro*, the girls assumed a humble respectful posture, called *u losha*, around the drums. There are a number of positions which constitute *u losha* and each vary in degree of respect. The most respectful, assumed by the girls, is a totally prone position, with the body on its side on the floor. *U losha.* was important to Vho-Mudzunga. He often insisted that girls and women *u losha* when he arrived to visit their homes. He referrred to *u losha* on a number of occasions as an example of "real Venda culture".

The girls wore only *shedu* - small apron coverings made from cloth which were tucked through their legs and into a cotton belt (*ludedi*) (see Stayt 1931:22-23). Their bodies were otherwise bare. Vho-Mudzunga referred to the girls in English as 'traditional girls.' When I pushed him for a Tshivenda equivalent though, he referred to them as *vhatei vha vhusha* - initiates of *vhusha*. *Vhusha* is the puberty initiation school for girls. In an idealized 'traditional' Venda lifecycle, young girls should attend a number of such schools before marriage. Stayt referred to humbled respectful postures, similar to those adopted by these girls, in his description of *vhusha* initiates (1931:109).

The leader of the *tshikona* group referred to the girls as *vhatamuni* - the young childless wives of a chief (Huffr a 1997:x). He explained that they traveled with the group

"because if you play *tshikona* there must be a chief." Thus, the girls signified the chiefly status of the *tshikona* dance. In addition, he remarked that the girls were used "to show what happened long ago." In this sense the girls were meant to signify *sialala* - the distant past, olden times or tradition (Van Warmelo 1989:338).

The single dancer danced around the drums, separate from the men. She was dressed in tattered cloth. Different sized calabashes were strung onto the cloth. Animal skin adorned her head. She carried a stick in one hand and an axe in the other as she danced. The only explanation for her appearance and role that I could obtain from the group itself was that "she is to show what happened long ago." Like the girls, she signified traditions of the past. Her appearance and individual style of dance suggested an affinity to the *mupengo* or lunatic reported by Van Warmelo in the context of female initiation rites (Van Warmelo 1932:97).

These remarks allude to the connection between *tshikona*, chiefly status and 'tradition'. The presence of the Philiyamavu *tshikona* group suggested a display of tradition, culture and the symbols of prestige and respect associated with Vhavenda.

Most of the activity which followed, occured in what I term the 'performance area' (Figure 2). This was the open space in front of Vho-Mudzunga's house within the enclosed house area. It was bounded to the west by the cooking hut - *tshitanga* - and a dam of water built by Vho-Mudzunga that he called his swimming pool ('pool' below): to the north it was delineated by a wall that separated the house area from the cultivated garden below; to the east the gate into the *khoro* enforced a separation; and in the south the house, raised onto a higher terraced level, completed the spatial demarcation.

Most of the audience gathered on the lower level of the house near the gate around the performance area and on the small strip of grass next to the 'pool.' Others sat along the northern wall that bordered the house area and the cultivated front garden. The audience

seated on the grass were mostly women who were dressed in colourful *minwenda*, the striped cloth worn by women as 'traditional' ethnic dress. There were a few other women sitting on the floor in front of the house away from the performance area. similarly dressed with *minwenda* and *vhukunda*, wire bangles or anklets.

The local coucillor from the recently elected Greater Nzhelele\Tshipise Transitional Local Council (TLC) attended the event. No other notable political figure or authority was represented. There was no representative from the *musanda*, the 'traditional' chiefly authority - in this case, the *vhamusanda* or headman of Shanzha. The *mukhoma* or court official for the section of the village in which Vho-Mudzunga lived. Vho-Mushiana, was at the performance, but Vho-Mushiana was a close personal friend of Vho-Mudzunga's and attended in this capacity. The local civic organization did not send an official representative. Other prominent members of the Shanzha community were also absent. No church leaders, no members of the *vhamusanda*'s *khoro*, and no prominent businesspeople were in the audience.

The audience included a relatively large group of approximately forty 'outsiders.'This group included members of the art-world and the academy from Johannesburg. The tripod and microphones of a few television crews formed part of the backdrop to the function. There were crews filming for the national broadcaster, the SABC; a crew from the former Venda Development Corporation and a journalist who worked for the SABC news department. Vho-Mudzunga's friend and school principal, Vho-Mabannda, also videoed the performance, with a hand-held 'vidcam', for Vho-Mudzunga's personal use.

The formal programme was begun by the Master of Ceremonies (MC), Vho-Netshiomvani. Vho-Netshiomvani was a retired school principal and a (generally) well-respected member of the Shanzha community. He was educated at the Pentecostal Holiness Mission's school that was established in Shanzha in the early 1920s. His status in the community was due to his level of education and to his leadership in the

Holy Evangelical Church.[3] He was also well known in the village, as he and his wife had taken a trip to Israel. He was the only person I met or heard of in the village who had been 'overseas'. His opening remarks invoked Venda 'tradition':

> We are gathered here to see just that - how things were done by us, the Venda people, in the olden days right from the beginning. Therefore we will not open [this function] by prayer, because this is a demonstration of our culture...*Tshikona* will give us an opening item.

In these remarks, as suggested above, *tshikona* differentiated this event from 'the present' and aligned it with the past - and with culture and tradition. At this stage of the proceedings, the *tshikona* were gathered by the gate to Vho-Mudzunga's house, and therefore were still in the *khoro*, where they had been dancing when guests arrived (See Fig.2). With a blast of their horns and led by the senior members of the group, the *tshikona* moved into the house area (Fig. 2). Vho-Netshiomvani had asked that the drums remain in the *khoro*. Thus on entering the house area, the *tshikona* did not dance in the customary circle around their drums. Rather, the dancers entered as an elongated group into the area of the house and headed onto the upper level of the terraced property, to the south of what I have termed the performance area and descended the stairs, which linked the two terraced levels of the house area. The dancers ended up on the western side of the *tshitanga*, and were separated from the audience by it. The *tshitanga* had two entrances and they entered the cooking hut through the entrance facing away from the performance area, on the western side. All the while they continued to sound their horns as the drums were beaten from the *khoro*.

Up until this time, the entrance of the *tshitanga*, facing the performance area, was shut closed. Now it opened and six men wheeled Vho-Mudzunga's drum out of the *tshitanga*. Five of these men were *tshikona* dancers and the sixth was Vho-Richard Mangoma. Vho-Mangoma was an artist and a friend of Vho-Mudzunga, who managed Ditike, the marketing outlet in Thohoyandou for regional art works.

Women in the crowd ululated at the sight of the drum, and the *tshikona* dancers, blowing into their horns, accompanied the drum out of the *tshitanga*.

A cement strip, which led from the *tshitanga* into the performance area, ended in a rounded area, and it was here that the drum was laid to rest. A quick negotiation was held, between Dan Mandavha, Vho-Makhomu and the 'drum bearers', as to how exactly the drum should lie and it was left more-or-less in the position in which it was wheeled out. Dan Mandavha was a school teacher at Tshirogoni Secondary School in Dopeni, the village adjacent to Shanzha. He was a friend of Vho-Mudzunga and helped him plan and implement this performance. He also translated the speeches at the event and was my field assistant during my stay in Shanzha. Vho-Makhomu was a patrilineal relation to Vho-Mudzunga, a descendant of the Tshiavha royal clan (see Chapter Two and Figure 3).

The drum thus lay in an approximate west-east position, with the front end/head in the west. It was large, about one and a half meters long and a meter high. It stood on four small wheels and was embellished with two carved arms on either side. The *tshikona* dancers arranged themselves around the drum, encircling it. Vho-Wilson Mudzunga, Vho-Mudzunga's elder brother, signaled to the *tshikona* to stop playing, and after another flurry of ululating, there was silence.

The 'girls' from the *tshikona* came forward and assumed an *u losha* position lying at the eastern end of the drum. The group's 'dancer' joined them and knelt down behind the girls. In an apparent response to the arrival of the 'traditional girls,' women ululated and cried out praises. The people around the drum, who were mostly the *tshikona* dancers, then sat down.

A path was cleared from the *tshitanga* to the southern side of the drum and a reed mat placed next to the drum on the south side whilst the ululation continued. Three women

entered along the path and took their places on the mat. The first woman was Vho-Netshisevhe. She was introduced to me later as a patrilinear relation to Vho-Mudzunga, who lived in the village of his birth, Mulaboni. The second woman was Vho-Munzhedzi. Vho-Munzhedzi was Vho-Mudzunga's mother. At the time of the performance, he estimated her age to be ninety-five years. The third woman was Vho-Mulondo. Vho-Mulondo was *makhadzi* to Vho-Mudzunga. That is, she was the eldest woman in the patrilineal line of Vho-Mudzunga's family. This is a position of responsibility characteristic of the political and social organization of Vhavenda polities (Stayt 1931; Hammond-Tooke 1993). She is the appropriate person who will act on behalf of the family in religious matters concerning their ancestors (Stayt 1931:249-50). Vho-Mulondo arrived carrying a basket (*tshidani*) of seeds (*mbeu*). All three women knelt on the mat. The ululation ended.

Everyone became still and quiet. A solemnity descended. No-one spoke, no-one moved - people seemed simply to wait (or perhaps did not know what to do). Vho-Mulondo moved around from where she was seated and sat on the northern side next to the drum with her basket of seeds. The silence continued and the audience's shuffling increased as they sat surrounding Vho-Mudzunga's drum. The moment was broken by a shrill burst of ululation. But quiet quickly returned. The crowd became increasingly restless-whispers and murmurs amplified.

Eventually, the MC, Vho-Netshiomvani, announced the "paying of last respects:" Once again he invoked the past, and situated the performance within a mimetic recovery of tradition:

> *This is the second part, [illegible]ing of the last respects.*[4] Please remain quiet. Remain quiet because traditionally, this is what people did. This was long even before whites came here, when the cows' hides were used. The cow's hide was used as a coffin.

At this point the audience was drawn into the performance as participants. The drum had a small door in one of its sides. This door was opened and members of the crowd filed past the open door and peered at Vho-Mudzunga, who was lying inside the drum. Those who came forward played their role as mourners with the seriousness and respect suitable for a genuine death. Vho-Netshiomvani urged the *tshikona* to play: "As people pay their last respects, let the *tshikona* continue performing, softly and nicely." Various members of the crowd, family and friends of Vho-Mudzunga, lined up, to look into the drum. They moved past the drum, crouched down and looked inside. Vho-Netshiomvani requested them to maintain order: "Those who are through should please move. Don't pay your last respects and continue standing there." The 'integrity' of the ceremony was maintained as people continued to play this role earnestly.

Those 'paying their respects' saw Vho-Mudzunga lying in the drum with his head to the west and feet in the east. Vho-Mudzunga later described the drum to me as a person and his head was therefore in the top part of the drum as he described it (see below for more details around the drum). He lay bare chested but with the lower half of his body covered in various material. His torso was covered by a white cotton cloth with a thick red strip in it. His blue shorts (which we will encounter later) were partly visible below this and his lower body and legs were covered by an unidentified black cloth. The cotton material may have been a *masila* that, according to Stayt (1931: 55), was sometimes used to wrap the dead body of a chief. Vho-Mudzunga would not confirm if this material was indeed *masila*.

When this 'procession' of 'mourners' ended, the *tshikona* stopped and *makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo came forward with the basket of seeds. She proceeded to throw the seeds at the coffin-drum performing the second burial rite called *mbeu*. As she threw, *makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo said:

> This seed that you people see me pouring over here is part of our family custom that we use when someone has passed away from this earth and we no longer know him as one of us...[5]

The exact procedure for this part of the ceremony was subject to much negotiation between Vho-Mulondo, Vho-Wilson Mudzunga, Vho-Netshiomvani, Vho-Makhomu and even Vho-Mudzunga himself. *Makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo poured some of the seeds into the drum. Members of Vho-Mudzunga's family then came forward, took some seeds from the basket held by the *makhadzi* and threw them around the drum. Vho-Mulondo then poured the remaining seeds into the drum.

Vho-Netshiomvani then announced the *mbeu* throwing over and introduced the second part of the drama:

> *Welcome to the second part. [Vho-Mudzunga] must now come out. We will see what he will do.* From here we proceed to the dam, and please watch.

Much of what had occurred, was performed in an ordered and rather serious manner. Now the drama was built up to promise mystery and wonder. What would Vho-Mudzunga do now?

The audience cleared a path from the drum towards the 'pool' or 'dam'. At this stage, Vho-Mudzunga's granddaughter, Vhengani and Vho-Wilson Mudzunga's granddaughter, Adziambei, came through the *tshitanga* and were placed by the door of the drum in the same *u losha* posture as the 'girls' from Philiyamavu (who had remained there). They were both wearing *mimwenda*. Later, Adziambei's younger sister, Funanani, joined them in similar attire. She was, however, crying and did not assume the correct posture.

Now, the crowd was led to anticipate a surprising moment and Vho-Wilson Mudzunga. Mudzunga's elder brother came forward to set the scene:

> Now we are at the end. Please listen. What we are doing here is what you wanted to know. What's going to happen? Without any waste of time, everybody must watch to see what's going to happen - what we are here for.

He then approached the coffin-drum and spoke with Vho-Mudzunga all the time feeling inside the drum. Vho-Wilson closed the door of the drum. Vho-Netshiomvani activated the *tshikona* and as they began to play, the women ululated. Anticipation was heightened as organizers anxiously checked the drum. The door was pushed open by Vho-Mudzunga and then closed again by him. Vho-Wilson Mudzunga and Vho-Makhomu came forward with concern and checked something about the drum. Then a woman removed the *minwenda* from Vhengani and Adziambei, leaving them similarly dressed to the 'girls' from Philiyamavu, still in *u losha* position next to the drum. Funanani, still crying, was led away. Vho-Wilson Mudzunga came forward yet again, apparently to steady the drum, as Vho-Mudzunga pushed open the door and crawled out.

The *tshikona* were still playing and women were ululating. Vho-Mudzunga was now wearing blue shorts with a red and white patch on either side in the front. He made his way very quickly to the 'pool,' dived in and emerged at the other side of the two-and-a-half meter long 'pool.' He climbed out and 'disappeared' in the direction of his own room.

Meanwhile in the performance area, Vhengani had gotten inside the drum and remained there in the *u losha* position. She came out and resumed her previous position and posture by the drum with the other girls. An older woman from Philiyamavu then led all the girls, in a single line, out of the performance area and through the *tshitanga*. They walked in the manner associated with *vhusha* girls (Stayt 1931:109). That is, they walked with heads bent and shoulders stooped and moved towards the back part of the house, where Vho-Mudzunga had 'disappeared.' They were followed by the 'dancer' from Philiyamavu, who also made her exit in this direction. The *tshikona* played. women ululated and some began to dance to the music.

The MC stopped the *tshikona* and announced the end of the drama saying this was "an old Venda burial system." Although this was the end of the drama, it was not the end of the programme, which lasted the rest of the day. A number of speeches were in turn followed by entertainment. The speakers included both locals and visitors : Hendrik Mudau, an architect and builder who worked at Ditike and was a friend of Vho-Mudzunga welcomed the guests; the local artist Vho-Richard Mangoma spoke briefly and Vho-Dan Mandavha delivered Vho-Mudzunga's 'life history'; Vho-Lufuno Mulaudzi, the Local Councillor for Shanzha, addressed issues of development; Vho-Johanna Siphugu, a community health worker from Soweto, made an impassioned speech about Vho-Mudzunga; and Steven Sack, then of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, represented the 'outsiders'; Vho-Makhomu, Vho-Mudzunga's relative was the final speaker before the 'deceased' Vho-Mudzunga himself said a few words (see Chapter Four).

Entertainment was provided by the *tshikona* group and a *tshigombela* group from Tshivhilidulu, the village adjacent on the eastern side of Shanzha. Perhaps the most notable dance of the day was the *tshikona* dance which occurred soon after the completion of the drama and encircled both the *khoro* and the performance area. The drums were moved into the performance area but only one of the *ngoma* drums belonging to the Philiyamavu *tshikona* was used. Instead, Vho-Mudzunga's coffin-drum was used as the larger base drum for this dance.

After the speeches, the 'out-of-towners' were invited into Vho-Mudzunga's house to eat in his dining room, separate from the 'other guests'. Meanwhile the 'other guests' were given food and drink outside.

Locating the Performance: *A Venda-Centred Analysis*

There was not one person, with whom I spoke or whom I interviewed during my fieldwork, who had ever witnessed, remembered or heard of another instance in the Venda region where a man pretended to bury himself. This was unique and was recognized as such by a broad spectrum of local villagers and outside visitors. I was often told, while conducting my research, that no-one had ever done what Vho-Mudzunga had achieved that day with his drum In this respect, he was associated with innovation and originality.

The function itself however, was set up in many ways as a recognizable event. It was structured by a formal programme that was printed in Tshivenda and circulated to those who attended. It proceeded through many speeches and ended with a meal. A formalized programme, speeches and a meal gave format to a wide range of public events in the Venda region.[6] What was unusual about the event staged by Vho-Mudzunga. was the dramatic performance described in detail above.

The function was announced to people outside of Vho-Mudzunga's local area through a formal invitation written in English.[7] This invitation set up the event as a dramatic performance. Vho-Mudzunga placed himself in the role of actor: "I will act the part of the deceased and will be carried into the drum-coffin in the traditional way." He incorporated other participants as actors. "At some point my older brother will open the drum-coffin for the closest relatives to act the part of the bereaved family paying their last respects." He announced that *tshikona* dancers would be present and that they "[were to] act their part as well." Indeed, many villagers accepted the drama as metaphoric, as acting, and in this regard, spoke of it as *vhutambo*.[8] By *vhutambo*, they indicated that Vho-Mudzunga's burial was just play, and should be understood in this make-believe sense

But for many others this play was deadly serious. Vho-Mudzunga's brother, Vho-Wilson Mudzunga, was genuinely concerned for the safety of his brother. He believed

that Vho-Mudzunga might not emerge from his 'coffin' alive - that the play death would result in real death. After V.o-Wilson's short speech, he reached into the coffin-drum to feel if his brother had gone cold.[9] Vho-Mudzunga's relative, Vho-Netshisevhe, who was seated next to Vho-Mudzunga's mother during the drama, performed *phasa madi*, a supplication to her ancestors, before leaving her home to attend the 'funeral'. Although she had little regard for the importance of Vho-Mudzunga's actions, she recognized a danger in them and requested ancestral protection for her relative. Other people who felt that the performance was dangerous, commented that feigning death was a bad omen (*u tula, u tuledza*) which could bring death to his family.

Makhadzi Vho-Mulondo differentiated between Vho Mudzunga's attitude and the attitude of others. The people who attended the function accepted it as a play (*vhutambo*), she said, but for Vho-Mudzunga and those who thought hard about it, it was not a pl ", but a serious attempt to demonstrate how he wanted to be buried when he died. This was the second sense in which the performance was accepted as serious. People who expressed this view, usually assumed Vho-Mudzunga had received a message from his ancestors in his dreams to pursue the drama. The dream legitimated the practice and, as a result, people who expressed this view did not associate the drama with danger. Rather, they described it as knowledge and wisdom. Mostly older women referred to the performance in this way.

Thus, although set up as a play-act, Vho-Mudzunga's enactment of death held potential consequences and conveyed serious intentions. As such, the Funeral Performance must not be regarded simply as a show and dismissed or understood merely as individual whim, but rather it should be recognized as social action and explored as social commentary. The form of his communication and the gestures Vho-Mudzunga intended to make, were symbolic. The question is, with what kinds of symbols was he playing? And to what purpose?

Vho-Mudzunga's Funeral Performance was framed as both tradition and innovation. He claimed to be using old symbols and reworked ones. In the invitation, he described how on the day of the performance he would "be carried into the drum coffin in the **traditional way** (my emphasis)" and he then described the *tshikona* dancers as "these traditional players." On the day itself, the MC, Vho-Netshiomvani, stated that what the performance demonstrated was "an old Venda burial system" and that what the audience was witnessing was "how things were done by...the Venda people, in the olden days right from the beginning." Furthermore, the combination of the presence of *tshikona*, the display of initiation outfits and *u losha* postures by the young girls and the participation of *makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo, imaged the performance in tradition.

At the same time, Vho-Mudzunga laid claim to originality and innovation when he stated in the written invitation to the event that his "drum-coffin is the first to be made in the Northern Province and I believe in the whole country." Of course the whole concept, to stage the funeral, was innovative and recognized by the local community as such.

Furthermore, the drama itself can be divided into two parts: the two 'funery rites' which were framed as old practices, solemnly performed with audience involvement and invoked ritual form; and Vho-Mudzunga's 'surprise,' an individual act without direct and stated recourse to communal practices of the past. The drama thus invoked tradition and innovation.

The accommodation of tradition and innovation is only a contradiction if one persists in holding them apart as different. Anthropological writing on repetitive practices like ritual has shown that a perfect reproduction of past practices is not viable as any re-presentation must involve some change from its reference (Drewal 1992). Not only is it not viable, but in some circumstances repetition is not as valued as innovation. Llewelyn-Davies' wonderful ethnographic film, The Woman's *Olamal* (1990), portrays

a Masai women's fertility ritual (*olamal*). The dress of the people, the location and the technology of the culture makes the documented ritual vulnerable to ideas of a pristine community living out a timeless, repetitive traditional lifestyle. But instead, the film shows how the *olamal* was valued by participants especially for its innovative elements. In addition, the past is a resource of power, mobilized in the present (Leach 1954). As a contested resource of power, parties seldom reach consensus in the present about a homogenous past. Rather different knowledge claims about the past compete against one another in the present (Apter 1992). Thus representations of and claims on tradition are not replicas of unchanged continuous historical practices but are implicated in debate, invention and innovation. Of course, the other side of the coin must not be forgotten. A self-identifying collectivity has limits on the types of past-claims that it would entertain as potentially authentic and thus allow into debates about its history and traditional cultural practice (Appadurai 1981; Wilson 1993). Innovation and re-invention must refer to past practice or knowledge:

> [E]ven under cataclysmic circumstances, tradition will never just 'disappear'. Instead, tradition is continually readjusted to circumstances, but within a monumental matrix carried forward from the past (Wilson 1993:135).

In recent times, the stress on invention has perhaps overshadowed historical continuities (Hastrup (ed) 1992:49). But as Lavie et al remind us:

> Invention takes place within a field of culturally available possibilities, rather than being without precedent. It is as much a process of selection and recombination as one of thinking anew. Creativity emerges from past traditions and moves beyond them; the creative persona reshapes traditional forms (Lavie 1993).

I thus accept Vho-Mudzunga's own assertion of local traditional knowledge as the basis of his actions and choose to locate him (temporarily) within a particular cultural framework. I do this for two reasons.

Firstly, elements of Vho-Mudzunga's performance, resonate with descriptions of 'Venda culture' in the ethnographic literature. The standard works of Stayt (1931), Van Warmelo (1932, 1948) and Nettleton (1984) are written in the ethnographic present and present structural-symbolic analyses of 'The Venda.' This is true of some of Blacking's work (1969), but less accurate about other publications that he authored (1964). Nonetheless, there are undeniable continuities between aspects of cultural belief and practices that I encountered in the contemporary Venda region and descriptions in this literature. Therefore, I use the tradition posited in this lit- ture to view the tradition posited by Vho-Mudzunga. I am simply arguing for a possible historical basis for cultural difference which is recoverable within limits through ethnography. So, for example, the *ngoma* drum has a particular meaning ascribed to it in the ethnographic literature which delineates its signifying potential. It also suggests that what one can do with a *ngoma* in a particular place with specific people, one would fail to achieve with it in another, because some forms of collective knowledge are localized. This must be useful in an endeavour to understand a man playing with symbols. Wilson argues that "change occurs within a constrained and processual framework (1993:122)" and comments, "[l]ike the floor of an old car, the symbols of ethnicity carry littered traces of previous occupants (ibid)." I intend to begin with what has been constructed and claimed as tradition, by Vho-Mudzunga and ethnographers to identify the "littered traces" of cultural meanings in the Funeral Performance.

My second reason for beginning with tradition follows the limits of the first. The Venda region is not bounded in time and unconnected in space and is not a unit of analysis in itself. The ethnography which suggests or constructs such a place and time, may be accurate in some of its ethnographic detail, but will be insufficient in explaining 'the Mudzunga phenomenon'. I use the structural-symbolic suggestions of continuity to determine the discontinuities, excesses and ironies that overflow a bounded analysis.

Thus I aim to survey the structural symbolic ethnography, which documents 'a Venda tradition' because Vho-Mudzunga's performance laid claim to some such past practice. But I do this in a comparison with my own ethnography of and around Vho-Mudzunga's Funeral Performance. The structural-symbolic ethnography is informative both in its content and its shortcomings and guides the subsequent inquiry into the meanings of Vho-Mudzunga's performative practices.

Before I do this though I must recognize the political context in which I am writing about tradition. Although the concepts of tradition are always political, South Africa has seen the abuse of the idea in a most degrading and dangerous way. The disenfranchisement of the majority of the population and cruel dislocations like forced removals have been justified and designed with a notion of a continuous separate tradition. A healthy sceptism thus gripped and motiv[illegible] South African anthropology over the literal acceptance of tradition as the continuity of past practices. Instead, in line with anthropology elsewhere, the concept of tradition has been politicized to assess what it is about the present which requires legitimacy through claims on the past. Analyses which dealt with radition in this vein were thus generally concerned with showing how claims about the past were contingent, invented or exaggerated by government and reflected contemporary patterns of power rather than truths about the past. The same is true for ethnic identity, studies of which have been anxious to demonstrate the historical nature of such identities and concepts of ethnicity (Vail 1989). Again, this has been especially burning in the South African context, in which a particular understanding of ethnicity was so closely linked by the apartheid government to the disenfranchisement and oppression of the majority of the population. In many respects, my ability to reclaim parts of structural ethnography which posits a tradition, is part of a new national political context that reopened the role that culture and tradition has to play in defining a personal and national identity.

Tradition and Innovation

Three major components of Vho-Mudzunga's Funeral Performance invoked tradition - his *ngoma* drum-coffin, the *tshikona* and the 'funerary rites'. These were the defining features of the dramatic item at the Funeral Performance. They are also widely featured in ethnographic writings and are closely associated in these writings with the chieftancy. Vho-Mudzunga is not *khosi* (chief) nor *vha anda* (headman). Nor does he hold any official court position (e.g. *khotsi munene*). He is, however, related to the Tshiavha royal family and regarded as *mukololo*, a prince or noble, signifying that he is not a commoner. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha, the head of the Tshiavha royal house, refers to him as *khotsimunene*, his younger brother. Vho-Mudzunga's status is an ambiguous backdrop throughout the discussion as his rights and privileges as *mukololo*, in respect to objects and practices of prestige, are interpreted by various players in different ways.

What follows is a discussion of each traditional item that draws on its ethnographic meanings and compares how it was used in the performance to its uses in a broader contemporary context.

The ngoma drum (or reinvented coffin?)

The Funeral Performance clearly centred around Vho-Mudzunga's carved coffin-drum. It established a focus for dramatic action and besides the 'pool' was the site of all symbolic action during the drama. The drum was the major curiosity of the event. As the *tshikona* dancers finished the dance which ended the drama, they filed passed the drum, staring at its door, out of which Vho-Mudzunga had crawled. After the programme, children crowded around the drum, laughing curiously, pointing at it and speculating about it.

There are two types of drums identified with Vhavenda material culture in the ethnographic literature: the *mirumba* and the *ngoma* (Hammond-Tooke 1993: Nettleton:1984; Blacking:1969;Stayt:1931). The *mirumba* is described by Nettleton (1984:251) as following "the shape of a mortar...being basically conical..." The *ngoma*, on the other hand, is "hemispherical" in shape.

Besides the obvious difference in appearance, there is a difference in status ranking between these two types of drums. The *mirumba* has no apparent restriction on its use and ownership and thus has no associated status or symbolic import. The *ngoma*, on the other hand, is linked to a special category of objects called *dzingoma*. *Dzingoma* refer to ritual events and the objects used in these rituals. These objects are kept at the chief's residence and political capital, the *musanda*. Nettleton (1984:262) argues that "the *ngoma* drum is closely associated with chietainship and is used only in those ceremonies which properly belong in the capital."

Vho-Mudzunga's coffin-drum was designed and functioned as a *ngoma*. A *ngoma*, as opposed to a *mirumba*, is carved from a piece of tree-trunk, with its cut-off ends forming the sides of the drum and the length of the trunk forming the top and bottom. Vho-Mudzunga carved the coffin-drum in this manner. We saw above that use of the *ngoma* is restricted. *Tshikona* dance was one of the privileged social arenas in which the *ngoma* was used. Vho-Mudzunga's coffin-drum was used by *tshikona* at the Funeral Performance as a base drum (*ngoma*).

Symbolic interpretations of the *ngoma* drum are embedded in generalized cultural patterns. The Zimbabwe cultural pattern, as put forward most recently by Huffman (1996), and based on Venda ethnography, most especially on the work of Anitra Nettleton (1984), proposes a symbolic cognitive complex, based around signifiers of reproduction and status. The central symbol of this system is 'the pool' which is inhabited by a crocodile and a snake. The pool and snake are associated with creativity

and fertility, while the crocodile is associated with status and the chieftancy. While Huffman (1996) used Nettleton (1984) to 'decipher' archaelogical remains, Nettleton's thesis revolved around mostly contemporaneous objects of material culture, especially 'traditional' woodcarvings. The central iconographic objects in this Zimbabwe pool complex were Shona and Venda divining die. Nettleton used the iconography on these die to interpret the iconography of *ngoma* drums. Her analysis of the drum's designs associated the *ngoma* with symbols of status and reproduction - crocodiles, snakes and pools.

Nettleton's analysis of the iconography of the drums was in turn bolstered by an analysis of its form. Here, she relies on the names given to the different parts of the drum in the pre-marriage initiation ritual called *domba*,[10] to associate the drum with an image of a pool, surrounded by a snake and inhabited by crocodile.

Besides the form and iconography, Nettleton demonstrated through mythology that the status of the chief, the office of his authority, was invested with power through a divinely sanctioned drum. The most well-known of these was *ngoma lungundu*. Chiefs were associated with drums and she noted that at the time of her research, drums were carved for a newly-installed chief or headman. For this reason, the ownership of *ngoma* drums was restricted to installed chiefs or headmen.

This ethnography thus suggests that the *ngoma* drum functions as a symbol of status, referring to chieftancy, in the Venda region. Vho-Mudzunga used a cultural status symbol in his Funeral Performance. A closer look at Nettleton's construction of the *ngoma* as a pool and a comparative analysis to the designs found on Vho-Mudzunga's coffin-drum lead to some tempting hypotheses:

An 'ethnographically' stylized *ngoma* presents the following repetitive form. The drum has four handles. Each handle is carved of two interlooped pieces, joined to the drum

above and below each other respectively. Between the handles are four panels, which are embellished with relief motifs. Nettleton argued that the names given to the different parts of the drum along with the designs of the four panels, lead to an interpretation of their symbolic meanings (Nettleton 1984:253).

The names of the drum parts are found in the *milayo* for *domba*, recorded most thoroughly by Blacking (1969b).[11] *Domba* is an initiation school held at a chief's court. It is predominantly for unmarried women, though some parts of it are open to men. One of its pedagogical techniques is aphorisms or *milayo*, which instruct the initiates in various forms of cultural knowledge, through a call and response technique. The *domba milayo* give analogous names of human body parts for the different parts of the *ngoma* drum.[12]

Nettleton extrapolated two images of a *ngoma* drum from these *milayo*: firstly a "generic image of man," and, secondly, an image which consistently refers to infancy and childbirth "so that the drum itself becomes an image of the womb or the child (1984:264.)" The image of drum as a womb was extended by Nettleton to images of other containers which have analogous associations. For example, Stayt (1931:115) recorded that a beerpot was referred to as "pregnant" or "giving birth." He also recorded the same name for the rim of the beerpot as Blacking recorded for the rim of the *ngoma* in the *domba mulayo* - "the toothless gums of a baby" (Nettleton 1984:265). Thus a metaphoric connection between different types of 'containers' is suggested.

Nettleton then linked the metaphor of a container to that of a pool. Both, she asserted, involve metaphors of childbirth and procreation. She quoted a *domba mulayo* which compares a churning pool to a pregnant woman (ibid:266). The pool is in turn associated with procreation and creativity through the presence of a snake in the pool and references to mythology of creation. The snake in question, was quoted by one of Nettleton's informants as being the "python of creation" which "dwelt in a pool" and

which brought forth the whole of creation from its stomach (ibid: 222). The *ngoma*, by association, is also a pool, which symbolizes fertility.

The pool image is enhanced by looking at the iconography on the four panels between the handles of the drum. Here Nettleton argued that the four panels represent the four divining die (*hakata* in Shona, *thangu* in Tshivenda).[13] The die are divided into gendered status pairs. The one gendered pair is a young man and young woman and is represented by designs symbolic of a snake. The other pair is an old man and old woman and is represented by designs symbolic of a crocodile. The snake represents fertility (youth), the crocodile status (age). Nettleton argued that the four panels of an *ngoma* are always pairable into snake and crocodile. Thus the *ngoma*, through its designed panels, replicates the pool motif, with a snake and crocodile.

Vho-Mudzunga's coffin-drum was markedly different from the 'ethnographic *ngoma*' described above. It did not have the expected four looped handles and four patterned panels in between. Instead, the embellishments consisted of four rather simple forms. On the one side of the drum, across its length was an arm and a hand, marked as female arm. The arm was signified as female by the *mukunda* or bracelets which are worn only by women. These bracelets are either worn only on the left hand or in greater quantity on the left hand compared to the right one. The arm of the female was carved as a left hand. This embellishment was thus simultaneously female and left. The other side of the drum was embellished by another, longer arm, which had no other marking. This Vho-Mudzunga identified as the male and right hand. The hands joined on either end to handles which were not looped but rather were simple u-shaped attachments. Finally there is was door which is carved into the drum below the female arm.

Vho-Mudzunga interpreted his own embellishments as a couple. He once explained the female side to me as his mother and the male as father. The door,

he claimed on another occasion, was on the female side, "because the baby comes out the woman." He described the whole drum as follows:

> The drum is a body of a person. It is my mother on the left side with the *mukunda*. The right side is a man - this is my father. The bottom side is the (gestures to his buttocks) [the buttocks] and the top is the woman's head.

Vho-Mudzunga's explanations of the iconography of his drum paralleled Nettleton's argument about the iconography of the ethnographic *ngoma* in two ways. Firstly, it is tempting to associate this gendered couple with Nettleton's interpretation of the gendered status pairs associated with the panel on the *ngoma*. Secondly, and perhaps most tempting in terms of Nettleton's argument, is to see this *ngoma* as a womb, because of the birthing imagery which Vho-Mudzunga himself offered. By extension, this could link the coffin-drum to symbols of the pool that signifies fertility and reproduction (creation, ritual power, magic).

This opens up the possibility of interpreting the Funeral Performance as a rebirth. When Vho-Mudzunga came out of the drum, he passed out of the 'womb', through the mother's side of the drum and emerged as a reborn 'baby'. This 're-birth' hypothesis can be extended then to include Vho-Mudzunga's immersion into a 'pool' - a further act symbolic of reproduction?

At this stage it is interesting to note a further meaning ascribed to pools in the literature, one which Huffman (1996) disregards. Loubser (1990) argued that the pool signifies the ritual power of the subjugated polities in the Venda region. This power is opposed to the 'mountain power' of the ruling class. For Loubser the pool is a source of power and opposition to the ruling hierarchy. Vho-Mudzunga's rebirth through the drum could be coupled with the appropriation of ritual power of the pool. The rebirthing would be about taking power.

This 'rebirth hypothesis' has the advantage of refocusing the questions to be asked of the performance. Instead of puzzling over the apparent peculiarity of 'self-burial before the time' and perhaps beginning a psychological investigation into the disposition of Vho-Mudzunga (which I am in no way equipped to undertake), the focus falls on what he gained through this public performance. Instead of concentrating on how he 'dies', this approach rather shifts to how he was re-invented. This, of course, also moves the analysis away from deconstruction to reconstruction. After all, it is already clear that Vho-Mudzunga was involved with cultural symbols of status.

But these are my own metaphorical analytical processes. How much of this can really be read into his actions? Vho-Mudzunga claimed on a number of occasions to be unaware of the meanings of a 'typical' *ngoma*, insisting that the panels and handles on these drums were simply the individual carver's ideas and decorations and nothing more. His embellishments were thus simply his own ideas, disconnected to a system of conscious meaning. He did, however, indicate that the shaved rounded spot of the tympanum of his drum was the "top of a 'pikinin's' [sic] head." The *domba milayo* refer to the tympanum as a baby's fontanel and Vho-Mudzunga could have been indicating some awareness of the content of the *milayo* or, at least, of the names of the *ngoma*'s parts, with this reference. Interestingly, this single reference is to a child.

But, although Vho-Mudzunga clearly offered a womb interpretation of the drum, his associations with the drum were never static. He described the drum variously as a coffin, a special bed , a body of a person and a womb. The day he finished preparing the drum for his second event at Lake Fundudzi (see Chapter Two), he declared to me: "It is no longer a coffin - it is a drum." Thus, although clearly gendered and representing biological and social roles and social status' of gendered persons in a Vhavenda context, the embellishments could not confine the drum to any one culturally defined symbolic use in Vho-Mudzunga's own mind. Following Nettleton, one could suggest that drums, coffins, wombs and bodies are all containers and thus all link to the 'pool'.

Further, the cultural uses to which the drum was symbolically attached were very unusual. No one could confirm to me that a *ngoma* had ever been used as a coffin. Indeed the burial of individuals in materials other than cow skins or blankets was unknown before the introduction of coffins. One informant told me that drum-makers used to put human body parts inside drums, especially hands. I could not corroborate this information. Most other informants denied the use of drums as coffins. Mudzunga asserted the uniqueness of this in his invitation: "The drum-coffin is the first to be made in the Northern Province and I believe in the whole country." Hence, one could suggest that Vho-Mudzunga is not manipulating a traditional symbol of a drum, but a recent object of ritual practice - a coffin.[14] In this respect the ethnography is unhelpful. In fact, if this is the case (and I believe it is - see Chapter Four), then the tradition of the ethnography misleads us. The contemporary realities of burials in the Venda region exceed the ethnographic system proposed by this literature. Innovation in this sense is not around a traditional object defined by a 'Venda-centred' analysis, but rather about an object which usually falls outside the canon of traditional objects. Is there a *mulayo* about a coffin yet?

Finally, this is one of eight *ngoma* drums that Vho-Mudzunga had made. Each one was differently embellished from the others. No general gendered or status patterning was evident across them. In fact, the art-world, the final destination of these drums, valued each one for its originality.[15] An ethnographic *ngoma*, and its symbolism, relies on repetition of form.

The associations around 'the pool' are interesting but probably illustrate the great possibilities of teleological thinking rather than an accurate understanding of Vho-Mudzunga's actions. If I initially accept the existance of a closed symbolic system, I could possibly make wide-ranging connections between my data and the proposed system. Nonetheless, even if some of the ethnographic detail is not helpful in this

particular situation, it does establish the status of the object rather clearly. The individuation of Vho-Mudzunga's drum, the signs of innovation, are not necessarily mutually exclusive of historically-based associations. Vho-Mudzunga himself attached the significance of the generic ethnographic *ngoma* to his drums, while at the same time professing their uniqueness. In response to questions put to Vho-Mudzunga by my family when they visited Shanzha, innovation and the assumption of cultural significance, are clear:

> Kaplan Family member (K): Are you the only person around here making drums?
> Vho-Mudzunga: A lot of people make drums but none make drums like mine. I am the first one.
> K: Why is your drum important?
> Vho-Mudzunga: Drums are not for ordinary people, they are for chiefs.

Vho-Mudzunga was well aware of the symbolic status of his product. The ethnography used above provides a rationale for understanding the *ngoma*'s relationship to chiefly status, and indicates a social realm in which the object could represent power and influence. However, as is well known, structural and 'traditional' arguments, subsume innovation and individuality into a homogenous and bounded cultural practice. The temptation to fit an individual's actions into a homogenizing social framework makes agency invisible and disguises the presence of other narratives and influences, which may motivate and explain behaviour. This is especially pertinent for situations which deal with complex relationships between individual creativity and socially-constructed meaning. One cannot read the meaning of individual behaviour off cultural patterns in a smooth and seamless leap of logic. Vho-Mudzunga's *ngoma* at once conforms to ethnographic interpretation, whilst eluding it. He uses a *ngoma*, because it is an *ngoma*, but as an *ngoma*, his is like none other.

Tshikona

Tshikona is often referred to as the "Venda National Dance" (Stayt 1931; Blacking 1971 and in Nettl 1995; Nettleton 1984). Although this term is in many ways problematic, it captures the status which this dance possessed in a broadly defined Vhavenda cultural region. "Of all shared experience in Venda society, a performance of *tshikona* is said to be the most highly valued (Blacking 1973:51)." *Tshikona* is associated with celebrations of importance, and often becomes synonymous with celebration itself.[16]

Tshikona is also spoken of in emotional terms. After his speech at the Funeral Performance, Vho-Mudzunga requested the *tshikona* to dance for fifteen minutes, as "it is the sound of the heart." A teacher who attended Vho-Mudzunga's performance of the 28th September, remarked to me while watching the *tshikona:* "It tugs at my heart. there is none better." Blacking (1973:51) described *tshikona* as "the time when people rush to the scene of the dance and leave their pots to boil over" and as the dance that makes "sick people feel better and old men throw away their sticks and dance."

Most ethnography unambiguously links *tshikona* to the office of the chief (Stayt 1931:320; Van Warmelo 1932:136; Burnett-van Tonder 1987:53; Kruger 1989). Each *tshikona* group is under the jurisdiction of the *vhamusanda* who supplies the musical instruments (including the *ngoma*) and appoints a *malungwane* - the *tshikona* leader (Burnett-van Tonder 1987:53). The *vhamusanda* will thus be the guardian of the drums required for *tshikona*. These drums are generally part of the *dzingoma*, or sacred objects, kept at the *musanda* and form part of the identity of that leader and his or her clan. The *tshikona* owes allegiance to that chief and must only dance or play *tshikona* in dedication to him or her (ibid). The Philiyamavu group always played in the name of their dead *vhamusanda*. Before each performance, they would visit her grave and play a short dance there, before moving on to the venue of their performance. According to Stayt (1931:320), *tshikona* is "performed at the command of chiefs and petty chiefs (sic)." The presence of *tshikona* at an event will require the sanction of the *vhamusanda/khosi*. If a headman has a *tshikona* in an area where the chief has no group.

the *tshikona* dance of the former must be dedicated to the chief (Burnett 1987:54). The *malugwane* of the dance group is a resident of the *vhamusanda*'s territory. The *tshikona* also draws its dancers from the territory under the *vhamusanda*'s control. Dance practices are usually held at the *musanda*. The quality and size of the dance group can be an indicator of a leader's commitment and knowledge around Vhavenda cultural practice and an affirmation of a 'traditional' form of leadership. The power of a chief has been settled through *tshikona*:

> A few years ago...a dispute over headmanship was settled by two simultaneous performances of the national dance [*tshikona*]. When it was clear that the resident headman's music was louder, and hence the number of followers was greater, the rival claimant withdrew without further comment.(in Nettl 1995:140)

Tshikona is a necessary part of ritual associated with the chief. Notably, *tshikona* is played at the installation and the burial of a chief. The installation of *vhamusanda* Shavhani at Shanzha in 1995 was marked by the appearance of the Mulaboni *tshikona*. According to Burnett (1987:54), the death of a chief was made public by the *tshikona* which accompanied the remains of the chief to its burial. This *tshikona* was called *tshikona tsha tshikumo* - the *tshikona* that cries (ibid).

The ethnographic record indicates that only a burial of a chief is accompanied by *tshikona*. Further, *tshikona* should be restricted to the *musanda* or to performances sanctioned by and dedicated to the *vhamusanda* or *khosi*. *Tshikona* was thus clearly associated with status of a chief, and the ethnography suggests that its presence at Vho-Mudzunga's burial was intended to indicate his royal status.

In effect, the opening dances of the *tshikona* that took place in the entrance area of Vho-Mudzunga's house, alluded strongly to the way the *khoro* at *musanda* would function when *tshikona* played there. The presence of *tshikona* in a home makes direct references to *musanda*. The *tshikona* also used Vho-Mudzunga's drum in the dance immediately after the conclusion of the drama and for many of the subsequent dances.

Thus, not only were *tshikona*, that are restricted in principle to the home of the chief, in the home of Vho-Mudzunga, but they used Vho-Mudzunga's drum, a symbol of patronage and allegiance.

Vho-Mudzunga was an ardent *tshikona* fan. Radio Thohoyandou often played *tshikona* music around lunchtime. He would turn the radio up full volume and soak in the music, especially if the Philiyamavu group was playing. After lunch, he would walk around exclaiming,"*Philiyamavu A-hay*," which was the refrain used by Philiyamavu *tshikona* in their dance and one way by which they were identified. There were notably few occasions where Vho-Mudzunga would devote time to activities not directly connected with his own business - be that organizing the event, working in his garden etc. However on two occasions he made special trips simply to see *tshikona*. This featured amongst his priorities. After the event of the 28th September, he remarked to me: "Not just anyone can get *tshikona*: it is a special thing."

Although Vho-Mudzunga was recognized as *mukololo*, the presence of *tshikona* at his home was interpreted ambiguously by members of the local community. According to some informants, his status as *mukololo*, affirmed his right to bring *tshikona* to his home and it did not represent a challenge to authority nor a transgression of hierarchial order. For others, this relationship to royalty meant that the presence of *tshikona* at his home was even more problematic than if he was simply a commoner. A well-known professional even suggested the this action was akin to madness. By bringing *tshikona* to his 'burial,' Vho-Mudzunga was highlighting his royalty. Some observers felt he was, in fact, over-valuing it.

In this context of ambiguous authority, Vho-Mudzunga's decision to patronize the Philiyamavu *tshikona*, is important. He created his own symbolic rationale in this regard. The tree which he cut down to make the drum-coffin was surrounded by an anthill or *phili*. He claimed he was attracted to the name of the village, Philiyamavu.

because of the name association with the anthill. Philiyamavu, which is also called Tshilapfene, is a village adjacent to Mukumbani, the *mus ,ada* of *khosi* Tshivhase. At the time of my research and Vho-Mudzunga's performances, Tshilapfene had no installed *vhamusanda*. One of the *makhadzi*'s to the late *khosi* 'Prince' Tshivhase was the last designated *vhamusanda* at Tshilapfene. When she died, an acting *vhamusanda* took over as there was no other *makhadzi* at Mukumbane at the time. Later, the problem arose as to which *makhadzi* should become headman. In June 1996, this was still unresolved. Meanwhile, a *mukhoma* was responsible for administering the village and problems were taken straight to the Tshivhase territorial council as there was no *khoro* in place in Tshilapfene. Tshilapfene had no clear authority and the *tshikona* played in the name of their deceased *vhamusanda*.

Furthermore, the *vhamusanda* of Shanzha, the village where Vho-Mudzunga lived, did not sponsor a *tshikona* group. The Milaboni group which installed *vhamusanda* Shavhani owed its loyalty to the headman of Milaboni, *vhamusanda* Budeli. In fact, Shanzha was itself a village with an undermined traditional authority (see Chapter Four).

The ethnography makes the association and restrictions regarding *tshikona* clear. But the contemporary social context does not restrict *tshikona* appearances quite as rigidly and their appearance at Vho-Mudzunga's funeral may be positioned in another ambiguity. During my stay in Shanzha, *tshikona* appeared at various different occasions: at the launch of Radio Phala-phala in Louis Trichardt; at the launch of the local Masekhane campaign at Mphephu Resort: and, at the opening of a new clinic in Ha-Khaku . No chief or headman was present at the launch of Phala-phala and the *tshikona* performed as entertainers amongst rock bands and drum-majorettes.

According to one *vhamusanda*, anyone, without regard to their royal status, could take *tshikona*, as long as they paid. The *vhamusanda* considered the presence of *tshikona* to be as much a financial matter as a cultural one. Furthermore, the field of prestige and

thus perhaps, its control too, extended beyond the confines of royalty. The leader of the Phiiiyamavu *tshikona* expressed his desire to appear one day at the FNB stadium in Johannesburg. Although this does not preclude the involvement of their own *vhamusanda*, it does focus on an arena of prestige beyond 'the chiefly'.

On the other hand, *tshikona* obviously maintained its cultural status. In an interview with Vho-Makhomu (a member of the Tshiavha royal family and a cousin to both Vho-Mudzunga), he related the time when the *vhamusanda* of Tshiavha had sent his *tshikona* to Makhomu's house. This was interpreted and retold as a significant occasion, and one which gave status and affirmation to Vho-Makhomu. He did not relate this event to me during our formal interview but he volunteered this event afterwards, as something I suppose he felt I should know about him. In this case *tshikona* operated within the context of cultural signifier.

Tshikona can thus be both 'secularized' entertainment and significant in terms of its relation to symbols of power. An appearance can straddle these categories and often does, as they are not mutually exclusive. This was true of the Mulaboni *tshikona*'s performance at the Masekhane launch for the Greater Nzhelele/Tshipise area at Mphephu Resort. The dignitaries, including councillors, local farmers, members of NGOs and the chieftancy (*vhuhosi*), were lead to the podium by the drum majorettes from a local secondary school. As they were lead in to the sounds of Michael Jackson over the loud-speakers, people sitting next to me murmured their disapproval that *mahosi* should be "introduced in this way." No *mahosi* spoke at the event until the *tshikona* had performed. The *tshikona* remained on the performance area after their first dance had ended and ritually heralded each *khosi as* they took the podium. The *tshikona* were part of a larger entertainment programme that day, which included majorettes, pop music, *tshifhasi* dancers and *tshigombela* dancers. Yet within this programme of 'entertainment,' they were still used to signify chiefly status.

Mudzunga operated in this gap, where *tshikona* was either a commodity to be bought or prestige to be bestowed. He was not only aware that "dresses [were] not for ordinary people" but clearly understood *tshikona* as "a special thing" restricted to certain people of status. The rationale behind *tshikona*'s "specialness" is provided by the ethnographic record and observations that demonstrate the connection between the dance and chiefly status in the Venda region.

"A Venda Funeral"

The presence of *tshikona* at the performance was tentatively revealed above to be part of a larger process of negotiation grounded in local politics. Under closer scrutiny, the burial rites affected at Vho-Mudzunga's Funeral Performance, foreground negotiation. The "old Venda burial" is revealed, as expected, as a contingent social act and not as a mimetic recovery. Perhaps ironically, the most ceremoniously performed elements of the drama make for the most interesting study of innovation.

Vho-Mudzunga proposed to demonstrate a Venda funeral in line with his "clan's funeral ceremonies". Indeed, he claimed and maintained a link to the Tshiavha royal clan of the Vhatavhatsindi. The Tshiavha clan are well known in the ethnographic record because of their religious beliefs and practices around Lake Fundudzi. Amongst these practices is a particular funery rite. The Tshiavhas, like other Vhatavhatsindi royalty,[17] cremate their dead. But, the Tshiavhas are unique in that they cremate their dead into Lake Fundudzi. Cremation is performed a number of years after the burial of the deceased, when all the flesh has left the bones. The bones of the deceased are exhumed and carried to a river flowing into Lake Fundudzi. There they are ceremonially burned and the ashes are poured into the river to join with Lake Fundudzi.

At the Funeral Performance, Vho-Mudzunga symbolized his clan's cremation practice by emerging from his 'grave' and jumping into his 'pool.' He had indicated that the

'pool' was like Lake Fundudzi. He immersed himself into its waters after his 'burial' to symbolize cremation into the waters of Lake Fundudzi.

In 1996, cremation was still practiced by the Tshiavha clan. Vho-Mudzunga recalled cremating his father in the 1970s. His *makhadzi*, his father's oldest sister, had died recently and was buried at Tshiavha. He was planning to cremate her remains at the appropriate time. But cremation remained an unusual practice and would not have been part of the general community's experience of burials. An accurate re-enactment of cremation would have been the most revealing of cultural practices to the general audience.

The other burial rites enacted were very familiar to anyone in the local community who attended funerals. The actual 'funeral' in the performance was affected by two rites. The first was the 'paying of respects' to the 'corpse,' and, the second, the throwing of *mbeu* on the 'grave.' All my informants rejected the 'paying of last respects' as a traditional practice. Rather, informants remembered that burials were carried out by close family relatives and perhaps one or two close friends. Practices around death and the corpse were generally shrouded in secrecy and privacy. The predominant attitude towards a corpse was one of fear and contact with it was minimized. A parade of mourners passing a dead body, as enacted at the performance, had no basis in memories around pre-Christian-influenced burials.

There was a rite, however, in contemporary burials, contiguous to the 'paying of last respects'. While the coffin remained in the deceased's sleeping room before the commencement of the burial, family members and friends opened the coffin to look at the corpse. This practice was called *u tovhowa*. It was regarded as one of the more dramatic and disturbing moments of contemporary burials and appears to have its roots in Christian practice.

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The *mbeu* rite, on the other hand, was associated with remembered pre-Christian burials. But it is not an extinct practice and is still in evidence at many contemporary funerals, including syncretic forms, which include elements of a Christian and non-Christian burial. But, in keeping with his style, Vho-Mudzunga affected another innovation here. Usually maize seeds are used to perform *mbeu* as they are associated with cultivated crops. Vho-Mudzunga however gave *makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo seeds of the *musuma* tree for the purposes of the rite in the performance. Vho-Mudzunga's drum is carved from the wood of the *musuma* tree and, in his own symbolic construction, similar to his association with Philiyamavu, VhoMudzunga chose to use seeds of the *musuma* (*tsuma*) at his drum-coffin 'burial'.

Although the MC, Vho-Netshiomvani, framed the burial as "an old Venda burial," the negotiations around how the *mbeu* should be thrown, were never framed around the way the rite **used** to be performed. Rather, the discussions were in the present: How is it done? The conversation around the drum at this time was hard to follow but went something like the following:

> Was the seed not supposed to be poured inside [the drum-coffin]?
> Inside?
> Yes.
> Won't it be poured afterwards?....as it is poured outside
> Has it got to be poured inside?
> Can you please start!
> Samson, where do we pour this?
> It is poured by family members as they pass by -
> They use the right hand?
> Yes, as they pass by on the left
> Do what you have to do, old man...
> Just after putting in that ... the seed is poured over it
> [Name]..will go first...
> He's done. If he's done then you pour whatever is remaining with both hands.
> All of it has to go in here?
> Yes. Now that all the seed has been poured in, the ceremony is then over.

The most vexing problem here seemed to be how to treat a drum as a coffin and how should *mbeu* be thrown accordingly. But general practice was also in question. Who should throw? With which hand? From where must they come? The 'old Venda burial' was quickly performed according to current knowledge and adapted to incorporate this quite unusual circumstance of a coffin-drum. These negotiations included the express advice of the 'corpse': "Samson, where do we pour this?" He answered in the whispered rasp of a man pretending to be dead!

Thus, in this 'traditional' burial drama performative notions of innovation, negotiation and play are foregrounded against the backdrop of some familiar traditional and Christian cultural symbols. In the analysis of *tshikona*, the negotiations around their performance exposed a broad political context. Here, an analysis of the funerary rites, exposed the negotiated nature of the micro-processes of performance.

Closing

According to Vho-Mudzunga, and to other participants, notably *makhdadzi* Vho-Mulondo, the reason Vho-Mudzunga 'buried' himself before he died, was to show how he was to be buried when he died 'for real'. In other words, he was preparing for death. I came across other people who were preparing to die in the Venda region. Some had already printed the programmes for their funerals because they wanted to write their own obituaries. Others had pre-bought their tombstones. In fact, preparing to die was a general condition amongst adults in the Venda region. Most belonged to burial societies or had life insurance (see Chapter Four).

What was unusual about Vho-Mudzunga's preparations, was that he chose to make them public through performance.[18] Informants who explained the event in Vho-Mudzunga's 'preparatory' terms, could not answer why he did not simply inform a few

close relatives or friends as to the manner in which he wished to be buried. The public performance was understood to be in fulfillment of the dreams which inspired him.

Public performances have been shown to be a dramatization of an internally existing interpretation of society's structures, values and norms - society made visual (Geertz 1973). I have shown that in part, Vho-Mudzunga was concerned with status, especially his own. Both the drum-coffin and *tshikona* were symbols of prestige which reflected and created status. Geertz proposed that performance, aesthetic representation, made social life: as much as it reflected it (1973:451). Vho-Mudzunga's performance had broader concerns than one man's unusual play with death.

There is no written ethnographic example in the Shanzha region of a man who imitated his own funeral. The existing ethnography assumes that symbols of chieftancy and death are associated with actual chiefs and real deaths. This event was play or imitation. The Funeral Performance presented signifiers to other signifiers, or to imitations of signifiers. The corpse is not dead. The imitations are thus already one level removed from the interpretations in ethnographic writing. The symbolic simulation of death, means that the ritual's symbols are not about 'a' death but about Death in general.

As such, the performance reflected and intervened into broader social conditions. In its intervention, the performance was a negotiation of meaning and consciousness. In the following chapters I will show what was negotiated, how it was negotiated and why it was Vho-Mudzunga who undertook to dramatize social and cultural conditions and innovations in the Venda region.

2

INTRIGUE AT LAKE FUNDUDZI:

Revelations and Patterns of Power

"[H]e is just putting himself in a difficult position because more white people and other foreigners are still to come"

Ratshilumela Samson Mudzunga

On September 28th, Vho-Mudzunga held his second performance of 1996. The Funeral Performance of June 29th, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, was conceptualised and performed by Vho-Mudzunga around the notion of a "traditional Venda burial."[1] On March 8, 1997, Vho-Mudzunga held another ceremony which centered around a traditional Venda marriage ceremony."[2] Both the funeral and the marriage were staged at his home in Shanzha and took a rite of passage as a central reference. The intermediate event however, the Lake Performance, was different in that its focus was neither a communally recognized rite of passage with social precedent nor was it centered around his home. It was located, socially, culturally and physically, quite differently.

In his written announcement of the event, Vho-Mudzunga explained:

> This idea is arising specially at this time because I am still very much rooted to my traditions and proud thereof. As a traditionalist I happen to have been called back home where I came from by Makhadzi Vho-Mulondo herself. She has made it known to me that 'the gods of Fundudzi would like to see me.' They say if I am one of them, I must come personally within the drum I have made, chief [sic] will open it up and let me get into Lake Fundudzi to take a bath. It is then that the gods will acknowledge whether I am one of them or not. As a sacred Lake if I happen to bath in there and I being not one of them I shall

> never come back (something awful will happen) but if I am one of them nothing will happen to me.

The peculiarity and dangers associated with Lake Fundudzi were described by Stayt (1931:237-8) as "weird beliefs" and "superstitions" about supernatural phenonmena. that resulted from "misunderstandings" - his explanation for 'traditional culture'. The Lake was believed to be the home of various spirits, most notably the ancestral spirits (*vhadzimu*) of the Tshiavha clan. As such the Lake was ringed by all manner of taboos and sinister tales, diligently recorded in the ethnography (Stayt 1931: Nettleton 1984). I encountered many of these tales and taboos during the period of my field research. The taboo of major concern to Vho-Mudzunga's performance was recorded categorically by Stayt, in a style reminiscent of biblical injuction: "No man dare wash or swim in the Lake as he will be dragged under by the spirits" (1931:237).

Vho-Mudzunga planned to go to Lake Fundudzi with his drum and to bathe in the waters of the Lake. He believed that if he managed to return from the Lake unharmed. having bathed in its waters, he would have found favour in the eyes of the gods which dwell there. In this performance, Vho-Mudzunga placed himself at the centre of a challenging and unusual pilgrimage to a challengingand unusual place. This ceremony did not easily make claims on authenticity based in the recapturing of a particular. older and forgotten life-cycle ritual form, as his other performances did. But this did not stop Vho-Mudzunga from mobilizing 'traditional culture' as a central organizing vision of his performance - the idea arose, he claimed, because he was still rooted to his traditions.

We have already encountered ideas around Vho-Mudzunga's practice and traditional authority in the Funeral Performance. My interpretive approach in the previous chapter placed the *ngoma* and *tshikona* at the center of a cultural structure, in line with ethnographic models of power in the region. The trip to Lake Fundudzi precipitated open conflict between Vho-Mudzunga and *vhamusanda* Netshiavha, the traditional political and religious authority figure associated with the Lake. On the

day of the event, Netshiavha blocked the road to the Lake with his 'bakkie' and a large truck, and refused to allow Vho-Mudzunga and his drum (or indeed anyone) to proceed towards Fundudzi. At the Lake Performance, we encounter Vho-Mudzunga in conflict with traditional authority. Unlike the static symbolism constructed around drums that for example constituted tradition in the ethnographic models of Nettleton (1984) and Huffman (1996), here tradition was performed and articulated in conflict. Vho-Mudzunga's Lake Performance 'enacted' negotiations around tradition, but also articulated the contemporary concerns of local-level politics. Crucially, these concerns exceeded the boundaries implied by an internally-consistent, bounded, ethnologized Venda culture and region, whilst simultaneously drawing on the continued awe that Lake Fundudzi inspired.

Some observers from Johannesburg retreated to a time and location, distant from 'the contemporary,' to explain this conflict that involved ethnologized objects (drums) and places (Lake Fundudzi). For example, a member of a film crew who was present at the Lake, thought that the conflict was caused by the disregard shown to the Sacred Lake by her cameras and the presence of 'whites'. Her views assumed a local concern for pristine isolation from the invasions of modern things and people. Such understandings are sourced in depictions of distant, far-off places as different and 'primitive.' A review of Vho-Mudzunga's Lake Performance in The Star newspaper[3] described it as a sacred and ancient ritual. The review located Vho-Mudzunga's event out of contemporary time, space and politics and assumed a collective agreement about its importance - it was sacred. Instructively, Bhabha comments that Islamic fundamentalism creates a difficulty for the British public and press because they need to grasp that this fundamentalism is occurring today, now, and is thus a modern response not simply an inconvenient re-play of another time (Rutherford 1990). This is the challenge I take up with regards my story of conflict - to locate the conflict in the context of contemporary concerns in the Venda region and thus begin to reconceptualize an understanding of life in distant places.

My methodological practice in the early part of my fieldwork was to observe Vho-Mudzunga as he prepared for his performance at Lake Fundudzi and to start collecting life history information. I wanted to begin to establish the parameters of meaning around the performance; that is, to begin to understand what Vho-Mudzunga did, what was involved on his behalf in actualizing the performance. For example what kind of knowledge was Vho-Mudzunga using and how ritualized were his preparations? In a sense I was looking for the kinds of cultural resources and social capital which were at his disposal.

Within the first few days of beginning the research, I was exposed through Vho-Mudzunga's preparations and my presence in this 'production space,' to a complex field of information around Lake Fundudzi, Tshiavha (Netshiavha) and Vho-Mudzunga's family. Almost from the start of my fieldwork the preparations were framed by a very real conflict over access to Lake Fundudzi. This context highlighted Vho-Mudzunga's behaviour and (potential) actions as contentious and transgressive of authority.

Furthermore, his life history was not a separate area of investigation which simply situated him in time and space but he allegorically wove it into an unfolding performance.

As his preparations continued, Vho-Mudzunga drew on and drew in multiple narratives and numerous actors in constructing and actualizing his performance. Further, he attracted an assortment of participants and audiences.

What follows is the story of Vho-Mudzunga's preparations for the performance leading up to and including the conflict at the Lake. It is a story of constant learning and application of knowledge, of jockeying, manoeuvering and improvisation by the various actors involved, in response to the modern context of life in the Venda region of South Africa. I leave this material in narrative form as a writing strategy to

highlight Vho-Mudzunga's agency. In addition my own presence cannot be ignored or rendered invisible through organizing categories. This is the story of the conflict as it was presented to me and interpreted by me, first by Vho-Mudzunga and then by other people whom I sought out for explanations.

PREPARATIONS AND ENCOUNTERS: *A STORY OF CONFLICT*

On the very second day of my fieldwork, Vho-Mudzunga wanted to show me Lake Fundudzi. A further aim of our journey that day was to see his *makhadzi*, Vho-Mulondo. Vho-Mulondo lived in the village of Tshixwadza which lies in the mountains, some four kilometres to the north of the Lake. Vho-Mudzunga described Vho-Mulondo to me as a very important person for the 28th of September (the Lake Performance), for without her, "nothing can happen on that day, she is the leader," she would make it possible for him to do what he had to do at the Lake.

On the way to Tshixwadza, we entered Thononda, the village of Vho-Mudzunga's childhood. There we stopped at the side of the road to view Lake Fundudzi from afar. Vho-Mudzunga enquired about the road to the Lake and we were informed that the road to Fundudzi was being cleared and improved. On my first planning trip to visit Vho-Mudzunga a month earlier, he showed me a letter which he was sending to the regional offices of the Provincial Government. The letter requested that the road to Lake Fundudzi be prepared and improved for his performance. It was signed by the chairperson of the Shanzha Civic Organization. It seemed his letter may have been successful, but at this stage we did not proceed towards the Lake and thus did not see for ourselves.

Vho-Mudzunga asked me to stop the car so he could greet various people in the village. In these exchanges he invariably mentioned his upcoming event, and that he would be going to the Lake with *tshikona*. The general response included a discussion

on what route Vho-Mudzunga planned to take to the Lake. The Lake lay between two territories. To the north was the area of Tshiavha ruled by *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. The Lake fell under his jurisdiction and it was with him that Vho-Mudzunga came into conflict. Tshiheni was situated to the south of the Lake and came under the authority of *vhamusanda* Netshiheni. Although Netshiavha had a ritual association with the Lake and performed annual rites there, there was no road through Tshiavha to the Lake. The access road lead through the territory of Tshiheni.

We stopped above the Thamvha section of the village and Vho-Mudzunga showed me where his family's homestead used to stand. Vho-Mudzunga's family had moved from the village of Mulaboni to Thononda when he was a young boy. Betterment planning[4] (instituted in Thononda after Vho-Mudzunga left in 1976) zoned his family's homestead area for grazing. The homestead therefore had been moved into the typical rowed stands produced by 'Betterment' some distance away in the 'residential zone.' Using trees and cattle as markers, Vho-Mudzunga reconstructed the homestead site for me. His observations and assertions were backed by Mashudu, the wife of Vho-Mudzunga's nephew, who still lived in Thononda.

Mashudu's young son soon joined us and Vho-Mudzunga asked him if he ever goes to Lake Fundudzi. The boy said he sometimes fishes there in the mornings. Vho-Mudzunga asked if he goes into the water. He replied that he goes into the water up to his waist. A friend of his, a younger boy, said he goes to the Lake but would not go into its waters. "When you are young you are brave," said Vho-Mudzunga. In previous discussions with Vho-Mudzunga he had always insisted that going to the Lake was "not a problem", and always concerned himself with the question of getting there logistically.

We left Thononda and reached Tshixwadza, where we found Vho-Mulondo. Together with her cousin, Vho-Mukumela, we ascended Thosa Hill from where they said there was a good view overlooking Lake Fundudzi. This view was from the north-west side

of the Lake. On top of the hill Vho-Mudzunga, Vho-Mulondo and Vho-Mukumela engaged in an enthusiastic discussion about the Lake. In this exchange Vho-Mulondo was positioned as the expert and Vho-Mudzunga was 'learning' from her. Significantly, the discussion started with the geographic characteristics of the Lake and the rivers which feed it and ended with a warning to Vho-Mudzunga and myself about the fatal dangers of certain parts of the Lake. Scholarly writing (Stayt 1931, Van Warmelo, Nettleton 1984) has claimed that the Lake's peculiar geographical features, though scientifically explainable, are the basis of many beliefs of the 'local' people. For example, the Mutale River, which is one of the rivers which flows into the Lake, does not flow out of the Lake on the surface but rather emerges about a kilometer down the valley from the Lake, bubbling "spring-like" to the surface.

The talk on Thosa Hill delved into these (and other) peculiarities. When we had reached the summit of the hill, Vho-Mudzunga wanted to identify the Mutale River in the valley below: Once Mutale was identified, the way it flowed into and out of Fundudzi was discussed:

> **Mulondo:** Mutale flows right straight down to the middle of Fundudzi. Mutale river runs right in the middle of Fundudzi, you can see it clearly in the morning.
> **Mudzunga:** This is funny. So this means Mutale River passes that point on its own [only Mutale, not others flow out]. Those [rivers] which flow from Thonon'a and Tshiavha end right there [in the Lake] and Mutale continues to flow past.
> **Mulondo:** These two rivers flow in from the other side.
> **Mudzunga:** I understand. You mean [the other rivers] flow right into Fundudzi though they don't continue flowing the other side.
> **Mulondo:** But Mutale river does pass [through the Lake].
> **Mudzunga:** Yes, because one can recognize it.
> **Mulondo:** Quite true...At some point around the enclosed area [Mutale] gives an impression of boiling as it flows very fast coming from below.
> **Mudzunga:** So does this mean that the Lake is supported by mountains?
> **Mulondo:** Yes

All the rivers were seen to flow into the Lake but none were seen to flow out. Water bubbled up to the surface in the valley below the Lake though. This water was identified as the Mutale River - "one can recognize it". The Lake itself did not flow but remained intact (see below) as if nothing flowed from it. How then did the Mutale go into the Lake and still remain separate from the waters of the Lake when emerging in the valley below? Vho-Mudzunga and Vho-Mulondo concluded that Mutale must go underneath the Lake. Thus the Lake is supported by the mountains, and not soil, so as to allow the water to pass underneath it. The unusual flow of the Mutale River established the peculiarity of the Lake and marked its 'special-ness'.

Vho-Mulondo then described what it was like to be near the various peculiar points where the river enters the Lake and where it emerges again as a spring. In her story, the Lake's strange powers started to emerge. Vho-Mulondo described how once she walked along the banks of the Mutale at the point at which it splits. The river was not visible but the sound of it flowing could be heard.

> It's quite a frightening experience. If you are a nervous person, you'll never want to go closer. [Further down] the water splits and flows from different points underneath the rocks like a spring. This water does not flow in great volume - the Lake does not flow, it remains intact...Whites have tried to open up that place, but after a while when they come back to check, they discovered that the area had shrunk back to its original size. Lake Fundudzi was once fenced in, but all that simply vanished. They can no longer tell what it is they fenced in...Now they simply leave it like that.

Vho-Mulondo admitted, that this powerful part of the Lake, frightened her. She 'summonsed' stories of the "whites'" inability to tame the Lake in order to bear witness to the mystery and power of the Lake. Vho-Mudzunga then proposed where the *tshikona* would play on the 28th, and checked that a certain clearing was in Tshiheni and not in Tshiavha. Vho-Mudzunga asked if it was not possible to approach the Lake from the north-west side, the Tshiavha end. He received a clear response:

> Where? Do you want to die and perish. You can't approach Fundudzi from that end. Someone will chop you off though we don't know

> how...You see, on the other side it is free/open, you can do as you like there. The dangerous point is the point of distribution - there you can't take chances. Fishermen always come running back from there, at times having left their trousers right there. They also see a lot of *mimwembo* (poisonous mushrooms), and they run for dear lives. They also hear voices without seeing the actual person who is talking.

At this point Vho-Mudzunga addressed me: "You see danger, danger zone this side...This side of Fundudzi." The dangerous area which he was pointing out was on the Tshiavha side of the Lake. The point of distribution appeared to be the point at which Mutale separated from the other waters and was the subject of conjecture as to where exactly it was located. Nonetheless, in the context of this discussion, the Lake was not just a logistic problem - how should one get there? - but a danger zone - how one should NOT get there!

Later that day when we returned to Dopeni-Shanzha, Vho-Mudzunga took me to meet Dan Mandavha who would become my field assistant. Dan helped Vho-Mudzunga organize the "Mock Funeral". We told him where we had just been. Dan said to me that Vho-Mudzunga would be "using Lake Fundudzi" in his next performance because that is where his family is from. The following day, in our first formal interview, Vho-Mudzunga explicated his familial connection to the Lake:

Vho-Mudzunga's paternal grandfather was born at Tshiavha. He was part of the Netshiavha royal family which still ruled at Tshiavha during the period of my research. Vho-Mudzunga was related to Tshiavha through descent, and was part of this royal family. He was described to me as *mukololo*- part of the royal classes. Vhamusanda Netshiavha, the ruler of Tshiavha, referred to Vho-Mudzunga as *khotsi munene*.[5] The Netshiavha clan identify themselves historically as part of the Vhatavhatsindi migration into the Soutpanzberg region in around 1500.[6]

Lake Fundudzi forms an important part of Netshiavha's land. The Lake is the ritual site, or *zwipo*, for Tshiavha and sacrifices to their ancestors - who are said to dwell in

the Lake - are performed there. Netshiavha's fortunes and those of his people have been said to depend on the maintenance of harmonious relations between them and the ancestors of the Lake (Stayt 1931; informants).

Vho-Mudzunga's family left Tshiavha because of a succession dispute. His father's elder sister (Tshavhungwe) and elder brother (Mushohe) were both born in Tshiavha. But Vho-Mudzunga's father, Rampilo, was born in Mulaboni. According to Vho-Mudzunga, Vho-Tshavhungwe, the eldest child would have become *vhamusanda* of Tshiavha (Netshiavha), if she had been a male.[7] A succession struggle ensued and, according to Vho-Mudzunga, the grandfather of the current *vhamusanda* (Vho-Ntsandeni Netshiavha) took control during this dispute. He was the son of Vho-Tshavhungwa's father from a different mother. Vho-Mudzunga's paternal grandmother (mother to Tshavhungwe and Mushohe) decided to leave Tshiavha because, according to Vho-Mudzunga, she feared for her life and the life of her children, as people were fighting over the headmanship. She thus moved to Mulaboni. At this time, Vho-Mudzunga claimed, the family changed their surname from Netshiavha.[8] This is often the case when succession disputes occur. It was thus in Mulaboni that Vho-Mudzunga's father, Rampilo, was born.

Vho-Mudzunga himself was born in Mulaboni. His father then moved to live in Thononda and Vho-Mudzunga was brought up there. In 1976, Vho-Mudzunga moved to live in Shanzha in Nzhelele Valley. Shanzha was then, and continued to be during the period of my fieldwork, under the authority of the Shavhani family. Thus, Vho-Mudzunga himself never lived in a residential area under the authority of *vhamusanda* Netshiavha.

When Vho-Mudzunga explained to me that he was ('originally') from Tshiavha he indicated that the people of Tshiavha were different from other people. His Tshiavha identity referred explicitly or implicitly to the Netshiavha clan's relationship with Lake Fundudzi.

Vho-Mudzunga's account of 'Tshiavha difference' referred firstly to his clan's burial practices. Tshiavha royalty cremate their dead. Vho-Mudzunga himself explained this process to me: The bones of the deceased are exhumed "some years" after the burial, once they are sure to be without flesh. The bones are placed in "something like a plastic bag" and taken to the banks of a "certain river" which flows through Tshiavha and into Lake Fundudzi. Cows are slaughtered and people are happy and do not sleep all night. "Special wood" is collected along with grass and a structure is built in the river. The bones are placed on the structure and burned. Then, all the ashes are collected and thrown into the river to join the waters of Lake Fundudzi. Vho-Mudzunga witnessed this ritual when his father was exhumed and cremated. He used death to assert his connection to Tshiavha and the Netshiavha family when he told me that Vho-Tshavhungwe, his father's eldest sister, had been buried "right" in the *musanda* at Tshiavha. She had died in 1994 and Vho-Mudzunga claimed there was no problem in burying her at Tshiavha as "we belong to there." Much later on in my fieldwork, I visited *vhamusanda* Netshiavha with Vho-Tshavhungwe's son, 'David' Netshidaulu. Vho-Netshidaulu was awarded all the respect of a *makhadzi* and the *vhamusanda* even referred to him as *makhadzi*. Netshiadaulu would be an important figure of family authority in the conflict at the Lake.

The second way in which Vho-Mudzunga explained how Tshiavha differed from other groups was by describing the *thevhula* ceremony. The *thevhula* ceremony is a first fruits ceremony (Stayt 1931:254-7). Although every family lineage could perform their own *thevhula*,[9] Netshiavha is known for a particular version of the ritual. Vho-Mudzunga did not give details of the ritual as it is described in other literary sources, but he did refer to *thevhula*, which he had attended, as a marker of his clan's identity. "After harvesting we thank the [gods] and make *skokiaan*." The Tshiavha *thevhula* involved a sacrifice to the spirits of the Tshiavha people in Lake Fundudzi and was one of the obligations Netshiavha had to fulfill to maintain harmonious relations with these spirits (Stayt 1931:257). The sacrifice is performed at the Lake. *Thevhula* is

thus a further ritual and cosmological connection to the Lake with which Vho-Mudzunga was familiar and associated.

The context in which Vho-Mudzunga began to speak of *thevhula* above, was in response to my query about the nature of his relationship with the current *vhamusanda* Netshiavha, ruler of Tshiavha and ritual guardian of Lake Funduduzi. Vho-Mudzunga answered me by saying that they saw each other at the *thevhula* ceremony in June/July. "We meet together and organize ourselves, we *ndou.i*"[10]

But our meeting with Netshiavha was not to wait until *thevhula*. The very next day following the above interview, Vho-Mudzunga and I were returning together from a trip to Thohoyandou, when Vho-Mudzunga spotted the blue bakkie that belonged to *vhamusanda* Netshiavha near the Tshikombani roadhouse. We stopped and went to greet the *vhamusanda*. I was eager to make an appointment to see him to further my knowledge about Tshiavha and Lake Fundudzi. Vho-Mudzunga knew this and we approached the *vhamusanda* with this in mind. The exchange which followed. between Vho-Mudzunga and Netshiavha, greatly disturbed Vho-Mudzunga. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha requested that I bring colddrink with me when I come to visit him. They spoke in Tshivenda and discussed a possible date for my visit. Netshiavha spoke about going to Natal and not being available until two weeks time. We finally agreed to meet at Tshiavha in two weeks time.

Immediately after this encounter, Vho-Mudzunga was very annoyed: "Netshiavha is trying to do something. If you [the author (Oren)] were not interested in writing something there [Tshiavha], I would not go. He is nothing." Vho-Mudzunga told me that he had asked Netshiavha why he had not attended the Funeral Performance. Netshiavha replied that he did not get a chance to do so and suggested that Vho-Mudzunga should come to Tshiavha to which Vho-Mudzunga replied that he had no transport. Vho-Mudzunga was further disturbed by the manner in which Netshiavha had spoken to him when they were discussing the date for my appointment. He felt

Netshiavha had been short and impatient. "He is going to mess something...but I know everything at Fundudzi...I can do it on the part of Tshiheni," he said.

This was my first sense that the two men were in conflict and that Vho-Mudzunga was thinking how to get around his authority. Vho-Mudzunga discussed this encounter with Dan Mandavha and two friends who arrived that evening at his home. At dinner Vho-Mudzunga told me that he was worried about Netshiavha. He said Netshiavha was jealous of him and that now that Netshiavha had seen a white man [Oren] with him, Netshiavha would think that Vho-Mudzunga was getting a lot of money and all the attention.

Much of this was repeated at breakfast the following morning, perhaps with more confidence:

> That day [at the Lake] Netshiavha will cry when he sees on the TV what I will do at Lake Fundudzi. He will cry because of what I will do at Fundudzi...it will be the first in the continent of Africa...Netshiavha wants me to kneel down. But it is myself who is going to do [everything]. So must I kneel down to myself? Lucky you were there yesterday. If I was alone with him I would have told him to go. I know everything about Fundudzi.

Vho-Mudzunga mimicked Netshiavha's request to me of the day before: "'I want cold-drink.' we were not talking about cold-drink, we were talking business...I don't think I will go there [to Tshiavha]." I suggested that perhaps I would go with Dan Mandavha. Vho-Mudzunga agreed that that was a good idea. "I will never go there.." he said. "Last night when I thought of that man, I was so fed up. He wants money for nothing...What is this democracy for us? When we people see white skin...wherever you [Oren] will go...people say 'money, money, money.' I hate that...Who is Netshiavha? He is not a chief, he's just an ordinary person. What's a headman? It's nothing, its just an ordinary person. He's just from royal blood. We are all the same."

In line with Vho-Mulondo's tales about Fundudzi's power, extra-local symbols began to emerge as an important part of the language of power in this conflict. Already Vho-Mudzunga identified my presence as a white and referred to the role of television in his own analysis of the antagonism between him and *vhamusanda* Netshiavha.

That afternoon, Vho-Mudzunga and I visited a prominent member of the Shanzha community to discuss the Lake Performance. Vho-Mudzunga told him about our previous day's awkward encounter with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha:

> **Mudzunga**: Yesterday, we met that Tshiavha gentleman. After some discussions he reverted to this general tendency of our people that whenever they see a white man they think we are making money - he then started asking for colddrink from my friend here. I didn't like that at all.
> **PM**: From a visitor?
> **Mudzunga**: Yes, you know I was so annoyed. I think even this one [Oren] saw it...I also told him[Netshiavha] that what I am doing is something that concerns me and not them. I am not going to *zwiponi*,[11] but I am going to perform my activities in the open where everyone can see...He's [Netshiavha] a type of person who always feels threatened about his position and status.
> **PM**: Yes, quite true
> **Mudzunga**: Well he is just putting himself in a difficult position because more white people and other foreigners are still to come.

At dinner Vho-Mudzunga refered to the above conversation and told me that he was advised not to bother with Netshiavha and to forget about him.

Vho-Mudzunga and I, together with his nine-year old granddaughter, Vhengani, and her friend, took a field trip to Lake Fundudzi to scout out the 'performance site.' We had to ask exact directions to get there. The road was in a very bad state. Vho-Mudzunga remarked, "If Mandela was coming to Fundudzi they would quickly fix it. but because I am an ordinary person they do nothing." As it turned out "they" did send graders to fix the road before the event (see below).

On the way, through the landscape of his childhood, Vho-Mudzunga told me stories from his life. He pointed out a place where there was a *tshiavelo*, a space which marked (with stones) where bones of a deceased person were rested on the way to the Lake to be cremated. He remembered passing this spot as a adolescent when he would walk from Thononda to Mandala and knelt down there in respect. He recalled riding Netshiavha's grandfather's horse when he would visit Vho-Mudzunga's father in Thononda. They were apparently good friends.

At the Lake, Vho-Mudzunga chose a spot where *tshikona* would perform. "Netshiavha is going to cry. We are going to play on Tshiheni's side," he said. We walked a little distance down the eastern side of the Lake. There Vho-Mudzunga chose the place where he would swim: "I will have a bath in here. I like this place. The ladies will just sit here (pointed to some rocks). 'He can't come back,' the people will say. But nothing can happen." Vho-Mudzunga drank some water from the Lake. " I will not stay in for a long time. Just [enough] to show the people I am not scared."

Vho-Mudzunga asked me how Fundudzi compared in size to Lake Malawi and Lake Tanganyika. In his mind they were comparable in terms of size. I had to admit it was much smaller. Significantly, he was looking for an 'outside' reference to support Lake Fundudzi's significance and magnitude. He pointed to the other side of the Lake (western) and told me that one is not allowed to go to the side of the Lake which is *zwiponi*. If one did, one would not return. A *zwipo* is a burial place of royal ancestors who have died before the period of living memory. It is thus not associated with individual known ancestors.[12] A *zwipo* is said to have supernatural powers which protect its sanctity, for example stones may fall on people who get too close to it. Vho-Mudzunga and I talked about a sacrifice which is made at this *zwipo* by the priest Nemaungani.[13] There he pours *halwa* and "says something." Once he has done this. *tshikona* can be heard (from the Lake) but no dancers can be seen. I encountered this claim, that *tshikona* could be heard from the Lake, on many different occasions.

Ten days before the performance, j over a week since our awkward encounter with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha, Vho-Mudzunga was interviewed on Radio Thohoyandou. by the morning-show presenter Lufu Madima. Vho-Mudzunga initiated this interview. We went to Radio Thohoyandou a week earlier to set it up Vho-Mudzunga had been interviewed a few times before including prior to the Funeral Performance. Now he wanted to publicize the upcoming event.

Vho-Mudzunga introduced himself and reminded listeners that he was the one who had been on the radio before. He was the one, he said, who had referred to his drum (*ngoma)* as a coffin. He then informed them that there would be another function (*mushumo*) on the 28th September. The announcer asked him to clarify why he was again concentrating on culture (*sialala*) (Mudzunga had not yet mentioned culture) and then without really allowing him to answer the question, introduced him as follows:

> You are a carver (*muvhadi*). You were once here and you explained to us that you carved a *ngoma*. You have contact with people from overseas countries; you take your work to places like Johannesburg...Right now here in the studio you are with a white man whom I want to believe you work hand in hand with. Tell us, at this function of going to Fundudzi, what will be happening?

Vho-Mudzunga promised that "at Fundudzi, amazing events will be taking place." He explained that he would be inside his drum (*ngoma*) at the Lake. Vho-*Makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo would open the drum and he would come out and get into the waters of the Lake. He would wash and then return to the *ngoma* and change clothes inside it.

Now, in the original written invitation, Vho-Mudzunga wrote that *vhamusanda* Netshiavha would open the drum for him. Vho-Mudzunga often mentioned that he had offered Netshiavha a big and important role in the performance. One of my informants who helped organize Vho-Mudzunga's performances also confirmed that at first the idea was o ask Netshiavha to open the door of the drum. But, a second invitation was printed and in it Vho-Mudzunga replaced *vhamusanda* Netshiavha

with Vho-Mulondo (see below). This was after our awkward encounter with the *vhamusanda* at the Tshikombani roadhouse.

Madima then tackled the issue of the Lake's accessibility and its ownership. She asked Vho-Mudzunga to clarify why the Lake was out of bounds for ordinary people and why **she** could not enter the Lake. Vho-Mudzunga explained the connection between Lake Fundudzi and the "people of Tshiavha": "It is the Lake of the Tshiavha people," he said. But, he made sure to mention that the performance would not take place at the *zwipo* as this is not allowed at the sacred ritual space on the western side of the Lake. However, he added that he had "report[ed] (*suma*) this performance" and that he has done *u luvha* (paid tribute, homage) "and indicated that [he] would be coming (to the Lake). This report (*masumo*) was made to the "the Tshiavha ancestors because we are the Tshiavha people." So Vho-Mudzunga made it clear that he was not going to *zwiponi*, the ritual space where communicaton with ancestors takes place. From the interview, it is unclear if Vho-Mudzunga claimed that he had reported the event to *Vhamsuanda* Netshiavha but the announcer concluded that he indeed had (see below).

Madima, seemingly not satisfied with the Tshiavha's association with the Lake as explanation, insisted on knowing why she could not picnic or bathe at the Lake. Vho-Mudzunga replied that there were different areas of the Lake, it was quite big and there was a part where picnicking was allowed and other parts where it was not. This answer was still not enough to end the announcer's probing into the issue of access and prohibition around the Lake. She continued "That's clear and quite important but I want you to explain fully whether Lake Fundudzi is owned by someone or does it belong to the area...Why are people not allowed to go there just like you are going there, and wash?" Vho-Mudzunga said this would not be allowed in the same way as the content of initiation schools were not exposed to non-initiates. He thus set the Lake up as a cultural secret. But Madima persisted: "Who refuses people permission to go there?" "It is the ancestors (*vhadzimu*) of that place under the leadership of

Netshiavha," replied Vho-Mudzunga. Changing tack slightly, Madima then questioned my status vis-a-vis the Lake and its powers and prohibitions:

> **Madima**: Today as you are here with this white man, does it demonstrate that whites are never hesitant, they go anywhere they wish to? If he can go in there into Lake Fundudzi, where you say not just anybody can go, what would happen to him?
> **Mudzunga**: If he should go in there, he won't come back. He will never come back.

Vho-Mudzunga was asked by the announcer to convince people who were not from Tshiavha of the "value of the Lake to the Venda people," to show that it was not simply an ordinary river. Here Vho-Mudzunga explained about the way Mutale river flows and how geographically the Lake "is surrrounded by mountains" and "not supported by any soil. It is all by itself. All rivers end there." These answers seem to reflect his discussion with *makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo on top of Thosa Hill.

The announcer was apparently under the impression that Vho-Mudzunga had made the necessary arrangements with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. When she started to question Vho-Mudzunga about his own reasons for staging his performance, she summized: "You say there is this ceremony that you are going to perform which you have reported (*u suma*) at *Musanda* and that you been given permission to go ahead. What made you think of performing this ceremony at Tshiavha.?" Vho-Mudzunga's reply centered on his drum, and on the message he had received to take his drum to the Lake before it went into the art market:

> These things simply come to me. I even dream them. It's like this *ngoma* I am taking there [to the Lake]...I have been shown that now that I am planning to exhibit it in different countries, it would be wise to take it myself to Lake Fundudzi with me inside it and Vho-Makhadzi as the person who would open [it] for me.and do the right thing. And after that I can take it to wherever I wish to as expected for anexhibition.

Thus Vho-Mudzunga indicated that he had a personal mission to accomplish the Lake, before sending his drum away to another country. Later in the interview she

asked what he hoped to achieve through this performance, and this time he was more orientated toward the collective:

> **Mudzunga** :What I am fighting for is for the nation (*lushaka*) to remember our culture."
> **Madima** :The Netshiavha culture?"
> **Mudzunga** :No the culture of the whole nation."

At the end of the interview Madima returned to Lake Fundudzi and asked Vho-Mudzunga if people will be able to see him inside the Lake and if he is not scared that he too will disappear into the Lake: "I don't even think about death," replied Vho-Mudzunga.

A week later, three school boys arrived at Vho-Mudzunga's home. It was a public holiday (Heritage Day). They came by foot from Tshiheni, some ten kilometers away, to see Vho-Mudzunga. They had heard him on the radio. They told me they had come to see *madembe* - a miracle worker. The following day we were visiting members of Vho-Mudzunga's family in Mulaboni to remind them about the upcoming event. We started talking about the performance. Vho-Mudzunga laughed and said he was not going to do at the Lake what he had said on the radio. "Everyone is waiting to see what I said on the interview. You must play people to keep them coming."

On the same day as the Radio Thohoyandou interview my family came up from Johannesburg and spent an afternoon with Vho-Mudzunga at his home in Shanzha. Amongst various discussions and interactions, Vho-Mudzunga explained about Lake Fundudzi and its geological peculiarities, especially how water reappears bubbling up to the surface away from the Lake. I asked my father if he knew of any other natural lakes in the Republic of South Africa, when Vho-Mudzunga interjected, that "this one [Fundudzi] is funny. It is a funny story. I really can't understand it" and explained how water reappeared down below the Lake. At this point my brother began to explain to Vho-Mudzunga about water tables and underground rivers. Vho-Mudzunga showed his drum to my family. He also got into the drum, first asking if anyone believed he could fit in. He took off his shirt to look better in the photograph. He

said on the night before the Lake Performance he would sleep in the drum. He mentioned this in the radio interview too. Then he discussed the 'meaning' of the drum, described it as the body of a person (see chapter one), and claimed that his drums were unique.

A pattern began to emerge around 'everyday encounters' in the way Vho-Mudzunga would present himself and how he was received. A rather typical encounter was with a few labourers at the mill. We went there to buy fire-wood for cooking. Vho-Mudzunga asked the labourers if they knew or recognized him. At first they did not. He then told them that he was going to Lake Fundudzi with his drum and that he planned to swim in the Lake. The labourers questioned him about getting into the Lake and Vho-Mudzunga replied that he was from Tshiavha, and related to Netshiavha, and therefore he could do this without fear. The discussion was centered on the drum, as Vho-Mudzunga explained that he gets inside his drum and can even sleep in it if he wants. At this point, two things occurred. Firstly, one of the labourers made reference to *ngoma lungundu*. Secondly, another labourer from Tshikombani realized who Vho-Mudzunga was. He had heard of the man who gets inside a drum. Then I became the subject of conversation vis-a-vis the Lake. Some of the labourers warned that I should not swim in the Lake. Vho-Mudzunga proceeded to give a "history lesson" beginning with the arrival of whites in 1652 and how they destroyed black culture. Finally he mentioned that TV and people from overseas would be at his performance.

Vho-Mudzunga often opened a casual conversation by asking if the person knew him. He told me once that in three months time, he would be known everywhere around "here" (Nzhelele/the Venda region). If people did know him, or if they had heard of him, the point of recognition was usually when he explained that he gets inside his drum - *u dzhena ngoma*. This was a general point of fascination and discussion. Further, Vho-Mudzunga's drum drew many references to *ngoma lungundu* in everyday encounters. Often these references were explained to me as jokes.

Nonetheless, it is significant that Vho-Mudzunga's presentation of himself and his drum allowed cognitive associations between the 'mythical' drum of power - *ngoma lungundu* and Vho-Mudzunga's named drum - *sukalifhalale* (see below). For one, such association placed Vho-Mudzunga's drum within the various possible cultural metaphors of *ngoma*, and thus perhaps within a whole range of cultural meanings. Vho-Mudzunga denied his drum was *ngoma lungundu* because clearly it was not. Once though, when the young visitors from Tshiheni (see above) were at his home 'seeking miracles,' he showed them his drum and said "This is what we call *ngoma lungundu*...It was round like this one and as powerful as this very one." During the radio interview he alluded to his coffin (not coffin-drum) as being like *ngoma lungundu* because it may not touch the ground. The 'mythical' *ngoma lungundu* was prohibited from ever touching the ground. The coffin is a simple wooden hand-carved 'box' which Vho-Mudzunga made and kept at his home in a storage space above a room in his house (the 'office').

I heard the "history lesson" about European cultural imperialism a number of times . It usually pinpointed material corruption as the source of cultural destruction. Vho-Mudzunga once said "(black) people" make mistakes because they like to "get some sweets". On another occasion he said western culture gave "us" colddrinks, mirrors, and razors and took all "our" cows. Vho-Mudzunga would ask if he had been seen on TV and then divulge that TV would be at the Lake.

When Vho-Mudzunga spoke of his upcoming event and how different it would be from anything that had ever been before, he sometimes emphasised that no-one had ever taken *tshikona* to the Lake. This was acknowledged as unique by Netshiavha too, but for him it was transgressive, whereas for Vho-Mudzunga it was inspirational. He would be the first and this would be a great feat. Some days Vho-Mudzunga imagined how *tshikona* would sound coming from the valley and how everyone would hear them. As we drove around in Tshixwadza or Thononda, Vho-Mudzunga would mention that at this time of the day on the 28th everyone will be hearing *tshikona*.

assured Vho-Tshinakaho that "everything" would be under control and that four or five people from Tshilapfene would be at his place on the Friday before the function to see to the preparations. The morning of this discussion, Vho-Mudzunga had held lengthy discussions with some representatives from the Philiyamavu/Tshilapfene *tshikona* and the people he refered to above were members of the *tshikona*. In preparing for this performance, Vho-Mudzunga was at the same time preparing for a wedding/marriagewhich involved an alliance with Tshilapfene and their *tshikona*. In the above meeting it was subtly suggested that the preparations were of a religious or 'magical' nature and would afford Vho-Mudzunga protection from anyone who may want to thwart his plans.

I dropped Vho-Mudzunga at Vho-Tshinakaho's on the designated day to make "preparations". He asked me not to tell anyone at home where he was and thought that his mother would want to know. In fact when he first told me that one of the participants at the Lake would be his prospective wife from Tshilapfene, he indicated that he did not really want me to know this. When I returned to Shanzha after dropping Vho-Mudzunga, his first wife. Vho-Tshinakaho questioned me about Vho-Mudzunga's whereabouts. *A thi divhi* - I don't know, I said.

Clearly, the Lake Performance and the *tshikona*'s participation, were involved in Vho-Mudzunga's negotiations for a wife from Tshilapfene. Mudzunga guarded his relationship with this *tshikona* group very carefully. For example, he made sure to attend a number of their other functions. I thus had the oppoprtunity of meeting the group before the event of the 28th when Vho-Mudzunga went to watch them perform at the launch of Radio Phala-phala in Louis Trichardt. I met him there and interviewed the leader (*malungwane*) of the Philiyamavu *tshikona*, Vho-Matada. According to him in this interview, if the *tshikona* did not play for Vho-Mudzunga at Lake Fundudzi, "something will trouble Samson." If Vho-Mudzunga did not bring *tshikona* before his gods then he will have trouble.

A few representatives from the Philiyamavu *tshikona* arrived a few days before the event to plan the performance and to "tune" the drum. They discussed withVho-Mudzunga which children they would bring to be part of the 'drama' and how they would be dressed. How the food was to be prepared was also discussed and it was decided to 'braai' the meat as this was a more traditional method of cooking. Then Vho-Mudzunga demonstrated the sound of the drum. He also gave a demonstration of his 'feat.' He asked if they thought he could fit in the drum and then he slid inside it.

The *tshikona* representatives asked Vho-Mudzunga about Netshiavha. He replied that he had informed Netshiavha and had given him the important role of opening the "ceremony". But now Vho-Mudzunga felt that Netshiavha kept 'messing him around' and therefore, he had decided to cut him out. "He thinks he is being deprived of his chieftainship," he noted. One of the representatives said he would speak to him but Vho-Mudzunga said he did not need him any longer. Later I learnt that Netshiavha and the Philiyamavu *tshikona* did not enjoy good relations either. Members of the *tshikona* claimed that Netshiavha did not like them, because they always won the *tshikona* competition, and beat the group from Khakhu which Netshiavha supported. Tshiavha itself could not raise a *tshikona*. We saw in the last chapter that *tshikona* can be a symbol of power and of relative support. The concern about Netshiavha indicated the connection between authority and *tshikona*. Tshilapfene, the home village of the *tshikona* group, had no *vhamusanda* at the time of this performance and was involved in a succession dispute. Thus there was no clear leader that Vho-Mudzunga had to contend with at Tshilapfene (see Chapter One).

Generally however, Vho-Mudzunga's lineage (from Netshiavha), was what was said to protect him from the dangers of the Lake (not *tshikona*). He stated this in the discussion with the labourers at the mill (above). An elderly women (Muofhe 'Leah' Mafunisa: Dopeni) told me Vho-Mudzunga was going to Lake Fundudzi because he was close to his ancestors. Vho-Elisa, a relative to Vho-Munzhedzi, said if Vho-

Mudzunga was not from Tshiavha his performance at Lake Fundudzi would be dangerous to him. If he was not from Tshiavha, and entered the Lake, the ancestors (*vhadzimu*) would cut off his head. This was repeated by Vho-Makhomu's wife. His wife warned me not to get into the Lake or I would never return. However, she claimed that Vho-Mudzunga could get inside because he is Tshiavha royalty. Vho-Makhomu is also part of the royal family of Tshiavha, and was given the task of speaking about the Lake at the performance. We visited him at his home a few days before the event, to ensure his participation.

Three days before the event, Vho-Mudzunga stopped drinking tea and *mabundu*. He only drank water in preparation for the performance. He also prepared a road sign which read "*Sukalifhalale Fundudzi*" with an arrow, and painted the same thing on a white T-shirt with green paint. Initially I observed that he called his drum *Sukalifhalale*, but by the end of my fieldwork, his 'project' was termed *Sukalifhalale*. Above the *tshitanga* was an old sign which read "*Sukalifhalale* R2". He once kept his drum-coffin in the *tshitanga* and charged visitors R2 to see it. I met an artist in Johannesburg, who took a group to see Vho-Mudzunga and they payed R2 to see the drum. I never got a clear explanation of the term *Sukalifhalale*. Vho-Mudzunga always told me that it "means many things." I was told that it meant to break out or overflow and found one more animated translation in the same vein: "You that strike and everything scatters." Vho-Mudzunga once explained it as "to run away." If someone in the village dies and people come and start accusing witches and things like that, then the people run away, "this is *Sukalifhalale*". But Van Warmelo (1989) listed it as meaning "intriguer" and this is perhaps the most intriguing of all possibilities. In driving rain and streaking lightening, we erected the sign indicating the way to Fundudzi off the main Thohoyandou-Wyllie's Poort road.

Vho-Mudzunga and I went to Vho-Netshiomvani three days before the performance to finalize the programme, write it out and print it. Vho-Netshiomvani had been the Master of Ceremonies at the Funeral Performance. Vho-Mudzunga had asked him to

He would later play a role in the developing conflict between Vho-Mudzunga and Vho-Netshiavha. During his radio interview, Vho-Mudzunga had said that he would not provide transport to the Lake and justified this by arguing that people used their own transport to get to soccer games.

The day following this visit, we stopped once more at Siloam to make a phone call. I assume now that this was to the government offices in Louis Trichardt and Vho-Mudzunga was still concerned about getting their support and help with transportation.

Early on Friday morning the 27th of September, the day before the function, I was woken up by two male voices arguing in the house. Since I was the only other male in Vho-Mudzunga's household, I was naturally curious as to what the commotion was about. I scrambled out of bed and came around to the house just as *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's bakkie was leaving Vho-Mudzunga's residence. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha had woken up Vho-Mudzunga and demanded that Vho-Mudzunga postpone the performance to a later date. He said Vho-Mudzunga had failed to come to him as we had arranged the day of our awkward encounter at Tshikombani and thus had not organized with him in the proper manner.

Above I recalled the meeting Vho-Mudzunga and I had set up with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. This was the initial encounter which made me aware of this conflict as it greatly disturbed Vho-Mudzunga. After this encounter, Vho-Mudzunga had clearly indicated to me that he did not want to go to Tshiavha with me as per our arrangement. I decided to align myself with Vho-Mudzunga during this period of my fieldwork and thus I did not to go to Tshiavha at this stage either. As it happened I had to be back in Johannesburg on the pre-arranged date.

Vho-Mudzunga had said he had actually met with Netshiavha prior to the beginning of my fieldwork period and had informed him about his plans for the Lake Performance.

Vho-Mudzunga claimed that at first "he (Netshiavha) was so proud" about his work. But then he got the feeling that Netshiavha wanted something from him, like money. He objected to this and pointed to his cousin and family elder Vho-Netshidaulu as a counter example. Netshidaulu was going to help Vho-Mudzunga with drinks and meat.[17] Vho-Mudzunga felt that as headman, Netshiavha should help him with the performance and not expect something from him. In fact, I had learnt earlier that they had indeed met. My informant believed that Netshiavha wanted money and was of the opinion that if the amount was not unreasonable, Vho-Mudzunga should have paid him. The informant was unclear as to the exact details of this intial meeting between Vho-Mudzunga and *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. It was probably at this meeting that Vho-Mudzunga offered Netshiavha to open the door of the drum, thus opening the 'ceremony.'

After this confrontation at the house, Vho-Mudzunga was anxious to get to Thohoyandou to see a lawyer called Ace Ndou. We skipped breakfast and headed for Thohoyandou. First we went to find Vho-Mabannda. Vho-Mabannda was a friend of Vho-Mudzunga. He was a school principal at Tshirogoni Secondary School in Dopeni. He also owned a video camera and recorded Vho-Mudzunga's performances for him. In the car Vho-Mudzunga made his first remarks to me about the confrontation:

> People are so jealous because I am staying with a white person. They are all so jealous. White people must [will] come if you work hard. If you do nothing, they can't come. If you know nothing people cannot come and see you.

On the way to Vho-Mabannda, Vho-Mudzunga related to me what had occurred:

> He arrived here [home]...You know what he said to me? OK, because now [the function] is very near and we didn't sit down and sort it out, it's better to stop it and make a plan for next time. I said 'What! What!' I was so cross, Jesus! Straight I told him 'You are too jealous,[18] I know you.' He said we must sit down and sort it out and tell his people in Tshiavha and that I should change the date. What for? Who is spending? It is my own, [Netshiavha] asked why we did not come to him. I said we didn't get a chance. He said now it was too

> late and that I can't go to Fundudzi. I said why? He said because we have not arranged properly. I said, oh, you are too late, my dear.

Vho-Mudzunga was not threatened by the confrontation. He said it did not present a big problem. In fact to him "it is nothing" because he had not asked *vhamusanda* Netshiavha for any money. "If I had [asked for money] then it would be something," he said. He asserted that it was his own money that he was using to finance the event and that he already spent a lot going "up and down" organizing. After what Netshiavha had done that morning, he swore (again) never to return to Tshiavha and that never again would he respect *vhamusanda* Netshiavha or his friend, the Shanzha headman Shavhani. Here Vho-Mudzunga rejected the authority of *vhamusanda* Shavhani, the headman of the village in which he lived Shanzha, and *vhamusanda* Netshiavha the headman of Tshiavha.

Vhamusanda Netshiavha told Vho-Mudzunga that he had heard on the radio that Vho-Mudzunga was going to Lake Fundudzi. This amused Vho-Mudzunga who commented "Did he want me to report to him that I was to be interviewed? I should report that?" At this point I queried, "What about the *vhadzimu* in the Lake?" "The *vhadzimu* are too far from where we are going to play. If it was night people would be afraid, but not during the day," he replied.

The principal, Vho-Mabannda gave Vho-Mudzunga assurance. According to Vho-Mudzunga he said Netshiavha was mad. Of course, Vho-Mudzunga agreed with this evaluation and used the following analogy, that stressed financial independence, to explain the 'insanity' of the *vhamusanda*'s actions: If I chose to fly somewhere instead of driving, and if I used my own money for the flight, could someone tell me that I should drive?

After visiting Mabannda we went to Thohoyandou. On the way there, Vho-Mudzunga revealed to me that he was advised not to go to report to Netshiavha that he was going to the Lake because he would be wasting his time going to see 'a man like

Netshiavha.' His advisor had said that a lot of people go to the Lake. Some go for braais and white people go there too. But Vho-Mudzunga chose to inform *vhamusanda* Netshiavha because he was a relative and it would not be right not to inform him about an event like this. Vho-Mudzunga claimed that he even invited Netshiavha to his birthday party (see Chapter Three) and to the Funeral Performance but he did not come, because he was too jealous. "Why do you think he is jealous?" I asked. He answered:

> *Lu ri, vha kho nita khosi.* Maybe [he thinks] I make like a headman. It means, maybe I make the headman by myself because I organize the people and they come to me and eat and what what. Now they [are] jealous. This man is like the headman...and the *tshikona* people just come.

Vho-Mudzunga recognized that his actions may have resembled chiefly authority, at least from *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's perspective. In Thohoyandou we met representatives from the government office in Louis Trichardt. They had already seen *vhamusanda* Netshiavha who told them that he had cancelled Vho-Mudzunga's event. Netshiavha was apparently quite astonished that graders had been sent to fix the road to Fundudzi. Vho-Mudzunga said to me that he told them that he was going to the Lake in any case and they could come if they wanted. We went to the Ditike Craft Centre and informed the artists Richard Mangoma and Hendrik Mudau of what had occurred. We left Thohoyandou without seeing the lawyer.

On our way back to Nzhelele, we passed *vhamusanda* Netshiavha on the road. Vho-Mudzunga waved at him dismissively. We drove straight to the shop of the family elder, Vho-Netshidaulu, in Makhado. Vho-Mudzunga wanted to see if he was going to give him his truck for transport (thinking perhaps that he had just lost the government's support). We stopped at the tailor Peter Madavha, and paid him for Vho-Mudzunga's uniform which Peter had sewn especially for the function. Vho-Mudzunga had specially ordered a shirt and short pants from *mvenda* material. His major concern when discussing the design with the tailor was that the suit should look good on TV. He was very happy with the look.

After ordering bread for the *tshikona* at the bakery in Shanzha, we bumped into Vho-Johanna Siphugu. At this stage I did not know who she was. Vho-Mudzunga had included her on the programme and thus mentioned her during the meeting with the masters of ceremonies, Vho-Netshiomvani. Nobody else however seemed to know who she was, including his wives, friends and relatives. It seemed I was not the only one curious about her identity. At the performance itself, some people even asked me who she was. She was an important 'co-conspirator' with Vho-Mudzunga. Later on Friday night she helped plan the next day's drama and then participated in it. She was the only woman who spoke at the function and was adept at manouvering within the 'culture of the day' - through dress, action and speech. She appeared to be well versed in 'local culture.' However, Vho-Siphugu was from Tshiawelo, Soweto, and arrived specifically for the function, and left for Johannesburg right after it. She told me she was a community health worker there. Apparently she told other people that she was a school teacher. In many ways, Vho-Siphugu was a 'mysterious' insider/outsider.

We dropped Vho-Siphugu at Vho-Mudzunga's home and then went down to Siloam to phone the government offices about transport. Shortly after we returned, a film crew arrived to greet Vho-Mudzunga and to prepare to film him the following day. The crew was an independent production team who were hoping to make a documentary profiling various "Venda artists." Vho-Mudzunga was one of three artists, the others being Jackson Hlungwane and Noria Mabasa.[19]

I left Vho-Mudzunga's home to fetch two friends who were arriving to help me on the day of the performance with a survey and a video. By the time I returned to Vho-Mudzunga's home it was eight o'clock. The household usually went to sleep around this time. Now however there was great activity. Vho-Mudzunga's wives, Vho-Tshinakaho and Vho-Frieda were awake. Vho-Mudzunga's elder brother's second wife, Vho-Matamela, had arrived with her grandchild from Thononda. The

'mysterious' Vho-Siphugu was also at home and the advanced guard of the *tshikona* dancers had arrived. Representatives from the regional government were in discussion with Vho-Mudzunga.

The government representatives had arrived to mediate what for them had become a difficult situation. When they had agreed to support Vho-Mudzunga and his performance, they assumed that *vhamusanda* Netshiavha was also supportive of the function. It seems that the first they knew of any potential conflict was that Friday morning, when Netshiavha informed them he had cancelled the event. He had expressed surprise at their support and was especially astonished by the graders which had repaired the road to Fundudzi. They now faced a situation where their support of Vho-Mudzunga could put them in conflict with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. This was in the context of a difficult relationship which already existed between regional (and local) government and 'traditional' leaders, where in the two parties often found themselves at odds. They came then to try and resolve this conflict because as government they did not want to take sides and get "caught in the crossfire." According to them, before they left that night and after what they described as tough negotiations with Vho-Mudzunga, he agreed to send a family representative (an elder) to Tshiavha in the morning before the event, to inform formally *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. Apparently he said they would go to Tshiavha with a goat. When the goverment representatives left, they believed the 'crisis' had been resolved.

By ten o'clock the household was still awake and active. Vho-Mudzunga, his mother Vho-Munzhedzi, his brothers first wife Vho-Denga, her late son's wife Vho-Ivy, Vho-Frieda, Vho-Matamela and Vho-Siphugu w[illegible] gathered in the dining room of the house. Vho-Ivy's youngest daughter Funanani was still awake and with the adults in the dining room. My friend, who had come from Johannesburg for the performance, and I completed the 'party'. Around the back of the house, the *tshikona* representatives were starting to cook. The women had been coaching four young girls

to *u losha* in the proper manner.[20] When my friend and I entered the dining room, the girls were ushered out of the bedroom and into the dining room to demonstrate their *u losha* skills. They performed *u losha* for us and their postures were corrected by the various women. Vho-Mudzunga made reference earlier in the day that Vho-Matamela would hold "night-school" and I assumed this is what he meant. Vho-Mudzunga was very fond of *u losha* and called it "Venda style." He would often demand of girls or women that they *u losha* when, for example, he entered their home. I seldom, if ever saw him enforce/request this at his home, though Vho-Tshinakaho would approach him on her knees if she required something from him. He usually insisted on *u losha* in other people's homes, when we were out organizing. *Losha* was a major feature of all his "dramas" and part of what he called real traditional Venda culture. He had also carved *u losha* figures.

Vho-Mudzunga summonsed us out of the dining room to observe something in the 'pool' In a bowl which he had carved, but which used to lie around in his garage unused and not displayed, he had put two pieces of meat. On top of the meat he placed a few honey combs. He then lit the meat and the honey and placed the burning bowl into the 'pool.' We watched casually, each one of us, I think, not quite knowing what to make of the burning bowl afloat on the 'pool.' The bowl remained in the pool until its contents had burned out. In the morning, Vho-Mudzunga placed the half burnt-out bowl, above the *tshitanga* from where it looked over the performance area and joined other artefacts on display. (These other artefacts were all throw-away objects.)

Vho-Mudzunga had bought the honey from a priest and bee-keeper in Thononda. We ordered the honey ten days before the event. Coincidentally (or not?) we made the trip to the beekeeper the day after I returned to Shanzha from my first trip to Johannesburg. That morning (after my return), Vho-Mudzunga showed me a hive of bees in his 'yard' which he said "arrived with me." This was a sign of good luck his mother had told him. He interpreted the bees' visit to mean that what he was going to

do on the 28th would be a great thing. If you dream of bees, he said, you are very lucky, it means that the path to success is open. "Today I am happy."

A week later, Vho-Mudzunga said he had dreamed that *zwidzimu zwa nga zwi kho nyaga u thabelo* - "my ancestral spirits want a prayer." "You will see fire in the Lake on that day because god must get something from the fire there," he exclaimed. He planned to burn some "nice meat" right there in the water of the Lake. This is what he had been told in his dream that night.

No meat was burned at the Lake. Instead it seems, just like for the Funeral Performance, Vho-Mudzunga's 'pool' became a metaphorical Fundudzi, and the 'sacrifice' was performed at home the night before the event.

When I retired to bed in the early hours of Saturday morning, Vho-Mudzunga Vho-Johanna, Vho-Frieda, Vho-Matamela and Vho-Tshinakaho were still in the dining room talking. Vho-Mudzunga did not plan to sleep that night. The *tshikona* representatives were cooking and planned to cook through the night.

In the morning at around sever o'clock I was asked to go with Vho-Denga to give the *vhamusanda* his *musumo* of *halwa*. *Hulwa* (maize beer) constituted an important element in the preparations for the function and was of course a major part of the function itself. The brewing process had started the week before and involved most of the women of both Vho-Mudzunga and his brother's households (Vho-Tshinakaho, Vho-Denga, Vho-Ivy, Vho-Mushoni). The *musumo* was the portion sent to the *vhamusanda* to inform him that *halwa* had been brewed and a function was taking place. In effect this is a recognition of authority. Van Warmelo (1989) defined *musumo* as "a portion sent to superior, relative or friend, sent to "inform" him of the fact. The *vhamusanda* was neither a relative nor a friend. This was then a tacit recognition of authority despite Vho-Mudzunga's insistence the day before that he would "cheek" Shavhani.

The performance at home commenced at around eleven o'clock in the morning. There were relatively few people present at this stage. However many of the major 'players' had already arrived. Vho-Mabannda, the principal, was there with his video camera. The documentary film crew was present too. The MC Vho-Netshiomvani had arrived along with the 'family elder' Vho-David Netshidaulu. Richard Mangoma and Hendrik Mudau, both artists and both included on the programme, came with Avhashoni Mainganye, the well-known sculptor and painter. Just before the commencement of the performance, a contingent from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism arrived in a 'bakkie' and two four-by-four vehicles. Vho-Mudzunga informed me that they had agreed to transport the drum to the Lake for him. They arrived with members of the Environmental Education Office from Pietersburg and with their respective families. Of course, the Philiyamavu *tshikona* dancers were also there in full force.

In this first part of the performance at his home, Vho-Mudzunga got inside his drum dressed in blue short pants and the white t-shirt with "Sukhalifhalale Fundudzi" painted on it, and emerged in the *mvende* outfit which he had had specially made for the day. The performance then ended and Vho-Mudzunga announced we were going to the Lake. People piled into any available transport. The drum was loaded onto the back of the government bakkie.

As we were approaching the final stretch of road down to the Lake, we suddenly came up behind a row of stationary vehicles and a large crowd of people milling around the cars. More people were streaming down the valley towards the Lake. The road to the Lake had been blocked by *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's bakkie and by a large truck which was parked across the road so that no other vehicle could get past and down to the Lake.

The first car to arrive at the 'blockade' was the government vehicle which was carrying the drum. The car was driven by a government representative. Alongside him in the car was Vho-Mudzunga and behind in the bakkie were the artists Richard Mangoma and Hendrik Mudau. At this stage, *vhamusanda* Netshiavha and three other men were sitting around a small fire waiting for them to arrive. There are conflicting reports as to what exactly occurred as Vho-Mudzunga encountered this blockade and saw *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. Netshiavha and others claimed that Vho-Mudzunga spoke harshly to him and insulted him, whilst other witnesses said that Vho-Mudzunga got out of the car and stood behind the government vehicle without confronting the *vhamusanda.* One of the government representatives claimed he advised Vho-Mudzunga to keep his distance and to remain qu... One of Netshiavha's men apparently exclaimed that 'they have come with government vehicles.' Another of Netshiavha's party had a camera and photographed the government vehicle. Richard Mangoma then apparently threatened that he would forcibly remove the bakkie. He had not yet noticed the truck further down the road. Netshiavha's men challenged him to try The government representative in the lead car felt that the confrontation could get violent and as government representative, he would be held responsible. He consulted with his colleagues and they decided to intervene. Immediately they called Vho-Mudzunga aside to ask what had happened. The government representatives were alarmed that nobody had arrived at Tshiavha in the morning to make proper arrangements and receive *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's permission, as they had agreed on Friday night with Vho-Mudzunga. Vho-Mudzunga said that the elders had arrived too late and in any case *vhamusanda* Netshiavha was just jealous. They told him that had they known that no-one had gone Tshiavha, they would not have come to the Lake.

Four government officials then approached *vhamusanda* Netshiavha and asked to speak with him alone away from the crowd. The crowd were uttering "ugly" and threatening things at *vhamusanda* Netshiavha and they felt that they had to remove him from that context in order to negotiate successfully. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha

himself claimed that he kept his distance so as to maintain control over whomever wanted to approach him. That is, he reasoned that once someone approached him, they were already to a some extent under his control. They inquired what his complaint was and how it could be solved. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha did not want the people to proceed as Vho-Mudzunga had not made proper arrangements with him, nor followed the formal procedures with regards going to the Lake. He stressed that there are formal procedures or rituals which the family must follow before coming to the Lake. Netshiavha told them that Vho-Mudzunga, as a member of the family, knew very well the kinds of procedures that had to be followed. He expressed the opinion that Vho-Mudzunga seemed to be regarding him as being younger than Vho-Mudzunga himself and did not want to recognize his 'headmanship.' (In fact during their Friday meeting, Vho-Mudzunga had said to the government representatives that Netshiavha was just a boy.) As a member of the royal family he knew what must be done. Had an elder (person) arrived even that morning, he would not be blocking the road. Later Netshiavha explained his position regards Vho-Mudzunga's initiative:

> To be honest I did indicate to [Vho-Mudzunga] that I am not against them doing things in public...I am against the idea of doing things whilst the people who matter (*lushaka*) know nothing about such things...If this person (Vho-Mudzunga) had such a dream, he ought to have told one of the relatives or he could have told me as head of the family (*lushaka*) and I would set a day and invite three old men and three old women...we would sit around and discuss this dream. It would be six or more heads together.

The "government negotiators" sympathised with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha but then pointed out to him that there were many people coming to the Lake and it was not their fault that Vho-Mudzunga had failed to make proper arrangements. It would be difficult to stop the people from proceeding they argued. (A head count of the crowd numbered over eight hundred people.) At one point the crowd was requested to move back behind the *vhamusanda*'s vehicle, thus creating more space between the crowd and Netshiavha. As the negotiations progressed, some members of the crowd said they would use force to go to the Lake if the negotiations failed. They were angered by *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's actions and condemned him for thinking he owned the

Lake. The Lake was created by God, they argued, and did not belong to him. Some members of the crowd called him crazy and said he was off his *kop*. Netshiavha said later that he too was prepared to use force and that he had positioned people with guns in case of violence. The representatives apologized to *vhamusanda* Netshiavha on Vho-Mudzunga's behalf. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha asked them to go check with Vho-Mudzunga and said he would allow the people through if Vho-Mudzunga apologized and promised to follow the correct procedures.

The 'government negotiators' then returned to Vho-Mudzunga and 'his advisors' which included Vho-Mudzunga's friends, the artists Richard Mangoma, Hendrik Mudau and a member of the *tshikona* group. They advised him to apologize to the *vhamusanda*. Vho-Mudzunga said he would follow the procedures, do the rituals, after going to the Lake, but that he would not promise this in front of government officials but only in front of his elders. Vho-Mudzunga chose Vho-Makhomu and Vho-Netshiadaulu to communicate this on his behalf. Vho-Makhomu was a relative to Vho-Mudzunga. It was difficult to determine from Vho-Mudzunga if he indeed apologized to Netshiavha through these representatives or simply agreed to follow a ritual procedure with his family. Netshiavha certainly expected that a ritual would be performed along with Vho-Mudzunga, Vho-Makhomu, Vho-Netshidaulu and himself, as part of an agreement reached at the Lake. This involved the slaughtering of a sheep at Tshiavha, because the family's privacy had been disturbed (*ro dzheneliwa*). Further, it is general practice to pay a penalty to a chief or headman as part of an apology. The government representatives thought that an apology definitely implied a monetary fine that Vho-Mudzunga would pay *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. During the negotiations, *vhamusanda* Netshiavha commented that he did not know how much would satisfy the gods.

Vho-Netshidaulu and Vho-Makhomu crossed over to *vhamusanda* Netshiavha and spoke with him. *Vhamusanda* said he was glad about that agreement and that the two old men were to be responsible for carrying out what Vho-Mudzunga had said.

Finally, *vhamusanda* Netshiavha agreed to let the function proceed to the Lake, but insisted that Vho-Mudzunga would have to come to him so that he could show him/tell him that he could proceed. Vho-Mudzunga came over to the *vhamusanda* and was told by him that what he had done by not following the correct procedure did not only wrong the *vhamusanda* but indeed, he had also wronged the very ancestors which he said he was going to meet at the Lake. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha asserted that the Tshiavha clan does not allow one to be angry with another person and the conflict between Vho-Mudzunga and himself caused the ancestral apirits to be angered.

The *vhamusanda* did not want to join the event at the Lake but was convinced to participate by the elders and the government representatives. He agreed provided he could speak at the Lake as the leader of the Tshiavha people and the one responsible for the Lake. The 'elder' Vho-Makhomu moved Netshiavha's bakkie, and insisted that Vho-Mudzunga and Netshiavha got in the bakkie together and drove to the Lake.

Interestingly, when I spoke with Vho-Netshidaulu the next day, he claimed that it was he who had solved the crisis. Until his intervention he said no-one was getting anywhere. Only once he arrived and interceded in the negotiations, were things solved.

The feeling amongst the crowd now was jubilant and triumphant. The truck carrying the *tshikona* was crowded to capacity by people singing and chanting their way to the Lake. There was a palpable excitement amongst the crowd.

At the Lake, the second part of the programme began. This was made up of three main elements - speeches, *tshikona* dancing and Vho-Mudzunga's "drama." The most significant speech in the context of the conflict was *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's. It was a short speech, but mostly remembered by Vho-Mudzunga and many others for the following statement:

> Vho-Mudzunga has done something very great which one can feel proud of. [Most] of you arrive here [at the Lake] for the first time. Maybe it could be the last time. What I can say to you all here [is that] Vho-Mudzunga is going to be forgiven by the gods who are [in] the Lake...Vho-Mudzunga...that is what I can say.

The speech quoted above was interpreted by various people, including the artist, Richard Mangoma, and the government representatives, as a warning that the gods would exact forgiveness, that this may be Vho-Mudzunga's last appearance at the Lake, that the penalty that the gods may ask for the contravention of Tshiavha procedure and ritual, wasVho-Mudzunga himself.

The drama was (in narrative sense) quite a simple affair. Vho-Mudzunga got into the drum (the crowd rushed forward to get a better view) still wearing his *nwenda* outfit and emerged again in his blue shorts and white T-shirt. All the while *tshikona* were playing. He then marched to the sight on the shore of the Lake which he had earmarked on our preparatory trip as the place at which he would "bath." He was followed by girls dressed as "*vhatei vha vhusha*" who assumed the modest bent-over posture particular to these initiates. The crowd was asked to watch from a distance, but they charged forward, over the mountain and followed Vho-Mudzunga, streaming over the landscape. Some even ran to the other side of the Lake to try and get a good view of Vho-Mudzunga's feat. Vho-Mudzunga stopped at the pre-planned spot. There he took a wooden ladle (*khavho*) and spooned water from the Lake into a drinking vessel (*phaphana*) which he had carved for the occasion. He asked the assembled crowd to count the number of ladles which filled the *phaphana*. He did this as if this number was of some significance. The crowd (mostly teenagers and women) counted with him. When it was full he said "This water is from Lake Fundudzi. I live by this water. None of you knows this. This is the water that strengthens and protects me...I have to drink this and finish this whole *phaphana*." He then drank the water down in one go. Having finnished the water he said: "Now we go back" and began to walk back to the performance area. The crowd moaned their opposition. He stopped and asked the crowd "Who wants to swim?...Do you want me to go in?

How much (money) do you have? Do you expect me to use the powers invested upon me by God as some kind of silly demonstration?...Now do you want me to get into the water?" The crowd replied "yes" Vho-Mudzunga replied to them: "The water which I went into, I drank it, it is all in my stomach." With that he marched back to the area where the *tshikona* had remained and where the first stage of the "drama" took place. The reaction from the crowd was one of bitter disappointment. "This is madness," they shouted. A teenager in matric from Khakhu Secondary School accosted me and expressed his disappointment:

> Today we expected miracles, but nothing has happened. He drank the water, but that doesn't matter...We expected something rare, but nothing has happened.

Indeed the next day, the question most frequently asked of me by those who could not attend was : "Did he swim?" Vho-Mudzunga apparently was intimidated at least from entering the Lake. Besides the threats in his speech quoted above, Netshiavha was overheard, during the negotiations, remarking that Vho-Mudzunga would not return from the Lake. The government representatives believed that one could easily assume from the things *vhamusanda* Netshiavha was saying that he was strongly suggesting that if Vho-Mudzunga got into the Lake he would not return - those responsible for the Lake were not satisfied and this endangered Vho-Mudzunga's bath. Vho-Mudzunga said to me after the event that he had to change everything at the Lake because of what Netshiavha did. I believe he was scared of the repercussions of his conflict.

As the performance ended and the crowds began to leave, the truck carrying the *tshikona* dancers got stuck in the mud and could not leave the Lake. It was getting dark and everyone else left. Vho-Mudzunga had to hire a tractor from Thononda to pull them out of the mud. They arrived back at Shanzha very late and very tired. I was to hear later from Netshiavha and others that this was the work of the *vhadzimu* who were indicating their disapproval for Vho-Mudzunga's behaviour and for "the disruption of their privacy".

> That's the reason why even the truck remained out there because ever since I was born or since I've been living here there has never been *tshikona* that has ever danced there (the Lake).

But back at Shanzha at Vho-Mudzunga's home, Hendrik Mudau said that the event had been a big success. "Why?" I asked. "Because many people had ventured to the Lake that day and everyone returned alive," he answered.

POWER AND POSITIONS

In this chapter, the local is reconceptualized from a perspective of boundaries and borders rather than from an introverted and centralized standpoint. Contestation signified both individual agency and a social complexity which cannot easily be subsumed into a social, cultural or traditional whole. By tracing lines of contestation we can identify competing interpretations (and thus meanings) of Vho-Mudzunga's actions, and pinpoint and name the various discourses and practices within which Vho-Mudzunga acted. The story thus illustrates the logics of power and authority in this region of South Africa and also the possibilities and limits of innovative intervention therein.

These logics articulated around the quintessential pool in the Venda region, *dzivha Fundudzi*, Lake Fundudzi. The Lake was the focus of Vho-Mudzunga's creative energies in an attempt to usurp its legendary powers. In the process, the Lake and Vho-Mudzunga's *ngoma*, were embroiled in negotiations between various authorities and symbols of power. The centrality of the pool and notions of power, once again, tempts me to play with the concept of Vho-Mudzunga's re-invention (see Chapter One). But here, the pool metaphor points to the difference between the play of the Funeral Performance and Vho-Mudzunga's action at the Lake, and is, as such, an important first step in discussing the conflict.

A colleague working in the Venda region and a friend of Vho-Mudzunga suggested that the Lake Performance was in fact the second stage of the Funeral Performance. In effect, according to this hypothesis, the Lake Performance was simply a further dramatization of the cremation practices of the Tshiavha clan. I found little evidence that a cremation rite was the direct and clear organizing metaphor for Vho-Mudzunga's performance at the Lake.[21] Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Vho-Mudzunga was attracted by the power of the Lake and wanted some of that power for himself. He claimed that he was prepared to risk his own death to get this power. Vho-Mudzunga himself thus linked power and death in this performance. In effect, he set up a form of resurrection - he would return, empowered, from the clutches of death. If we accept that he had been 'buried' a few months before, we see how at the Lake, he was to be re-born out of the pool, the source of creation (and, in this case, creativity). Thinking through this performance with a death metaphor in mind leads to images of re-birthing and the creative seizure of power. Death and re-birth are of course common themes in rituals of chieftancy and kingship in southern Africa (e.g. Swazi *Ncwala*).

In both the Funeral Performance and the Lake Performance, Vho-Mudzunga 'tempted' death - by pretending to be dead and by entering the Lake - but the events were set up differently. The Funeral Performance was set up as a re-construction, a drama, about death. In this case other people interpreted Vho-Mudzunga's actions as challenging fate - he might bring an omen of death on his family. Death was present at the Lake Performance, not as a metaphorical ritual activity (a 'burial'), but as a heroic test to the identity of Vho-Mudzunga. The Lake Performance was an explicit confrontation with fate. Vho-Mudzunga openly expressed a challenge to himself and his gods ("If I am one of them..."). He himself put danger on the agenda ("Something awful will occur...").

Between the Funeral Performance and the Lake Performance, Vho-Mudzunga had clearly 'upped the stakes.' At the Funeral Performance he made a symbolic reference to cremation by jumping into a symbolic Lake Fundudzi. His 'death' remained symbolic, as did the Lake - these actions were safely confined to 'play'. At the Lake Performance of course, his death became imminently real. This was no longer play - it no longer involved imitations of signifiers. The Lake was the Lake, Vho-Mudzunga was himself. The protective garment of enactment no longer fitted the actions of the man.

At this point, when play was no longer confined to a protected space ñ enactment within the confines of a private home - but became part of uncertain everyday politics, *vhamusanda* Netshiavha felt his authority threatened. He acted to limit the imaginative use of the foundations of his authority. Vho-Mudzunga commented that perhaps *vhamusanda* Netshiavha thought Vho-Mudzunga was acting like a headman. Until that moment at the Lake, the 'props' of the man 'acting' as headman, like the *tshikona* and the drums, remained reasonably encapsulated by enactment. When conflict did ensue, it was fed by all the material and symbolic actions accumulated by Vho-Mudzunga until that moment:

Throughout the story of conflict, Vho-Mudzunga accessed three forms of power. The first, already discussed above, was the power of transgression. This is the act of an individual, based in successful heroic exploits, that carves out new mythologies about himself and the world.

Secondly, Vho-Mudzunga's project was embedded in places, stories and beliefs particular to the far northern region of the South African state. Some of the important symbols, spaces and ideas through which he accessed resources, were constructed around a claim on origins. He stressed that he came from the Venda region. In particular he came from Tshiavha and therefore he knew about Lake Fundudzi. An elderly friend of his mother explained his performances in this way too. He was

inspired to do these things, she said, because he was from Tshiavha: Tshiavha was his "mountain (*thavha wa vho*)," his origin, his source of knowledge, experience and ancestral sanction. The countless times that I was told that it would be dangerous for me to go to the Lake, I was generally informed that it was, on the contrary, not dangerous for Vho-Mudzunga to be at the Lake as he was from Tshiavha. Vho-Mudzunga based his power and knowledge in claims to origins in a particular 'land' and to the knowledge which that 'land' had nurtured. Based on this indigenous claim, Vho-Mudzunga could enter debates about tradition and 'Venda culture' with ascribed legitimacy. In the process Vho-Mudzunga accessed memories and mythologies of past practices and other ideas that were associated with mythologies of power - *ngoma lungundu* or even Lake Fundudzi. These mythologies were both insecure and unrelenting in the contemporary Venda region. When Vho-Mudzunga went to the Lake, crowds flocked to witness for themselves if what was claimed in the mythologies about power in the land, was true. Vho-Mudzunga accessed the power of origins and associated knowledge, a power I term autochthony.

Thirdly, the Venda region was constituted through extra-local mythologies. Power of the autochthon was shadowed by the power of the extra-local. For example, the powers of Lake Fundudzi were confirmed by the Lake's power over 'whites.' Whites and foreigners represented symbols of status and prestige that Vho-Mudzunga mobilized in the conflict with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha and in his appeals for government support. This was the power of the outside, of the extra-local, of the centre on the margins. The centre was also represented by the state, which, in the story of conflict above, mediated between the antagonists. The government represented scarce national resources, denied to the Venda region throughout the apartheid years. Vho-Mudzunga thus also accessed the power of the centre.

His ability to resource his performances with these forms of power was not based in a homogenous set of relationships or identities. Vho-Mudzunga managed to access these powers through numerous heterogeneous relationships. The manner in which he

was identified by several authorities (both real and imagined) and people that fueled his practice (both intentionally and unintentionally), was different in each case. These authorities and people often entertained contradictory perceptions of Vho-Mudzunga. Towards the successful execution of his performances, Vho-Mudzunga targeted different and often conflicting parties who in turn (or perhaps in the first instance) targeted him. For some then, Vho-Mudzunga became a resource (e.g. local and regional government). The reasons these authorities and people engaged with him and thus opened various forms of power to him, differed from authority to authority, from person to person. For Vho-Mudzunga himself had no authority outside his gendered role in his household, and was dependent on his own creativity, to harness available powers. As we have seen, even his status as royalty was ambiguous and open to his innovative manipulation.

The pattern of his relationships, through which we can trace how he gained access to resources (some of which ultimately led to conflict), represents the pattern of power in which Vho-Mudzunga engaged. At times he confirmed authority and at times he challenged it. Often the same authority that he chose to confirm and engage, he later challenged and resisted. These relations were both fragile and complex and they ultimately lead us to the question of Vho-Mudzunga's own power and ability to act (which I tackle in Chapter Three).

In the previous chapter, I showed how Vho-Mudzunga cast himself as a kind of revisionist who attempted to reconstruct and thus promote the renewal of a past culture and tradition. He claimed that 'tradition' was his source of knowledge and thus determined the content of his drama. In addition, Vho-Mudzunga railed against corruptive Western influence and in this way reinforced the notion that the performances were reconstitutive of a destroyed or threatened "Venda culture." He did after all write that he "is still very much rooted to his traditions." We might assume that he should still be very much rooted to the traditions of traditional authority. His conception of tradition, and his structured position therein, should

align him with the interests of 'traditional' classes of authority. But of course, because he locates himself in this idiom, and manoeuvers within it to obtain power, he ultimately conflicts with the official bearers of tradition, the installed *mahosi*.

So it should come as no surprise, that his escapade with his drum at the Lake, brought him into direct conflict with the *vhamusanda*, for the very reason that he contravened 'traditional procedure.' For to follow the correct procedure would have been to cede authority and power to the headman. This underlies the contradictory nature of Vho-Mudzunga's project, his drive to use 'tradition' to accumulate cultural capital for himself. He acknowledged the power of the Lake, but not the authority that administered there.

Vho-Mudzunga took what we saw above to be widely held ideas about Lake Fundudzi, ideas associated with social groups and social knowledge, and translated them into a personal challenge. By doing this though, Vho-Mudzunga disregarded, and in the opinion of some even challenged, the cultural authority of some of his family and clan. Prior to the Lake Performance, Vho-Mudzunga claimed that *vhamusanda* Netshiavha visited various family members to convince them not to attend Vho-Mudzunga's function. In the end very few family members did come to the Lake. Even *makhadzi* Vho-Mulondo was absent. She apparently was in Johannesburg tending to a sick relative. Family that I later interviewed denied that *vhamusanda* Netshiavha had visited them.

Rather than uphold certain procedures and acknowledge certain authorities, he chose to fight for his right to act as an individual. Vho-Mudzunga's attempt to wrest power from the Lake for himself forced him to argue for his independence over his cultural sociality, or at very least to challenge the motives of [illegible]nal authority which could attempt to thwart him. From being [illegible]t then, seeking to recuperate culture, Vho-Mudzunga is exposed in [illegible]s a potential cultural revolutionary, seeking to usurp cultural power. The very thing which he claimed to

represent was in fact exposed for a moment and what we see is the opposite. The (potential) innovative, transgressive and wonderous nature of his work was confirmed and not his social integration with the people and gods of Tshiavha.

He never fulfilled this transgressive potential as he did not swim in the Lake and thus failed to appropriate the ultimate symbolic power to his person. He was in some real way attached to his sociality and thus limited in his 'revolutionary individualism.' He himself contextualized his individual efforts (to swim in the Lake) by foregrounding his descent group and his connection to it. He claimed that the Lake was not dangerous to him as he was from Tshiavha. The very group which he claimed would legitimize and protect his endeavours, challenged the legitimacy of his endeavours.

Vho-Mudzunga's rationale for his performance was that he was inspired to perform by a dream. The attitudes to this dream articulate the issues discussed above. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha claimed not to be against Vho-Mudzunga's work per se, but opposed Vho-Mudzunga's individualism. Accordingly, if Vho-Mudzunga had a dream, he should not pursue that dream alone, or with outsiders. He should bring the dream into the social realm of Tshiavha's elders, "those that matter." Then *together* they could proceed.[22] Vho-Mudzunga was also, to a point, clear about where he stood. This was his dream. It did not concern 'them.' He was not going to *zwiponi* to perform rituals of collective importance. And above all, he was financing the project on his own and thus had a right to act independently.

But of course Vho-Mudzunga's rationale for his independence was caught up in an ambivalence of its own - the allusion to a larger cultural logic, the benchmark for his innovation. As I recounted above an elderly woman told me that Vho-Mudzunga cannot stop his performances for they are messages from the ancestors of his mountain (*thavha wa vho*), from Tshiavha. She was uncomfortable with some of his actions, but integrated them into an acceptable social explanation - the close relationship between Vho-Mudzunga and his ancestors. At the Lake, the socially

sanctioned role of ancestral mediator (Netshiavha's) and self-proclaimed role of mediator (Mudzunga), jockeyed for authority. Netshiavha's opposition exposed Vho-Mudzunga's location between his individual motive and his cultural agenda. The conflict opened the boundary at which Vho-Mudzunga's social integration met his own individual aspiration.

This tension (which resolved in the direction of the social) prevented Vho-Mudzunga from becoming a 'white,' who, unconstrained by local social belief and norms, dared to go wherever he or she wanted. 'Something' prevented him from swimming in the Lake that day as he had so boldly advertised. That 'something' was the threat, that the ancestors which lay in wait in the Lake, may exact the full price of forgiveness from him, because of his confrontation with the authorized leader *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. His individualism was limited by his own beliefs which in any case contextualized the challenge he had set for himself.[23]

Vhamusanda Netshiavha acted with a particular worldview. As headman or *vhamusanda* he may be called *Mavu*, which is the Tshivenda word for land. This recognizes the fact that to be chief or headman one must control land. *Mavu* is the one who controls the land. Netshiavha had the authority of headmanship. He was a recognized headman in the territorial council of the chief Tshivhase, and in fact chaired that council. He had a role in a structure which recognized and confered his right to administer (and own) a territory called Tshiavha. The basis of this right is an inherited one, based on patrilineal descent, and recognition by his family as the hereditary leader of Tshiavha. Besides administrative authority, he also had a religious or ritual authority over the people of Tshiavha and their *zwipo* at Lake Fundudzi. He exercised power over Lake Fundudzi because he claimed (and someone recognized) a religious connection between his people, his territory (the Lake) and his ancestors. The Lake was part of his territory and his administrative and ritual authority there, merged and blurred. *Vhamusanda* Netshiavha's power (not authority) was predicated on his ability to control and administer his territory. His authority partly depended then on

his maintaining power over "his" Lake. From Netshiavha's perspective, the Lake was a sacred resource, for this was the basis of his claim to it. It was a place of 'prayer,' the location of his clan's *zwipo*. Its sanctity had to be maintained by him, as this continued and reinforced his authority.

The regional government representatives had an alternative worldview. Their view can also be identified in the assumptions which underpin their claims on power and authority. The government representatives were part of the new democratic authority in the region and one instrument of the new state bureaucracy. Their authority came from the provincial and ultimately national government, which in turn was legitimated by a democratic electoral process. The particular branch of government which was involved in the conflict was that department which was charged with promoting tourism and safeguarding the environment. The department had the authority to mobilize state resources to achieve these ends. The promotion of tourism by the government assumed the right of the public to access and visit certain land. A governmental tourist department presumes that 'tourist land' is a regional (or national) asset which the government has the right and even obligation to access and develop. The Tourism Department's power rests on their ability to exercise control over lands designated as 'tourist lands'. To them, Vho-Mudzunga's performance was to take place on such land. In this particular case, tourism does not exclude the sacred. Instead, it appropriates it to the State and makes it part of the government's resource.

Vho-Mudzunga's plans to "meet his ancestors" at the Lake meant different things to Netshiavha and the government because of the different ways in which their authority was constructed. For Netshiavha, Vho-Mudzunga's presence on the territory of Tshiavha and the confines of the Lake was a serious engagement with the powers of the Lake, an engagement that intended to appropriate those powers. This clearly transgressed the socially sanctioned roles of mediation (priests, procedures etc) and sidelined Netshiavha's authority. His authority went hand in hand with the protection of his Lake's sacredness and Vho-Mudzunga openly set out to enter into a

dialogue or debate with what was known or believed about the Lake, challenging its powers, and thus perhaps taking them for himself.[24] Sacredness cannot afford to be put to question, it must remain "beyond question" in order to maintain a sense of power. Its knowledge claims should not be made subject to debate (Parkin 1991). For Netshiavha then, Vho-Mudzunga was a man engaged in serious endeavours, a man in 'prayer', who should approach the sacred place after following the correct procedures, and with the correct authority only. Further, someone who transgressed sacred boundaries needs to reconstitute that space through formal ritual processes, which recognize the rightful owners and users of the sacred space.

Vho-Mudzunga was well aware of this potential interpretation of his actions. As we saw, he was cognizant of the fact that his actions were interpretable as a threat to Netshaivha's headmanship, to his authority over sacred spaces. Vho-Mudzunga tried to deal with this by 'fragmenting' the Lake and 'carving' out a space for his activities there. He talked about the Lake in a way that divided it into sacred and less sacred places, into dangerous and not dangerous areas, into parts where one could picnic and parts where one could not and perhaps most astutely into the part which was under the political control of Tshiavha and the part which was under the control of Tshiheni. Vho-Mudzunga could thus claim that he was not going to the *zwipo*; that he was not going to prayer; that he would perform in public in the open and he would perform on Tshiheni's side not Tshiavha's. This was a performance not a prayer service. But once again his own actions in preparing for the event cast some ambiguity. The way he prepared for the performance alluded to a pilgrimage. He was acccompanied to the Lake by *tshikona*, a gesture that could signify intentions to communicate with the ancestors (as at *thevhula* for example). The *tshikona* group acknowledged that their role was to protect Vho-Mudzunga from the gods. He wanted his *makhadzi* to be present to do what 'had to be done'. He observed self-imposed food taboos in preparation for the performance. It seems that he himself was undecided about 'prayer' and 'play.'

For the government Lake Fundudzi was a place for tourists to visit and they mobilized resources to market it as such. Vho-Mudzunga was a marketing tool, a resource, a way to promote the Lake as a place for tourism. Vho-Mudzunga could draw crowds and TV to the Lake, and thus help promote the region. If the government aided in actualizing Vho-Mudzunga's performance (which successfully drew attention to the region as a place to visit), their authority would be cemented. The government's emphasis on the Lake as a place to visit, saw the Lake as a place to 'play', rather than one to 'pray,' although the Lake was able to attract because of its sacredness.

Vho-Mudzunga manoeuvered between these two conceptions of 'land' and the resources, which were controlled by the authorities and powers which supported these conceptions, were afforded him. On the one hand, the government made their resources available to him because he promoted tourism to the Lake. On the other hand, the crowd supported him because they expected the danger associated with the Sacred Lake to produce miracles. He played both 'tourist guide' and 'pilgrim'. Some time after the performance a 'white' visitor arrived from Giyani. She wanted Vho-Mudzunga to take her to the Lake. Much later Vho-Mudzunga reported to me that he was in discussions with the local TLC about developing a hotel at Lake Fundudzi. On the other hand, he was a member of the royal family from Tshiavha, who was setting out to meet his ancestors. He *knew* the ritual procedures of the Lake.

Vho-Mudzunga's access to these different types authorities also operated in the context of a new conflict, between local government and traditional authorities. The recently elected Transitional Local Council (TLC) was the new democratic government structure which administered politics at a local level in the area. Prior to South Africa's transition to democracy, this authority was in the hands of traditional leaders who had been absorbed into state structures. Traditional leaders now feared the erosion of their power by the TLC and the TLC feared conserva .ve

obstructionism from the traditional leaders. In effect, parallel adminstrative systems were running - the TLCs and the Chief's Territorial Councils.

The local TLC, the Greater Nzhelele/Tshipise council was granted an annual budget of one million rand in 1996. It canvassed its constituencies to determine how to spend the money. According to the councillors, the overwhelming priority indicated by the constituency was for new and improved roads. The council thus spent its budget on heavy road machinery. As you will recall, the regional government requested that the road to Lake Fundudzi be prepared for Vho-Mudzunga's event. They mobilized this 'important' resource around his function. The sight (or report) of graders working this road, astonished *vhamusanda* Netshiavha. The road to his village, Tshiavha, was in a terrible state of disrepair. On one of my visits to Tshiavha, the *vhamusanda* was completing a *khoro* meeting with the taxi driver who was supposed to serve Tshiavha, and was the only source of transport out of the village, other than on foot. The driver had not been arriving at the village for some time and thus no transport out the village was available. He refused to make the trip, as he said the road was too bad.

Vho-Mudzunga's ability to mobilize the road machinery through the government was very significant. The everyday administrative needs of a traditional leader in an out-of-the-way village were undermined by the 'cultural' needs of Vho-Mudzunga and the 'developmental' needs of local/regional government. From *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's perspective, not only was Vho-Mudzunga refusing to recognize his authority, but he somehow managed to influence the distribution of important resources which the *vhamusanda*'s 'office' could not. This I believe was a very powerful statement. When I was brave (or rude) enough to ask informants directly if Vho-Mudzunga was like a chief, I often got the response that he could not be because he had no land to administer. By mobilizing road machinary, he 'administered' land without possessing it. The people of Tshiheni, who benefitted most from an improved road, were delighted by Vho-Mudzunga's efforts.

But Vho-Mudzunga's individual aspiration, to get to the Lake with his drum, did allow the social work of chieftancy in the Venda region to be exposed, actualized and then opposed by various members of the crowd that had gathered to witness Vho-Mudzunga's feat. They were thwarted by a traditional leader's claim that he controlled the land. This basis of authority did not enjoy wide support. They characterized *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's actions as crazy, thus marginalizing his authority. They argued that this was a public space to which they should have access, and not tribal land, over which the *vhamusanda* could exercise his will. Vho-Mudzunga thus 'opened' that borderline which challenged the legitimacy of traditional authorities' territorial relationship to the land.

The crowd did not care for the people of Tshiavha and their right to sacred privacy. They threatened Netshiavha and his possessions and proclaimed the Lake to be God's Lake and not Netshiavha's. This located Vho-Mudzunga's practice in a broader space and explains a further contradiction involving the crowd at the Lake. The crowd hoped to see something miraculous. Thus, to them Fundudzi was the potential sight of wonder and danger. Yet they rejected the very authority which protected and should have represented the 'special-ness' of the Lake. For them, the event and Vho-Mudzunga's promised feat transcended clan-based religious and political claims. Many believed that Vho-Mudzunga might still die, despite his Tshiavha descent. What they wanted was the thrill of the unusual, the promise of the miraculous, the spectacle of the out-of-the-ordinary - proof of the wonders and powers of the land of the Vhavenda. In this respect Vho-Mudzunga became the potential cultural revisionist who would reclaim that past which was filled with powerful Venda feats and magic, the past represented by *ngoma lungundu*, with which we saw Vho-Mudzunga was 'associated'. Through this 'transcendent' Vendaness, Vho-Mudzunga garnered the support of the crowd who resented the headman's 'petty territorialism.' The Lake to an extent, had been appropriated from the particular association with Tshiavha. It now fitted into the "Land of Legends," the popular tourist image of Venda promoted in the 1980s. Under a chapter heading of this name, a tourist

brochure, printed by the homeland government, detailed legends and mysteries about sites in 'Venda': The Thathe Vondo Forest, with the tale about a chief who reincarnates as a lion; Lwamondo Kop, with details about the sacred baboons that lived there; Tshatshingo Potholes, and tales of the execution of witches and, of course, Lake Fundudzi, with two accompanying legends. This was Venda, the Land of Legends:

> Rich legends and superstitions have been woven into the fabric of the daily lifestyle of the Vhavenda people and today these legends are alive and well and living throughout the land (Republic of Venda 1989:12)

In the Land of Legends, Lake Fundudzi takes its place alongside other wonders which identify a larger imaginary polity. A large variety of people mentioned many of these places to me as places to go and investigate as a researcher interested in Venda culture. The majority of these places had tales of supernatural resistance to outside forces attached to them - stories that told of how white workmen were thwarted by spirits who damaged their machinery or refilled holes after they had been excavated by bull-dozers. Netshiavha's own power base was thus exposed as part of a larger legendary landscape in which Fundudzi was central, and his role marginalized. It was a land over which all wonder-seekers had rights, and in which a wonder-maker had power.

Mudzunga did not simply appropriate the resources of others (government, his clan, sacredness, wonders). He brought elements of his own achieved individual status and the resources which accompanied it. We saw how conscious he was of the affects of being with a white anthropologist and how he challenged those who interfered with his project with the presence of "whites and other foreigners." We also saw how he was identified by his access to these 'whites' and his "contacts with other countries," for example, in his radio interview. Vho-Mudzunga used this association to influence other resource-brokers. When he requested the government to repair the road to Lake Fundudzi he wrote that "even Wits Anthropology department" was now interested in his work. He saw visits by whites to his home as the just rewards for his hard work, thereby accepting whites as conveyors of status. Further, Vho-Mudzunga appealed

to the power of television and the status which this lent his work. He enticed people to attend his performances by offering TV as a 'carrot' and promoted his own recognition in the community through his TV appearances. So when *vhamusanda* Netshiavha confronted Vho-Mudzunga, he in turn was confronted by video cameras and interviewers, an anthropologist and his notebooks. Vho-Mudzunga was able to mobilize these resource through his links to art museums, art galleries, and companies to which he had sent written invitations. These were the resources of an artist (see Chapter Three).

But his relationship to this 'foreign' resource was once again ambiguous. His own 'reconstructive' work was premised on reclaiming a culture which he 'knew' had been destroyed by the material enticements of those very outsiders from whom he drew status and power. He objected to the stereotyped vision of rich (and thus powerful) whites in his awkward encounter with *vhamusanda* Netshiavha at Tshikombani roadhouse, but used the same stereotyped symbolic meaning of 'whiteness' to gain status. Perhaps he was correct that *vhamusanda* Netshiavha was influenced by the presence of a white outsider and the threat of TV in his own territory, and that this lent more weight to *vhamusanda* Netshiavha's concern that Vho-Mudzunga's actions were serious and important enough to oppose. Perhaps too, the white outsider may have been a factor in Vho-Mudzunga's ability to convince the government to repair the road and to view his trip to Fundudzi as part of 'tourism.'

Vho-Mudzunga said he was fighting for all Venda culture and not just Tshiavha's, against the corruptive influence of "western culture". Vho-Mulondo's first claim about the power of the Lake, was that the Lake's mysteries and powers were impenetrable by whites. Fundudzi became a place of resistance to the power of whites, and a testament to the triumph of the ancestors and mysterious powers of the Vhavenda. Through his performance at this place, and his claim to cultural knowledge, Vho-Mudzunga came to symbolize 'Vendaness.' Vho-Mudzunga's ability to draw outsiders to the Lake can be seen as part of this signification process. In a way, the

presence of 'whites' at the Lake helped define it in a broader 'Venda' sense. The Lake's 'other,' so to speak, had come to bear whites. His performances thus also became spaces to express Venda concerns to TV, anthropologists, visiting whites and overseas foreigners. For example, in his speech at the Lake, Vho-Makhomu lamented the paucity of both Tshivenda and Vhavenda on national television.

Vho-Mudzunga was positioned as Muvenda by the presence of outsiders and possessed the distant power of authorities and mythologies which stretched beyond the borders of the Venda region. Yet he rhetorically rejected that power, building instead on the difference which existed between them and the Vhavenda. Vho-Mudzunga was located in an ambivalent relationship that manipulated 'whiteness' and 'Vendaness' at the local level. Each category defined and constructed the other, and allowed Vho-Mudzunga to manipulate the resources and status each category offered.

Vho-Mudzunga clearly operated in a dynamic environment of local political negotiation. I have shown that the patterns of power, mapped through Vho-Mudzunga's numerous relationships, are fraught with ambiguity and contradiction. He operated in contexts that were embedded in each other, contradicted each other and were mutually constitutive of each other. As previously demonstrated, Vho-Mudzunga wrested three forms of power through these relationships: the power of transgression, the power of autochthony and the power of extra-local forces. In the following chapter, I turn to his own power and investigate how his agency was constructed.

3

THE FLOW THROUGH A TRIBUTARY:

Art and its Rights of Passage

"We have a lot of artists in this area, who do not know they are artists"
Dan Mandavha
"People conclude that an artist is a *nanga*"
Elikana Nemurunzini

In this chapter I present the story and history of the artist - Vho-Mudzunga. On the one hand this is part of a life-history. On the other, it is necessary to place that life-history into broader histories which contextualize it, for these broader developments shaped the opportunities of the individual life-course. By focusing on the artist and his history, I sharpen the analytic lens on the specific nature of Vho-Mudzunga's influence and his strategic location within relations of power through which he gained access to the potential resources in acts of transgression, claims of autochthony and mobilization of the centre.

The first contextualization of Vho-Mudzunga's career as an artist records the history of the metropolitan art-world's relationship with the Venda region. In particular, I investigate the categories and meanings that the art-world attached to objects made in the Venda region and how these categories changed at particular moments in time from ethnographic material culture to art-object. The crucial event in this regard was the successful Tributaries art exhibition (1985). Prior to the exhibition, and the commensurate change in the categorization of objects, the role of 'artist' was largely denied to black practitioners from the Venda region. I thus begin with the way the role of 'artist' became available to Vho-Mudzunga (and other individual Vhavenda)

and how an identity around artists from the Venda region, and a market for their work, was created.

The analytic focus of the chapter then shifts to the local world in the Venda region. My analytical swing, from the metropolitan art-world to interpretations of art-practice at the local level, follows Vho-Mudzunga's own life-history. He began practising as an artist in Johannesburg and returned to continue his art-work in the Venda region. The practice of art in the Venda region was not accompanied by a hegemonic transfer of meaning from the metropole. Rather, it was met in the local by interpretation and debate. This negotiation is the second context into which I place Vho-Mudzunga's life-history. In particular I argue that some forms of local knowledge interpreted art in a way which potentially alienated the artist from his community. In order to assert and explain his identity and practice as an artist to the local community, Vho-Mudzunga held a sixtieth birthday party for himself. The birthday party highlights Vho-Mudzunga's agency as an artist in the Venda region and serves as a public display of the conjunction of the two processes of metropolitan art practice and local interpretation.

If Tributaries represented the first decisive discursive moment in this history, the 'fall of apartheid' precipitated a second important change in the discursive context for Vho-Mudzunga's art-work. Here I argue that the post-apartheid cultural context cast Vho-Mudzunga as a cultural survivor and his art objects as 'cultural preservatives'. He became a symbol of a new African nationalism and an assertive regionalism.

Seen as a whole, the history of Vho-Mudzunga's art is the history of the extension of 'art,' an imported metropolitan discourse, to a distant area of the South African state. Throughout this history of Vho-Mudzunga's art and his role as an artist, I tell another story. This is the story of access to influence. In Chapter Two, I described how Vho-Mudzunga realized the various powers of the centre, transgression and

autochthony. Here I explain and demonstrate how being an artist facilitated the gaining of this access.

Firstly, I show how connections to extra-local symbols of status and power - for example whites and foreign visitors, who came to the home of Vho-Mudzunga in Shanzha to view and buy his work - resulted from Vho-Mudzunga's establishment as an 'artist'. Secondly, some local interpretations of 'art' characterized artists as 'magicians', and credited them with supernatural powers. This located them in a transgressive space, from where the power of transgression could be grasped. Thirdly, new cultural discourses opened by political transition made Vho-Mudzunga into a relatively sought-after agent of development and identity. Local and regional government saw Vho-Mudzunga, through his art practice, as a promoter of the unique, original character of their region and lent him their support. This access was facilitated by the representation of Vho-Mudzunga as an authentic Muvenda which, relied on his identity as an artist. Vho-Mudzunga did not enjoy the same access to political authority or regional and national media, prior to the political transition of South Africa.

In a complex web of histories and change, I provide an analysis of a further level of relationships, contexts, connections and symbols in which to locate Vho-Mudzunga's symbolic performances described in Chapters One and Two.

ART DISCOURSES AND RURAL PRODUCERS

During the nineteenth century, in 'Western' cultural centres, 'art' came to signify a special realm of human achievement (Clifford 1988). It supposedly represented one form of the finest expression of humanity, and was identified as "a special domain of creativity, spontaneity, and purity, a realm of refined sensibility and expressive 'genius' (Clifford 1988:233)." The English Romantic idea of culture conceived of 'art'

as a special marker and communicator of human civilization. In this respect 'art' constituted 'high culture,' a signifier of class and sophistication. Cultures that possessed and produced art were situated on a higher evolutionary level than those who were apparently without it. This art-conscious society regarded individuals who produced art as particularly articulate human beings who had great insight into the nature of humanity and society. They were labeled 'artist' and "[were] set aside, often against, society (Clifford 1988:234)." Conventional thinking and anthropological theory has assigned a particular role to 'the artist' due to this separation or marginalization. So for example Turner (1969) refers to 'the artist' as a liminal character. Liminal characters operate in a social space in which transgression can take place with impunity. Such transgression would have as its aim a critical reflection on culture and society so as to reconstitute creatively that society. This, then, would be the role of the 'artist'. Art institutions were established that canonized particular objects produced by artists and displayed them as 'art' for the cultural edification of the viewer. These institutions became spaces for the meditation on human genius and transcendent inspiration - they became "quasi-sacred" spaces.[1] Individuals, whose objects were placed inside art galleries or museums, were elevated in status and prestige and some even became figures of national or even international importance.

This system and its discourses - the idea of art as 'high culture,' the role of the artist and art institutions - persist to a large measure till this day. In contemporary Europe and the United States of America, art organizations are still prominent cultural and social institutions. National or municipal resources are often dedicated to the maintenance of art museums. Some of these museums form an integral part of the identity of the nation's capital cites in which they are found - Paris and the Louvre, New York and the Metropolitan Art Museum, London and The Tate Gallery, Amsterdam and the Van Rijks Museum. Artists are still elevated to national heroes, and some form part of the history of national achievements which construct national identity.

In South Africa today, the country's largest art museums are found in the cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg. The former is home to the South African National Gallery and the latter to the Johannesburg Art Gallery. The South African National Gallery was inaugurated in 1871 in Cape Town (Rankin 1995:56). The Johannesburg Art Gallery was opened in 1915 through the efforts of Lady Florence Phillips, the wife of mining magnate Lionel Phillips (Rankin 1995:57; Nettleton 1993:62; Carman 1988:204). Lady Phillips' express motivation was to provide a respite of sophistication and 'high culture' amidst the dusty rudimentary beginnings of the mining city. The content of this culture was unreservedly foreign and predominantly English (Carman 1988:205). The tradition of 'high culture' and fine art was imported from England to South Africa. From the beginning, this approach excluded particular types of material culture and their producers (Rankin 1995; Nettleton 1993; Carmen 1988). Most notably in respect of this study was the absence of rural black producers.[2] Neither their produce nor their person could qualify within this discursive definition as art or artist. By implication, they did not possess high culture or an elevated degree of civilization.

In general black artists continued to be excluded from art museums in the cities and towns of South Africa until the late 1980s when exhibitions like The Neglected Tradition acknowledged their exclusion and attempted to re-image and re-write South African art history. Black artists were not completely excluded from public collections in South African institutions. South African museums and public galleries began to purchase some work by black artists in the 1960s (Rankin 1995:66) but until the 1980s these purchases were insignificant compared to acquisitions from foreign artists or white South African artists. For example in 1940, Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) purchased a work by the artist Gerard Sekoto. However JAG did not buy an additional work by a black artist until 1972. After this date a few works were acquired that conformed to the western fine art tradition and were produced by individuals with some training in the tradition's techniques. No work by black rural

producers was purchased (Nettleton 1993:63). This was quite typical of the majority of public collections.

The small number of purchases for public collections of work produced by black artists did not incorporate black artists into the mainstream history of South African art. The social role of the 'artist' and the discourses of 'art', associated with the metropolitan institutions which housed these collections, were not made available to black producers of objects.

ETHNOGRAPHY OR ART: RURAL PRODUCERS IN THE VENDA REGION

In the 1980s, when black artists began to be included into the canon of South African art, a number of rural artists from the Venda region, predominantly woodcarvers, rose to prominence in the art-world. The commercial art market had previously ignored the Venda region as a site for collecting art pieces. Nettleton's doctoral thesis, entitled "The Traditional Figurative Woodcarving of the Shona and the Venda," was completed in 1984 and explicitly refers to craftsmen to describe the producers of woodcarving. She did not confer the identity of artist onto any of the individual carvers she encountered in the field during 1978.[3] In the 1980s, the art-market penetrated the Venda region. Below, I detail the discursive context which prevented their inclusion before this date.

Duncan (1994) argues that woodcarvings were being produced in the Venda region[4] prior to the penetration of the art market largely (but not exclusively) to meet the demand of, what she termed the "indigenous market" (Duncan 1994:12). The "indigenous market" conforms to the objects identified by Nettleton in her study and termed "traditional figurative woodcarvings" (Nettleton 1984). One institution demarcated by this term is the initiation schools that used figurative woodcarvings as

didactic tools. Especially well documented in this respect, are the *matano* or sculptural displays for *domba*, the pre-marriage initiation rites (Stayt 1931, Blacking 1969, Nettleton 1984). Other initiation schools, like *murundu* (boys initiation) and *musevetho* (more recent girls initiation) made use of woodcarvings, too. Drums, another object with an 'indigenous demand,' were carved for chiefs or *sangoma* for use in *tshikona*, *tshigombela* or possession rituals of *mulombo*.

Significantly however, no special status accrued to the producers of these carvings (Nettleton 1984:189) which were created on a commission basis. A producer of woodcarvings, generally referred to as *muvhadi*, would accept commissions as an additional source of income to that earned from subsistence agriculture (Nettleton 1984:ibid). Prior to the penetration of the commercial art-market in the Venda region and the subsequent creation of professional artists, a woodcarver's livelihood did not depend on his carving alone.

In her study of the metropolitan art-world's "positive reception of artworks" of selected artists from the Venda and Gazankulu areas,[5] Duncan argues that the weakening and alleged near-annihilation of this indigenous market was a necessary precondition for the successful penetration of the metropolitan commercial art market into the Venda region. The assumption is, that had indigenous demand been stronger, the commercial market would not have penetrated as easily. She argues that the social institutions (chiefship, *domba*, male initiation schools) which supported the production of these carvings were weakened and in some cases even disappeared (1994:13) and so "freed woodcarving from its historical uses (ibid.)." She argues further that the decline of demand by the indigenous sources was coupled with the economic underdevelopment of the Venda bantustan (betterment, border industries for white ownership, influx control), which made subsistence farming unsustainable. The decline of indigenous demand and economic deprivation predisposed the producers of woodcarvings and other objects to the commercial market.

There is no telling how strong the "indigenous market" was in different historical periods. No quantitative study of demand for *matano*, drums or wooden instruments exists for any historical period which would facilitate such a comparison. It is thus an assumption that contact with colonialism and market economies spread a modernist destruction of 'traditional' practices. However, 'indigenous institutions' which create indigenous demand, like *domba* and *tshikona*, still exist today as contemporary phenomenon. Further, the social institution of chieftancy was underpinned by successive South African governments. The chieftancy, in some cases, maintained authority over its people, albeit often in a distorted manner. The cultural rationale of the 'independent homeland' strategy created policies that promoted indigenous institutions (to the extent that some opponents to the Venda National Government associated 'Venda culture' with state propaganda). The legacy of this period is evident in contemporary politics. Chiefs and their *vhamusanda* are still seen as the loci and guardians of tradition. They feel threatened by new democratic local government structures. The chiefship, civic organizations and local government are involved in complex and contentious relations of power. This is evidence that although chiefship has changed it is still a powerful player at the local political level, with a special claim on authority over 'indigenous practices'.

I encountered many carvers during my fieldwork for whom the local "indigenous market" remained the only one to which they had easy access. For example in Shanzha, Vho-Muthavhine was a carver of drums who sold primarily to local clients. He also ran a *musevheto* girls initiation school. One of Vho-Mudzunga's sons had begun to carve drums and made his first sale to a woman for *mulombo*[6] ritual purposes. A third carver from Thononda approached me to help him contact white clients. He had worked on commissions for the *vhamusanda* of Thononda and sometimes sold to *sangoma* or Zionist churches. Some of the artists studied by Duncan did indeed make work for the 'indigenous market' at some stage, as well as attempting to sell their work in other markets.

Thus, in assessing the factors which mitigated the penetration of the commercial art market into the Venda region, it is (at the very least) unclear just how much weaker the indigenous market really was in the 1980s, compared to other historical periods. 'Indigenous practices' still existed and thus following Duncan's own logic so should a certain amount of demand for 'indigenous woodcarvings'. Duncan's argument that an "indigenous market" in the Venda region was destroyed by the penetration of colonialism and the market economy, cannot be demonstrated and relies on the assumption of an 'uncontaminated' culture at some historical period which was internally cohesive and self-supporting.[7]

Carvers in the Venda region did have a certain (unclear) amount of contact with urban art markets and the tourist market in the Venda region prior to the 1980s, but attempts to market production by successive bantustan development agencies (from the 1970s), church groups and some non-governmental community organizations, defined the carvings and other work within an 'arts and crafts' discourse.[8] For example, Paul Tavhana, an artist working in the Nzhelele area, sold work through the Bantu Investment Corporation's shop in Pretoria. Crafts were being produced for sale to tourists and some of the producers of objects, later canonized by the art-world, attempted to draw on the passing tourist trade for their works too (for example, Nelson Makhuba).

The 'arts and crafts' label, in its various guises, was the discourse that defined objects which were produced in the Venda region and consequently, limited their signification. These discourses, more than an imagined decline in indigenous demand or sustainable agricultural practices, inhibited the inclusion of indigenous objects into the metropolitan art market. This limitation was a discursive one. The metropole (art and government institutions) categorized objects produced in the rural Venda region as 'material culture' - items of cultural, rather than aesthetic, interest. Objects, like initiation dolls, clay figures, clay pots, woodcarvings, drums, were included in ethnographic collections and cultural history museums, or sold to tourists as 'cultural

souvenirs'. This label relied on distance and difference. Objects produced by individuals in far-off places with 'different' cultural practices were subject to this labeling.

Collections of 'arts and crafts' from the Venda region were rare. Individual pieces of material culture were to be found in various metropolitan institutions. The University of the Witwatersrand housed objects collected by the anthropologist John Blacking durir his extensive fieldwork in and around Sibasa in the late 50's. These objects formed part of Wits anthropology's ethnological collection. The Cultural History Museum in Pretoria housed some objects collected by Theodore Bent. There was a xylophone in East London and some other musical instruments in (what was then) the Africana Museum in Johannesburg (as part of the Kirby collection of musical instruments that are now at the University of Cape Town).[9] Another drum from the Venda region was in the Campbell Collections of the University of Natal (collected by Barbara Tyrrell). All these objects were collected and displayed for cultural and not aesthetic purposes. Their cultural significance was valued over any aesthetic qualities.[10]

The categories applied to these pieces of material culture were effective both in the Venda region and in the metropole. In the latter, this manifested as the corollary of the discourse on which art institutions were founded in South Africa, a discourse that only associated art with 'high culture' and with the Europeans who possessed it. Other producers of objects possessed a different culture and their objects signified a different civilization. As Rankin writes in her discussion of the exclusion of black artists from South African art institutions:

> If objects made by African people were collected at all earlier in the century, it was in the context of historical museums...The notion that [these objects] might be in some way equivalent to the aesthetic expressions of western culture was clearly never seriously entertained. Instead antitheses were constructed, of primitive as opposed to civilized people, of nature versus culture (1995:62)

The ideology around objects collected from African people separated art from artifact, contemporary art from traditional art, aesthetics from anthropology. This hierarchized system of divisions was not peculiar to South Africa but also characterized the general international treatment of ethnographic objects in opposition to art objects.[11] A cultural discourse defined the artifact or ethnographic object (as opposed to an aesthetic one). It ascribed value by using concepts of authenticity which related to the function of the object in a different belief-world.[12] Thus an authentic cultural expression of a delineated 'tribe' was represented through the object,[13] which then functioned as a sign of timeless and internally cohesive 'traditional' practices. Objects were specifically chosen which could signify a pure African society uncontaminated by western influences.[14] Even when such objects did penetrate the art world, they were defined as traditional African art and were still understood as part of a different cultural iconography.[15] Further, the practice of collecting the traditional objects was performed by anthropologists - not art dealers - or by missionaries during the course of their work. The producers of traditional art were generally regarded as craftsmen or -women; woodcarvers, weavers, pot makers etc. They were not considered to be 'artists' and the objects were displayed in tribal categories without reference to the individuals who produced them.[16]

Here we see a crucial difference in social practice resulting from the binary categorization of art and artifact. 'Art' closely relates the object to the individual producer/creator, and, thereby defines the individual as an 'artist' and thus allows (perhaps ascribes) him or her, as an individual, to play a specific role in society.[17]

In the Venda region, the definition of objects as material culture involved a different set of practices and ideologies. The ethnographic idea of material culture was used in the construction of ethnic nationalisms that underpinned the homeland system. Part of the attempt to build a Venda nation, and to promote such a political and ethnic entity, was the notion of 'Venda arts and craft'. Material objects manufactured in the Venda region were made to represent 'Venda-ness' and an authentic and separate

Venda cultural practice. They were used in the representation and creation of a Venda ethnic identity in South Africa. 'Arts and crafts' (or handwork as Vho-Mudzunga described it) was part of the school curriculum. Agricultural officers, the representatives of 'development' in Bantu reserves or homeland regions, would organize agricultural shows at local and district levels. These shows included an arts and crafts competition to which school pupils and other craftspeople would enter the work they produced in class. The best work was judged and progressed onto a 'national' competition, where it was displayed at the Venda National Show. These winning 'arts and crafts' were also taken to the Rand Show in Johannesburg, and were part of the Venda Pavilion, at which the 'independent nation' (post 1979) represented itself to the South African public and to a limited international audience. These pavilions were also part of competitions between the various 'countries' represented.[18]

Arts and crafts was one site of cultural production which apartheid ideology used to create a bounded Venda identity and reinforce black political and economic exclusion. This involved the separation of 'art', a defining practice of 'white civilization,' from 'arts and crafts' which was an acceptable term (from an apartheid perspective) for the objects produced by traditional black cultures.[19] The meaning of objects produced in the Venda region was partially imposed by apartheid ideology.

The penetration of the art market into the Venda region, then, was necessarily preceded by a change in 'the minds' of the art-world, as to what constituted art and thus what could be included within its milieu.[20]

TRIBUTARIES, THE EXPANSION OF 'ART' AND THE MAKING OF 'VENDA ARTISTS'

The change in the metropole's art practice and discourse with regard to black rural producers suggested above, occurred in 1985 with the BMW sponsored-Tributaries exhibition. As part of the curatorship of the exhibition, 'the art world' of the cities engaged in a pro-active outreach to the rural areas in search of 'artists.' This drive was organized by the Johannesburg-based artist, Ricky Burnett. Many works by 'new rural artists' were 'discovered' as 'art' and then taken to Johannesburg and exhibited alongside 'established' and 'recognized' artists (most of th ..ite). Individuals from rural areas were thus inscribed into the discourses of 'art' and proclaimed as 'artists'. Material culture became art; regions which produced tradition were suddenly producing artistic comment; names of rural producers were attached to their creations and placed alongside with, and on an equal basis to, established artists.

Many of those individuals whose work was exhibited at Tributaries, were based in the Venda region. They became known as "the Venda artists." Some of them experienced a sudden rush of demand for their work and a quick rise to prominence within the art-world. For example Jackson Hlungwane had a retrospective exhibition just four years after the Tributaries show (Duncan 1994) where he had exhibited for the first time. Normally the art-world reserves the honour of a 'retrospective' for a life-time's work and involvement in the arts.

The attempt to impart the 'tradition of art' to these rural producers was a conscious one. The organizer of the exhibition, Ricky Burnett, traveled "eighty thousand kilometers" in order to select works. He went on a journey to find artists "that he had not heard of before, and to areas in the country that had not received the attention of the metropolitan art institutions in the past (Duncan 1994:34)." Burnett writes that these were "investigative journeys" motivated by a "sense of curiosity" (Tributaries catalogue). The aim of these journeys was to assemble "a collection of contemporary South African art." (ibid.) Burnett was aware that some of the places which were included in this project, and the items which were exhibited, transgressed the usual exclusivity of the fine art discourse and practice. In the catalogue he wrote: "In

compiling this exhibition we have not felt bounded by the demands of traditional anthropology." He visited the Museum of Cultural History in Pretoria and examined their collections (Duncan 1994:57 endnote 9). In his practice, Burnett challenged what he described as "an inflexible distinction between art and ethnology." which led to a "misplaced exclusivity:"[21]

> This exclusivity has **dictated** that official art and culture is white and orientated towards Europe. (My emphasis, Tributaries catalogue)

Indeed in 1983, just two years before Tributaries and a year before Burnett began his 'journey of discovery,' Esme Berman published a revised encyclopaedic reference for South African art, with short biographies of South African artists. It included a handful of black artists but not one artist from the Venda region. By 1987, other compilations were quite different. Sue Williamson's Resistance Art in South Africa featured a host of black artists alongside white colleagues. Her second volume published in 1994 which attempted to position South African artists in relation to international trends and standards, once again, included many black artists. By this stage, in a country with a black president, an exclusion of black artists would, of course, have been untenable.

The trend towards the inclusion of black artists was the same in terms of exhibitions. The Cape Town Trienniel, an initiative of the Rembrandt Art Foundation and the South African National Gallery, held exhibitions in 1982 and 1985 without black artists (Duncan 1994:73). The 1988 Trienniel, however, included works from the Venda region. Reviewers of this exhibition compared the works of the 'Venda artist' Noria Mabasa to the works of nationally-acclaimed artists David Brown and Andries Botha. Her work was bought by the Johannesburg Art Gallery (ibid. 74). The Vita awards were set up as the most prestigious art competition in Johannesburg (and by implication nationally). Entries were taken from major exhibitions staged in the Johannesburg area. In 1987, works by Venda artists Noria Mabasa, Jackson Hlungwane and Nelson Makhuba, drawn from exhibitions around Johannesburg the year before, were selected for the Vita exhibition. In 1988, the Johannesburg Art

Gallery held the Neglected Traditions 'retrospective' which highlighted the previous exclusion of black art in the metropole, and thus also confirmed the metropole's extension of its practice to include them.

Through these efforts to change the ideology of exclusivity, the role of artist as understood in the cities was made available to individuals in the Venda region. The works of producers from the Venda region were bought by art museums, curated in art galleries and sold by art dealers.[22] By virtue of this, whatever it meant to be an 'artist' in the cities became available as an identity for, and at times was imposed as an identity on, certain individuals from the Venda region. This went hand-in-hand with the economic opportunities which the commercial art market presented. Thus both economic and social opportunities were opened to or imposed upon Venda artists by the extension of the metropolitan art-world's discursive practices.

The extension by the metropoles of their discourses and practices around art to rural and thus traditional practitioners in South Africa was not a smooth one, nor a complete one. Indeed to cope with the emergence of non-functional figurative work from areas like the Venda region, the art world construed a new category.[23] Aesthetically most of the work displayed at Tributaries was not the traditional craft which easily slotted into the ethnographic museum and connected to a traditional practice (usually cosmological in nature and thus signifying different world view). Rather, at Tributaries, the traditional aspect was marked by innovation or appendage. Nor was this 'new' work clearly able to articulate with the latest contemporary trends of 'western' artists, as its innovation could not erase the tradition on which it was based (even if this tradition was simply the region from which it originated!). These emergent works were thus labeled Transitional Art (Dell 1989, Richards 1990) and were situated somewhere between traditional and contemporary art.[24]

The term 'Transitional Art' exposed the boundaries of the metropole's concept of art and the way other material objects, especially those from far-off places within

'different' cultural zones, were defined as outside art practice. Of course this occurred as a result of the art-world's attempts to change these very boundaries. What emerged was a sense of underdevelopment, where Transitional Art was 'developing' into Fine Art or Contemporary Art. The racism and paternalism inherent in this term was clear. White artists would never be labeled Transitional as a group, as they were already part of a fully developed socius. Another element of 'confusion' was the duplication of forms coming from 'Transitional Artists.' Some newly canonized rural artists produced a number of the same works in succession for the art market. This violated one of the major principles of the fine art practice which demanded originality and progress from one work to another thus guaranteeing a work's uniqueness.

Thus, although the discourse of 'art' was extended, it was never a seamless transfer and art from the rural Venda region maintained a sense of difference and distance from a classic, high fine art tradition.

Tributaries was can also be read as an attempt by the curator to break down apartheid nationalisms and create, through art, a unifying national expression. By including black rural artists into the white world of art, these separated communities were brought together, and a representative South Africa, where all residents were South African citizens, began to be promoted. In a review of the exhibition, Ivor Powell wrote: "By placing a Ndebele doll next to a Bruce Arnott sculpture, the show is refusing to distinguish [between the two] (1985:46)." The country's border was the only boundary of this nationalism rather than some constructed and reified idea of cultural differences and the commensurate national units of 'the homelands'.

Burnett did not try to claim a unitary South African culture through Tributaries. Instead, he attempted to expose a common humanity within diversity through the "creative spirit of art." The separateness of the rural practitioners persisted though. In fact what emerged after Tributaries was not only the new category Transitional Art, but also a group identity for so-called Venda artists. 'Venda' as place, was

reinscribed with a new indigenous identity, by virtue of the association of 'new/old artists' and the Venda region. Many of those grouped under the label 'Venda artist', were in fact not Venda-speaking at all (or example, Johannes Maswanganyi, or Jackson Hlungwane).[25] One of the organizations which promoted 'Venda artists' after Tributaries was the South African Association of Art (SAAA) in Pretoria. The director of the northern Transvaal branch of the SAAA expressed her reasons for becoming involved with 'Venda art':

> The main reason was that we think that there was a lot of prominence...If you think that Venda is a sculpture nation. If you think that from babies they are woodcarvers. For the Association it was for promoting black art...We just thought it was good to promote Venda (quoted in Duncan 1994:70).

Ironically, what emerged from Burnett's confrontation with "traditional anthropology" was the identification and promotion of 'the Venda artists,' a regional identity along the lines of the ethnic nationalism of apartheid.[26] The Venda Development Corporation through its marketing organization, Ditike (see below), began to promote artists from the region in the commercial art market as a group. In 1987, Ditike was instrumental in organizing "The Vhavenda exhibition" at the Grahamstown Arts Festival. In 1988, The Sanderling Gallery held an exhibition called "Venda" and encouraged artists from the Venda region. In 1993 another exhibition entitled "Venda" took place overseas at the Gallery Charlotte Daneel in Amsterdam.

What seemed to typify these 'new artists' was their 'mysterious' technique which perpetuated their association with 'the exotic' and located them outside mainstream art practice. Many of them explained to the art-world how they first dreamed of their works, and through this medium of inspiration, created 'art'. Some claimed that their works were guided by advice from their ancestors:

> Away from the bustle and commerce of the modern image ridden city most of the rural artists we spoke to, referred to their dreams as both source and a guide for their image making. According to Dr. Seoka it is through dreams that the ubiquitous and powerful ancestors appear. (Tributaries catalogue)

The move to include previously excluded art producers into the art world was not only a South African phenomenon. Instead, it could be argued that South Africa was responding to an international trend in the ideological framing of art exhibitions and debates. Two international exhibitions capture the debates around and through which Tributaries and the subsequent prominence of black artists (and especially 'Venda artists') emerged in the art-world. They were Primitivism' in 20th Century Art held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City (1984) and Magiciens de la Terre at the Pompidou Centre in Paris (1989). In both these exhibitions, the curators tried to show the relationship between and the "affinities" of "the tribal and the modern." 'Primitivism' highlighted the influence of 'pre-colonial' art on western art practitioners. Magiciens... tried to compare the "cultural production" of contemporary African, Asian and Diaspora artists to the Western avant-garde movement. Both exhibitions brought producers of art objects from the 'Third' and 'First' Worlds, from the margins and the centre, into dialogue. The nature of this communication was the subject of debates which arose around these exhibitions.[27]

As part of a general re-evaluation of colonialism and west-other relations, the western art-world looked to identify excluded practitioners. Nettleton explains the extension of art discourse to 'third-world arts' as part of a post-colonial moment and western retrospection:

> In an attempt to salve the collective western conscience from the guilt of past physical and spiritual colonization and present economic and cultural domination of the Third World, artists and a variety of types of historians have indulged in a form of atonement in which an attempt has been made to place Third World arts on a par with those of the western tradition. In a sense this elevation of such forms above the status of 'primitive curios', originally accorded to them in the West, has been the result of the rejection of the notion of superiority inherent in colonialism itself. (1988:301)

Nettleton's religious tone is perhaps misleading and dismissive of the scrutiny of western practices which lead to the deconstruction of colonial ideology. Nonetheless, what she captured is that post-colonial or post-modern moment which confronted the

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