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THE ICONOLOGY OF WOMEN'S PARAPHERNALIA AMONG THE NTWANE

Hazel Deborah Friedman

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,
for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

Due to the paucity of literature on the material culture of the Ntwane, the bulk of my information was collected during months of (interrupted) fieldwork. This period was spent researching the material culture of the Ntwane at a farm called Kwarrielaagte, which is where the largest proportion of the group resides. Situated in Central Transvaal, between Loskop Dam and Dennilton, Kwarrielaagte is also the place of residence of the current Ntwane Regent, Chief Tlokwe Mathebe. Mathebe is the appointed head of the Moutse district, an area south of Groblersdaal, of which Kwarrielaagte is a part.

My fieldwork began in November 1985. Although I did not live among the group, I visited them on a daily basis and became familiar with many aspects of their material culture. My research was interrupted in 1986 due to the outbreak of hostilities between the Ntwane and Ndebele inhabitants of Moutse, an area which had been incorporated into KwaNdebele against the wishes of the majority of the Moutse inhabitants. I resumed my fieldwork for two months in 1987, during a lull in the conflict. Unfortunately I was unable to conduct my investigations in an unhampered manner for several reasons; firstly, certain questions, regarding cross-cultural ties between the Ntwane and Ndebele, could not be asked for fear of arousing the suspicions of my informants. Secondly, my interpreter - a Moutse resident by the name of Paulina Hlongwane - was accused

of being a spy because we often spent time with both Ndebele and Ntwane informants. Consequently, she could no longer assist me with my research, and I was compelled to complete my fieldwork without the help of an interpreter. However, on numerous visits to Kwarrielaagte, I was accompanied by an Ntwane elder, a man by the name of William Malephatlo, who is both a World War One veteran and a respected ngaka (witchdoctor). I am grateful for his friendship and co-operation, without which would have made completion of my research impossible.

I wish to express my gratitude to the following members of the Ntwane community who made this dissertation possible:
- Chief Gideon Tlokwe Mathebe, leader of the Ntwane, for his constant enthusiasm and support.
- William Malephatlo, my principal informant, for his invaluable information on colour symbolism.
- Paulina Hlongwane, my interpreter, who courageously assisted me in my fieldwork, despite threats to her personal safety.
- Maria Ditsego, who provided me with a fascinating insight into the process of female initiation among the Ntwane.
- All the inhabitants of Kwarrielaagte, who opened their homes to me, even when their very survival was at stake.
- The Wits Senior Bursary Committee, Human Sciences Research Council and Standard Bank for their financial sponsorship of my research.

Special thanks to my family and loved ones who gave me constant financial and moral support.

Most of all, I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Anitra Nettelton for her wi dom, tolerance and tenacity.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The following photographs of members of the Ntwane community and their paraphernalia were taken by myself during numerous fieldtrips to Kwarrielaagte. In certain instances, however, I have reproduced photographs from secondary sources, such as D.P. Stoffberg 1967 Die Tegniese Skeppinge van die Bantwane van die distrik Groblersdal. MA dissertation, Pretoria University; as well as D.F. Coetzee 1978 Kulturele Faktore wat doeltreffende landboupraktyk in Lebowa bepaal met besondere verwysing na die gebied van die Bantwane. PhD. Pretoria University.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of the iconology of paraphernalia produced by women, among the Ntwane. It represents the culmination of primary field research into the material culture of this group, as well as supplementary research conducted at the Africana Museum in Johannesburg, the South African Museum in Cape Town, the National Museum in Bloemfontein and the Duggan-Cronin Museum in Kimberley.

My investigative methods consisted of unstructured interviews with both married and unmarried members of the Ntwane community at Kwarrielaagte. Although the focus of my research was primarily on paraphernalia produced and worn by women, I also interviewed Ntwane men in order to obtain a variety of interpretations and opinions as to the 'meanings' of the objects and traditions under analysis.

In addition to the above-mentioned field-work and gallery research, I consulted a wide range of literature on critical theories, such as marxism, structuralism and post-structuralism, in order to supplement my methodological approach to the iconology of women's art among the Ntwane. I also referred to literature on a number of traditional South African groups, such as the Pedi and Ndebele, in order to identify the cross-cultural influences between these groups and the Ntwane. The literature on these closely related

However, this definition constitutes a gross oversimplification of the concept, for it does not allow for a shift in aesthetic criteria from culture to culture. It establishes the concept 'aesthetic' as an absolute, whereas in actuality, it is a value-laden term, whose problems of definition are exacerbated when attempting cross-cultural research. It is therefore necessary at the outset of this dissertation to formulate a working definition of 'aesthetics' within the context of the Ntwane. It is suggested that the aesthetic components of Ntwane objects include style, technique and medium, but extend beyond their formal qualities into activities such as ritual and custom. The socio-cultural activities performed by the Ntwane may be regarded as intrinsically significant to the formal characteristics of their paraphernalia. It may therefore be argued that their objects are the concrete, tangible manifestations of a set of underlying constructs, expressed in adherence to particular conventions of representation; furthermore, that the reduction of the aesthetic component of Ntwane objects to merely an assessment of their formal criteria, would constitute an impoverishment of their levels of meaning. A formalist approach to the art of Ntwane women also fails to consider issues of change in the form and function of their paraphernalia and the effects of broader social transformations on the material culture of the Ntwane.

Chapter One of my dissertation will comprise a brief survey of the literature on the Ntwane. In addition to identifying the existing information, methodological gaps in the literature will be mentioned. It is the partial aim of this dissertation to "fill in" some of the gaps by

groups helped to shed light on significant aspects of Ntwane material culture, which in turn, provided me with greater insight into the iconology of their paraphernalia.

INTRODUCTION

The Ntwane are a virtually unrecorded group, whose history, customs and objects have received little -if any - documentation. Therefore, the thrust of this dissertation is two-fold. Firstly, the history and material culture of the Ntwane will be documented, with particular focus on the paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women. Secondly, selected objects and apparel will be interpreted in terms of their meanings within the social context in which they are produced.

The concept 'iconology' will constitute the cornerstone of my research into the paraphernalia of Ntwane women. 'Iconology' may be understood as the meaning of certain objects, whose imagery is derived from underlying cultural premises. It denotes the broader context in which an artwork may be assessed, analysed and understood. The aim of this dissertation is to provide a deeper insight into the extent to which the paraphernalia of Ntwane women reflect their function, as well as the manner in which these objects are integrated into a social context.

My research into Ntwane material culture has been undertaken with consideration of the aesthetic qualities of the objects under analysis. The term 'aesthetic' is problematic, for it presupposes a set of criteria applied to an object in order to determine its qualification as a 'work of art'; yet these criteria are by no means universal. For example, The Oxford Dictionary defines 'aesthetics' as "the philosophy of taste, or the science of sensuous perception, or the perception of the beautiful."

means universal. For example, The Oxford Dictionary defines 'aesthetics' as 'the philosophy of taste, or the science of sensuous perception, or the perception of the beautiful.' However, this definition constitutes a gross oversimplification of the concept, for it does not allow for a shift in aesthetic criteria from culture to culture. It establishes the concept 'aestheic' as an absolute, whereas in actuality, it is a value-laden term, whose problems of definition are exacerbated when attempting cross-cultural research. It is therefore necessary at the outset of this dissertation to formulate a working definition of 'aesthetics' within the context of the Ntwane. It is suggested that the aesthetic components of Ntwane objects include style, technique and medium, but extend beyond their formal qualities into activities such as ritual and custom. The socio-cultural activities performed by the Ntwane may be regarded as intrinsically significant to the formal characteristics of their paraphernalia. It may therefore be argued that their objects are the concrete, tangible manifestations of a set of underlying constructs, expressed in adherence to particular conventions of representation; furthermore, that the reduction of the aesthetic component of Ntwane objects to merely an assessment of their formal criteria, would constitute an impoverishment of their levels of meaning. A formalist approach to the art of Ntwane women also fails to consider issues of change in the form and function of their paraphernalia and the effects of broader social transformations on the material culture of the Ntwane.

However, this definition constitutes a gross oversimplification of the concept, for it does not allow for a shift in aesthetic criteria from culture to culture. It establishes the concept 'aesthetic' as an absolute, whereas in actuality, it is a value-laden term, whose problems of definition are exacerbated when attempting cross-cultural research. It is therefore necessary at the outset of this dissertation to formulate a working definition of 'aesthetics' within the context of the Ntwane. It is suggested that the aesthetic components of Ntwane objects include style, technique and medium, but extend beyond their formal qualities into activities such as ritual and custom. The socio-cultural activities performed by the Ntwane may be regarded as intrinsically significant to the formal characteristics of their paraphernalia. It may therefore be argued that their objects are the concrete, tangible manifestations of a set of underlying constructs, expressed in adherence to particular conventions of representation; furthermore, that the reduction of the aesthetic component of Ntwane objects to merely an assessment of their formal criteria, would constitute an impoverishment of their levels of meaning. A formalist approach to the art of Ntwane women also fails to consider issues of change in the form and function of their paraphernalia and the effects of broader social transformations on the material culture of the Ntwane.

Chapter One of my dissertation will comprise a brief survey of the literature on the Ntwane. In addition to identifying the existing information, methodological gaps in the literature will be mentioned. It is the partial aim of this dissertation to "fill in" some of the gaps by

using more open-ended methodologies which pertain both to the focus of this dissertation in particular, as well as to the discipline of art history in general. In so doing, this chapter aims to elucidate briefly both the limitations and scope of research into the iconology of paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women.

Chapter Two will provide an overview of the habitat, modes of dress and paraphernalia produced by the Ntwane. From the outset, it should be emphasised that only certain paraphernalia produced and worn by Ntwane women have been selected for documentation. The term 'paraphernalia' refers to objects and modes of decoration, and includes the frontal and rear aprons worn by pre-intitiated, initiated and married women; fertility dolls, hair adornments; as well as certain examples of homestead wall decoration.

However, certain Ntwane objects which fall under the rubric of "paraphernalia", such as wooden stools and meat platters, have been excluded from this dissertation. This is because these objects are traditionally produced by men, and the focus of my research - as suggested by the title - is on paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women for both their own use and that of their menfolk.

Chapter Three will trace the emergence of the Ntwane as a cultural group. Implicit in this chapter is the view that Ntwane art has arisen out of particular historical developments in the social evolution of the group, as a result both of internal developments, as well their interac-

tion with other cultural groups. The fact that the Ntwane are of Tswana origin, but have adopted Northern Sotho customs, suggests that the emergence of a distinct Ntwane culture is the product, not of a static, unchanging heritage, but of collectively shared, exchanged and appropriated customs and experiences. Therefore this chapter will describe the interaction of the Ntwane with other groups, and simultaneously raise questions concerning the issue of an Ntwane cultural "style" and identity as expressed through their distinctive forms of decoration and adornment.

Chapter Four will explore the mural aesthetic of the Ntwane, in terms of the "meanings" of the patterns which are found on their homestead walls. Mention will be made of the possible origins of the tradition of wall painting among the Ntwane, and reference will also be made to the mural decorations of the Pedi and Transvaal Ndebele. Some of the methodological problems encountered in the interpretation of the iconography of Ntwane mural decorations will also be highlighted.

Chapter Five will focus on the symbolic parameters of the colours red, white and black which are used pervasively by Ntwane women on their paraphernalia, as well as in certain rituals involving both male and female members of society. In other words, the theme of colour in women's paraphernalia will be dealt with both in terms of its iconographic and iconological signifance among the Ntwane.

Chapter Six will examine, firstly, the historical role of Ntwane women, as upholders of tradition, in the face of changing historical circumstances. The second part of this chapter will explore more fully the tension between the perpetuation of traditional mores, as reflected through the paraphernalia of Ntwane women, and inevitable changes within the Ntwane community which have occurred through the alienation of the menfolk from the rural economy, as a result of the migrant labour system. The third section will focus on shifts in function and meaning of traditional paraphernalia produced and worn by Ntwane women, and the transformation of these objects, and by implication the role of their producers, as they move from the rural context in which they possessed "use value" into the commercial market, where they become commodities imbued with "exchange value".

CHAPTER ONE

Research into the art of Sotho-Tswana groups in general, and the Ntwane in particular, has been lacking, compared with studies of other indigenous groups of South Africa, such as the Venda and Zulu (Nettleton 1984; Klopper in progress). However, the gaps are slowly being filled by research into the art of the Pedi, the largest North Sotho-speaking group, (Vogel 1984), the Lobedu (Davison 1989) and the Transvaal Ndebele, who - although of Nguni origin - have adopted North Sotho customs (Schneider 1986; Levy 1990). These studies have been extremely useful for research into the art of the Ntwane, because although the latter were originally of Tswana origin, their material culture bears similarities to that of the Pedi and Transvaal Ndebele. Furthermore, despite the paucity of literature on the Ntwane (see below), scholars outside the discipline of art history have conducted research into Ntwane society, thereby shedding light on aspects of their material culture (Stoffberg 1967; Coetzee 1978; Rich 1982; Tyrrell 1983). The growth of literature on the Pedi, Transvaal Ndebele and Ntwane could not have appeared more timeously, as many of the traditions of the material culture of these groups are rapidly dying out.

Before discussing the specific focus of this dissertation, namely the iconology of art produced by women among the Ntwane, it is necessary, firstly, to do a brief survey of the literature on the Ntwane. In addition to identifying the existing information, gaps and methodological

weaknesses in the literature will be mentioned. It has become apparent that most of the information on the Ntwane has been written in a functionalist, ahistorical manner. While this approach is useful for a general understanding of certain aspects of the social life of the Ntwane, it ignores issues of change within their material culture. It is the partial aim of this dissertation to confront these problems, and to "fill in" some of the gaps by using more open-ended methodologies which pertain both to the focus of this dissertation in particular, as well as to the discipline of art history in general. In so doing, this chapter aims to elucidate briefly both the limitations and the scope of research into the iconology of paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women.

As mentioned above, the literature on the material culture of the Ntwane has been written by scholars in diverse disciplines, such as Ethnology, Social Anthropology and Architecture, as well as by authors who have no academic specialisation and who cater primarily to the "coffee-table" market. One of the earliest sources of documentation on the Ntwane is a publication entitled 'A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa', written in 1935 by Van Warmelo, a government ethnologist. In this work, he deals briefly with issues such as "tribal" classification, as well as the location, history and language of South African Bantu-speaking groups. Basing his historical information largely on a 1905 Department of Native Affairs publication entitled ' History of the Native Tribes of the Transvaal', he mentions the existence of the "Bantwane" in sections of the Transvaal inhabited by the Pedi, Ndebele, Kopa and Koni, among others. He describes them as being of Tswana or

West-Sotho origin, but adds that they have adopted North Sotho customs. However, he omits a detailed historical overview of the emergence of the Ntwane, nor does he mention their material culture.

This omission was partially remedied in a 1967 MA Social Anthropology dissertation by D P Stoffberg, called 'Die Tegniese Skeppinge van die Bantwane van die distrik Groblersdal'. Stoffberg provides a more comprehensive account of the history, location and lifestyle of the Ntwane, but he too avoids a detailed account of important aspects of their material culture, such as beadwork and mural decoration. His text is accompanied by photographic documentation, from which information on dates and location is omitted. Furthermore he does not acknowledge the possibility of changes within the Ntwane ethos, resulting from external socio-political influences; consequently the impression he creates is of a static society, unaffected by changes in the broader South African landscape.

A similar criticism may be levelled at the PhD thesis by D.F. Coetzee, entitled 'Kulturele Faktore wat doeltreffende landboupraktyk in Lebowa bepaal met besondere verwysing na die gebied van die Bantwane' (1978). To date, Coetzee has provided the most comprehensive overview of Ntwane history, from their first migration to the Transvaal in the late 1700s, up until the appointment of the regent chief, Tlokwe Mathebe, who currently rules the Ntwane. Coetzee also traces the lineage of Ntwane chiefs, their interaction with other groups such as the Pedi, Koni and Kopa, as well as the history of their military confrontations during the

Difaqane. The orientation of Coetzee's research is anthropological, yet the bulk of his primary research deals with agricultural issues. He omits investigating for example, the degree to which cross-cultural exchanges between the Pedi and Ntwane have influenced the Ntwane mode of existence. He also seems to accept unquestioningly the strong sense of Ntwane cultural identity, without taking into account the various historical, social and political factors that might have contributed to their sense of ethnicity; nor does he acknowledge the strong ties between the Ntwane and neighbouring groups. At the time that Coetzee was conducting his research, the Moutse district of which the largest Ntwane area, Kwarrielaagte, is a part, consisted of various groups who lived peacefully with and among one another[1]. Yet the impression created by Coetzee's information is that the Ntwane are an essentially "isolated", homogeneous group.

Although Coetzee does include a description of Ntwane material culture, such as settlement patterns, clothing and artefacts, his information is generalised with no detailed investigation into the origins of, influences on, or changes in their traditional lifestyle and activities. Furthermore, in discussing the agricultural practices of the Ntwane, Coetzee avoids confronting the factors which have affected and continue to affect their mode of existence, such as the migrant labour system,

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1. Coetzee's research was done prior to the forced incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele in 1986, which erupted in ethnic conflict among the once-peaceful communities of Moutse, particularly between the Ntwane and Ndebele. See chapter three for a discussion of the roots and results of this conflict.

which has resulted in a transformation of the South African rural economy in general, and Ntwane society in particular. Consequently, much of his research remains largely descriptive and static; the Ntwane ethos is documented as an unchanging "box" from which the migrant leaves and to which he returns when he is finished work. The inner workings of the box are not fully considered.

An article published in 1982 by architect, Peter Rich, in the November/December issue of 'Architecture SA' on the architectural configuration of the Ntwane at Kwarrielaagte provides an in-depth survey of Ntwane settlement patterns. In addition, Rich gives a brief but enlightening historical and social context for the Ntwane. He also links their material culture to that of the Pedi and Transvaal Ndebele. However, as his orientation is primarily architectural, his observations on Ntwane customs, influences and artefacts remain generalised and descriptive, relying primarily on Coetzee as a source.

Reliance on secondary sources characterises Barbara Tyrrell and Peter Jurgen's 'African Heritage' (1983). Although the authors mention some of the paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women, such as fertility dolls, and certain types of female body adornment, their information is scant, anecdotal and in some instances, inaccurate. For example, Tyrrell writes that young Ntwane girls wear a feather in their hair in order to "advertise their marriageable state", whereas Ntwane informants have stated that an Ntwane woman wears a feather only on her wedding day, as do her bridesmaid and mother-in-law. Tyrrell's detailed illustrations

are useful but idealised representations. Consequently, this publication, like its predecessors creates the impression of a timeless, isolated tradition, an image which ignores historical factors which have shaped and reshaped Ntwane cultural identity and expressions thereof.

It is only in recent years that the discipline of art history has begun to revise traditional approaches to the study of African Art and to regard the material culture of the black people of South Africa as a viable field of study[2]. There has grown a genuine concern to preserve a rapidly disappearing cultural heritage, through the establishment of public South African art collections, in order to document the culture and its erosion which has occurred through the processes of urbanization, as well as through the removal of traditional objects from their places of origin by foreign dealers and collectors. Simultaneously, in-depth research into many aspects of South African material culture has been undertaken by scholars in diverse, academic disciplines, who have adopted a more holistic approach to the subject of material culture in order to "fill in the gaps" of this much neglected field.

However, this endeavor has in itself raised many problems for art historians in particular, because it has necessitated a re-examination of the art historian's traditional lexicon. In other words, the discipline

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2. This shift in attitude may be attributed to factors such as the changing political dispensation in South Africa and the resultant, albeit belated acknowledgement of the historical and socio-cultural contribution made by black South Africans - both rural and urban - to South African culture as a whole.

has been forced to shed preconceptions regarding traditional methodological approaches towards, as well as definitions of, art. For example, certain aesthetic criteria, which have determined what is admissible as art within a Eurocentric context, have had to be re-examined when approaching art produced in a particular ethnographic context. As Roy Sieber has noted, the concept of aesthetics is an essentially historical phenomenon because:

> "...art changes and these changes find expression in the conceptual structure that surrounds art. So the application of a certain aesthetic concept may be unproblematic in connection with one historical manifestation of art and problematic in connection with another..." (Sieber 1978:427)[3] .

These problems have therefore necessitated a re-examination on the part of art historians as to the validity of using traditional art historical criteria, to classify the products of particular societies into art or non-art.

However, the issues mentioned above raise another problem relating to an examination of material culture and the approaches adopted thereto by the art historian; namely the relationship of art to the society that

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3. The notion of the artist as a definable class does not apply in many ethnographic contexts, and the artist as the creative interpreter of social situations is very much a historically determined figure in European society. Furthermore, objects referred to as "craft", or "applied art" in a Eurocentric context, such as beadwork, play as much of an integral role in the cultural traditions of South African groups, as do objects that would fall under the Western rubric of "art", for example wooden sculpture.

produces it. In viewing art as a social product, the scholar is faced with the problem of confronting the precise nature of the contingent relationship between art and society; i.e. the contextual emphasis which should accompany any analysis of art traditions. It is suggested that a clearer understanding will be gained of both the form and content of aesthetic systems through thorough investigation of the mode of production practised by the society in question, without resorting to a functionalist approach, which views aesthetic traditions as simply utilitarian and instrumental.

It may be further argued that it is not enough simply to link society and art functionally, without an explicit theory of society and social causation. Until recently, the discipline of art history avoided ventures into the realm of social theory, preferring to remain within the familiar formalist territory of art-historical enquiry. It may be suggested that this conservatism has resulted in a theoretical stasis within the discipline. Norman Bryson, Director of English studies at Cambridge University, and a writer on art from a semiotic perspective, has lamented what he describes as "the lethargy of the custodians of art":

> "It is a sad fact: art history lags behind the study of the other arts. ... while the last three or so decades have witnessed extraordinary and fertile change in the study of literature, of history, of anthropology, in the discipline of art history there has reigned a stagnant peace." (Bryson 1983:xi)

Bryson goes on to advocate that the topography of art history must change and that the discipline should undertake a theoreti-cal cross-fertilization. (Bryson 1983:xii).

However, there does exist within the discipline of Art History, an expanding school of thought for whom art production cannot be separated from the other components which comprise material culture. This school of thought has succeeded in directing art history away from the intrinsic aspects of the discipline into the social dimensions within which art exists. By viewing art as a social variable, the analytic emphasis of scholars such as Meyer Schapiro, John Berger, Donald Kuspit, Roy Sieber, Terry Eagleton, and Nelson Goodman has been placed on the network of social relations engendered by art[4].

It may be contended that these scholars have broadened, without transgressing, the parameters of art historical research, by embracing a variety of disciplines which constitute the science of humanity. For example, scholars such as Kuspit and Eagleton (to mention two) have drawn on linguistic, sociological, anthropological and political sources in their theoretical investigations. Furthermore, "non art-historical" theories such as structuralism, post-structuralism and marxism have proved invaluable in enriching and expanding the field of art history[5].

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4. See J.Berger (1972); T.Eagleton (1976); N. Goodman (1976); R.Sieber (1978); K.P. Etzkorn (1978).

5. It may be proposed that the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to art history in general, and African art in particular, is reinforced by the common problems faced by disciplines such as anthropology and art history; namely the elucidation of meaning (S. Blier 1988:75 - 85).

There are numerous methodologies that can be used in order to gain a critical understanding of the meanings of art produced by Ntwane women. Therefore a multidisciplinary approach has been adopted for the following reasons: during my fieldwork, it became frustratingly obvious that the search for meaning was not simply a matter of identifying objects and asking their producers what they meant. In fact, the greater my familiarity with the styles of Ntwane paraphernalia, the more opaque the meanings of these objects became. It became evident that, instead of relying solely on exegetical information, I would have to use other interpretative yardsticks, as well as confront the problems of meaning itself[6]

Before attempting this methodological "cross-fertilization", a brief and generalised exposition of the interrelationships between several widely used social theories will be undertaken. These theories are concerned with concepts of social structure and social process, to which the art object is inextricably tied. The empiricist-functionalist approach ap-

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While there is always the danger of dillentantism when crossing disciplinary boundaries, it may be argued that the "synthesis of insights [from adopting this approach] leads to the construction of a whole ultimately larger than its parts." (H. Geary 1988:112).

6. To date, no single academic discipline has devised a definitive method for uncovering all the subcutaneous layers that comprise both the internal and external features of a particular society. It may therefore be argued that because "meaning" infuses every aspect of its material existence, it is necessary to consider a variety of methodological approaches, if not to re-create or replicate the entire fabric of a particular material culture, then at least to disentagle some of its threads.

pears to separate process and structure - empiricism, by concentrating on visible sequences or processions of events; functionalism by focusing on structures without consideration of temporal alterations.

It may be argued, in opposition to this separation, that process is intimately bound up with structure and that an adequate analysis of material culture demands an exploration of the relationship between the two, because this may provide the scholar with clues to the nature of "forces of systemic maintenance even as they shed light on the countervailing forces of change" (Turner 1977:71) It may further be argued that this "processual" approach can facilitate a greater understanding of Ntwane material culture and the forces of both continuity (structures) and change (processes) which characterise Ntwane society and the art produced by its womenfolk[7].

The relationship between stable vertical structures and mutating horizontal processes, or the synchronic-diachronic dialectic, has long been explored by scholars in various disciplines who have attempted to forge a critical discourse between theories of structure (structuralism) and historical materialism (Marxism). Maurice Godelier, for example

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7. It may be argued that functionalist methodology, while shedding light on the way in which particular communities function, remains a descriptive methodology and therefore does not offer a sufficient interpretation of the interaction between the production of art objects, social structure and social process. However, this does not invalidate adopting a functionalist approach for the purposes of documenting the role of art objects produced in specific societies. In chapter two, this method has been adopted to provide a general overview of aspects of Ntwane material culture.

argued in 1972 that a new situation was emerging, one of the aspects of which was the resumption of a dialogue between structuralism and marxism.(Godelier 1972:136).

This resuscitation of discourse between these disciplines may be attributed to the fact that for Marxist scholars, as well as for structuralist theorists, such as Claude Levi-Strauss (1968), "structures" are not simply visible social relations (as implied by the empiricist-functionalist approach), but constitute a level of invisible reality beneath these visible relations. It is the existence and functioning of these hidden, yet present, structures on which social relations depend. Structure, according to Roland Barthes, is:

> "the sediment of series upon series of particular acts, frozen with the analysts glance or reified by actors attempting to control the future acts of others, and each act is in fact an actualization (and a simultaneous transcendence) of one or more structures. It is in this dialectic - mediated by an entire complex of social relations and historical processes - that meaning is continually taking shape". (Barthes 1977:45).

Furthermore, Deconstruction theorists, such as Jacques Derrida (1976) argue against traditional theories of meaning which imply a static vertical relationship between the signifier (object) and the signified (meaning), according to which structures of meaning correspond to some deep-set universal and invariant pattern. Deconstruction theory opposes and attempts to undo the notion of a universal, hierarchial order, as well as the very system of conceptual opposition which makes that order possible. Derrida, alongside other post-structuralist scholars, argues

for a theoretical approach which will replace this vertical model relationship between the image/object and its meaning with one that will regard the generation of meaning as a process which occurs within a horizontal system of relationships. (Derrida 1976:30)[8].

Reference to structuralist, post-structuralist and historical materialist approaches to art history may provide a sound basis for a theory of the relationship between Ntwane art as a social product and social transformations experienced by the Ntwane. The following chapters will argue that that cultural symbols such as manifested in the art traditions of the Ntwane are both overt and latent indicators of social relations and that significant social relations which both maintain, celebrate, socialise and mystify the societies in which they occur, stem from productive activities. It will also be argued that cultural symbols may be regarded partly as communicators of contradictions between

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8. Opposition to the notion of symbols as the bearers of stable meanings, and the scholar as a faithful seeker of truth, is also expressed in post-structuralist thought. Deconstruction theorists reject formalist notions of timeless self-possessed structures of meaning. 'Form' itself is regarded as an operative fiction, a product of the interpreters desire for order, rather than an immutable attribute vested in the symbol itself. This view also forms one of the basic tenets of structuralist thought, that the "natural" is itself ideologically rooted and constructed in a specific historical situation and operating in conjunction with a particular social formation. In other words, it may be argued that what seems natural and obvious is not necessarily so, but that on the contrary the 'obvious' and the 'natural' are not given but produced in a specific society by the ways in which that society thinks and talks about itself and its experience. (Derrida 1976:3). Similarly, the deconstruction theorists resist any kind of settled or definitive meaning, and processes of reification through which people appropriate their created histories and cultures as "natural"and inevitable. In other words, what may appear as "natural" to the scholar, in reality presupposes a whole theoretical discourse about meaning, about the relationships between meaning and the world, meaning and people, and finally about people themselves, and how they perceive their place in their world. (Norris 1982:34).

processes of the world and a particular society's immediate knowledge of those contradictions. It may be suggested that symbols mediate this contradiction in various ways, and that they have the potential to either facilitate understanding or to mystify. (Jameson 1980:57).

For example, it may be suggested that in chapter six, the above inter-disciplinary approach is particularly useful for an exploration of the complex relationship between the traditional art produced by Ntwane women and the migrant labour system. In this chapter, it will be argued that the function of Ntwane women, as upholders of custom and traditional culture in the face of social transformations, is reflected in their apparel, as well as their roles within the domestic rural economy. This may be contrasted with Ntwane menfolk who have largely been absorbed into the migrant labour system, and are consequently more urbanised than their female counterparts. It will also be argued that the "timelessness" of Ntwane traditional objects, is rooted in the desire on the part of the producers and/or other members of Ntwane society to perpetuate a sense of stability and continuity in the face of social disruption. The above hypothesis will be investigated by analysing shifts in the function and meaning of traditional paraphernalia produced and worn by Ntwane women, as well as the transformation of these objects, and by implication, the roles of their producers, as they move from the rural context in which they possessed "use value" into the capitalist market, where they become commodities imbued with "exchange value".

As Robert Layton observes, interpretation of culture as a system of meanings expressed through symbols, is not new. Quoting Durkheim, he states:

> 'Without symbols, social sentiments could only have a precarious existence ... social life in all its aspects and at every period of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism.' (Layton 1978:74)

However, outsider access to the "meanings" behind that "vast symbolism" remains problematic. Experience in the field has revealed that the attempt to recreate an unbroken circle of communication between cultural objects and their "meanings" is a futile exercise. As Clifford Geertz has emphasised, cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. The researcher is faced with a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures:

> 'many of them superimposed, ... which are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render accessible. Imprisoned in the immediacy of its own detail, interpretation is presented as self-validating, or worse, as validated by the supposedly developed sensitivities of the person who presents it'. (Geertz 1975:24)[9].

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9. Geertz continues: "The whole point ... is, ... to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense, converse with them. The tension between the pull of this need to penetrate an unfamiliar universe of symbolic action and the requirements of technical advance in the theory of culture, between the need to grasp and the need to analyze, is, as a result, both necessarily great and essentially irremovable" (Geertz 1975:24).

Geertz's argument has proved particularly relevant during my research into the "iconography" of Ntwane mural decoration. As will be substantiated in chapter four, it may be argued that there exists neither a literal, nor allegorical relationship between Ntwane wall decorations and their meanings. In other words, it may be suggested that it is impossible to construct an unbroken circle of communication between Ntwane mural iconography and its "meaning", or iconology. This does not imply that Ntwane mural patterns do not communicate "messages" to the society which lives among the structures on which these patterns are produced; rather, as shall be expanded in chapter four, it may be argued that the patterns on the walls of Ntwane homesteads communicate meanings in an indirect and often subliminal manner, and that their significance lies not only in the decorations themselves but in the medium, materials, producers and processes involved in mural decoration; furthermore, it may be contended that Ntwane mural decorations do not passively reflect the socio-cultural mores of Ntwane society but are symbolic indicators of both social structure and social process[10].

Interpreting culture from an hermeneutic and semiotic perspective, Geertz criticizes reductionist "enclosure" as well as scientific positivism and empiricism in the interpretation of cultural symbols (Geertz 1975:45). Instead, he offers a semiotic interpretation of culture:

> "I take culture to be ... webs of significance, and the analysis of it to

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10. See chapter five for an analysis of colour symbolism among the Ntwane.

> be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretaive one in search of meaning."(Geertz 1975:5)

Adding to Geertz's defintion, mentioned above, Scholte writes: "Cultures are webs of mystification as well as signification" (Scholte 1979:3)[11]. Scholte argues that theories of representation need to be extended into theories of production, that scholars need to ask not only 'What is considered meaningful', but also 'How is meaning constituted? By whom, for whom, at whose expense? And how is meaning maintained, distributed, controlled? (Scholte 1979:10).

In other words, it may be postulated that cultural symbols are apprehended more effectively by focusing on how they work and the ways in which meaning is articulated in, by, and even against the established order. For example, the symbolism attached to the colours red, white and black, will be examined in chapter five, in order to understand how they are used to reproduce and reinforce the Ntwane's prevailing social mores in terms of the hierarchical structures governing relations between men and women.

If one perceives cultural symbols not simply as structures but as forms of social action and interaction, this may reveal how norms and social

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11. Scholte, however, criticises Geertz's analysis for its lack of "the totalising concept of context or situation" possessed by the marxist and feminist critical tradition: "Where feminists and marxists find oppression, symbolists find meaning."(Scholte 1979: 8).

structures themselves are sedimented out of social action. For example, it may be argued that the recurrence on Ntwane paraphernalia of specific colour arrangements, such as black-red-white, suggests that these colours function as models for social, cosmic and religious ideas and processes. These colours operate both within domestic and agricultural spheres - for example red, white and black earth pigments are used in mural decoration - and are associated with prosperity and fertility. Furthermore, the rites in which they are used most often - rain rituals, weddings and initiations - serve as microcosmic paradigms of the broader Ntwane social framework. In other words, as will be argued in chapter five, these colours form an essential part of the Ntwane magico-religious system of causation, in which they help sustain the general mores of Ntwane society.

Although reference will be made to several social theories concerning material culture, namely structuralism, deconstruction and marxism, the basis for the investigation of Ntwane cultural symbols remains within the orbit of traditional art historical enquiry. In this respect, acknowledgement must be given to the icolonological method employed by Irwin Panofsky, due to its emphasis on context in art historical research, and its insistence that the cultural ideas embodied by art require deciphering. "Iconology" may be understood as the meanings of certain objects, whose form and content derive from certain underlying cultural premises. An iconological interpretation directs itself to the concern with "intrinsic meaning or content"[12]. In other words,

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12. See Panofsky: Studies in Iconology (1939), Gothic architectre and

iconological analysis presents the art historian with symbols that demand decoding. These are symbols which are "manifestations of underlying principles", made up of social, philosophical and political forces which have shaped its existence, "forces that may well be unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express" (Panofsky 1939:79). Panofsky sought to overcome cultural "strangeness", to show how just as one culture could appropriate the art of another, as art, so could the outsider interpret the art of another culture without having to be an integral member of it.

The following chapters will attempt to address many of the issues raised in the above discussion. Hopefully, by adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the art produced by Ntwane women, questions will be answered as to why the Ntwane - although the smallest North Sotho-Tswana group - have maintained a strong sense of cultural identity and cohesion. Through an investigation of the meanings of Ntwane art forms, as well as an exploration of social process and its effect on the art forms that are produced in the Ntwane milieu, the following chapters will attempt to address some of the problems that are highlighted above.

Scholasticism (1951), Early Netherlandish painting (1953) and 'Meaning in the Visual Arts' (1955).

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the habitat, modes of dress and objects produced by the Ntwane. From the outset, it should be emphasised that only certain objects and modes of decoration have been selected for documentation. These include the frontal and rear aprons worn by married women, fertility dolls, hair adornments and certain examples of homestead wall decoration (2.1). Objects such as wooden headrests have been omitted, as have other wooden obects or utensils.

The reasons for this omission are as as follows: as regards the headrests; although they have been classified by Coetzee (1978) as being of Ntwane origin, it is unclear whether they are "authentic", traditional Ntwane paraphernalia. The reason for this confusion arises from the fact that Coetzee seems to have based his information on the presence of photographs in a previous, unpublished thesis by Stoffberg (1967), in which the latter - without providing corroborative evidence - assumes that certain photographed headrests form part of the Ntwane oeuvre (2.2).

Problems relating to their cultural origins also arise from several interviews with elderly male informants, who have denied that these are traditional Ntwane paraphernalia, having neither seen these objects within the Ntwane community, nor produced them[13].

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13. It is possible that Stoffberg might have had access to these headrests in other areas where small communities of the Ntwane dwell, for example, North of Groblersdal. However, the lack of adequate

Furthermore, although the headrests are sold in African art shops under the label 'Ntwane', during my fieldtrips to Kwarrielaagte, I did not witness the production of these objects, whereas with all the other objects to be described below, I was given a demonstration of the techniques and processes involved in production. This reinforced the sense that these objects - unlike the headrests - still form integral threads in the Ntwane socio-cultural fabric.

Nevertheless, one cannot irrefutably discount the possibility that these headrests were produced many years ago, and that with the introduction of migrant labour, as well as other disruptive social forces, the tradition of sculpting these objects was not passed down through the male generations - and consequently perished.

There appear also to be formal similarities between these "Ntwane" headrests, and those produced by the Kalanga and Ovahimba in Botswana (Schapera 1940:72). This may be of significance, given the Tswana origins of the Ntwane; furthermore, factors such as the break-away of a splinter group (which became known as the Ntwane) from the larger Tswana group in the late 1700s, might have resulted in the disruption of the continuity of certain artistic traditions, which would normally have been passed down from father to son.

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documentation on photographic sources in Stoffberg's dissertation, makes it impossible to establish exactly where and when the photographs of these headrests were taken.

It is therefore possible that the objects photographed by Stoffberg as 'Ntwane' headrests, and later attributed by Coetzee as belonging to the Ntwane, were possibly the few remaining vestiges of a tradition now lost. It should also be noted that in recent years, the commercialisation of traditional South African art, has resulted in objects such as the headrests finding their way into African art shops. It is possible then, that these 'saleable' objects have been fashioned for commercial purposes from the few remaining prototypes photographed by Stoffberg.

Furthermore, wooden objects have been excluded from description in this chapter. because the focus of my research - as the title of the dissertation suggests - is on paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women for both their own use and that of their menfolk. This precludes the study of wooden objects, such as meat platters and stools, which are traditionally produced by men. However, selection of some objects for research purposes and the exclusion of others cannot be made according to simplistic criteria, such as gender differentiation. For this criterion ignores the fact that although certain objects are not produced by women, they are both commissioned and used by them. Furthermore the hides of frontal and rear aprons which are decorated and worn by Ntwane women (and will therefore be analysed extensively) are in fact products of inter-gender collaboration. For it is the men who slaughter and skin the beasts and prepare the hides for decoration[14]. This raises the issue

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14. Informants have emphasised that although the women decorate the aprons, it is the men who prepare the hides. They describe the first step in preparing the skin - a lengthy process - which entails scraping

of patronage among the Ntwane, whereby women may "order" objects to be produced for their rituals. However, the parameters of this thesis preclude thorough investigation of the issue of patronage among the Ntwane.

Although sectors of the Ntwane are known to reside in different parts of the Transvaal, the focus of this chapter - and indeed the entire thesis - will be on a specific area in the Central Transvaal, known as the Moutse district, and in particular a farm called Kwarrielaagte, which is where the largest proportion of the group resides (2.2). Situated in Central Transvaal, between Loskop Dam and Dennilton, Kwarrielaagte is also the place of residence of the current Ntwane Regent, Chief Tlokwe Mathebe. Mathebe is the government appointed head of the Moutse district, an area South of Groblersdaal, of which Kwarrielaagte is a part (2.4).

Kwarrielaagte consists of concentric settlements divided into wards, called dikgoro. The Ntwane kgoro settlement is arranged as follows: the byre (cattle kraal) provides the spatial core, the ancestral burial site and the location for rituals. It is defined and enclosed by rugged, broken tree trunks and branches, which both protect and enclose the area. It is also surrounded by concentrically arranged housing units, with each semi-circular housing arrangement having a separate name. Each

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off the meat with a tool called petlo. Then tsale (nails tied together) are used to pound and soften the pelt. It is also treated with cow's milk and then pummelled to enhance the softness.

kgoro is ruled by a kgosana (headman) and below that, exist metse (villages) headed by a ramotse (father of the village). Within the socio-spatial hierarchy, the households are next, comprised of malapa of the men's wives with their respective children. The hierarchy of social groups, thus can be listed in the following order: morafe (entire group) - kgoro - motse - lapa.

The Ntwane community at Kwarrielaagte is comprised of 10 main subgroups with the Kgoro Ya Mosate (chief's family) making up both the spiritual and spatial centre of the architectural configuration. The chief's homestead is divided into two unequal semicircles, the larger belonging to the Mathebe family, and the smaller to the Mathebata. The homestead belonging to the current chief, Tlokwe Mathebe, who is acting as regent for the heir Mohlamme (2.5), is located at the point which generates the circumference.

In order of seniority, the dikgoro are arranged as follows: Kgoro Ya Mosate (the chief's kgoro), Makitla, Mohlamonyane, Ditsega, Phora, Kokomorago, Monaheng, Madise, Maphaqane (ramphise and Roko) and Malephatlo. As indicated above, these dikgoro, while forming a single unit, function as clearly divisible living units, each with separate living units, lekgotla (tribunal) and cattle kraal. The different dikgoro thus have a geographic identity in the sense that they are distanced from each other and form separate small units within the larger central area.

Ntwane homesteads are microcosms of the larger kgoro, representing the private world of the family within the broader social configuration. Access from the kgoro arena to the homesteads is via public passageways, radiating at every two or three alternate homesteads (2.6.). Where the expansion of extended family dwellings has occurred resulting in layered rear courtyards, access to these areas is often via a "transverse spatial lock" (Rich 1982:39). The main entrance of the forecourt and central house of the lapa are located on a radial axis, which links up with the communal kgoro arena. A mosadi (married woman) is in charge of one lapa, and each wife is entitled to her own lapa after the birth of the first child. In cases where a man has more than one wife, two or three more homesteads are built adjacent to one another with the 1st wife's lapa in the middle. the second wife is positioned on the left of the senior wife and the 3rd wife to the right, with additional wives being placed alternately to the left and right, with the settlement forming an inverted "U" sign. (However, this pattern is seldom found today because the average Ntwane male does not have more than one or two wives and the space for expansion is limited). A man does not have his own homestead but considers each of his wive's houses equally his own.

Married sons live in their mother's lapa until they form their own homes with the birth of their first child. It may be argued therefore, that a man's independence from his parental home is inextricably dependent on his wife's ability to conceive children[15].

The Ntwane are believed to be of Tswana origin (Van Warmelo 1935). They belonged to the Kwena-Ngwato group and were probably also related to the Rolong. However, a splinter-group migrated to the Transvaal in the late 18th century and was influenced by North Sotho groups with whom it formed alliances to escape the rampages of the Ndebele Chief, Mzilikazi. These groups, particularly the Pedi, with whom the Ntwane sheltered in the 19th century, still exert a strong influence on one another, as is evident through similarities in dress, custom, ritual, architectural configurations and language[16]. Until 1986, when conflict erupted due to the forced incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele, the Ntwane co-existed peacefully and integrated with other groups living in the area, namely Swazi, Tsonga and Ndebele speakers. The Ndebele, in particular are known to have shared close ties with the Ntwane, reinforced through intermarriage, mutual participation in initiation rituals and similarities in female adornment, such as the beaded neckbands worn by women from both groups.

Of particular significance is the similarity between the material culture of the Ntwane and Pedi, which has often resulted in outsiders mis-

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15. However the development of the migrant labour system has resulted in many young men being leaving their parental households prior to marrying and raising families of their own see chapter six for a detailed discussion on the effects of the migrant labour system on the lives of Ntwane women.

16. See chapter three for a more detailed history of the Ntwane.

taking the former for the latter. As will shortly be substantiated, it may be suggested that these similarities are manifestations of similar material conditions experienced by both groups with regard to modes of production and general social configurations. For example, both the Pedi and Ntwane depend on the rural agrarian economy and the migrant labour system for their subsistence (see chapter four for a comparison between Pedi and Ntwane traditions of mural decoration); each society observes a strict division between gender roles, which manifests itself in different types of activities performed by men and women; the Ntwane dialect is virtually identical to the North Sotho language spoken by the Pedi; and both groups usually participate in combined initiation rites. Most significant, perhaps, is the similarity in modes of decoration and apparel produced by Ntwane and Pedi women. For example, there seems to be a strong correlation between the aprons worn by women from both groups in terms of their shape, medium, traditional function and decoration. Both Ntwane and Pedi female apparel suggest the influence of missionary attitudes towards the covering of breasts; their traditional skin and bead aprons are often covered by modest smocks (ele), which are worn for special occasions (2.1 & 2.7). (Among the Ntwane, older women appear to wear their traditional clothes more regularly than their younger counterparts, who only wear them at weddings and religious occasions. This contrasts with their previous habit of wearing traditional paraphernalia on a daily basis. Furthermore, in both groups, changes in traditional dress reflect the rites of passage women experience before they are accorded the adult status of mosadi (woman/wife).

The traditional dress of both Ntwane and Pedi women changes through the maturation process which involves many transitional stages (Coetzee 1978:79)[17] . The phases of maturation are as follows: lesea (baby)(2.8a & 2.8b); mosetsana (girl) (2.9); lethumasa (uninitiated girl); sealogana (transitional period); mothepa (initiated girl), where her mature status is acknowledged as a kgarebe(2.10). However, it is only after marriage, and particularly after the birth of her first child that an Ntwane woman is accorded the status of mosadi (woman) (2.11). As proof of her acquired role of mosadi (interestingly, the word mosadi means both woman and wife, suggesting that the former concept is dependent on the latter and vice versa), her status is reflected through her apparel: a frontal leather apron, called a thetho, and an ntepa rearskirt. As will be substantiated, the form and function of the thetho and ntepa are inextricably interwoven and associated with either land or female fertility. In fact, it may be suggested that for both Pedi and Ntwane women the thetho and ntepa symbolise the most important stage of their lives: their married status, and consequently their acceptance as adult women in their communities[18].

Prior to a discussion of the traditional paraphernalia of Ntwane basadi, the stages in their sexual development will be described, namely rites

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17. See chapter five for a more detailed discussion of the maintenance of tradition by Ntwane women in the face of social change.

18. In order to provide a clear overview of the various types and styles of Ntwane women's paraphernalia, I am writing in the ethnographic "present". My use of the synchronic approach, however, does not imply that Ntwane traditional paraphernalia is necessarily divorced from the forces that effect changes in other aspects of their material culture.

of passage such as initiations and weddings. In addition to highlighting the significance of some aspects of Ntwane material culture, it is hoped that this section will introduce some of the issues which are pertinent to a greater understanding of the iconology of Ntwane women's paraphernalia. These issues, which include the importance of symbols of fertility among the Ntwane, as well as the significance of colours associated with the symbolic properties of heat and coolness, will receive greater analysis in subsequent chapters.

Among the Ntwane, rites of passage such as weddings, burials and women's "coming out" ritual ceremonies are performed within the yards of individual homesteads. Before the adolescent girls participate in the byale (initiation ceremony) which forms part of the koma (the entire intitiation period), they are expected to undergo a puberty rite - a "coming out" ceremony, as recognition of their physical maturity. However, as she is accorded official group status only after initiation, each girl undergoes a private domestic ceremony which is attended by her mother and a couple of older female relatives. When she begins to menstruate, she is placed in seclusion for a couple of days, after which she is given new clothes as recognition of her incorporation into the next stage of maturity[19]. During this "transitional" phase, between puberty and initiation, the unitiated girls wear a lebole (2.12 and 2.15) - a short leather foreskirt, sparsely decorated by rows of buttons. The skirt is largely comprised of swaying leather tassles which

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19. As mentioned above, Ntwane women are accorded adult status only after the birth of their first child.

resemble the hairstyle of fertility dolls (2.13 & 2.16), produced by Ntwane girls (to be discussed below) as well as that of the Ntwane ngapale (female diviner) (2.13 & 2.14). At the rear, she wears an ntepana (2.17; 2.18), which is a smaller replica of the married women's rear apron (2.19). (also to be analysed below). Like the foreskirt, it is adorned only with buttons[20]. The ntepana is also adorned with a leather version of the lekgabi (loose swinging vertical strings of beads) found on the married woman's ntepa (rearskirt)(photos 2.8a, 2.8b & 2.19).

The bvale (initiation rites) are directed by the chief's principal wife, because as a man, the chief is excluded from the secrets of the bvale[21]. Older female members of the group, as well as previously initiated girls assist with the ceremonies.

The first stage of the initiation process includes ritual hair cutting in which the girls' hair is shaped like "a bicycle seat" called

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20. According to informants, beads are worn by women only after initiation. This suggests that while there is a clear distinction in the type of dress worn by pre-initiates and Ntwane basadi (women), the aprons worn by the former provide a visual foretaste of the dress worn by their seniors. As will be explained with reference to the fore and rearskirts of married women, the similarities in dress may also be of conceptual significance, for each pre-initiate (as well as the initiated kgarebe) is already being prepared for her future role as wife and mother, functions which will finally accord her adult status and which are clearly indicated by the mode of dress worn by Ntwane women.

21. Information on Ntwane female initiation was provided to me mainly by an Ntwane elder by the name of Maria Ditsego and her sixteen year old granddaughter, Pretty Ditsego. To my knowledge, there is as yet no literature on the details of Ntwane intiation rites. However, Vogel has described aspects of intiation rites among the Pedi, which are very similar to those practiced by the Ntwane (Vogel 1984; Also see Monnig 1978).

tlhotshwana". The hair is rubbed with a mixture of charcoal and fat, while their faces are rubbed with a mixture of fat and red ochre. (For an examination of possible symbolism attached to the colour red, see chapter five). The girls are also given leather aprons by their mothers called kgakgo, which they wear with the ntepana at the rear. Their breasts are uncovered, their arms laden with ditokwa (bangles made from tall grass) and they wear mathala (beads around their necks). During the first stage of their initiation, the girls sleep at "a place with no name", where they are subjected to beatings and a simulated circumcision operation[22]. After this stage they have graduated from the mathuntsa stage, but have not yet reached the status of kgarebe. In fact, during the first phase of their initiation, they are also called khunwane, (red cow, or heifer) and are generally addressed as ngwale (girls undergoing initiation[23].

After their initial "breaking in period", the ngwale spend a month in a lodge called mphato (2.20), where they are instructed in sexual and domestic matters, as well as undergoing the stretching of the labia minora. The ngwale are forced to wear the grass braids for three weeks. This stretching process is monitored on a weekly basis by several female elders. When the three weeks have been completed, the elders mak two scars on the left thigh of each initiate with a thorn. According to

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22. See chapter six for a comparison between boys' and girls' initiation rites and apparel.

23. The reference to a particular cow (red and female) may be perceived as another fertility symbol; the colour red is associated both with liminality and fertility. See chapter five.

informants, this serves as verification that the ngwale have succesfully completed this rite. During this period, they are also subjected to other endurance tests, such as carrying clay dolls covered with thorns, tied to their backs[24].

This stage is also characterised by nocturnal singing and dancing, as well as other activities which reinforce the bonds of sisterhood between the ngwale. They are also taught how to make gimwane/ponenyane (fertility dolls) (2.21), legogo (mats made from river grass) and to decorate mogope (domestic calabashes) (2.22). At the final stage of their initiation, the girls are called boramaswaile. They are covered with ash and return home to their community where they are finally accorded the status of kgarebe[25].

Each kgarebe's apron differs from pre-initiated apparel, only in terms of the replacement of buttons on the fore and rearskirts by beads. As mentioned above, an Ntwane woman may wear the "adult" front and rear aprons only when she has been accorded the marital status of mosadi.

Marriage among the Ntwane is not an individual affair but a group concern, legalising a relationship between two groups of relatives (Kuper 1982:8). It also accords the bride and groom new adult status (see in-

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24. These dolls are destroyed after the initiation ritual. I was therefore unable to obtain photographic evidence, or attempt a stylistic analysis of them.

25. For an interpretation of the symbolic properties of ash, see chapter five.

itiation above). According to informants, there are no kinship taboos among the Ntwane; however, cross-cousin marriages are still favoured (Setiloane 1976:49). Usually the parents of the prospective groom visit those of his potential bride to begin negotiations on the magadi (dowry) to be given to the latter's parents, in exchange for her hand. Negotiations are usually conducted directly between parents, although a motseta (mediator) is sometimes called in if there are disagreements as to the nature of the brideprice. However, the bride's parents do not prescribe to the groom on the amount of magadi and the final amount is decided upon by the groom's relatives in terms of how much he can afford to pay. On the first day of the monyanya (wedding feast), the groom delivers the magadi in whatever form - sheep, goats, agricultural implements, money, even cattle if he is affluent - has been agreed upon by both parties.

The lenyalo (wedding) takes place over two days, the first of which is celebrated at the home of the bride's parents. At the feast, all the male members of the groom's family bring gifts to the bride and her parents, and there is much feasting and dancing, during which a goat is slaughtered in order to ensure the fertility of the bride's future home. The following day the bride and her parents go to the groom's family. Before they depart, however, she is instructed on how to behave at her in-laws' homestead.

Despite the fact that most of the Ntwane are members of the Zionist Christian Church, marriages are conducted according to Ntwane custom.

Although the groom is dressed in a city suit, the bride dons traditional bridal apparel (to be discussed below) (2.23). This adherence to custom may be contrasted with Pedi weddings, at which the bride sometimes wears a white dress, particularly if her family is Christian (2.24). In instances where the Pedi bride marries according to custom, her wedding clothes appear similar to those of Ntwane brides, in terms of the thetho (foreskirt) and the preponderence of the red, white and black/blue colour arrangement. However, unlike her Ntwane counterpart, the former wears layers of smocks, a material headdress, and her thetho is more elaborately decorated than that of the Ntwane[26]. Conversely, the Ntwane monyadiwa (bride) wears a sparsely adorned thetho and ntsepa (rearskirt), which are almost fully hidden from view by a beaded blanket[27]. Of particular significance is the tlopo (2.25; 2.26), which resembles the shape of a helmet and bicycle seat. It is carefully styled, using a razor-blade to clearly demarcate the boundary between hair and skin. Then letsopa (river mud) is mixed with cattle fat and rubbed into the hair until it forms a hard, shell-like appearance. Then, using a small stick, intricate patterns are incised onto the crust-like surface. Finally sibilo (special black soil found after the rains) is smeared over the hairstyle to make it shine[28].

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26. See Vogel (1984), for a discussion of Pedi traditional dress

27. The wearing of beaded blankets by Ntwane brides probably derives from a similar custom practiced by the Transvaal Ndebele. See Levy (1990).

28. See chapter six for a discussion on the significance of certain soil pigments in wall decoration and as a means of bodily adornment by Ntwane women.

The bride always wears a red, white or blue lekola (feather) - depending on the colour worn by her mother - atop her head (2.23). The colour is echoed in the headscarf of her bridesmaid, while her mother-in-law and sister-in-law wear contrasting coloured headscarfs in either red, white or blue (2.27; 2.28; 2.29)[29]. Sometimes the bride may also wear hlohlwane (head jewellery) in the form of a beaded headband, in either red, blue or white. The bride's face is smeared with ochre and she is required to "look glum at the thought of leaving her father's household". According to informants, the blanket worn by the Ntwane bride has a special significance in this respect, for she must wear it on entering her mother-in-law's household, having been instructed by her parents not to remove it until bedtime.

This suggests that the Ntwane bride is made to feel particularly conscious of her "foreigner" status in the homestead of her new husband[30]. However, her mother-in-law peforms a ritual which signifies that the new member of the family is indeed welcome; the latter removes the blanket, replacing it with with her own or one specially bought for the occasion. She then wears her daughter-in-law's blanket or gives it to a senior female member of the household. Thus, through the ritual of 'go tlhobola kobo ya bongwetsi' (taking off the cloak of the newly wed bride), the

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29. See chapter five for an analysis of the significance of the colour triad red-white-black/blue.

30. The label "foreigner" may be significant for an understanding of witchcraft accusations levelled at Ntwane wives who do not comply with convention. See Setiloane 1976:145. See also chapter five.

bride is no longer a moeng (stranger) but a ngwana wa legae (child of the home)[31]. Theoretically, the Ntwane bride now shares her husband's status in the kgoro. However, in actuality, as mentioned above, she is only accorded full adult status on the birth of her first child, at which point, she is given her own lapa (homestead), within the kgoro (ward) of her husband. Given the fact that Ntwane women are accorded adult status only after giving proof of their fertility, this will be an opportune point at which to document and describe in detail the paraphernalia worn by Ntwane "female adults".

Although the shape of the frontal aprons worn by Ntwane and Pedi women is identical, they differ in terms of decoration. Pedi pelts are usually incised with cross-hatched patterns, or multiple diminishing concentric semi-circles, which create a relief-like surface. Conversely the skin surface of Ntwane aprons is usually smooth and unbroken except for the presence of standardised decorative motifs. Ntwane frontal aprons are made from goatskin or, occasionally, ox hide. The former animal is regarded by the Ntwane as a "female" beast, while the latter - as mentioned above - exists in a complex relationship with its wearer.[32] Interestingly, informants are adamant that there is no higher status

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31. Setiloane (1976) mentions this ritual in relation to all marriages conducted among Sotho-Tswana groups. However, although this practice has been corroborated by several Ntwane sources, they emphasise that it rarely takes place these days, because wedding ceremonies are conducted on a much more informal basis.

32. See chapter six on the relationship between traditional paraphernalia and changing social relations among the Ntwane; see also chapter five on colour symbolism among the Ntwane.

given to wearers of aprons made from ox hide. However, given the scarcity of cattle and both the symbolic and economic value accorded them by the Ntwane, one may speculate that ox hide is regarded as implicitly superior to goatskin[33].

The thetho - as with much of the paraphernalia of the Ntwane - has a sparse mode of decoration (2.30). In the course of my fieldwork, I have encountered only three varieties of thetho decorated and worn by Ntwane women. The first, and most common, type comprises a largely unadorned surface, except for the lower half of the apron. The lower left hand side consists of two dipeshane (white beaded squares) with patterns in the centre of each square. Adjacent to these beaded squares are two square beaded motifs with beaded tassles below, called tetiane. These are normally attached to the apron between the dihlora. The dihlora are rosette-like motifs comprising beaded concentric circles in white, on the outside, black and yellow in the inner circles and red and white in the centre[34] . Each sehlora, (singular) - can function, like the dipeshane and tetiane, as an object in its own right. It appears to be of great significance to the Ntwane for it recurs on most of their traditional objects. It is said to mean squirrel's tail and, like the Pedi sehlora, is worn on the side of the head (Vogel 1984:68) (2.31).

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33. Informants also stress that goathide is used with greater regularity than cattle hide for the production of the aprons, due to the greater availability of the former.

34. Both Ntwane male and female informants have stated that it is associated in form and function with both the moon and sun.

A variation on the frontal apron described above can be seen in the thetho worn in photo 2.32. This apron may be differentiated from Type 1 by its distinctive beadwork, in the form of vertically sewn, red, white and blue beaded strips, called kgwavila. Another difference between this and the abovementioned type may be seen in the colour, shape, and position of the dihlora. (Although the hides are of different colour and texture, informants have stated that they do not regard this as significant). The dihlora in photo 2.32, while still circular, are decorated with red and blue beaded inverted triangles, which meet at the centre. The number of inverted triangles varies between four (suggesting the shape of a cross) to five (evoking the shape of a star). However, neither the wearer, nor informants attributed the sehlora's changes in form to shifts in function or meaning. Nor did they suggest that this variation indicated a different status of the wearer to those of the other type of thetho[35].

The third type of thetho is worn by an Ntwane female diviner, (mapale), who exorcises spirits which have been sent by ancestor spirits (badimo) or witches. The diviners (or prophetesses) wear frontal aprons called titwane (2.33), and rear aprons called motseka (2.34). These differ from Ntwane basadi apparel in terms of their decoration as well as in the predominance of the white-red-black colour triad, which appears more overtly on the mapale's aprons. For example, the motseka is divided into

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35. Variations in the form of the sehlora worn by Ntwane women, may depend on the geographical location of the wearer. However, I cannot corroborate this theory, as my focus of research is on the relatively "homogeneous" area of Kwarrielaagte.

three horizontal sections, the upper and lower comprising black hide and white beads, the middle section being adorned with red material[35]. Furthermore, unlike her ordinary married counterparts, the diviner does not wear the ele or smock introduced by the missionaries at early this century; instead she dons the bib-like blouse of the kgarebe called the elenyane. This immediately sets her apart from the other women, because unlike their aprons which are covered by the smocks (2.1), her apparel is clearly visible, as are the motifs on her apron. The most distinctive adornments on the frontal skirt are the dikulusane - grass-like patterns - which a mapale informant has claimed, are "helpful in locating the correct medicines". Furthermore, unlike other Ntwane women, who usually conceal their hair beneath "doeks", the hair of the mapale hangs in the style worn by small Ntwane children as well as by Ntwane fertility dolls (gimwane) (2.9; 2.14; 2.16; 2.21). This suggests that the mapale has established a degree of autonomy from the dress conventions to which other Ntwane women adhere. However, as mentioned above, it may be contended that her separation from her peer group enhances her precarious ambivalent status, and renders her virtually a social outsider.

A noticeable element on the thetho worn by Ntwane women - excluding the mapale - is the right hand side protruding flap, which the Ntwane call "the tail" (2.30). This description relates the shape of the apron to its source, an animal, a connection which is reinforced by the resemblance of this flap to the stubby tail of a goat, and which further

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36. See chapter five for an analysis of the symbolism associated with the colours red, white and black among the Ntwane.

suggests a strong connection between the medium, form and function it assumes as the thetho. This link will be clarified when examining the ntepa, the rear apron of the Ntwane woman.

The ntepa (rear apron), worn by Ntwane women, is shaped into an inverted "V" formed by a triangular shaped gap which is framed by two lekobe (tapering flaps) (2.35). Among the Pedi, this form has been interpreted by Catherine Vogel as representing the female genitalia. However, Ntwane informants have stated the shape of the ntepa adheres to the form of the animal from which it has been skinned, and that it represents the hind legs of a goat.

Yet a significant analogy may be drawn between these ostensibly divergent interpretations: the references to genitalia and goats' hind legs obviously derive from their associations with female fertility (2.36; 2.37)[37] .

As mentioned above, the frontal and rear aprons symbolise the most important stage of the Ntwane woman's life: her marital status, and consequently her acceptance as an adult woman in the community. Interestingly, as mentioned above, pre-initiated and newly initiated Ntwane girls wear rear aprons called ntepana, which - although unadorned - unless decorated with buttons - for beaded aprons are only worn by married women - are shaped like the ntepa worn by married women. It may be sug-

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37. The significance of fertiltiy symbols on Ntwane women's paraphernalia will be discussed in chapter five.

gested that because of the link between the shape of the rear apron and its possible associations with the concept of fertility, the wearing of these aprons signifies the highest status an Ntwane woman may achieve in a patriarchal environment.

The emphasis on woman's central role as childbearer is pervasive even before initiation. It finds a form in the Gimwane or Popenyane, a traditional fertility doll made from plaited sisal, string, beads and buttons (2.16; 2.21). Adolescents usually learn to make these dolls during initiation, but I have been informed that they are also made by pre-initiates, or given to them by mothers as "surrogate" children, to be played with in a 'mating' game with pre-initiated boys[38] . Each little girl pretends that her fertility doll is the child of her current boyfriend. Together with her peers she invites the "father" to participate in a dance competition to determine the leader of the group. The young boys congregate at the home of one of the girls. Placing all the fertility dolls in a line, the boys and girls form two lines on either side, and proceed to dance with their partners. The winner, judged by one of the parents, is given a goatskin as a prize

Although the doll is anatomically unarticulated, it evokes the human form, particularly that of Ntwane herbalists and children due to similarities between their hairstyles and the texture of the clay-like woollen hair of the fertility dolls. The Ntwane herbalist achieves a

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38. This game is also played by Pedi children. See Monnig 1978:107 - 108.

similar effect to that of the doll's hairstyle by mixing oxide powder with vaseline, and rubbing the mixture into her hair. Although there is no articulation of features, the gender of certain dolls may be determined from the shape of their frontal and rear aprons. Male fertility dolls are usually characterised by rectangular frontal aprons, whereas female dolls are dressed in miniature replica ntepas.

Further analogies may be drawn between the female fertility dolls and Ntwane women because of the similarities between decorative motifs found on the dolls and those worn by Ntwane women; for example, the former are adorned with [illegible]hla on the side of their heads, identical to the motifs on the women's frontal aprons. Likewise, the fertility dolls, like their human prototypes, are adorned with beaded hoops arranged in the following uniform colour pattern: two white bands are placed on top, followed by one red, one blue or black hoop, then one pink and sometimes one white hoop at the bottom (2.21 & 2.38). In fact, white, red, blue/black seem to be pervasive colours among the Ntwane, occurring in different but related contexts. The colours black, red and white are found in certain types of soil and are said to possess magico-healing powers[39].

From the above description of aspects of their material culture, it may be argued that the Ntwane are discernible as a distinct cultural group, whose modes of dress and production of objects are distinguishable from

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39. See chapter five for an analysis of the symbolic significance of the colours red, white and black.

those of other groups. However, this in no way implies that stylistic distinctions coincide with ethnic categories as an ideological justification of separate development. It would nevertheless constitute a misrepresentation to ignore the distinct cultural variations between and within groups in general and among the Ntwane in particular. The following chapter will trace the emergence of the Ntwane as a cultural group and will also examine the historical factors which have helped to shape its strong sense of ethnicity.

CHAPTER THREE

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the emergence of the Ntwane as a cultural group. Implicit in it is the view that Ntwane art has arisen out of particular historical developments in the social evolution of the group, as a result both of internal developments, as well their interaction with other cultural groups. Ntwane history has been characterised largely by the establishment of close reciprocal links with groups such as the Pedi and Ndebele. The fact that the Ntwane are of Tswana origin, but have adopted Northern Sotho customs, suggests that the emergence of a distinct Ntwane culture is the product, not of a static, unchanging heritage, but of collectively shared, exchanged and appropriated customs and experiences. Therefore this chapter traces the interaction of the Ntwane with other groups, and simultaneously raises questions concerning the issue of an Ntwane cultural "style" and identity as expressed through their distinctive forms of decoration and adornment. In this section, however, no attempt will be made to interpret the iconology of Ntwane art forms. This will be undertaken in the following chapters.

One of the problems encountered during research on the emergence of the Ntwane was the paucity of written documentation identifying the Ntwane as a distinct cultural group. Scholars researching the history of groups who occupied sectors of the Transvaal in the nineteenth century, and who are known to have interacted with the Ntwane during and after the

Difaqane, mention groups such as the Pedi, Koni and Kopa, but make no reference to the Ntwane[40]. This omission seems strange in the light of the strong sense of cultural identity among the Ntwane; however, it is possible that they were overlooked or confused with other groups because of their eclectic traditions and paraphernalia, which, as has been discussed in chapter one, are clearly similar to the material culture of groups such as the Pedi. Coetzee, however, provides a comprehensive overview of the history of the Ntwane, as well as their links with the Kopa, Koni, Kgatla and particularly the Pedi during the nineteenth century (Coetzee 1976:45 - 67). However, information concerning Ntwane material culture and history prior to this period is sketchy, and accurate dates are impossible to determine accurately. In fact, the most reliable sources of information are the Ntwane themselves, who - through their tradition of oral history and mythology - have succeeded in filling in many historical gaps. Together with Coetzee's research, occasional photographic documentation and visits to government archives and verbal explanations by Ntwane informants, the history of Ntwane material culture is slowly being pieced together. At this stage however, the reconstruction is only partial.

As mentioned in chapter one, in 1935, Van Warmelo documented the existence of the "Bantwane" in sections of the Transvaal inhabited by the Pedi, Ndebele, Kopa and Koni, among others. He described them as being of Tswana or West-Sotho origin. More recently, scholars such as D.F.

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40. See Delius (1983); also Maylam (1986).

Coetzee (1978), J.F. Stoffberg (1967) and P. Rich (1982) have documented that the Ntwane, as early as the 19th century, were interacting closely with the Pedi, and may therefore be regarded as belonging to North Sotho speakers. A description of several features by which the Ntwane can be classified as North Sotho will be made, prior to an exploration of the emergence of an Ntwane cultural identity. This overview of North Sotho characteristics will possibly provide insight into the issue of land ownership and the probable reasons as to why the land is of such importance to groups such as the Ntwane.

In the Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa, Hammond-Tooke describes the word 'Sotho' as a broad generic term, designating a large group of people who display linguistic and some cultural similarities, and who occupy the interior plateau of South Africa (Hammond-Tooke 1974:71). He subdivides them into 3 main groups: West Sotho or Tswana, Northern Sotho (Pedi and Lobedu), and Southern Sotho (Basotho), who occupy present-day Lesotho and adjacent areas. He emphasises however, that although these groups are related linguistically, they are not homogeneous, and that differences between and within groups, as well as the historical experiences of each, have varied (Hammond-Tooke 1974:75).

The Sotho may be differentiated from the Nguni by variations in language, settlement patterns and kinship ties. The Nguni tend to be widely dispersed in scattered homesteads and villages, whereas the Sotho live in more concentrated settlements or towns. (Maylam 1980:21). Within the Sotho group, however, there exist differences in dialect, varying

settlement patterns and socio-political organisations. Furthermore, it has been argued by Maylam that the distinction of West, North and South Sotho are based primarily on differing political structures that developed during the difaqane. He suggests that these communities may have developed dense settlement patterns because of ecological constraints, such as the availability of water, which resulted in a small number of densely concentrated settlements (Maylam 1980: 42 - 44). This argument may also explain why certain North Sotho groups such as the Pedi, and Ntwane, who live in areas where water is scarce, place an important emphasis on concepts of fertility (and threats thereto), as expressed through their paraphernalia and mural decorations[41].

In addition to a greater territorial consolidation among the Sotho in general, and the North Sotho in particular, there is also more emphasis on familial introversion. As regards kinship, the Nguni are exogamous, whereas the Sotho prefer cross-cousin marriages. It may be argued that this kinship system among the Sotho reinforces community ties on multiple levels, binding members of a village or ward in "multiplex relationships" (Hammond-Tooke 1974: 125) It may also be suggested that the architectural configuration of Ntwane settlements in Kwarrielaagte, in particular, reflects and reinforces close reciprocal community ties, as suggested in the above description of North Sotho settlement patterns. Kwarrielaagte consists of concentric settlements divided into

41. See chapters four and five. Hammond-Tooke also discusses the central significance of water among the Kgaga (Hammond-Tooke 1978)

wards, called dikgoro. The Ntwane kgoro settlement at Kwarrielaagte is arranged as follows: the byre (cattle kraal) provides the spatial core, the ancestral burial site and the location for rituals. It is defined and enclosed by rugged tree trunks and branches, which both protect and enclose the area. It is also surrounded by concentrically arranged housing units, with each semi-circular housing arrangement having a separate name. Each kgoro is ruled by a kgosana (headman) and below that, exist metse (villages) headed by a ramotse (father of the village). Within the socio-spatial hierarchy, the households are next, comprised of malapa of the men's wives with their respective children[42].

From a functionalist perspective the Ntwane offer an "ideal" cultural paradigm from which to study the meaning and role of art within a traditional society. Firstly, the largest dwelling area of the Ntwane - a farm called Kwarrielaagte, between Loskop Dam and the rural township of Dennilton - is comprised of traditional North Sotho dwelling units, each consisting of a lapa (homestead), courtyard and surrounding wall, which are accessible via public passageways, radiating at every two or three alternate homesteads. This architectural configuration seems to reflect a stable social hierarchy, in which everyone has his or her assigned status and position, according to nature and social custom, presided over by a benevolent chief who serves as both mediator and absolute ruler. Furthermore, the traditional paraphernalia produced and worn by Ntwane women seem to reflect this "unchanging" ethos; their function is

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42. See chapter two and four for a detailed description of Ntwane settlement patterns at Kwarrielaagte.

to affirm and reinforce the status quo . Thus, this traditional rural environment appears to offer - from a functionalist-empirical perspective - an ideal model for an understanding of how Ntwane art objects and customs are integrated into and serve to uphold prevailing customs, within a traditional rural context.

However, this stable appearance is possibly deceptive, for it masks the underlying socio-political disruptions which have characterised the history of the Ntwane. It may be suggested that the above functionalist interpretation fails to address questions as to why there has been such a strong emphasis on ethnic identity on the part of the Ntwane, ever since the group broke away from the larger Ngwato group in Botswana in the late 18th century. This splinter-group's history as a definable entity started with their migration to the Transvaal in the 19th century and included the political upheavals of 1986 which centred on so-called ethnic hostilities between the Ntwane and Ndebele. It will be argued in this chapter that the sense of ethnic identity among the Ntwane has developed historically through interaction between the Ntwane and other groups and as a result of inter-group conflict revolving around the issue of land-ownership (to be elaborated on below). An analysis of the socio-historical evolution of the Ntwane will serve to highlight the discrepancy between the outsider's perception of a "traditional" environment as a static entity, and the reality of social changes and processes which have affected Southern African rural communities in general, and the Ntwane in particular.

The issue of cultural identity is a sensitive one within the South African arena, because rigid classification and demarcation of ethnic groups has been used by successive white governments in this country as a justification for apartheid, resulting in the subjugation and dispossession of the vast majority of South Africans. It may also appear contradictory to apply cultural boundaries at a time when the barriers between academic disciplines (not to mention population groups) are being challenged and blurred. However, it may be argued that to deny the existence of separate - though not exclusive - cultural identities among the many groups of South Africa, amounts to a misrepresentation of socio-political realities. It is therefore necessary to grapple with problems of classifying groups in South Africa and establishing criteria for such classification[43] .

One should however, be aware of the danger of imposing mutually exclusive criteria onto groups and thereby interpreting them as static, timeless units. Rather, it is suggested that one should attempt to draw out the essential cultural dynamics of a particular society, while simultaneously highlighting changes, variation and inter-group influences over space and time.

In the introduction to the book 'The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa, L.Vail (ed) argues that ethnic or cultural consciousness is a

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43. It may also be argued that as one establishes classificatory boundaries, so do they disappear, because the criteria often overlap between different societies, making it virtually impossible to define neatly compartmentalised, exclusive and self-contained entities.

product of historical experience, which cannot be dismissed simply as 'false consciousness'. He suggests that the emergence of ethnic ideologies should be examined as a response to changes, which have affected the rural areas as much as the metropolitan districts (Vail 1989:5). He examines several theories concerning the emergence of ethnic ideologies as "consciously crafted" responses to the disruption of traditional society in the late 19th and early 20th century. These disruptions have caused the breakdown of traditional patriarchal societies, and resulted in the creation of firm values and customs by senior members of traditional rural communities in order to reinforce a collective sense of security and identity in the face of political and territorial emasculation (Vail 1989:12)[44].

The focus of the rest of this chapter will be predominantly on the historical evolution of the Ntwane from the beginning of the 20th century. This period has been selected for special emphasis for the following reasons: firstly, Kwarrielaagte, the farm on which most of the Ntwane reside, was purchased shortly after the end of the Second South African War (also known as the Anglo-Boer War), a transaction, which signalled the historical consolidation of the Ntwane as a distinct cultural group.

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44. The notion of a static human nature independent of time, place and circumstance is possibly a misconception, that what people are, or consider themselves to be, is so entangled with where and who they are, and with their belief systems, that people are inseparable from the circumstances and context of their existence. As emphasised by Colin Murray, the perception that culture is the private property of a given population, amounts to the reification of the concept of culture, according to which it is treated as a concrete, "tangible object" instead of as "an aspect of the human condition". (Murray 1980:17).

Secondly, the early years of the tw[illegible]th century heralded the passing of several land laws which were to disrupt the economic and political survival of black South Africans in general, and the Ntwane in particular. These laws revolved around the issue of land ownership, on which the Ntwane base their their subsistence, and indeed, their wellbeing.

Loss of land would most likely be perceived by the group as a threat to their existence and cultural identity (to be elaborated on in detail, below). Thirdly, it may be argued that this period is of particular significance for an understanding of the complex relationship between the Ntwane and Ndebele, both of whom were affected in similar ways by the social, economic and political upheavals which occurred at the turn of the century. Therefore a brief overview of the recent history of the two groups will be made in order to understand the historical nature of ethnic identity and how external factors can play a crucial part in reinforcing the desire for ethnic solidarity. It may further be argued that the sense of ethnic identity, emphasised by both the Ntwane and Ndebele, and which culminated in the outbreak of ethnic violence in 1986, is the symptom and product of factors which at one time or another, threatened the survival of both groups.

As mentioned above, the name "Ntwane" refers to a group who live on the fringe of the north eastern Transvaal middleveld. Although they have been classified as Northern Sotho, or Central Transvaal Sotho, (Van Warmelo 1935:109), their background can be traced to present-day Botswana,

where they lived until the late 18th century as part of the Kwena-Ngwato group. In approximately 1780, a splinter group broke away from the Mangwato group. According to Ntwane informants, a prohibition on the consumption of cattle was violated by one of the Mangwato chief's sons, who was consequently banished. Although informants do not recollect the name of the offender, he was apparently labelled "Ntwane", because of his belligerent manner. Those who followed him into exile became the BaNtwane (people of Ntwane)[45]. It was only from approximately 1825 - as a result of the rampages of the militant Ndebele leader, Mzilikazi - that the Ntwane, fleeing in search of protection, become influenced by Transvaal North Sotho groups. It may be argued that during this period, the Pedi in particular, exerted a strong and lasting cultural influence on the Ntwane[46]. Those wars, called the Difaqane played a pivotal role in the disruption and disintegration of many Sotho communities. Simultaneously, however, it may be argued that the Difaqane also played a part in stimulating the development of cultural consciousness among the Ntwane.

The history of the Ntwane from approximately 1825 - 75 was one of confrontation, with Mzilikazi's impis, as well as with neighbouring tribes and with members of the old Z.A.R during the Sekhukune Wars[47]. An in-

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45. See Coetzee 1978:36.

46. See Delius (1983) for a discussion on the the rise of the Pedi polity; also Monnig (1978) and Vogel (1984).

47. See Coetzee 1978:chap 2 for a detailed overview of Ntwane history during this period.

evitable consequence of these confrontations was that the Ntwane were often defeated, although they always succeeded in reconsolidating.

The dates and historical details of their defeats and successes have been difficult to reconstruct. However, it has been easier to document the chronology of reciprocal ties between the Ntwane and other groups, during peaceful periods. Confrontations with Mzilikazi seem to have pushed the Ntwane into the sphere of influence of the Pedi, of Sekhukuneland. Furthermore, the bonds between the two groups were reinforced due to the common practice among the Pedi to offer in marriage the daughters belonging to the chief's family in order to foster close relations with other cultural groups (Monnig 1978:20; Coetzee 1978:45) Intermarriages were part of the forging of advantageous alliances between the Pedi and Ntwane, providing the former with swelled ranks of followers, and the latter with a protection under the wing of the polity.

According to historical documents, the Ntwane first came into contact with white farmers of the Z.A.R, between 1850 and 1860. When Z.A.R farmers waged war against chief Sekhukune 1 on 16 May 1876, attacking Sekhukuneland from various directions, the Ntwane were also targeted for invasion. On 4 July 1876, the Ntwane were attacked and were forced to surrender a day later. This again resulted in a fragmentation of the group, whose members fled to escape retribution from President Burgher's soldiers[48]. According to informants, the Ntwane leader

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48. Archives SN 1877- 2881 p. 8; Taken from Coetzee 1978: 46.

Chief Ramatshedi fled with some members of the group further east to Chief Sekhukune's abode. However, his wives returned to their ancestral home of Chief Maserumule, among the Kopa. (Van Warmelo 1935:76)[49]. Other members of the group fled approximately 150 km southwards and settled on a farm called Spitskop, approximately 15 km NE from Bronkhorstspruit, on a koppie by the same name (3.1).

Informants mention that members of this splinter-group who settled on Spitskop approached a certain Martiens Porter, teacher and brother of field marshall W. Porter, on whose farm they lived . They asked him to make peaceful overtures to the white farmers who resided in the area, and as a result were granted permission to remain there. This conflict-free period, during which members of the Ntwane stayed on Spitskop, became known as the Period of Peace (Coetzee 1978:119).

During this period, Ramatshedi II, along with several members of the chief's house, had remained in Sekhukuneland. According to informants, he was subsequently captured by a group of farmers, under the leadership of a boer farmer called Ferreira. He escaped on the way to Pretoria and returned to Sekhukuneland where he reconsolidated his family and other members of the Ntwane group who were still in

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49. The Ntwane also chose wives for the royal household from the family of the Koni chief. In turn, his male subjects chose their spouses from the ranks of the Ntwane, in addition to having selected wives from the Pedi chief's household (Van Warmelo 1953:75). In addition, the Kopa, under the chieftainship of Maleuw (Bolce) established blood ties with the Ntwane (Coetzee 1978:109) The Ntwane in turn gave one of their chief's daughters as a wife to Monamudi, the Kopa chief.

Sekhukuneland. He then joined the rest of the group at Spitskop. According to documentary sources , by 1884, there were approximately 333 Ntwane settled on Spitskop and surrounding farms[50]. Apparently, after this conflict-free period, problems arose between the Ntwane and several farm owners. Consequently a large portion of the group, still under the leadership of Ramatshedi II, departed from Spitskop and settled on the farm Witpenskloof in about 1890. Witkpenskloof is only a few kilometres south of Groblersdal and approximately 15 km from Kwarrielaagte, the Ntwane's present chief residential area (Coetzee 1978:48). At Witpenskloof, the chieftainship was taken over by Paledi (3.2), who acted as regent for Ramatshedi II's young son Mohlamme II, (known as Piet) (3.3). It was during their stay on Witpenskloof that the Ntwane began fully incorporating scattered groups into the central Ntwane group. By 1902, (the end of Anglo-Boer war) the group had swelled its ranks considerably, and by 1903, they had moved to the nearby farm of Kwarrielaagte.

The period that began with the Difaqane in 1820, was to end with most Southern African societies being subjected to some form of colonial rule. Although this era for the Ntwane was also one of consolidation, it may be argued that several processes served to simultaneously emasculate its political power, and strengthen its desire to maintain a strong sense of cultural identity. Both the lack of historical documentation and the parameters of this dissertation do not allow for a comprehensive

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50. SR 597/84 p. 9-10, quoted in Coetzee 1978:124.

overview of the Ntwane's cultural history from the mid 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century . However, it may be suggested that the processes which disrupted most Southern African traditional societies, also affected the Ntwane. These processes include the penetration of Southern Africa by white missionaries, in particular the Berlin Mission. In addition, wars fought by the Z.A.R. farmers against the Pedi affected the Ntwane directly. Finally, the process f proletarianisation, stimulated by the discovery of gold and diamonds (Maylam 1986:132), as well as the Anglo-Boer war, disrupted the traditional material culture of most rural African societies, and the Ntwane in particular.

In 1902, farms came onto the market because of losses or death during the Anglo-Boer war, and many were bought by Africans. Keegan has observed :

> 'In the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War, the devastation of Boer farms and herds and the shortage of liquid capital contrasted sharply with the accumulation of stock and agricultural equipment in African hands' (Keegan 1979:238).

Furthermore, white landowners often found that the best return could be obtained by renting land to African tenants or through sharecropping. Keegan notes that it was a system that suited white landlords who lacked capital. It reached a peak in the decade after the Anglo-Boer war and appears to have been the 'dominant relation of production in most of

arable districts of white-settled highveld during those years' (Keegan 1979:238).

According to informants, the Malephatlo family - who are members of the Ntwane - were the first to hear that the farm Kwarrielaagte (69 JS) was up for sale after the Anglo-Boer war[51]. While negotiations took place between Chief Paledi and the owners of Kwarrielaagte, the Prinsloo brothers, the Ntwane bought 856.5 hectares, belonging to a neighbouring farm, Elandsdoorn, from its owner Mr de Beer in 1908 (Coetzee 1978:149)[52]. This portion of land was registered in the name of Chief Paledi. In addition the group paid the owners of Kwarrielaagte an annual rental until the sale was finalised in 1910. The Ntwane then purchased 5/9ths of Kwarrielaagte, which in total is 2 249.3 hectares[53].

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51. Members of the Malephatlo family have related how their ancestors had to contribute offerings in the form of livestock, in order to reach the required sum (3.4).

52. All official accounts of the transaction may be found in records in the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, as well as in the Deeds of Transfer no' 5381/ of 1910, 2070 of 1910 2071 and 2072). According to the Transvaal Native Affairs Department, from 1 July 1909 to 31st May 1910, the Ntwane members living at Kwarrielaagte (69JS) totalled 4712. 1970 census figures reveal that the Ntwane population had increased to 20062 people, broken down as 8237 men and 11825 women.

53. Kwarrielaagte has remained the largest dwelling place of the Ntwane over the last 85 years. It is here where the morafe ya mosate (the chief's household) is located, ruled by Chief Gideon Tlokwe Mathebe (Regent since 1975), who is also chairman of the Moutse District Governing Council, within which Kwarrielaagte is situated. (Coetzee 1978:60). The chief also occupies a seat on the Lebowan Executive Council, together with a member of the Ntwane royal family, G.M. Mathebe

However, despite their success in securing land in 1903, it may be argued that the Ntwane continued to feel vulnerable in the face of outside threats to their security and survival as a group.

Like other groups in the Transvaal, their period of post-war prosperity was short-lived. Rural settler capitalism began to increase through new export markets for maize, and due to the injection of capital into white farming. These advantages appear to have changed the outlook of white landowners in the Transvaal. It became more profitable to use land for direct production than to enter into cash tenancies or sharecropping arrangement with Africans. In addition, new legislation was introduced, further restricting Africans' access to land. For example, in 1913, the Land Act was passed, promulgating the principle of territorial segregation by setting aside existing African reserves for African occupation and prohibiting the purchase or leasing of land outside these reserves. And as the government began to act against the independent African peasantry in the interests of white commercial farmers, the expectations and aspirations of rural Africans, in general, and the Ntwane, in particular were thwarted. The decline of the black rural economy was also accelerated by the outbreak of diseases such as rinderpest, which destroyed large numbers of livestock.

It may be argued that the above events were contributory factors to a desire on the part of the Ntwane to emphasise their cultural solidarity, as expressed through their artforms. For example, as will be discussed in chapter four, the origins of an Ntwane mural tradition can be linked

to historical circumstances which threatened the existence of the group. It may further be suggested that the sense of ethnic identity among the Ntwane can be regarded as a response to the historical circumstances mentioned above.

By the 1950s, the Ntwane were experiencing severe financial problems, due to difficulties in repaying a loan from the Department of Bantu Administration and Development. In order to meet their financial commitments they were forced to sell portions of land they had purchased in Valshfontein. (Deed of Transfer 17776/1949, in Coetzee 1978:157). Furthermore, the Vlaklaagte area occupied by the Ntwane was designated by the government for the Loskop Development Scheme. After initially resisting the relinquishment of Vlaklaagte, the Ntwane eventually agreed to move. However, they believed they had been poorly compensated for their compliance. Thus, forced removal, financial problems, and insecuirty in the face of oppressive legislation possibly reinforced the determination of the Ntwane to maintain a strong sense of cultural cohesion. It may also be suggested that the concept of a strong ethnic identity appealed to the Ntwane, because it provided them with a sense of psychological comfort and a measure of control over situations which threatened to disrupt their lives.

A brief overview of the historical circumstances that affected the lives of the Transvaal Ndebele will possibly highlight similar features, which have been manifested in the material culture of the Ntwane and the

Transvaal Ndebele. Schneider, in her research on Ndebele mural decoration, has postulated that their art symbolises a statement of ethnic identity. She traces the origins of their strong sense of ethnicity to the Mapoch war of 1883, in which the Ndebele were defeated. Schneider argues further that Ndebele desire for unity was intensified by legislation such as the Land Act of 1913, which did not provide land for the Ndebele, because of earlier suspension of their land rights. (Schneider 1986:210; also Levy 1990:90). They were forced to move between farms because the Squatters Law of 1887 prevented them from congregating on farms. The only choice was to remain on Boer farms as cheap labour. After having been evicted from surrounding white-owned farms in the early 1920s, the Transvaal Ndebele sought refuge in Moutse. In 1924, the Ndzundza chief, Mapoch, requested permission to settle in the area and was given a place with his people at Weltevrede." (McCaul 1987:66).

In the 1950s and 60s, many Ndebele were evicted from farms because of increased mechanisation, poor conditions and the abolition of labour tenancy in 1964. At this stage, unlike the North Sotho, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu and Tswana, no formal separate Ndebele homeland had been earmarked by the Nationalist Party; it may be suggested that the government had intended that the Ndebele should integrate with other African groups and "disappear" (McCaul 1987:63).

A number of traditional chiefs were, however, unhappy about proposed exclusion from homeland status and in 1968/9 they began to promote the idea of a separate Ndebele nation.At first the government stated the

Ndebele should remain under the jurisdiction of Lebowa and Bophutatswana (where many Ndebele had settled after being evicted from white farms), and in 1968, the government established the Ndzundza tribal authority in Lebowa.

The Ndebele chiefs resisted this attempt to absorb them into other homelands, and soon after the nucleus for an Ndebele homeland was chosen in the form of an area near Groblersdal, to which extra land was added in later years. By 1983, the government promised to give the Ndebele territory legislative assembly status. In December 1985, the Moutse district, which incorporates the Ntwane, as well as a number of cultural groups, such as the Swazi, Pedi, Sotho and Tsonga, was forcibly incorporated into the soon-to-be independent KwaNdebele[54].

This move was implemented by the South African government, who (among other promises to the bantustan) hoped to provide KwaNdebele with an established infrastructure - a hospital and schools - which it presently lacks. The authorities ignored the protests of the Moutse community, which has resulted in ongoing unrest, violence and hostility within the once peaceful area. The ongoing conflict has had a disastrous effect on Ntwane and Ndebele relations. Whereas in the past the two communities freely intermarried and engaged in cross-cultural exchange, a deep

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54. A 1980 census revealed that the Southern Ndebele have grown to a population of a third of a million within the Transvaal, many of whom live in Moutse among other cultural groups such as the Ntwane, Pedi and Swazi (Moutse also has a small but sizeable Tsonga and Swazi population) (McCaul 1987:104)

mutual distrust now characterises their relationship, with whole families being divided into Ndebele and Ntwane factions. Both groups have ceased participating in collective initiation rites, and among the Ntwane, object or mural decoration that is deemed too "Ndebele" is avoided. As yet, however,it is still too early to hypothesise the long-term effects of this conflict on the art produced by both groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

Although the farm Kwarrielaagte is situated within the densely populated district of Moutse, which is inhabited by a variety of cultural groups, it is immediately distinguishable from the other close-knit wards in the area. This is partly due to the architectural configuration of Kwarrielaagte which evokes a sense of homogeneity, unlike the rest of the heterogeneous structures that have sprung up from Loskop Dam to Dennilton[55] . This appearance of unity is communicated through the form and structure of the circular settlements of Kwarrielaagte, as well as through the distinctive mural decorations on each homestead wall. However, the casual observer might mistake the decorated homesteads of the Ntwane at Kwarrielaagte for those belonging to the Pedi (Rich 1982:40)[56] . This is possibly because in its general layout, form and structure, the architectural configuration at Kwarrielaagte is representative of the typical North-Sotho type settlement pattern.

However, it may be argued that the Ntwane have adopted a distinctive style of mural decoration which is clearly distinguishable from the mural aesthetic employed by other groups. This suggests that despite obvious inter-group affinities, the Ntwane possess a strong sense of cultural solidarity, which is expressed through homestead decoration.

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55. Kwarrielaagte is located between these two points, just off the main road leading from Loskop Dam to Dennilton

56. Rich, in his study of Ntwane and Southern Ndebele architecture, points to similarities between the house forms, *lapa* enclosures, threshhold entrances and decorative murals of both groups

This chapter aims to explore the mural aesthetic of the Ntwane, in terms of the "meanings" of the patterns which are found on their homestead walls. Mention will be made of the possible origins of the tradition of wall painting among the Ntwane; in addition, reference will also be made to the mural aesthetic of the Pedi and Transvaal Ndebele. Some of the methodological problems encountered in the interpretation of the iconography of Ntwane mural decorations will also be highlighted. However, at the outset it must be emphasised that at this stage, no attempt will be made to investigate their iconology. That task will constitute the predominant thrust of the following chapter on colour symbolism.

As mentioned in chapter two, the notion of an absolute style belonging exclusively to one group, is problematic. It may be postulated that the cultural style of specific groups constitutes the accumulation and appropriation of experiences, aspirations and ideologies, selected from their own history and influenced by other groups with similar histories and material cultures. For example, inescapable similarities which exist between the Pedi and Ntwane are revealed through cross-cultural comparison between Ntwane and Pedi modes of dress decoration. Both groups depend on the rural agrarian economy and the migrant labour system for their subsistence[57] ; both societies observe a strict division between gender roles, which manifests itself in the divisions between types of activities performed by men and women. In both societies, domestic

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57. See chapter six for a discussion on the possible effects of the migrant labour system on Ntwane material culture.

mural decoration appears to be inextricably related to both the architectural and agricultural environment. Mural decoration is undertaken by female members of each household, who also pack and plaster the soil for the lapa walls. The art of wall decoration is passed down from mother to daughter, and is also taught during female initiation[58] .

However, visually, each group seems to favour separate iconographies, comprised of specific patterns, filler patterns and motifs. In her MA dissertation on the Pedi, Vogel (1984) offers an interpretation of Pedi wall iconography which postulates that pattern types, such as the incised multiple triangles, known as magwai, directly reflect the socio-cultural background of their producers, and are related symbolically to motifs found on other Pedi paraphernalia, such as women's aprons. Vogel postulates further that a specific Pedi style may be noted from the types of decoration applied to their walls, from which it is possible to "read" an iconography which reflects the socio-cultural background of the Pedi women (Vogel 1984:45).

Conversely, research into the "iconography" of Ntwane mural decoration suggests that there appears to be neither a literal, nor allegorical relationship between mural visual representations and their referents. In other words, it may be argued that it is impossible to construct an unbroken circle of communication be tween Ntwane mural iconography and its "meaning", or iconology. In fact, it may be suggested that one is

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58. See chapter five for a detailed description of the function and process of female initiation among the Ntwane.

forced to undertake a cultural analysis which, in the face of a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, is intrinsically incomplete. This does not imply that Ntwane mural patterns do not communicate "messages" to the society which lives among the structures on which these patterns are produced; rather, as shall be expanded below, it may be argued that the patterns communicate meaning in an associative and subliminal manner, and that their significance lies not only in the decorations themselves but in the medium, materials, producers and processes involved in mural decoration. Furthermore, it may be contended that their socio-cultural function is not reflective, but mediatory.

It is perhaps significant to note that by referring to the structure and style of walls surrounding Ntwane homesteads, one is al-luding to the demarcation of boundaries which operate both on a physical and metaphysical level; for just as the walls divide one homestead from another, so do they serve as structures which define the traditional status of the women who decorate them. It is therefore tempting to link these functions with the "meanings" of the motifs employed to decorate the walls.

However, it may be postulated that meanings of motifs do not simply reflect a socio-cultural context and that the attempt to link visual signs to cosmological concepts on a one-to-one basis diminishes the essence of their multivalency. It may be suggested that to form direct equivalents between signs and concepts amounts to a reduction of their symbolic potential to the level of allegory, a mechanical and restric-

tive derivative of the symbolic forms; whereas the latter are dynamic and polysemic, imbued with emotive, conceptual and experiential values. It may be postulated, therefore, that the concept of allegory is based on the attempt to make reality conform to one-to-one analogical relationships. This contradicts reality which, by its very nature, does not conform to a single theory of causation despite our efforts to impose a sense of order thereon.

This does not imply that the motifs used to decorate Ntwane homesteads do not "mean". On the contrary, it may be argued that they are imbued with meanings, some of which may be apprehended, and others of which remain elusive. It may also be suggested that to interpret motifs and modes of decoration in terms of their function alone, does not amount to an apprehension of their meanings, because it roots them in the synchronous present, implying that their 'symbolic' components are suspended in time and space, and are therefore excluded from the forces of change which affect all aspects of material culture.

Before elaborating further on the problems encountered in interpreting the meanings of Ntwane mural decorations, a brief description will be undertaken of the arrangement and structure of Ntwane homesteads, as well as the process of wall decoration, as undertaken by the female members of each home. This will be followed by suggestions as to when and why the tradition of wall painting developed among the Ntwans.

Kwarrielaagte is divided into semi-circular wards, which, according to their overall spatial arrangement, comprise one large semi-circle. The chief's homestead is located at the top of this semi-circle, and forms the point which "generates the circumference of the housing enclosures' inner circle" (Rich 1982:33). The homestead locations of his subjects are similar to the Pedi model of being to the left and right, in accordance with seniority. The inner circle is traditionally representative of the most senior members of the Kgoro, and subsequent growth takes place from behind. It may be suggested that the structural and spatial arrangement of the homesteads and Kgoro are intricately related to one another, thereby enhancing the overall sense of community and solidarity among the Ntwane. The homestead itself is rectangular, serving as a microcosm of the larger Kgoro and representing the smaller unit of the family within the greater architectural and social order. The homestead is defined by the orthogonal walled courtyard, which is in turn divided into a front and rear courtyard by the central position of the main house. The courtyards function as outdoor rooms, where most of the daily domestic and social rituals occur.

It is on both the outer and inner main wall of the rectangular courtyard that Ntwane women engage in mural decoration (4.1)[59] . The walls - which are packed and plastered by the women - are comprised of earth, dung and coarse aggregate stone. Their structural design is simple, and - apart from the entrance portals - they are usually unadorned by moulded embel-

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59. By "outer", I refer to the position of the wall in relation to those approaching the homestead from outside.

lishments. It may be suggested that the structural simplicity of the courtyard walls forms a suitable canvas for the understated, earth-hued patterns with which they are decorated (4.2)[60] .

As mentioned above, the process of mural decoration is undertaken by female members of the home. this activity is performed at the end of the harvest, the beginning of the dry season and the period between the harvesting of the crops and the sowing of the following year's crops. According to both male and female informants, one of th first tasks of the newlywed bride is to "make the home look beautiful", by decorating the walls, but it is not necessarily a solitary task as female relatives often lend a hand. Red, white and black coloured soil is combined into a monochrome mixture called limo which is used as both a decoration and as a protection against witchcraft[61] .

It may be suggested that it is not only the aesthetic components of the wall decorations that appear to be of significance, but also the healing and protective properties of their soil components - black river mud, a white chalky clay, and reddish ochre. Once these pigments have been combined into an earth-hued mixture, the women paint the mixture on the walls, using either their fingers or sticks. The patterns are generally

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60. Occasionally, as in photos 4.2 and 4.8, geometric motifs are incorporated into the mural design, in separate panels. Informants have stressed that these designs are simply embellishments and have no special symbolic significance attached to them.

61. See chapter five for a discussion on the use of specific colours as deterrents against threats to the wellbeing the Ntwane community.

understated and simple, and the visual emphasis appears to be more on symmetry and clarity than virtuosity.[62]

The tradition of mural decoration obviously forms an in: ral part of Ntwane culture (the relationship between the development of Ntwane cultural identity and Ntwane material culture has been discussed in chapter two). This becomes particularly evident when comparing early and more recent photographic documentation of Ntwane architecture. It must be emphasised, however, that photographic documentation does not date earlier than the 1920s; furthermore there is very little data accompanying the photographs indicating specific dates or locations, and, as has been the case with the Ntwane in particular, many of the subjects photographed have been mistaken for members of other groups. Notwithstanding these problems, however, photographic documentation has proved particularly useful for an understanding of elements of change and continuity in Ntwane material culture.

Not only are the Ntwane virtually unrecorded as an historical entity, possibly because of their small numbers in the beginning of the twentieth century, there concomitantly appears to be very little photographic documentation pertaining to this group. However, the most comprehensive collection of photographs on the Ntwane I have found to date belongs to the grandson of a missionary who ministered to several groups in the North Eastern Transvaal Middleveld during the early 20th

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62. See below for a more detailed description of the pattern-types found on Ntwane homestead walls.

century, and particularly in the Moutse district, (as it is known today). He was called Father Charles Weil, and apparently helped to pioneer the establishment of the Philadelphia Mission Hospital, located in Dennilton[63]. One of his photographs is of a woman in traditional garb, standing outside an enclosure made from reeds. Although Weil identifies the subject as a member of the Kopa, it appears from comparisons between her mode of dress and that of contemporary Ntwane women, that she is indeed of Ntwane origin (4.3).[64]

According to elderly Ntwane informants, the traditional dress of Ntwane women has not undergone drastic changes. This information has also been corroborated through the existence of old photographs, taken of the family ancestors of several informants, which apparently were taken many decades ago. In contrast, Ntwane domestic structures have undergone significant changes. In a later photograph of several Ntwane homesteads, taken in approximately the 1950s, it appears that the mural structures and modes of decoration that we identify today as belonging to the Ntwane, were already in existence during this period.

It may be suggested that there are several reasons as to why this tradition of wall painting was nonexistent at the beginning of the century,

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63. This has been corroborated by my chief informant, Willie Malephatlo, who is 85 years old, and can recall with disarming clarity, the cultural evolution of the Ntwane.

64. I was refused permission to photograph his collection; however, Stoffberg, in his doctoral thesis on the Ntwane, (1967) has similar (undated and unsourced) photographs which I have substituted for the ones taken by Weil.

and why it had already become widespread by the 1950s. Firstly, until their purchase of the farm Kwarrielaagte in 1903, the Ntwane did not possess a permanent place of abode. They had spent relatively short periods of time at various locations in the Transvaal[65].

Despite periods of peace which were spent among groups such as the Pedi, Koni and Kopa, their history until the end of the Anglo-Boer war was characterised by conflict, as a result of which they were often fragmented. It therefore seems likely that the erection of permanent shelters was not possible until a suitable piece of land was secured for their survival. Furthermore, it may be suggested that the threat to their sense of security by laws such as the Land Act of 1913, as well as the Natives Trust and Land Act which further restricted African land rights, intensified their desire for ethnic cohesion. This may have been a significant factor in the development of Ntwane wall decoration in the 1940s[66].

If one compares the cultural history of the Ntwane and the Transvaal Ndebele during the 1940s, it may be suggested that there are discernable

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65. See chapter three for an historical overview of Ntwane migration to Kwarrielaagte.

66. As resources in reeds were depleted, due to the increase in higher density settlements, they were replaced by mud walls as boundary markers. It is possible that the lack of height in mud walls might have prompted a marking of boundaries through paint. Schneider postulates that the development of an Ndebele mural tradition was largely the response to a feeling of dispossession and displacement. This insecurity, she suggests, was augmented in the 1940s, by the passing of the land laws, mentioned above.

similarities as well as differences in the circumstances which contributed to a strong sense of ethnic identity on the part of both groups. During this period, the Ndzundza Ndebele, who, like the Ntwane had been the victims of conflict in the late 1800s, were living as indentured labourers on white farms in the Transvaal (Schneider 1986:210). Unlike the Ntwane, their land rights had been confiscated, and it is therefore possible that "the memory of the injuries of the past, and the shared experience of defeat, humiliation and despair, have combined to produce a feeling of cohesiveness, of belonging to the Ndzundza (Schneider 1986:218). In the 1940s, the residents of Kwa Msiza - the first Ndebele tourist village - were given acrylic paints by the South African government to decorate the walls of their homes, in order to provide a tourist attraction.

Later, Ndebele living at Kwa Mapoch, and more recently, Botshabelo were also provided with acrylic paint for similar purposes. This resulted in a departure, on the part of the Ndebele, from the earth colours with which they used to decorate their homes in the 1930s, to a more garish, bright mural art tradition (Schneider 1986:219). It may be suggested that the Ntwane, who were living nearby and had already participated in cultural exchanges with the Ndebele, were influenced by this aesthetic activity.

However, the fact that the Ntwane had adopted North Sotho customs and had close ties politically and linguistically with th Pedi in Lebowa might have resulted in greater stylistic similarities between Ntwane and

Pedi mural art, than between the Ntwane and Ndebele. For example, both the Ntwane and Pedi decorate their homestead walls with earth colours, unlike the elaborate hues used by the Ndebele. Until the 1970s, when land was finally earmarked for an Ndebele homeland, the Ndzundza were scattered in areas under the control of white or other black groups. Considering the history of the Ndebele responses to domination, their sense of displacement might have intensified their need for a strong ethnic identity. This might have been a significant factor in the development of their bold, idiosyncratic mural tradition in the 1940s. Conversely, among the former groups, there appears to be a greater emphasis on stylistic cohesion and continuity as opposed to the more individualistic virtuosity of the Ndebele. It may also be argued that the more understated mural aesthetic of the Ntwane and Pedi ties in with the broader symmetrical arrangement of North-Sotho settlement patterns. As Rich writes of the Ntwane, "the abstract concept of a universal order, as expressed in the ... concentric settlement pattern should be seen as symbolic of the BaNtwanes' cosmological code" (Rich 1982:40).

This does not imply that the Ntwane have not been influenced in any way by Ndebele visual iconography. In 1985, I visited several homesteads of Ntwane men who had married Ndebele women. Although the decoration adhered to the standardised visual scheme employed by most of the inhabitants of Kwarrielaagte, I discovered that Ntwane wives of Ndebele origin sometimes incorporated synthetic hues with the earth pigments which were used to decorate their homestead walls. Thus, yellow and blue outlines sometimes framed the more conventional patterns (4.4). However,

in 1986, after conflict had erupted over the forced incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele, I was informed by Chief Mathebe that homes in Kwarrielaagte, which were regarded as "too Ndebele"(as in fig 4.5), had been burnt, and/or their inhabitants ostracized by the rest of the community. It may be argued that the events of 1986 - 1988 reinforce the fact that the tradition of mural decoration, as practised by the Ntwane and Ndebele, serves as a statement of ethnic identity, which is in turn, a response to historical conditions.

However, in order to comprehend the changing qualities of Ntwane mural motifs, and the problems of interpretation thereof, it is necessary beforehand to describe their physical and formal components. Like their Pedi counterparts, Ntwane mural decoration appears to conform to a standardised formal scheme. During my research I encountered two principle examples of wall decoration. Firstly, the most commonly used decorative type (Type A), found on the walls surrounding the chief's homestead and that of his headmen consists of the following scheme: the exterior of the walls (on most homestead walls, both sides are decorated) are divided into two horizontal fields, the upper being narrower than the lower. Both fields are subdivided into vertical sections, demarcated by thickly applied borders. The uppermost field is subdivided into one decorated sector alternating with empty or undecorated areas. The decorations consist of short and long wavy or straight striations.

The lower wall in type A appear to be divided into "fields" divided by either blank spaces or by vertical strips with geometric motifs in them,

which are visually similar to the motifs used in Pedi mural decoration. However, the Ntwane, unlike their Pedi counterparts, generally do not appear to decorate their walls with "filler" motifs[67]. The motifs on the lower field of Ntwane walls are two well-defined, inverted triangles, forming diamond shapes between them. The apices of the triangles are separated by a thickly applied horizontal band which runs continuously through the centre of the wall. This type of decoration on the lower field varies slightly from homestead to homestead, with the points of the "inverted triangles" being intersected directly by the horizontal band, without a space between the triangles. On all the homestead walls which I studied during my research, representing type A, these motifs were repeated, giving Kwarrielaagte the appearance of stability, order and continuity (4.1; 4.6; 4.7; 4.8; 4.9).

The second principal mode of decoration found on Ntwane walls (also called makwala, as in Type A) were motifs which resemble continous, elongated figures of eight (8), placed in a horizontal position, with each "8" intersecting the next (4.10). Although these motifs were filled in with orange and brown/black, unlike the monochromatic decoration of type A, informants have refuted the possibility that the additional colour imbued type B with extra "meaning". However, although this formal

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67. In her research into the mural art of the Pedi, Vogel has identified filler motifs with names, which were identified by her informants as being "representative" of aspects of their environment. In contrast, Ntwane informants insist that there are no direct, literal analogies to be made between the visual details of their mural art and the surrounding environment. See Spencer 1975:x.

scheme did not occur in a different geographical context to Type A, several informants suggested that Type B was more "Ndebele" than Type A and was, consequently, less popular. This information was corroborated on my return to Kwarrielaagte in 1986, during which time I was informed that no-one practices that type of mural decoration, for fear of being ostracised by the rest of the community. Yet, apart from suggesting that mural decoration is primarily a statement of ethnic identity, informants appeared reticent about disclosing why the formal schema of Type A had been chosen as a specific form of Ntwane decoration, and whether or not the decorations embodied a specific symbolic code.

Perhaps the most repeated and frustrating question asked by the cross cultural researcher of members of societies under examination is: "what does it mean?". In the field, I have discovered many phenomena that may be regarded as 'symbolic'. However, one of the problems in trying to decipher these symbols, lies in the outsider's insistence that the "true" meaning of art objects is explicitly iconographic. For example among the Ntwane, when questioned as to what their mural decorations were called, the general response was "makwala" (4.11). On being asked the "meaning" of the word, informants replied that it was a "decoration". Similarly, the designs on Ntwane calabashes are also called makwala. However, Ntwane informants insist that although the latter are also decoration, they are altogether different from the mural paintings, despite the similarity of design. Furthermore, when asked why certain motifs or designs were produced on certain objects, the collective response has been 'It is the custom/ tradition'.

'We have always done it this way'.

'Our ancestors knew the meaning of these things but we have forgotten it.'

One may speculate that these responses imply that the original interpretation may have been lost, or that a design has been repeated solely because it is customary. Alternatively, some informants believe that semantic disclosures constitute the desecration of an object's powers which may be cumulative, or associative and not amenable to articulation.

These responses have prompted the examination of what constitutes meaning, and for whom? If informants do not recognise or identify "meanings" of objects, or if they do not recognise the discrepancy between their explanation of a symbol and their behaviour in connection with it, does that imply, as suggested by Nadel, that "uncomprehended symbols have no part in social inquiry; their social effectiveness lies in their capacity to indicate, and if they indicate nothing to the actors, they are, from our point of view irrelevant, and indeed no longer symbols". (Nadel 1954:108).

Or, does it imply as Victor Turner states, that it is nevertheless "legitimate" to include within the meaning of a symbol, "aspects of behaviour associated with it which the actors themselves are unable to interpret, and indeed of which they may be unaware, if they are asked to interpret the symbol outside its activity context" (Turner 1967:27)[68].

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68. Turner distinguishes three levels or fields of meaning: 1) the

Turner has emphasised the importance of regarding and interpreting ritual and symbolic objects as keys to the understanding of social structure and social process. (Turner 1977:63). As will be expanded upon in chapter five, the Ntwane produce and utilise a large number of objects and symbolic colour arrangements, which are connected with multiple rituals, without attempting to explain their meanings. Rites of passage, in particular, in which objects and apparel with evident symbolic associations are used and worn, are not accompanied by explanations as to their significance and meaning. This suggests that complex symbolic systems are not necessarily dependent on publicly articulated exegetical commentary. (Sperber 1975:18).

It may be suggested that meanings might be assigned to Ntwane mural motifs non verbally through ritual and ceremonial action, and should therefore be investigated according to "a processual approach"[69]. Turner maintains that process is intimately bound up with structure and an adequate analysis of social life necessitates a rigorous consideration of the relation between them. This approach, he proposes, will then

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level of indigenous interpretation (exegetical meaning); 2) the operational meaning; and 3)the positional meaning" (Turner 1967:50). The exegetical meaning is given by indigenous informants, the operational meaning is equivalent to its use, and to the qualities conveyed through usage, such as anger or sadnes, whereas the 'positional meaning' derives from structural relationships which symbols possess among themselves .(Turner 1967:51).

69. Turner uses this term as a method for ascertaining how cultures give significance to their rituals, material activities, cultural interactions and social transactions. (Turner 1977:69).

give us "clues to the nature of forces of systemic maintenance even as they shed light on the countervailing forces of change" (Turner 1977:69).

It may therefore be suggested that the meanings of cultural motifs, objects and activities are constantly changing, even though they might be made or utilised by their producers as a form of socio-cultural rationalisation, in order to render their social life a coherent and comprehensible reality. In other words, it may be suggested that references to socio-cultural customs and tradition refer simultaneously to continuity; furthermore, that the coherence of a system is as much in the dimension of space as that of time.

Having investigated the boundaries of interpreting mural decoration among the Ntwane, it may be suggested that a partial understanding of the meanings of Ntwane mural decorations can be apprehended through an acceptance of the open-endedness of the motifs used in decorating the walls. Furthermore if one regards them, not as rigid allegorical entities, but examines, for example, the historical and social context in which they are applied, the components of which they are constituted - in other words, the materials which are used to decorate the wall surfaces, and the conceptual relationship between, say, mural decoration and other cultural activities practiced by the Ntwane - a clearer picture may emerge of the meanings of Ntwane of these decorative motifs .

It is hoped that this approach will build up a series of networks and correspondences between several areas of cultural activity practiced by the Ntwane, in order to apprehend the cumulative meanings communicated through the paraphernalia produced by the Ntwane women. It must be emphasised that the attempt is not to impose boundaries so as to comprehend the art of the Ntwane as a reflection of a single, synchronous whole. For this approach would constitute an artificial imposition on a field which is naturally continuous.

As mentioned above, the notion of an absolute style belonging exclusively to one group, is problematic. It may be postulated that the cultural style of specific groups constitutes the accumulation and appropriation of experiences, aspirations and ideologies, selected from their own history and influenced by other groups with similar histories and material cultures. From the above cross-cultural comparison between Ntwane and Pedi modes of decoration, it is evident that inescapable similarities exist between the two groups. An exploration was undertaken of the Ntwane mural aesthetic in terms of the "meanings" of the patterns which are found on their homestead walls, the possible origins of the tradition of wall painting among the Ntwane, as well as some of the methodological problems encountered in the interpretation of the iconography of their mural decorations. From the above, it may be concluded that the Ntwane possess a distinctive style of mural decoration which is clearly distinguishable from the mural aesthetic employed by other groups, and that, despite obvious inter-group affinities, the Ntwane possess a strong sense of cultural solidarity, which is express

through homestead decoration. The following chapter on colour symbolism will attempt to investigate the iconology of selected art forms produced and used by the Ntwane in terms of their colour symbolism.

CHAPTER FIVE

During the course of my research, I discovered that the colours white, red and black seem to be used pervasively by Ntwane women, recurring both on their paraphernalia, in mural decoration and as a form of body adornment. This chapter aims to describe the manner in which these colours are manifest in Ntwane women's paraphernalia, as well as to explore the symbolic parameters of the colours white, red and black, according to the different contexts in which they are found. In other words, the theme of colour in women's paraphernalia will be interpretetd both in terms of its iconographic and iconological signifance among the Ntwane.

Because of the lack of documentation, the origin of these colours' significance for the Ntwane is, at this stage, speculative. However, as is the case with several traditional groups in Southern and South Africa - the Ndembu, Kgaga, Zulu and Ndebele, to mention a few - these colours appear to have had, and continue to have ritualistic, if not symbolic, importance. Among the Zulu, for example, red, white and black are associated with the training and practice of diviners[70]. With reference to the Ndembu, Turner gives a range of symbolic interpretations to meanings expressed in the colours red, white and black (Turner 1967:38). Among the Ndebele, the specific meanings of these colours have not yet been

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70. See A.I. Berglund (1976).

established, but early literature on the material culture of the Ndebele mentions the prolific use of red and white beads[71]. Although a systematic symbolic code has not been established for the Zulu and Ndebele, it may be argued that the Ntwane regard the colours red, black and white as having great symbolic significance, and as being directly linked to concepts of fertility (and threats thereto)[72].

Unlike the Ndebele, with whom they have shared close cultural and aesthetic exchanges, the Ntwane have not developed elaborate beaded colour schemes. Instead, they have adhered mostly to the basic red-white-black triad on their beadwork and other paraphernalia. Exceptions to this rule may be found on the pink beaded hoop worn by Ntwane women around their waists. However, as will be explained shortly, this colour - a mixture of white and red - functions within the symbolic code accorded to the colours red, white and black. Furthermore, in some instances, dark blue beads have been substituted for the colour black, and Ntwane informants have insisted that this colour is regarded as the equivalent of black[73].

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71. Levy, in her research on the beadwork of the Ndebele, states that it is unlikely that the colours red, white, black, have symbolic meaning, nor systematic colour coding. She suggests that specific regional or individual meaning might exist, but that these are difficult to establish. (Levy 1990:8).

72. The following chapter discusses in greater detail the origins of beadwork among the Ntwane; however, it may be suggested that as it appears that at least from the late 19th century onwards - with the discovery of gold and diamonds in the Transvaal and the influx of foreigners, traders, and missionaries into the interior, Ntwane women, along with their Ndebele and Pedi counterparts, were able to obtain beads (Levy 1990:103).

73. It should be emphasised that the sections below paint an ahistorical picture of the contexts in which this colour triad functions. This "essentialist" approach has been adopted as a matter of convenience in

In chapter two, selected examples of Ntwane women's paraphernalia were documented and described, as indicators of the status of their producers. It may be argued that the colour triad black, white and red functions in a similar, albeit more subliminal manner. For example, black and white beads are sewn along the edges of the frontal and rear aprons worn by married women, and black, white and red beads form the centre design of the sehlora motifs found on female aprons. The beaded hoops worn around the waists of Ntwane women are arranged in the following order: two white bands are placed on top, followed by one red, one blue or black hoop, then one pink and sometimes one white hoop at the bottom. Likewise, Ntwane fertility dolls are also adorned with beaded hoops which follow the same black-white-red triad arrangement as their human prototypes. Furthermore, Ntwane brides always wears a red, white or blue lekola (feather) - depending on the colour detailed description of Ntwane bridal regalia). The colour is echoed in the headscarf of the bridesmaids, while the mothers-in-law wear contrasting-coloured headscarfs in either red, white or blue.

The colours black, red and white are found in certain types of soil and are said to possess magico-healing powers. These soil-types are combined to form a paint-like substance, mutswara mutsi, with which women decorate their homestead. Informants have stated that this "medicine",

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order to highlight the possible symbolic significance of the colours black red and white within the Ntwane worldview. However, this does not preclude - due to historical factors - the possibility of mutations in the meanings of these colours.

which is painted on the walls, acts as a deterrent against witchcraft as well as a form of decoration[74].

Significantly, as shall be explained shortly, the colour triad white (tshweu), red (khwibidu), black (ntsho or lechoku, which also means 'to protect') operates both within domestic and agricultural spheres and is associated with prosperity and fertility. For example, rain - which is essential to the rural economy of the Ntwane - is invoked through the symbol of the tladi (the lightning bird) which according to Ntwane informants, has red, white and black colouring[75]. The lightning bird is "trapped" in an object called lehadima. It is an ox horn, decorated to resemble a bird, with red, white and black concentric circles which are called "the eye" of the lehadima (5.1). This object is used by an ngaka (diviner), a symbolic "outsider" with mystical powers, who uses those powers for healing purposes (5.2).

The role of healer and outsider is also embodied in the female version of the ngaka, namely the mapale (5.3).[76] . She also utilises the colour

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74. See chapter four on mural decoration among the Ntwane.

75. Isaac Schapera has identified the tladi as belonging to the Cape Fish Eagle family. (Schapera 1955:47).

76. Turner, in 'The Forest of Symbols' (1967) and 'Drums of Affliction' (1968), describes the social role of diviners among Ndembu, as one of persuading the recalcitrant individual to fit in. He suggests that the diviner has similar powers as the recalcitrant witch, and remains the object of suspicion because he or she does not quite fit in with social convention. Consequently the diviner is simultaneously respected, feared and mistrusted by the rest of the community (Turner 1967:101). The mapale exists in a more precarious state of ambivalence than her male counterpart, because of the ambiguous symbolism attached to women as both harbingers of, and threats to, health and fertility.

triad red-black-white; however it is manifested, not in symbolic objects, but in the clothes she wears[77]. Unlike Ntwane women she does not wear the traditional thetho and ntepa. Instead she wears a frontal apron called titwane, and rear apron called motseka. These differ from the apparel worn by Ntwane women in terms of their decoration as well as in the predominance of the white-red-black colour triad, which appears more overtly on the mapale's aprons. As will be substantiated below, the mapale, employs the colour triad both as a protective device, and as a reflection of her ambivalent social status .

The above brief description of selected contexts, objects and paraphernalia in which the colour triad black-white-red is found among the Ntwane only hints at the pervasive presence of these colours within the community, and at their association with concepts of fertility, health and wellbeing. However, it may be argued that because these colours are found in different circumstances and contexts, it would be simplistic to interpret their meanings according to a static symbolic paradigm. It may be suggested that meanings may shift according to context and that the pervasiveness of the red-black-white colour arrangement does not presuppose a static interpretation of their function within Ntwane society.

Before providing a detailed examination of various social contexts in which the above colours are used to produce meaning, it is necessary to

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77. See chapter two for a detailed description of the apparel worn by the mapale.

confront the problem of apprehending the symbolic significance of objects used in specialised activities, which can be intepreted only by experts or initiates. For example, objects used for the purpose of divination, healing or witchcraft possess symbolic properties which may be understood only by those who have been initiated into the practice of divination, such as the ngaka, or mapale. The objects themselves and their operational meaning, such as the lehadima (a decorated horn used by the ngkaka, to trap lightning) might not be hidden from the unitiated; however, the reason as to why this particular object is considered efficacious, may constitute knowledge that only the specialist may divulge. Likewise, according to informants certain motifs which appear on the foreskirts of female diviners may allude to certain grass types, which in turn may be believed to possess curative or magical properties; however, these symbolic attributes may be accessible only to the diviner. Furthermore the colours red, white and black may be recognised as symbols of central significance to the Ntwane, without the participants attempting to dissect or explain the sources of their symbolic significance.

Much has been written on colour symbolism - particularly the colours black, red and white - through the ages, in various societies. While scholars have found parallels between the occurrence of this colour triad in cultural histories diverse as Christianity during the Middle Ages and the Ndembu (Turner 1967: 110), the predominant trend in recent literature has been to discount the notion of a universal, archetypal meaning, as manifested through colour symbolism. Rather, recent studies

of symbolism in general, and colour symbolism in particular, tend to emphasise the lack of natural links between symbol and thing symbolized - to view the symbolic attribution as a matter of cultural determination, as conventional or even as arbitrary (Layton 1978:23).

The reasons why a specific symbol appears in use, seems to depend upon some form of cultural condition; upon the social position of the claimant and claim rather than with the question of the objective reality of what is claimed. Bearing this theory of colour symbolism in mind, the methodological approach in this chapter will centre on the application of structuralist and post-structuralist theories. The role of the colour triad red-white-black will be examined in terms of its ideological function among the Ntwane in order to sustain the general mores of Ntwane society, as well as its role in reinforcing specific power relations between men and women[78].

It may be argued that the imposition of a classificatory system onto otherwise disparate elements, provides the Ntwane with a symbolic language which helps to render intelligible a world which would otherwise

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78. The term ideology implies a system of representation whereby everyday life is produced and perceived by its participants as "natural". (Althusser 1971:57) That which is specific and historical is expressed as general and unconditional by the proponents of a particular ideology. It may be argued that ideology is not an option adopted by self-conscious individuals, but is the condition of a particular unconscious worldview, unconscious precisely in that it is unquestioned and taken for granted. Ideology work in conjunction with political and economic practice to constitute the social formation of a particular society and is inscribed and embodied in a particular way of thinking, speaking and acting (Belsey 1980:6).

be uncomprehended or chaotic. This symbolic language may be expressed through material symbols, such as art objects, which function as mechanisms for ordering experience and segmenting it into manageable categories through culturally standardized systems of visual representation. As Nancy Munn suggests:

> "Art is concerned with ordering experience and expressing that order not in general statements but in as succinct and concrete way as possible: "It is the essence of cultures to construct patterns of meaning and social relevance out of the diverse phenomena of experience...," (Munn 1983:337).

It may be suggested therefore that the significance of individual colours is to be interpreted primarily in terms of the relations envisaged among them in each culture, not in terms of a colour's universal value.

The colours red-white-black - as they occur in various objects and context - are used by the Ntwane to reinforce socio-cultural traditions, and the "power" of these symbols has its strongest effect during Ntwane rites of passage. It may be suggested that these rites are regarded by the Ntwane as models for social, cosmic and religious ideas and processes; in other words, as microcosmic paradigms of the broader Ntwane social framework.

This is particularly significant in the phase of initiation during which both male and female initiates do not yet fit into a defined social structure. They are neither child nor adult, because they occupy an in-

determinate stage between a defined social status and the threshold of adulthood. This stage of "in-betweeness" or liminality is a period during which they are made to reflect upon their future social roles and during which they learn about the Ntwane worldview.

Their status is one of ambivalence because they are no longer children yet neither are they adults. They are therefore in the most vulnerable and, consequently, malleabl of states[79]. Turner, in his study of Ndembu ritual, has suggested that what is undefined and contradictory in terms of social definition tends to be regarded as ritually dangerous (Turner 1967:106). Similarly Clifford Geertz explains :

> 'Man cannot tolerate ambiguity, and the chaos that flows from it. He finds the uncanny profoundly disturbing; he demands order, so that he can take his world for granted ... Thus he builds conceptual, explanatory, schemas that define unequivocally the nature of the world and man's place in it. The first step in this endeavour is classification. Man classifies his kin according to logical principles and the demand of his social structure, ..."
> (Geertz 1966:47).

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79. The activities and rituals performed by both male and female initiates are organised around the concepts of submission and equality. They are subjected to beatings and painful rituals whereby for example, sticks are placed between the initiates' fingers and squeezed. These endurance tests serve as lessons in submission to authority, as well as the in acceptance of pain. The authority of elders is perceived to be absolute, because they represent the axiomatic values of Ntwane society. While the initiates are made acutely conscious of the hierarchical gap between themselves and their elders who supervise the rites, they are also instilled with a sense of community. They are all forced to undergo collective rites without regard for rank, hierarchy or cultural division, and their sense of comradeship is reinforced by songs and dances in which they all participate.

Mary Douglas argues that the concept of pollution "is a reaction to protect cherished principles and categories from contradiction." (M. Douglas 1966:134).

It may therefore be postulated that during this period of liminality and social ambivalence, specific symbolic structures have to be erected which will serve as models for future behaviour of the neophytes. These symbolic structures may be manifested in certain ritual activities, endurance tests and art objects.

For example, the human physiology of both Ntwane male and female initiates seems to become a symbolic template for the communication of knowledge and for the reinforcement of social divisions. Ntwane female initiates undergo simulated circumcisions at approximately the same stage of initiation as their male counterparts who are actually being circumcised. Similarly, newly circumcised males are dressed in female paraphernalia: their hair is shaped in the "bicycle seat" style of female initiates. Round their waists (like their female counterparts) they wear beaded grass hoops arranged in the following descending order: white, red, black or blue, followed by pink (5.4 & 5.5). As mentioned in chapter one, these colour arrangements approximate those worn by initiated and married women, and those with which Ntwane fertility dolls are decorated. It may be suggested that for the initiates these gender inversions represent either sexual neutrality or androgyny[80]. This may

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80. It is worth noting that just as men's and women's roles are demarcated in Ntwane society, the structures in which initiation rites take place at an advanced stage, are built and situated in opposition to one

be of particular significance in view of the fact that after initiation, male and female initiates will assume strictly demarcated social roles, which up to this stage have not been so rigidly defined.

The fact that males are dressed to resemble both menstruating women (post-menopausal women cease wearing the beaded hoops, see below) and brides may also be an indication of a relationship between their extreme liminality and that of Ntwane women at certain stages of their fertile years, for menstruating women are always considered "polluted"[81].

It may be argued that the colour triad, red-white-black, found on Ntwane female paraphernalia in general, and initiates' apparel in particular,

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another. For example, the male initiation lodge - although above ground - is shaped in the form of a tunnel, with only a roof overhead and no sealed exits and entrances (5.6 & 5.7). It is also placed to the right of the cattle kraal. Conversely, female initiates are housed in a large enclosed hut-like structure, which is constructed to the left of the kraal. This positioning appears to tie in with lateral gender symbolism which has been discussed by Needham (1962). Among the Ntwane this division appears pervasive: during marriage ceremonies, the groom stands on the right hand side; widows paint the right side of their gate-posts black; Ntwane women are buried on their left sides, Ntwane men on their right; diviners throw "female" bones with the left hand. Male informants have stated that women are associated with the left because they are "smaller" than men. Furthermore, a man must walk on the right side of his woman "because he defends her from men approaching from the opposite direction with their women". However, it may be argued that the association of all things weak, small and female with the left, is rooted more in ideological conditioning than according to a natural order.

81. The initiates are considered unclean because their status is at this stage undefined, nor have they been structurally placed within a particular cultural topography. The fact that girls in the first phase of initiation are taken to a "place with no name", suggests that while they may still have a physical reality, during this first phase they have no social reality.

serves as part of a classificatory system which is imposed onto otherwise disparate elements. It may be suggested that the relationship that is constructed between, say, particular colours and states of purity and impurity, provide the Ntwane with a symbolic language which helps to render intelligible a world which would otherwise be uncomprehended or chaotic. It may also be suggested that these colours, although not strictly allegorical (see chapter three for a discussion of the difference between symbol and allegory), themselves are made to form part of a structural system of oppositions; that is, between the qualities associated with heat and coolness.

Turner (1967) and Hammond-Tooke (1978) have both discussed the concept of heat (danger, liminality) among the Ndembu and the Kgaga, respectively. They have also linked this concept directly to the use of systematic colour combinations in specific contexts. It may be argued that the Ntwane associate certain colours with particular properties which are believed to affect the well-being of the individual and the community. However, unlike the Ndembu, who judging from Turner's interpretation, are particularly vocal about the specific symbolism of their colour combinations, the Ntwane use of certain colours within varying contexts appears to be more effective as tacit symbolism. In other words, although different colours are used in different combinations within varying contexts, it may be suggested that the Ntwane do not appear to link individual colours overtly with specifically defined states of heat or health. This does not reduce the pervasiveness of certain colours among the Ntwane, nor their referential powers; rather it may be

argued that it is partly due to this pervasiveness that their symbolic associations work on a socially subliminal level.

As mentioned above, male initiates wear beaded coloured hoops around their waists, arranged according to standardized colour combinations of white, red and black/blue. Likewise, their faces, at a later stage of the initiation process, as is the case with female neophytes, are decorated with black, red and white clay pigments. This colour triad also forms the decorative basis of Ntwane brides' apparel (5.8), as mentioned in chapter two, as well as appearing in connection with rain rituals[82] . However, the white-red-black combination also appears pervasive outside of the context of rites of passage and formal social rituals; it appears on Ntwane female apparel, in the beadwork of the thetho and ntepa, and particularly on one of the dominant symbols of the Ntwane, namely the sehlora. Furthermore, its soil constituents are used on Ntwane homestead walls as a magico-religious means of protection against all forms of misfortune. Likewise, various elements which are either associated conceptually or visually, or in both ways, with the colour triad, are also used extensively in both ritual and everyday situations by the Ntwane[83].

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82. In this context, red may be linked to the colour black as a symbol of sexual attractiveness, for Ntwane brides also smear their faces with a form of charcoal, which, according to informants, also enhances their physical desirability. This interpretation is discussed more fully in relation to the association of black with storm clouds.

83. For a discussion of the latter context, see section on homestead wall decoration, below.

For example, female initiates have soot rubbed into their hair, and, on completing initiation, are covered with ash. Soot and ash may be connected in terms of the colours black, and red (the latter deriving from fire of which soot and ash are residues). Furthermore, both soot and ash represent heat in its "cool" phase. If one accepts heat as a symbol of liminality, as suggested by Turner (1967) and Hammond-Tooke (1978), then it may be argued that soot and ash represent the termination of a period of liminality. However, as mentioned above, the colour red is also associated with menstruation and heat, which makes it a "liminal" colour in certain contexts.

As will be substantiated below, the associations of the colour red, among the Ntwane, appear to be ambiguous, for just as red may signify danger, or pollution, so is it associated with the concept of fertility, on which the survival of the Ntwane is dependent. There also exists the aesthetic component of the colour red, as a sign of beauty. At Ntwane weddings, the bride and her attendants smear their faces with red ochre, which, I have been told by informants, makes them more attractive to men.

The concept of fertility, mentioned above, highlights the importance of another cooling agent, namely water. Linking this element with the colour white and human biology, Turner has noted that the Ndembu associate water with semen, purity and cleanliness (Turner 1967:110). However, among the Ntwane the significance of water as a cooling (implicitly healing) agent, seems to derive mo[illegible] from environmental fac-

tors and material relations of production. Among the Ntwane, according to informants, rain is regarded not merely as the physical source of regeneration; it is also the symbol of spiritual fertility and a sign that the social order is operating smoothly. In order to ensure the smooth operation of society, rain making rites are held annually, by the chief and a rainmaker, and are attended by the Ntwane community as a whole. As mentioned previously rain is invoked through the symbol of tladi (the lightning bird) which according to informants, comes from the sea. This bird has been identified by Isaac Schapera as the Cape Fish Eagle, and it is possible that it has been singled out for symbolic emphasis by the Ntwane both because it embodies the colour triad red-black-white on its feathers and beak, and because it acts as a mediator in the dialectic relationship between air and water, above and below (Schapera 1955:47). This mediative role may also link symbolically to a creature which features prominently in Ntwane mythology: the Ntwane totem, the kwena (crocodile), which is capable of surviving both in water and on land, and therefore, like the lightning-bird, may be regarded as a link between the elements necessary for the survival of the Ntwane: land which yields crops and water which is the life-source of the Ntwane, and on which agricultural production is dependent.

The lightning bird is "trapped" for the rain making ceremonies by an object called lehadima , which is made from a cow horn. A red, white and black beaded circle near the apex of the lehadima is called the eye (nonyana) and the "mouth" because, according to informants, "the eye sees lightning and the mouth speaks thunder". Thus the lehadima incor-

porates a number of symbols - selected colour arrangements, circles, references to lightning, horns - which are directly related to concepts of fertility and cyclical regeneration. These symbols in turn may be linked to the circular sehlora and its inextricable connection with the women who produce this motif. Several Ntwane informants have concurred that the sehlora is "necessary for a healthy life". Significantly, one of the fertility dolls that I photographed displayed a sehlora that had been divided into shaded segments of differing tonality. The owner of this fertility doll informed me that the shaded segments referred to the moon's monthly cycle, which she equated with her own. Forms which approximate the moon's shape or function are also used to characterise fecundity. For example, an ox horn resembles a crescent shape, just as two horns joined together make up a circle (or full moon if one forms an analogy between the moon and a circle). According to informants, it is considered extremely lucky to find two ox horns because that implies that good fortune will visit the family of the founder for generations[84]

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Likewise, the black-white colour combination may suggest the light and darkness of elemental disturbances such as lightning and thunder, respectively. The Ntwane have described black rain clouds as "pregnant", a metaphor, which may be interpreted on two levels. The Ntwane possibly associate the heavy, rounded shape of cumulonimbus clouds, which are

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84. The fact that the horn is from a female "cow" may have particular relevance for an understanding of the connection between cattle and women as symbols of fertility.

common during the highveld rainy season, with a state of pregnancy. Furthermore, informants have implied that black is regarded as a sign of sexual attractiveness, which reinforces the suggestion that the colour black, in specific contexts, is associated with fertility. This argument may be substantiated by mentioning another use of the colour black on the apparel of Ntwane brides. Informants have related that black alluvial soil and charcoal are rubbed into the tlopo of the bride in order to enhance her sexual attractiveness to her husband and arouse his passion[85]. Furthermore, the significance of the inner beaded concentric circles of the lehadima, called the eye or the mouth may also be explained as a visual reference to lightning, and a vocal or audial equivalent of "thunder speaking". Significantly, as has been mentioned above, both the inner colour arrangement of the sehlora and of the eye of the lightning bird are comprised of the colours red, white and black. From the above it may be argued that the colour triad red-white and black forms part of a complex web of symbolic relationships, and that the experiences associated with symbolic ritual, colours and objects are essentially experiences in social relationships. Furthermore, it may be contended that the colours which comprise the symbolic strands within the "cultural webs of signification" (Geertz 1973:5) adopted by the Ntwane are not simply allegorical in function; that is they do not have a one-to-one relationship with their referents, but may be associated with more than one concept depending on the context of their production and use. Furthermore, as will be substantiated below, it may

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85. Turner also makes reference to black as a symbol of sexuality among the Ndembu of Zambia and Shona of Zimbabwe (Turner 1967: 110).

be argued that these colour symbols are also representative of broader social ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions within Ntwane social existence, and that these paradoxes are either manipulated or suppressed in order to sustain existing gender power relations within the group.

It is suggested that these ambivalences have been highlighted through reference in the above paragraph to lightning and cattle, both of which exist in a paradoxical relationship with those members of Ntwane society with whom they are associated, namely, women.

That is where the next category of use for the colour triad assumes an added importance, as a deterrent against "human" threats to the "well-being" or fertility of the community. Red, white and black coloured soil is combined into an earth mixture called limo which is used to decorate homestead walls as a protection against witchcraft. It may be suggested that it is not only the final appearance of the wall patterns that appears to be of primary significance - for Ntwane women take particular pride in the aesthetic appearance of their homestead walls - but also, the healing and protective properties of their soil components. These are black river mud, a white chalky clay, and reddish ochre, which are mixed into a monochromatic hue. A medicine called mutswara mutsi is also placed in the four corners of the homestead as a further safeguard against witchcraft. It is comprised of the soil types mentioned above, as well as a fourth element of either blue or green colour (tala) which is added to the muti. In addition to doctoring the homestead walls, the yard floors are decorated in concentric circle patterns with dung and

water. Hammond-Tooke (1978) has mentioned that along with water, ash and chyme, dung is considered a significant cooling agent among the the Kgaga of the Lowveld, as has Turner (1967) with regard to the Ndembu. Although Ntwane informants do not emphasise the cooling properties of cattle dung, they are adamant about the fact that a combination of water and dung is an effective deterrent against the threat of witchcraft.

Witches are perceived as threats to the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the home and the community. According to an informant by the name of Willie Malephatlo:

"If it were not for witches the world would be a good place. Everyone would know their place in the world".

This statement suggests that the prevailing worldview among the Ntwane is that relationships between people are essentially harmonious. Disharmony is explained with reference to a supernatural force in the human form of witches. Witches, usually identified as women, have the ability to turn nature and society against one another, using both nature and society as means towards this end. For example, witches are said to be able to direct lightning to strike the target of their malevolent desires or hatred. However, this "ability" highlights the contradictory attitudes towards certain symbols of fertility and, by implication, women. On the one hand, lighting is regarded as the harbinger of a positive force, namely rain, which will ensure the regeneration of the land and community. On the other hand, however, this symbol of fertility can also be misdirected in order to disrupt and subvert the "fertile" order of things. Likewise, women, who are responsible for the fecundity of

land and womb, are also regarded as potential threats to the mode of production and reproduction. This ambivalence is highlighted by the relationship between women and another symbol of fertility, namely cattle. Women and cattle existed, and continue to exist in an ambiguous interrelationship because they are both identified with, and stand in opposition to one another. Both are symbols of fertility, and both represent a threat to the other's procreative powers. For example, women, during their fertile years are barred from the cattle kraal. If they disobey the taboo, it is said that the cattle will fight among themselves, and wound, even kill each other; if a barren woman goes into the kraal, the cattle will likewise become barren; if she has a miscarriage or her children have died in infancy, the identical fate will befall the calves.

It may be argued that women are never free from ambiguous classification until they reach their "safe" menopausal years. This ambivalence may be associated with the colour red, the associations of which are both multivalent and contradictory (see below). Informants have revealed that in their menopausal years Ntwane women usually discard their beaded waisthoops, all except the lowest pink band. If one interprets pink as being a combination of red and white, this may imply that the colour pink signifies neutrality because it combines both cool (if one associates white with coolness) and hot (red) components. This interpretation may also shed light on the standardised order of the coloured waistbands worn by Ntwane women; it is possible that white, if associated with cleanness, purity and coolness, represents the pre-menstrual phase of the Ntwane

woman. The next phase begins with menstruation, the period in which the symbolic ambivalence surfaces, and which may be represented by the red coloured beads; the next layer of either blue or black beads appears more complex in its associations; the colour may also be associated with sexuality and fertility[86]. However, black may also be associated with night, death and the unknown (see Turner (1967) and Hammond-Tooke (1978) for a discussion of the multivalent symbolism of black). The Ntwane believe that witches strike in the dark. Thus the symbolism attached to the colour black as with the colour red, seems to embody multivalent and often contradictory associations, with neither positive nor negative qualities taking precedence over each other[87].

It may be suggested that the complex symbolism associated with the colours mentioned above, is reflected in the ambivalent social and mystical roles accorded to Ntwane women. Although devoid of political and judicial power, Ntwane women are nevertheless regarded as powerful and dangerous in a mystical, marginal realm. Women may not approach the place where the ancestors are buried, because it is said that they remove soil from the grave which they use for witchcraft purposes. If a woman contravenes this taboo, her parents have to pay damages. It may be suggested that the prototype of the inherently malevolent witch, whose

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86. See above, with reference to the bride's tlopo, as well as to the interpretation of black clouds for the Ntwane.

87. However, the association of black with mourning may be unambiguously expressed by Ntwane widows painting either the right or left doorpost black. In this context, black serves an allegorical or indexical function.

preoccupation is to destroy fertility in men, beasts and fields (the sites of production and reproduction. is juxtaposed against benevolent sources of supernature, namely the ancestors[88]. Women give birth and women are chief mourners thereby exerting power over both the entry into and exit from the world of the living. It may therefore be argued that women are structurally appropriate to serve as mediators of the mystical relationship between life-fertility-health and death-heat-witchcraft. (Kuper 1982:153)

From the above discussion on colour symbolism among the Ntwane, it is evident that the colour triad red-white and black forms part of a complex network of symbolic relationships, and that the experiences associated with symbolic ritual, colours and objects are essentially experiences in social relationships. The colours white, red and black are used pervasively by Ntwane women, recurring both on their paraphernalia, in mural decoration and as a form of body adornment. In addition to describing the way in which these colours are manifested in Ntwane women's paraphernaila, the above chapter has explored some of the symbolic parameters of the colours white, red and black, according to the different contexts in which they are found in Ntwane society.

It has been argued that the Ntwane regard the colours red, black and white as having great symbolic significance, that they operate both within domestic and agricultural spheres and that they are associated

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88. See Berglund 1975:268; also Kuper 1982:19.

with prosperity, fertility and danger. Furthermore, it has been suggested that because these colours are found in different circumstances and contexts, it would be simplistic to interpret their meaning according to a static symbolic paradigm, and that their meaning may shift according to context.

It may be concluded from the above overview of colour symbolism among the Ntwane, that the imposition of a classificatory system onto otherwise disparate elements provides the Ntwane with a means to impose a symbolic language onto their world which helps to render intelligible that which would otherwise be uncomprehended or chaotic. This symbolic language may be expressed through the colours red, black and white, which function as mechanisms for ordering experience and segmenting it into manageable categories through culturally standardized systems of visual representation. These colours have particular significance in the phase of initiation during which both male and female initiates do not yet fit into a defined social structure. Furthermore, these colour symbols are representative of broader social ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions within Ntwane social existence, and that these paradoxes are either manipulated or suppressed in order to sustain existing gender power relations within the group.

The following chapter will question whether, and to what extent, there exists role differentiation among Ntwane men and women, and the way in which this is reflected through female paraphernalia. It will also examine the tension between the perpetuation of traditional customs and

inevitable changes within the Ntwane community, which have occurred through the alienation of the menfolk from the rural economy, as a result of the migrant labour system.

CHAPTER SIX

Of central importance to an understanding of the iconology of Ntwane headwork and mural decorations is, inevitably, the role played by the women who follow these traditions. This chapter aims, firstly, to explore the historical role of Ntwane women as upholders of custom and tradition, in the face of changing historical circumstances. The second part of this chapter will explore more fully the tension between the perpetuation of traditional mores, as reflected through the paraphernalia of Ntwane women, and inevitable changes within the Ntwane community which have occurred through the alienation of the menfolk from the rural economy, as a result of the migrant labour system. This will entail a brief examination of the relationship between tradition and social transformation. The third section will focus on shifts in function and meaning of traditional paraphernalia produced and worn by Ntwane women, and the transformation of these objects (and by implication, the roles of their producers) as they move from the rural context in which they possessed "use value" into the commercial market, where they become commodities imbued with "exchange value".

Notwithstanding the increase in literature on changes in modes of production in the rural areas, most studies of female rural producers have been hindered by static generalisations: by the idea of 'traditional woman', leading an essentially unchanging existence outside the transformations wrought by urbanisation. Among the Ntwane in

particular, women appear initially to epitomise this 'traditional' role. They are the upholders of cus-tom and family stability, while their menfolk work away from the homestead, mainly as migrant labourers[89].

This division is reflected in their apparel: female modes of dress and beadwork decoration have remained unchanged, as is evident from a comparison between photographs taken in the early part of this century, with photos of contemporary apparel[90].

The paucity of visual and written documentation makes it dif-ficult to determine when Ntwane women first began making their beaded paraphernalia. But as will be substantiated below, it ap-pears that at least from the late 19th century onwards - with the discovery of gold and diamonds in the Transvaal and the influx of foreigners, traders, and missionaries into the interior - Ntwane women were able to obtain beads[91]. The fact that the Ntwane had contact with white settlers and missionaries in the late 19th century, as well as having had ongoing contact with the material cultures of other groups prior to the influx of foreigners, suggests that the tradition of beadwork practised by

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89. It should be emphasised at the outset that the phenomenon of migrant labour is not peculiar to this group alone, but has been instrumental in uprooting, in varying degrees, the social foundations and fabric of all rural groups in Southern Africa.

90. This does not appear to be the case with the <u>gimwane</u> (fertility dolls, however. These dolls have undergone shifts in form and function, which are related to their popularity on the commercial market. This will be elaborated on in the section on the commercialisation of Ntwane art.
See chapter four for a brief discussion of problems encountered in using photographs as historical documentation.

91. See Levy (1990) for a discussion of the possible origins of a beadwork tradition among the Ndzundza.

their Pedi and Ndebele counterparts became known to Ntwane women, even before their acquisition of Kwarrielaagte in 1903. For example, the beaded sehlora, worn by Ntwane women on one side of their heads, possibly derives from the Pedi sehlora, a circular furry motif which, according to Pedi informants, means squirrel's tail[92]. The patterned cloth smocks (ele), which - according to informants - were worn by Ntwane married women as a form of modesty, on the insistence of missionaries, are very similar to those worn by their Pedi counterparts. Ntwane female informants have also stated that many of the smocks had been passed down to them from their great grandmothers, which suggests that among Ntwane married women, the tradition of wearing smocks is at least as old as the Anglo-Boer war. Furthermore, in the early twentieth century, it appears that Ntwane women were also influenced by the Ndebele traditions of wearing several beaded hoops around their necks, arms, waists and ankles (Duggan-Cronin photographs 1928: 1954). This has often resulted, even today, in the former being mistaken for the latter.

However, apart from the information gleaned from Ntwane inform-ants, as well as occasional photographs documenting Ntwane paraphernalia in the early part of the twentieth century, the paucity of documentation makes it difficult to determine with certainty the functions of early beadwork traditions practised by Ntwane women. Furthermore, answers as to why certain colours and motifs were chosen above others remain speculative[93]

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92. See Vogel (1984) for a discussion of the function of the sehlora among the Pedi.

93. See chapter five for possible reasons as to why the Ntwane seem to favour particular colour schemes above others.

From the available documentation dating from the late nineteenth until the mid twentieth century, it may be suggested that Ntwane beadwork, like mural decoration, was worn as a statement and reflection of ethnic identity. The Ntwane, until their purchase of Kwarrielaagte in 1903, were constantly migrating from one area to the next, mixing with other groups during periods of both conflict and peace. In addition, towards the end of the nineteenth century, they, like the Transvaal Ndebele and Pedi, were faced with colonial subjugation and the migrant labour system, which disrupted their lives. It may be argued that these historical circumstances augmented the emphasis on stable values and traditions, in order to preserve a way of life that was in the process of being transformed. It is within this context that the wearing of traditional paraphernalia by the Ntwane assumes special significance.

The above interpretation of material culture as an expression of cultural identity has been supported by several scholars in disciplines concerned with different aspects of Southern African history (Delius (1983), Nettleton (1984), Schneider (1987), Levy (1990). Vail, for example, writes in the introduction to The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa that:

> 'the emphasis on past values, 'rediscovered traditions and chiefly authority ... were calculated to conserve a way of life that was in the process of being rapidly undermined by the forces of ... colonialism' (Vail 1989:14).

Vail also describes the effects of the migrant labour system, which resulted in women "becoming more important to the day-to-day survival of the family through their work on the land". He argues that to prevent women from leaving the rural areas:

> "an emphasis on the need to control women and a stress on the protection of the integrity of the family came to be intrinsic to both ethnic ideologies and actual institutionl practices of indirect rule" (Vail 1989:15).

As will be substantiated further in the following section, this may explain the emphasis accorded to Ntwane women as the custodians of traditional customs and Ntwane cultural identity; a role which was - and continues to be - expressed through their traditional paraphernalia[94].

Today, Ntwane women in the rural areas are still under con-siderable pressure from their menfolk to maintain Ntwane customs. They still make and wear "traditional" apparel whereas Ntwane men make money and wear city suits (6.1). Although the younger female generation tend only to wear their traditional clothes for special occasions, such as weddings and initiations, the older women often wear their "traditional apparel" such as beaded aprons and distinctive bicycle-seat hairstyle underneath doeks, smocks and blankets. And when their menfolk return from their jobs in the city, on weekends, monthly or annually, the women are ex-

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94. This interpretation may also explain the significance of fertility-related objects among Ntwane women, and the role that the colours red, white and black play in perpetuating the traditional function of Ntwane women See chapter five.

pected to be dressed in full regalia (6.2). This regalia comprises the thetho and ntepa, beaded hoops in standardised colour arrangements around the neck, arms, waist and ankles, as well as a beaded sehlora worn on the side of the head.

By contrast, Ntwane men have long ceased to wear their traditional apparel, except for a "jas" (a bib-like jacket made from fur and decorated with beads), which they wear only for important civic events, such as meetings between community elders (6.3). Close means of transport - a Putco busstop near Kwarrielaagte - facilitates this dual mode of existence: men can migrate to and from their place of work in the distant towns - Moutse's infrastructure cannot accomodate their work needs - which marginalises them from their farming and family roots. Meanwhile, back at the village, women sustain the rural economy. Thus, the perseverence of custom among Ntwane women may be understood in relation to the increasing marginalisation of men from the rural base through, for example, the migrant labour system.

Today men (except the very young and very old) spend most of the year away from their rural homes. A 1970 census conducted in the Moutse district calculated that on tribal and trust farms within that area, the population percentage breakdown was as follows: Tribal farms = females 60.1% and males 39.9; Trust Farms = 56.75% female, 43.3% males (McCaul 1987:25). In his doctoral thesis on the Ntwane, Coetzee ascribed this gender imbalance to the fact that the majority of men spend most of their working lives as migrant labourers in white industrial areas. He

further suggested that this imbalance occurs during the most productive period of a man's life, and consequently must have significant repercussions on family life and agriculture in Moutse (Coetzee 978:174). It may be suggested that because of the disruption and undermining of male authority, due to their enforced alienation from the community, many traditionally male spheres of activity have collapsed. Not only has the maintenance of traditional domestic, agricultural and social duties been left in the hands of the community elders and female members of the group, there are few remaining examples of wood carving, traditionally a male activity. Gourds of Marula trees, and wooden chairs are rarely carved; in addition, the only wooden image that I encountered during my field trips had been produced by the present owner's great-great grandfather. Within this context, it is therefore possible that Ntwane women are expected by their menfolk to be the custodians of traditional values, of which the latter have been deprived through the migrant labour system.

It may be argued that women, within the rural economy, are ex-pected to ensure the continued prosperity in both domestic and agrarian spheres, hence the preponderance of fertility-related objects and apparel. This responsibility also allows their men-folk to retain a semblance of control over women during their prolonged absences from home.

An understanding of the issue of migrant labour in relation to the paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women entails an exploration of possible changes - due to the disruptive effects of this system - in the

form and function of these objects. It is also necessary to investigate which objects - if any - remain unaffected by changes in the social context in which they are produced, and whether their "exemption" from change is due to their "intrinsic" features, which render them timeless, or whether this quality is rooted in the desire on the part of the producers and/or other members of Ntwane society to perpetuate the myth of "timelessness" in the face of social disruption. An examination of changes in form and function of traditional paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women does not presuppose, however, that social change is automatically reflected in and by the material culture of the Ntwane. It may be argued that although forces of socio-cultural change and material production are inextricably related, the latter does not function as a passive reflector of the former. In reality the interaction between the two is far more complex than implied by a simple "cause and effect" canon[95].

Furthermore, it may be argued that female consciousness of, and commitment to, traditional values is not necessarily synonymous with social cohesion or stability. While it is evident that women occupy, or are expected to occupy, "traditional" female roles, it may be argued that

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95. Questions must be asked whether customs persist in spite of or because of transformations in social relations. As Colin Murray emphasises:

> "Those who make judgements about the relative integrity of a traditional social system misconceive the problem within a functionalist paradigm in which evidence of ... breakdown is counterposed to evidence of continuity in or persistence of social relations, leading to conclusions which are mutually incompatible". (Murray 1981:173).

these roles are not reflections of an unchang-ing rural ethos but are, in fact, responses to social upheaval. Furthermore, the persistence of longstanding customs, modes of subsistence and the production of "traditional" paraphernalia, does not presuppose that these activities retain the functions they performed within their former "traditional" context.

The persistence of tradition or custom should therefore be analysed as part of a process of transformation, affecting both the traditional producers and traditional paraphernalia, as well as gender relationships within the broader social framework. Factors which have contributed to - as well as having been affected by - social transformations, such as the migrant labour system, cannot be regarded simply as incidental phenomena, extraneous to the functioning of a so-called cohesive traditional social system.

An interdisciplinary approach - embracing a predominantly marxist-feminist perspective - will be adopted in order to comprehend the complexities of the relationship between the traditional role of Ntwane women and the objects they produce in the face of social disruptions. Hopefully, this approach will begin to eliminate the perpetuation of misconceptions regarding the "timelessness" of Ntwane traditional art, ongoing within a frozen historical context[96].

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96. See chapter one for the argument in support of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Ntwane art.

Marxist theorists, working on South African subjects have placed a primary emphasis on the relationship between the capitalist mode of production and female oppression; they have attempted to show the 'functionality' of female oppression for the capitalist system through isolated, unpaid labour performed by women in the reserves which serves to lower the cost of the reproduction of labour power. Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe (1972) have also offered an interpretation of this relationship, which is often regarded as the most sound theoretical basis for a materialist analysis of the role of black women in South Africa[97]. They suggest that as the demands of the capitalist mode of production for labour increased, so men were drawn, or forced off the land, and women were increasingly left behind to maintain the subsistence economies[98]. Men were therefore absorbed into the capitalist sphere while women performed the productive-reproductive functions necessary for the maintenance of the rural economy, as well as the continued supply of manpower needed for the capitalist sector. (Legassick and Wolpe 1972). Notwithstanding the overall validity of this analysis

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97. See also J. Yawitch,'Black women in S.A. Capitalism, Employment and Reproduction.' B.A Hons Dissertation, Univ Wits 1978; reprinted in Africa Perspective, 1980.

98. While it is beyond the parameters of this thesis to fully investigate the dynamics involved in the proletarianisation of the rural economy, several presuppositions in Legassick and Wolpe's theory require analysis. They suggest that male migration has resulted in a harmful adjustment to the structure of family life and women's positions within the rural economy. This, they argue, is due to the fact that migration produces a kind of "low level equilibrium trap" in which migrants and their families are only maintained at, or near, subsistence level by the low wages received. Due to manpower shortages and lack of capital, productivity of the rural areas remains unchanged or declines, thus causing greater dependence on the migrant labour system.

in explaining the points at which female oppression and the capitalist mode of production suit each other, it does not take into account the other "forces ... which the blunt concepts of 'reproduction' and 'production' are unable to encapsulate". (Bozzoli 1983:144).[99]

The static, functionalist attitude reflected in several marxist theories seems to reflect, what Bozzoli calls an "anti-historical and economistic bias", because it focuses primarily on the structure of the social order without taking sufficient cog-nisance of its mutability . Furthermore, the fact that female op-pression performs certain functions for capitalism should not imply that it is solely a product of the latter. This leads to another problem which may be levelled at the above theories, as argued by Hartmann (1979). It concerns the omission by structuralist-marxists of the relatively autonomous existence of unequal relations of domination and subordination between men and women, and not solely between capitalism and women (Bozzoli 1983:143).

Legassick and Wolpe further argue that in Southern Africa, a pre-capitalist rural sector continues to exist and is necessary to the process of accumulation and growth in the capitalist sector. Subsistence farming permits employers to offer a wage lower than the cost of maintaining a worker and his family. As a result of the traditional sexual

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99. Legassick and Wolpe's theory falls into static reductionsim, because it implies that the rural family is simply an unchanging "box" from which the migrant leaves and to which he returns when he is finished work, without taking into account the inner workings of the box.

division of labour, much of the burden of agricultural production is borne by women (Legassick & Wolpe 1972:59).

Challenging the above Structuralist-Marxist theories, Bozzoli bases her interpretation of the relationship between the rural economy and the capitalist sector on the notion of struggle, not on structure. She suggests that social change is based upon the results of contradictory and opposing forces, rooted in material reality, confronting one another, achieving temporary resolution, which in turn lead to further contradictions and op-positions. Bozzoli also adds a feminist perspective to her interpretation in that she posits that certain conflicts and contradictory forces are located in the "domestic sphere", and that in certain instances they involve conflicts between men and women (Bozzoli 1983: 145).

Bozzoli posits that the way in which resourses are controlled is not the result of a pre-given distribution of power, but the result of struggle and that, within the domestic sphere, gender power relations and struggles are likely to have crucial effects on the distribution and control of key resources. (Bozzoli 1983:149). She also suggests that the issue of male migration and female domesticity was a symptom of gender conflict as far back as the first decades of the twentieth century. She draws on evidence employed by Yawitch in which the latter quotes Sol PLaatje's description in 'Native Life in S.A.' of the:

> "... drastic measures adopted by chiefs and tribesmen to stop their women from migrating. Women were prevented from buying bus or train tickets or

travelling alone".
(S. Plaatje 1916:29, quoted in Bozzoli 1983:149).

In other words, it is suggested that asymmetrical gender relations were features of many patriarchal pre-migratory societies and that control exerted by men over their womenfolk was not solely a product of the migrant labour system.

It is beyond the parameters of present research into the art of the Ntwane, to postulate exactly whether, when and to what extent women became regarded as subordinate to men. However, it may be postulated that among the Ntwane, women have been socialised into accepting a position of inferiority in public spheres, while their "power" is largely concentrated within the domestic spheres[100].

For example, Ntwane women were prevented from participating in a meeting held at Kwarrielaagte in November 1985, concerning the forced incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele. When I asked my chief informant, Willie Malephatlo, why this was so, he replied: "Women are smaller than men. They do not understand these mat-ters. They are queens in the home, but children among men".

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100. However, as suggested by Bozzoli, the persistence of traditional social relations may be analysed as an integral aspect of subtly conflicting processes of transformation . Attempts to discover elementary forms of sexual division may also include attempts at discovering transformations which occur through changes in wider social relations:

> "The sexual division of labour acquires an ideological function of rendering non-comparable the different tasks performed by men and women, and correspondingly the portions of the product that are assigned to each sex." (Bozzoli 1983:145).

See also Edholm, Harris and Young 1977:124

Furthermore, during the course of my research, I was constantly accompanied by a male elder, who mediated between myself, the interpreter and the women who were being interviewed. When I enquired whether I was allowed to conduct interviews without a male presence, the response from Chief Mathebe was that Ntwane women are very shy, and like to get permission from their elders before responding to questions.

Therefore, the interpretation of gender roles simply as 'complementary' may serve to obscure the dependence of women on men as well as legitimise the unequal exchange between them. Furthermore, when one seat of power is accorded a higher status over another, namely economic power over domestic, an 'asymmetrical' gender relationship occurs. For example, among the Ntwane, as well as being considered legal minors, women are excluded from the most priveledged source of wealth within the rural economy - namely cattle. In fact, as has been demonstrated in chapter four, magico-religious objects, rituals and taboos may also be employed as means of legitimising and reinforcing the power advantages accorded to men. Furthermore, it may be suggested that social controls are imposed on women in order to ensure that they do not deviate from their traditional roles. Women run the risk of being accused of witchcraft for antisocial behaviour, because any deviation from convention is perceived by the rest of the group as a potential threat to the well-being or fertility of their community. In other words, the chief measure of Ntwane women's social status, namely their procreative power, would be called into question if they transgressed traditional social codes.

It may be postulated that the greater social power and prestige generally given to Ntwane males is indicative of inequality in the exchange values of males and females. Despite the fact that there exists a larger pool of available women than men (due to the prolonged absences of male migrant labourers), within their individual families, women are able to contribute relatively little to the household's financial security. Although they continue to perform essential economic and social functions, these roles offer few financial rewards. This may in part be attributed to the fact that domestic services have no price in the market place[101]. The family is no longer the key production unit. Money is earned outside of and separately from the domestic domain. Furthermore, goods formerly exchanged for use on the basis of kinship or need are now bought and sold for cash. In the past a family group orientation made economic sense. There were few opportunities to earn a living beyond the village and few ways to store wealth. Sharing made efficient use of resources possible and provided a form of social security, whereby people could rely on relatives or on the chief in hard times. While some of the economic rationale for sharing still holds, it may be argued that there are countervailing pressures which have weakened co-operative relations. Income generating activity is dispersed geographically and provides rewards through wages. Cash has become a primary means of exchange[102].

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101. Although financial security is traditionally provided through family reciprocal obligations, those ties are undergoing major changes.

102. Ester Boserup (1970) has argued that the situation of economic inequality has placed women in a position of economic and social dependence on men. Conversely, Elizabeth Colson (1970), suggests that women actually gain greater economic and social freedom through male labour

If one analyses the production of traditional paraphernalia by Ntwane women within an exchange theory paradigm, it may be argued that a significant role-transformation among Ntwane women may be in the process of emerging; simultaneously, it may be suggested that a greater understanding of this process may in turn shed light on the changing function of traditional paraphernalia produced by Ntwane women. Formerly, these objects were both made and "used" by their producers, and their "value" was measured solely in terms of their functionality within their specific social context. However, in order to survive financially, Ntwane women have begun to sell these traditional paraphernalia, thereby enhancing the "exchange" value" of these objects.

The transformation has taken several forms: an increasingly common practice is for Ntwane women to mass produce the decorated motifs which are traditionally found on the thetho and ntepa, and which are then sold separately from the aprons for between R10 and R20 per item. Apparently this has met with limited success, as buyers, mainly white dealers from the cities, seem more interested in what they consider Ntwane "art" than "craft", the former adhering more to aesthetic conventions and tastes of the contemporary urban art market. Furthermore, these motifs, as explained in chapter one derive predominant significance within the

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outmigration. Other scholars such as Monica Hunter-Wilson, (1933) argue, however, that greater independence depends on the existence of opportunites for women to earn a reasonable income through activities such as the production of artifacts and through agriculture (1933: 268).

socio-cultural context in which they were produced and worn. Separated from the aprons on which are traditionally found, they may be misperceived as "abstract pieces of decoration", because when viewed in isolation from the aprons, they seem to indicate nothing about the Ntwane as a cultural group with a distinctive aesthetic style.

Conversely, Ntwane fertility dolls, which have become popular commodities, seem to adhere more to conventional "figurative" art norms, as well as to the market's preconceptions about ethnic art. They are recognisable as examples of a 'distinct' Ntwane style, through their hairstyles, and colour arrangement of beaded waistbands. Thus, Ntwane fertility dolls have become popular items in public collections as well as private galleries and curio shops. Although the basic form of these dolls has remained unchanged, they have undergone surface transformations. The sehlora - which was traditionally decorated with beads or fur (see chapter two for an analysis of the sehlora) - may now be substituted by plastic flowers, ribbons and chains (6.4). The dolls have also been "prettified" by the addition of a variety of adornments, which were generally absent from the more "traditional" forms (6.5). Symbolic detail, such as the ordering of the coloured beaded waistbands, seems to have been subordinated to superfluous ornamentation. These dolls, which are sold by their producers for between R10 and R20, cost up to (and sometimes beyond) six times that amount in retail stores.

Another feature of these dolls is their size. There appears to be a growing "stylistic" trend among Ntwane producers to enlarge these objects (6.4)[103]. It may be suggested that because the large dolls would be impractical for traditional purposes, the emphasis on size may be related to a belief on the part of Ntwane producers that the larger the doll, the higher will be the price it fetches.

It may be argued that despite the basic retention of traditional form - a cone shape made from plaited sisal, the dolls' content has been transformed; its meaning and function could only be fully apprehended within the social context of its production, whereas its recently acquired exchange value has rendered its social role redundant compared to its decorative function. The fact that these objects have become decontextualised "end products", may also be attributed to the current fashionable demand for ethnic "South Africana", which has attracted dealers to the rural areas.

The Ntwane appear to have also ventured into a more "figurative" art style for the purposes of sale on the commercial market. In African Art shops, such as "African Magic", for example, I encountered ochre-coloured clay dolls, representing Ntwane brides and male initiates. However, informants have refuted the possibility of traditional prece-

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103. In her MA dissertation on Ndebele beadwork, Levy also discusses this phenomenon in relation to Ndebele dolls (Levy 1990:116). Also see Graburn's interpretation of the stylistic trend of "gigantism" among rural producers catering for the commercial market (Graburn 1976:313-314).

dents for the production of these figures; furthermore, unlike the case with other examples of female paraphernalia that have been described in this dissertation, there appears to be no photographic evidence corroborating the existence of these dolls in the Ntwane traditional social context. It may be argued therefore, that these dolls, emulating the most "colourful" and exotic aspects of Ntwane male and female regalia have been produced primarily for the commercial market. Unlike the traditional fertility dolls, these figures have differentiated limbs and facial features, which suggests that they have been produced in adherence to western sculptural prototypes. This feature, in addition to the fact that the dolls are modelled on the more picturesque aspects of Ntwane material culture, possibly endears them to dealers and to the public, who are not that discerning in terms of their expectations of what a traditional Ntwane doll should look like.

It may be argued that the growing demand for Ntwane art objects on the part of dealers and consumers reveals fundamental contradictions; on the one hand, it may be argued that the increasing commercial popularity of Ntwane paraphernalia is symptomatic of the growing reappraisal of our assumptions concerning the supremacy of the Western tradition and its value system, thereby contributing to the blurring of the fine art/artifact hierarchy. What was once referred to, in a derogatory sense, as "women's work", has now become elevated to the status of "art", according to Western definitions thereof. However, the producers of these "objets d'art" have not been accorded the status of artists, because their individual authorship remains unacknowledged; conse-

quently, their subordinate status of craftswomen remains unchanged and they continue to be perceived primarily as anonymous members of an ethnic group.

Producers may either modify, enhance or omit elements of their products, in order to suit the tastes of the metropolitan market. This has been corroborated through interviews with several producers of traditional paraphernalia which are sold on the metroplitan market. For example, if there is a greater demand for "pretty dolls" , the producers deliberately enhance their decorative qualities. Furthermore, if one object proves more "saleable" than another, the producers will concentrate on producing that object in bulk, using repeated decorative formulae. On the one hand, the proliferation of decorative Ntwane objects may perpetuate the notion harboured by the predominantly white market that these objects reflect a timeless, integrated community; on the other hand, however, the proliferation of these objects violates another sacrosanct Western canon: that of the unique, once-off artwork. Therefore, there is always the danger - as is already evident in several urban artshops - that once the novelty appeal of these objects has worn off, the producers will be unable to sell them on an already oversaturated market .

However, it may be counter-argued that there is a positive side to the shift of Ntwane paraphernalia from use-objects to exchange objects[104].

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104. When art is conceived in one culture and enshrined in another, the issue of patronage is inevitably raised. For within "traditional " rural communities, art objects remain integrated within the socio-

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The commodification of these paraphernalia may provide an opportunity for women to redress their financial dependence on their absent menfolk. Most migrants are paid a bachelor wage which supports a single male during his working days, while the rural economy theoretically should support his parents, wife, children and himself in old age. The dearth of manpower, along with erratic rainfall and scarcity of land has revealed the failure of this masterplan. Therefore, the income received from the sale of female paraphernalia may be regarded as an essential supplement to the daily subsistence of Ntwane women who are forced to survive within, preserve and maintain, the rural economy.

Unlike their Ndebele counterparts, however, Ntwane women seldom - if ever - venture out personally into the commercial market to sell their products[105]. Instead, Ntwane women seem to rely on dealers visiting their homes and selecting pieces of merchandise for the urban market.

It may be futher argued that the decontextualisation of objects produced in one social environment and sold to members of another may result in a decrease in or total loss of control over the selling price and destina-

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cultural fabric in which they are produced, and the chain of communication and consumption between producer and consumer is constant. These objects are also constituted in terms of their "use" within the communities in which they are produced; whereas commercial objects (in terms of the above definition, are constituted according to their exchange value, and aesthetic worth within a foreign market. Thus the traditional chain of communication between producer and consumer is broken.

105. See Levy 1990:chap 3, for a discussion of the role of Ndebele women in the commercial art market.

tion of artworks, on the part of the producers. When the organic relationship between producers and the objects they produce is broken, and when they are alienated in some way from full control over their labour power, this condition may be sanctioned , justified and mystified, if not by the society in which these objects are produced, then by the market in which they are consumed.

However, transactions between producers and dealers only take place only with the Ntwane chief's permission. The reason, according to Chief Mathebe, is that: "money matters are the responsibility of our men. Because they have to work far from home, I must protect the interests of their women"[106].

Collective action has also been undertaken by the female residents of Moutse in order to redress some of the imbalances created through the system of migrant labour. Several years ago, the Zenzele Women's Association was established in the area by Athalia Ngele, headmistress of the local 'Paledi Primary School'. According to its founder, the association arose because:" Mothers and wives, as the backbone of the nation in Moutse, needed to overcome the helplessness caused by the absence of our menfolk, and to organise ourselves under the motto 'Unity Is Strength'".

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106. It is uncertain whether the chief receives a commission from dealers for his efforts, as both dealers and the chief himself were reluctant to discuss such matters. However, interviews with several Ntwane producers revealed that many women feel cheated by the prices offered by dealers in the field. This might be because they have heard of the enormous markups of fertility dolls and aprons in on the urban market.

The organisation is an affiliate of the 'Associated Country Women of the World' (ACWW), an avowedly non-political international women's group (established in 1935) which aims, according to its constitution, to "further friendship and mutual understanding between women of all nations, in the interests of no one particular social, political, racial or religious group" (ACWW pamphlet). In accordance with this policy, membership of the Zenzele Women's Organisation is not restricted to one cultural group but includes women of Tswana, Pedi, Tsonga, Swazi, Ndebele and Ntwane origin.

The Zenzele Women's Association provides services such as advice on basic nutrition and small-scale agriculture, as well as a nursery school for children whose families have been entirely absorbed into the migrant labour system. In addition, the association recruits experts in certain fields who travel from community to community, teaching handcrafts and literacy skills. Each year, a committee - all residents of Moutse - organises a prize-giving day in which awards are made to women who have excelled in different activities, such as knitting, cooking, farming or the production of traditional objects (6.6; 6.7; 6.8; 6.9)[107] .

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107. Despite the fact that the Moutse community is comprised of many cultural groups, these objects seem to be decorated mainly in an Ndebele style. According to Mrs Ngele, the Ndebele women of Moutse are much admired for their beadwork and they are consequently encouraged to display their decorative skills as often as possible.

The most prolific traditional objects made in bulk are the gourds and fertility dolls (6.11 & 6.12). Frontal and rear aprons are not produced in bulk, possibly due to the lengthy process involved in treating the hide before it is ready for decoration. It is also possible that these aprons are still regarded by their producers as having a special ritual significance, as many Ntwane women, particularly the younger married women, don them only for special occasions or when their husbands return home. The gourds and fertility dolls are produced in a more informal, prolific and quick manner. Therefore they appear far more suitable for bulk production than traditional apparel.

The association also attempts to sell all goods that are not used by the community. This has met with limited success, possibly because no central trading store has been established for this purpose, and travelling from town to town is difficult by public transport. Furthermore, the association has been unable to prevent exploitation of local producers, as there is no cost standardization of items. Most goods are sold on an individual basis, and prices often vary according to the bargaining power of the purchaser. Nevertheless, the Zenzele Women's Association functions as a forum for solidarity and attempts to counter the isolation and hardship experienced by women whose menfolk are absent for most of the year.

This may suggest that male proletarianziation among the Ntwane has had a complex series of consequences, which may be apprehended through changes

in the form and function of traditional objects produced by Ntwane women. On the one hand, male migrancy has exacerbated the impoverishment of the rural economy, and has placed women in a financially dependent situation. It may be suggested that the expectations thrust on women for the maintenance and continuation of "tradition", are evidence of their continued subordination, and that the often-absent migrant labourer manipulates this expectation as a means of retaining control over his wife.

However, it may also be postulated that among the Ntwane, male control - apart from that of the chief and elders - is exerted in an increasingly nominal sense, and not in actuality. Within the South African political economy, women in the rural areas are the most exploited group; however, it is suggested that migrant labour - through the disruption of traditional labour divisions between men and women, as well as the undermining of the patriarchal household - has contributed to a shift in gender power relations. In addition to introducing exchange value onto their traditional objects and apparel, which has possibly given Ntwane women greater financial independence, they have had to take responsibility in the absence of menfolk which would other-wise have been denied them under traditional gender role divisions. Ntwane women have had to assume the role of decision makers within the family, have greater control over their resources and are gaining access to areas that were previously perceived as exclusively male. This suggests, as argued by Yawitch (1978), that under certain circumstances it is possible that not only have women's positions within the domestic sphere been strengthened but

that their retention of a rural base has placed some of them in a stronger position in relation to outside forces as well.

However, despite their attempts at greater independence, this does not imply that Ntwane women have achieved sufficient economic capacity to to take full advantage of any shifts in gender power relations. It is uncertain as to how much they have profited financially from the sale of traditional paraphernalia. In fact, fieldwork has revealed that the majority of Ntwane women remain primarily dependent on their absent menfolk for their subsistence. In cases where they own land, they often lack the resources to make farming worthwhile[108]. Furthermore, in Moutse, there is a shortage of labour and draft power for ploughing and hoeing their fields. Female-headed households often have to share a plough and labour or hire a tractor or oxen. This added expense possibly heightens the risk of their not being able to survive substantial financial losses due to the high hiring costs as well as the risk of producing a meagre harvest. These factors may delay ploughing, the timing of which is crucial in dry land farming in a semi-arid area.

Furthermore, the shortage of cattle among female-headed households affects more than crop farming. Cattle provide financial security and are still regarded by the Ntwane as status symbols. Given the prohibition of

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108. Robert Lucas has shown in his study of 'The distribution and efficiency of Crop Production in Tribal areas of Botswana' (1981) that because women have fewer resources for crop farming, they farm smaller pieces of land at a higher cost, and with smaller harvests than men.

contact between women and cattle, as well as the financial constraints preventing the ownership of substantial herds, goats are used as both nutritive and ritual substitutes, due to the fact that they are cheaper than cattle, and because women are not prohibited from contact with them.

It may be suggested that an investigation of the above arguments is essential for a greater understanding of the relationship between migrant labour, material culture and mutating social relations among the Ntwane, as well as an exploration of the affective relationship between changing socio-cultural factors and the aesthetic traditions (and transformations) practiced by Ntwane women. Unfortunately, comprehension of all the dimensions of this complex relationship lies beyond the parameters of present research.

From the above exploration of the perpetuation of traditional mores, as reflected through the paraphernalia of Ntwane women, and changes within the Ntwane community which have occurred through the migrant labour system, it is evident that the maintenance of traditional values is not necessarily synonymous with social cohesion or stability. While it is evident that Ntwane women occupy, or are expected to occupy, "traditional" female roles, it has been argued that these roles are not reflections of an unchanging rural ethos. Rather, that they have been responses to social upheaval in the form of colonial subjugation and the migrant labour system. It has been shown that these historical circumstances forced the Ntwane to increase their emphasis on stable values

and traditions, in order to preserve a way of life that was in the process of being transformed. However, it has also been suggested in the above chapter that the issue of male migration and female domesticity is also an historical symptom of gender conflict, among the Ntwane in particluar; furthermore, that the greater social power and prestige generally given to Ntwane males is indicative of inequality in the exchange values of males and females. For example, Ntwane women were prevented from leaving the rural areas and entering the job market, through the emphasis on traditional domestic roles, in order to allow menfolk to retain a semblance of control over women during their prolonged absences from home. It is within this context that the wearing of traditional paraphernalia by the Ntwane has assumed special significance.

The above chapter has also focussed on the shifts in function and meaning of traditional paraphernalia produced and worn by Ntwane women, and the transformation of these objects (and by implica-tion, the roles of their producers) as they move from the rural context in which they possessed "use value" into the commercial market, where they become commodities imbued with "exchange value". This has resulted in the emergence of a significant role-transformation among Ntwane women which in turn sheds light on the changing function of their traditional paraphernalia. It is possible that the commodification of these paraphernalia - as well as collective action undertaken by the female residents of Moutse in order to redress some of the imbalances created through the

system of migrant labour - has provided an opportunity for Ntwane women to redress their financial dependence on their absent menfolk.

It may therefore be concluded that male proletarianization among the Ntwane has had a complex series of consequences, which may be partially apprehended through changes in the form and function of traditional objects produced by Ntwane women. On the one hand, male migrancy has exacerbated the impoverishment of the rural economy, and has placed women in a finacially dependent situa-tion. It may be suggested that the expectations thrust on women for the maintenance and continuation of "tradition", are evidence of their continued subordination, and that the often-absent migrant labourer manipulates this expectation as a means of retaining control over his wife. However, migrant labour - through the disruption of traditional labour divisions between men and women, as well as the undermining of the patriarchal household - has possibly contributed to a shift in gender power relations. In addition to introducing exchange value onto their traditional objects and apparel, which has possibly given Ntwane women greater financial independence, they also have the potential of exerting greater control over their resources and of gaining access to areas that were previously perceived as exclusively male.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has demonstrated - through the process of examining the iconology of art produced by Ntwane women - that there exists a particular Ntwane style, which is the product of a specific ethnic consciousness. Research into the art of Ntwane women has also revealed that the types, styles and functions of their paraphernalia are characterised by elements of both continuity and change . In order to attain a greater insight into their material culture, it has been necessary to challenge romantic notions of the Ntwane, which have evoked the impression of a static, frozen culture in a timeless landscape, without consideration of the dynamic and complex relationship of Ntwane art to social factors and external influences. Although functionalist and ahistorical approaches are useful for a general understanding of certain aspects of the social life of the Ntwane, they ignore issues of change within their material culture. It has been the partial aim of this dissertation to confront these problems, and to "fill in" some of the gaps by using more open-ended methodologies which pertain both to the focus of this dissertation in particular, as well as to the discipline of art history in general.

However, adopting a more holistic approach to the study of Ntwane material culture has raised many problems for art historians in particular, because it has necessitated a re-examination of the art historian's traditional lexicon. In other words, the discipline has been

forced to shed preconceptions regarding traditional methodological approaches towards, as well as definitions of, art. For, in viewing art as a social product, one is faced with the problem of confronting the historical and contextual emphasis which should accompany any analysis of art traditions.

This dissertation has attempted to show how Ntwane art has arisen out of particular historical developments in the social evolution of the group, as a result both of internal developments, as well their interaction with other cultural groups. Research has revealed that the Ntwane are discernible as a distinct cultural group, whose modes of dress and production of objects are distinguishable from those of other groups; furthermore, that the development of an ethnic or cultural ideology among the Ntwane, was a "consciously crafted" response to the disruption of traditional society in the late 19th and early 20th century. The socio-political upheavals, which caused the breakdown of traditional patriarchal societies, were contributory factors to a desire on the part of the Ntwane to create firm values and customs and to emphasise their cultural solidarity, as expressed through their artforms.

However, it has also been emphasised that cultural or ethnic solidarity on the part of the Ntwane, does not necessarily imply cultural exclusivity. Brief, cross-cultural comparisons between of Ntwane and Ndebele paraphernalia, as well as between aspects of Ntwane and Pedi material culture, have demonstrated that inescapable similarities exist

between the Ntwane and certain other groups, residing in the Transvaal. Similarities may be found in the historical circumstances affecting these groups, their rituals and belief-systems, the paraphernalia produced and worn by their women, as well as their practice of homestead decoration.

An exploration was undertaken the the Ntwane mural aesthetic in terms of the "meanings" of the patterns which are found on their homestead walls, the possible origins of the tradition of wall painting among the Ntwane, as well as some of the methodological problems encountered in the interpretation of the iconography of their mural decorations. It was concluded that the Ntwane possess a distinctive style of mural decoration which is clearly distinguishable from the mural aesthetic employed by other groups, and that despite obvious inter-group affinities, that the Ntwane possess a strong sense of cultural solidarity, which is expressed through homestead decoration.

Research into specific colours used pervasively in a variety of contexts has demonstrated that the Ntwane impose a classificatory system onto otherwise disparate elements, which provides them with a symbolic language, thereby rendering intelligible that which would otherwise be uncomprehended or chaotic. This symbolic language is expressed through the colours red, black and white, which function as mechanisms for ordering experience and segmenting it into manageable categories through culturally standardized systems of visual representation. These colours have particular significance in the phase of initiation during which

both male and female initiates do not yet fit into a defined social structure. Furthermore, these colour symbols are representative of broader social ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions within Ntwane social existence, and that these paradoxes are either manipulated or suppressed in order to sustain existing gender power relations within the group.

The issue of gender relationships among the Ntwane has also been tackled, concerning whether, and to what extent, there exists role differentiation among Ntwane men and women, and the way in which this is reflected through female paraphernalia. This has entailed an examination of the tension between the perpetuation of traditional customs, and inevitable changes within the Ntwane community, which have occurred through the alienation of the menfolk from the rural economy, as a result of the migrant labour system. It is evident that male proletarianization among the Ntwane has had a complex series of consequences, which may be partially apprehended through changes in the form and function of traditional objects produced by Ntwane women. On the one hand, male migrancy has exacerbated the impoverishment of the rural economy, and has placed women in a financially dependent situation; furthermore, that the expectations thrust on women for the maintenance and continuation of "tradition", are evidence of their continued subordination, and that the often-absent migrant labourer manipulates this expectation as a means of retaining control over his wife. On the other hand, however, migrant labour - through the disruption of traditional labour divisions between men and women, as well as the undermin-

ing of the patriarchal household - has possibly contributed to a shift in gender power relations. In addition to introducing exchange value onto their traditional objects and apparel, which has possibly given Ntwane women greater financial independence, they also have the potential of exerting greater control over their resources and of gaining access to areas that were previously perceived as exclusively male.

This dissertation has demonstrated that of central importance to an understanding of the iconology of Ntwane beadwork and mural decorations is, inevitably, the role played by the women who follow these traditions. In the face of changing historical, social and political circumstances it has become incumbent upon the women to uphold Ntwane traditions and to sustain a sense of cultural solidarity.

The concept of ethnicity remains controversial and problemmatic, particularly because of its historical association with the ideology of apartheid. It would nevertheless constitute a misrepresentation to ignore the distinct cultural variations between and within South African groups. Given the historical experience of the Ntwane, in particular, which has resulted in their strong sense of cultural cohesion, it must be acknowledged that this phenomenon does exist, and that separate cultural identities should be recognised and respected without being exploited as justifications for discrimination on any basis. It is hoped that this dissertation into the iconology of paraphernalia produced by women among the Ntwane has contributed towards redressing some of the misconceptions towards so-called "traditional" South African groups.

There is, however, a long way to go before all the chapters have been written of our - as yet incomplete - cultural history.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The following photographs of members of the Ntwane community and their paraphernalia were taken by myself during numerous fieldtrips to Kwarrielaagte. In certain instances, however, I have reproduced photographs from secondary sources, such as D.P. Stoffberg 1967 Die Tegniese Skeppinge van die Bantwane van die distrik Groblersdal. MA dissertation, Pretoria University; as well as D.F. Coetzee 1978 Kulturele Faktore wat doeltreffende landboupraktyk in Lebowa bepaal met besondere verwysing na die gebied van die Bantwane. PhD. Pretoria University.

I have also photographed examples of fertility dolls and aprons from the Standard Bank African Art Collection at the Wits Gertrude Posel Gallery. I have acknowledged these sources in the list of illustrations below, as well as after the individual captions accompanying each photograph.

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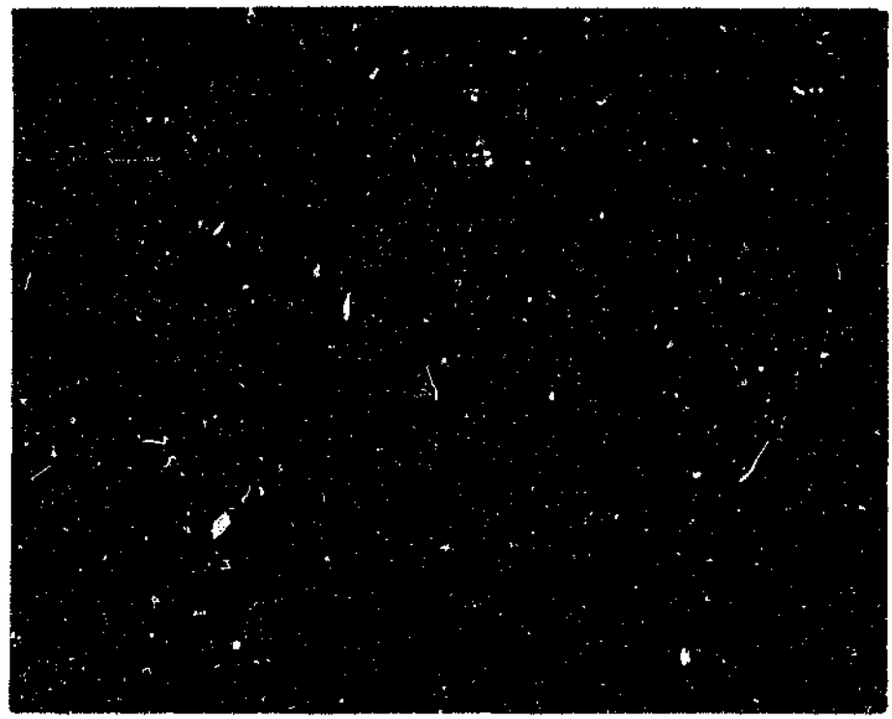
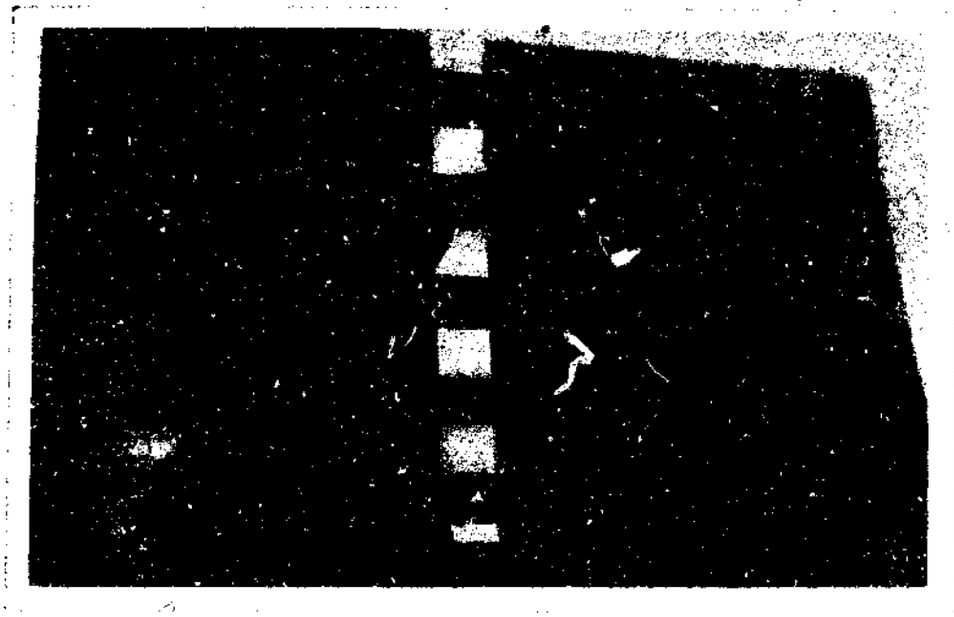
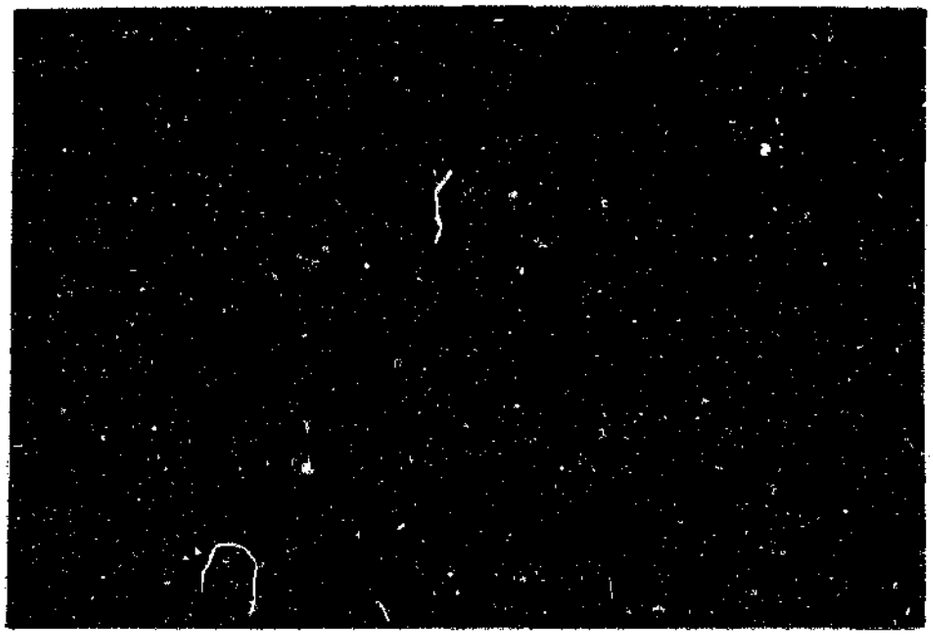


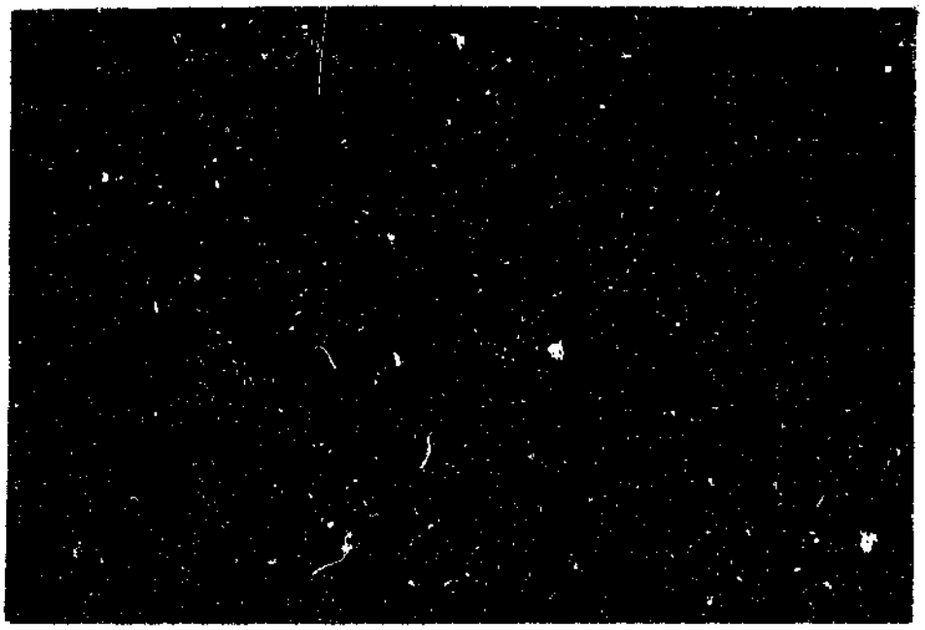
2.1 Ntwane woman in traditional regalia, wearing an *ela* (smock), introduced by missionaries, December 1988.



2.2 "Ntwane" metamelo (neck rests), c.1967.
D.P. Stoffberg.



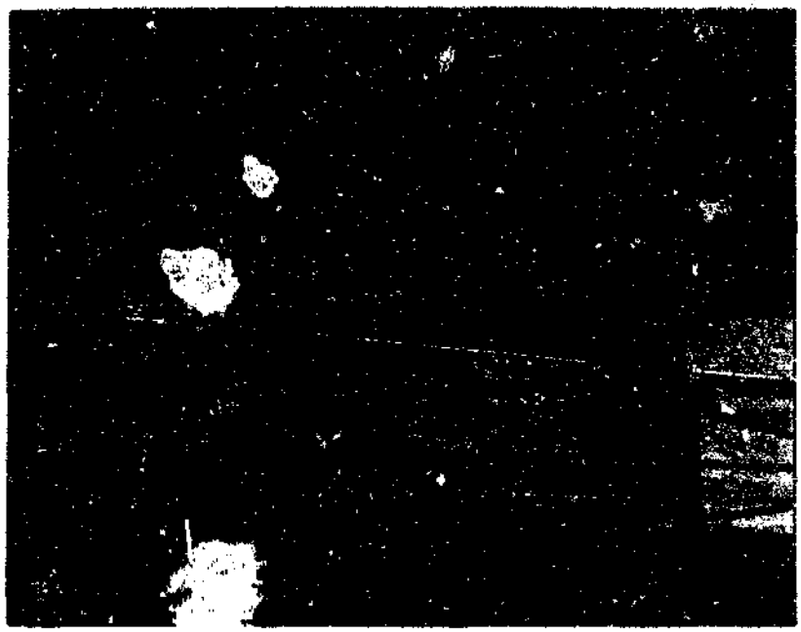
2.3 A view of some of the homestead settlements at Kwarrielaagte, 1978. D.F. Coetzee.



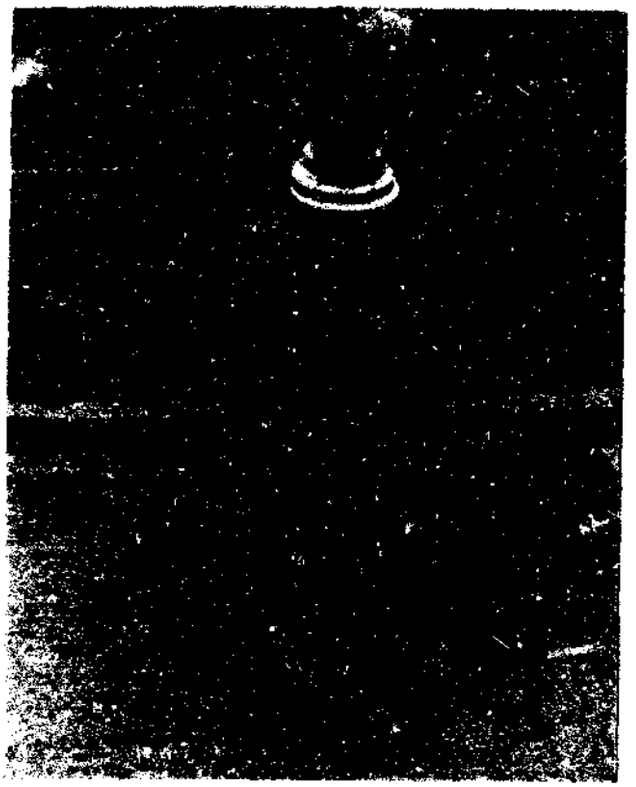
2.4 Tlokwe Mathebe (seated centre), Regen.
since 1975, flanked by elders, c.1978.
D.F. Coetzee.



2.5 Mohlamme Mathebe (seated centre), future chief of the Ntwane, c.1978. D.F. Coetzee.



2.6 Entrance to Ntwane homestead at Kwarrielaagte, July 1986.



2.7 Example of an ele (smock), introduced by missionaries, worn by both Pedi and Ntwane women, c.1986.



2.8a Lesea (Ntwane babies), c.1967,
& 2.8b D.P. Stoffberg





2.9 Mosetsana (little girls), September 1985



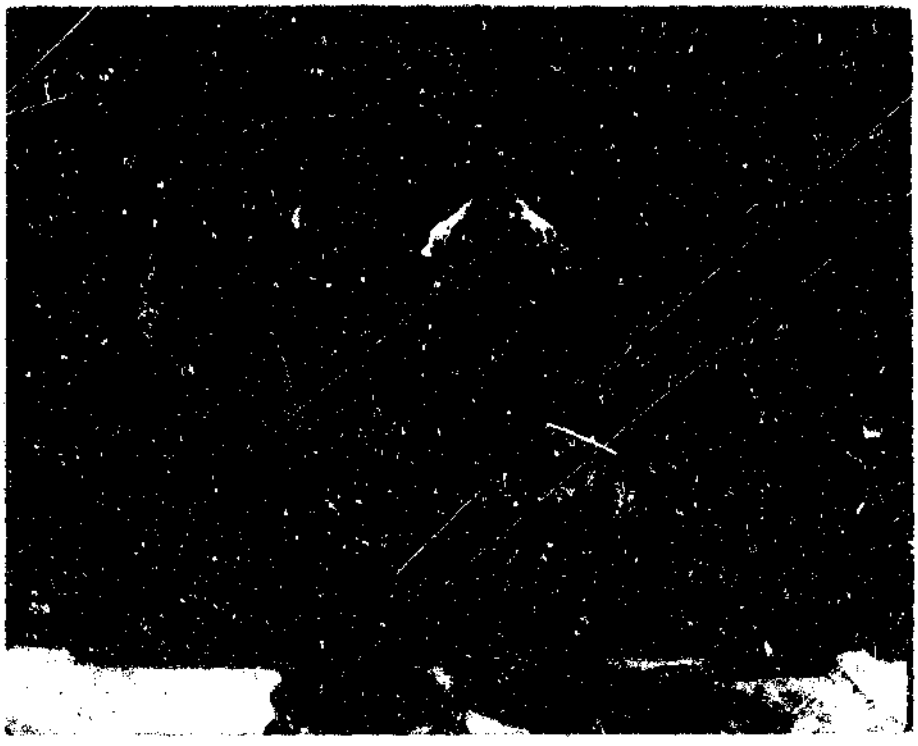
2.10 Mothepa (initiated girls), July 1986



2.11 Mosadi (Ntwane woman), December 1988



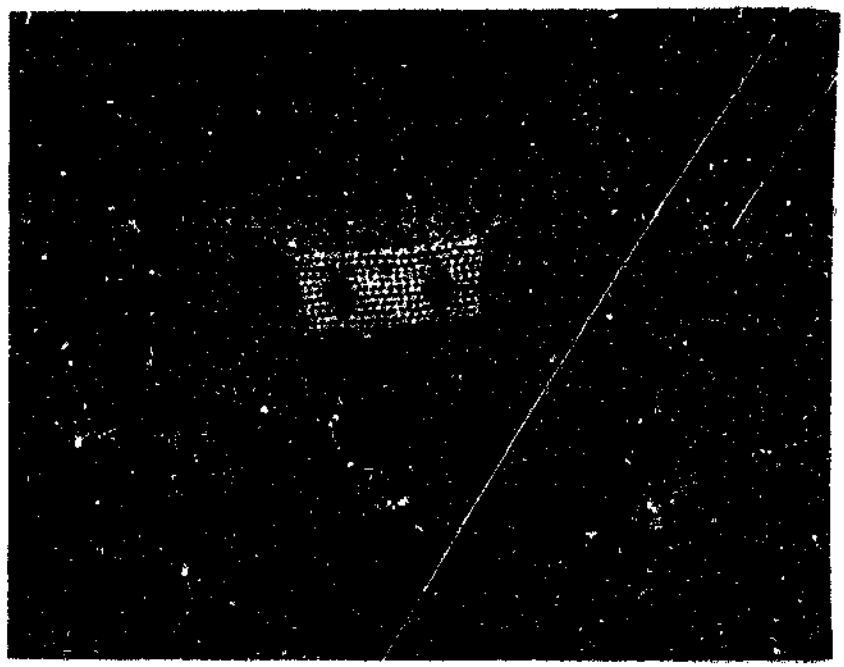
2.12 Lebole (short leather foreskirt worn by girls in the 'transitional' phase of initiation. The leather tassles resemble the hairstyle of Ntwane fertility dolls, July 1986.



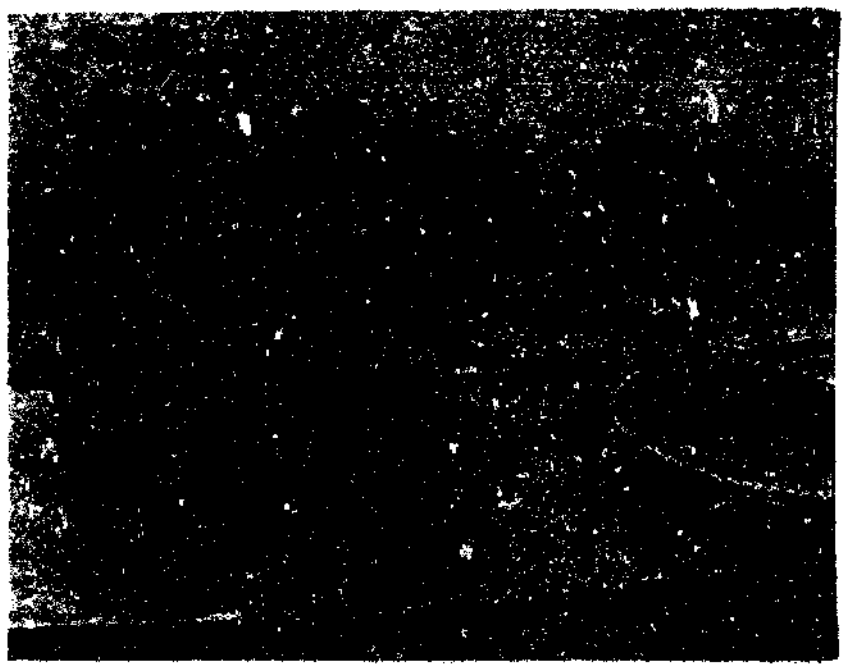
2.13 Bapale (female diviners), holding fertility dolls, December 1985



2.14 Mapale (female diviner with her daughter (and apprentice), July 1987.



2.15 Another example of a <u>lebole</u>, a short leather foreskirt, sparsely decorated with rows of buttons and largely comprised of swaying leather tassles. December 1985



2.16 Traditional Ntwane fertility dolls made from plaited sisal, string, beads and buttons
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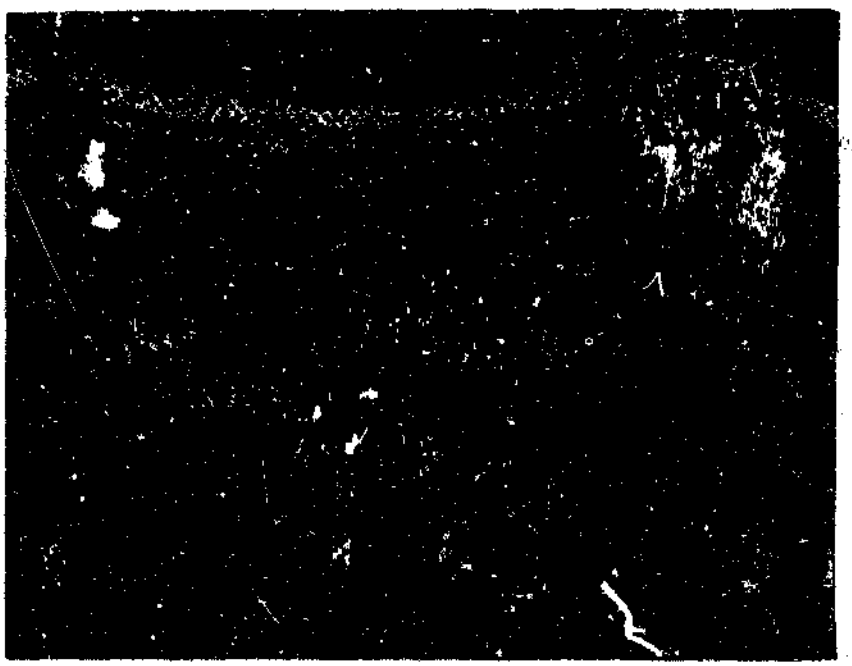
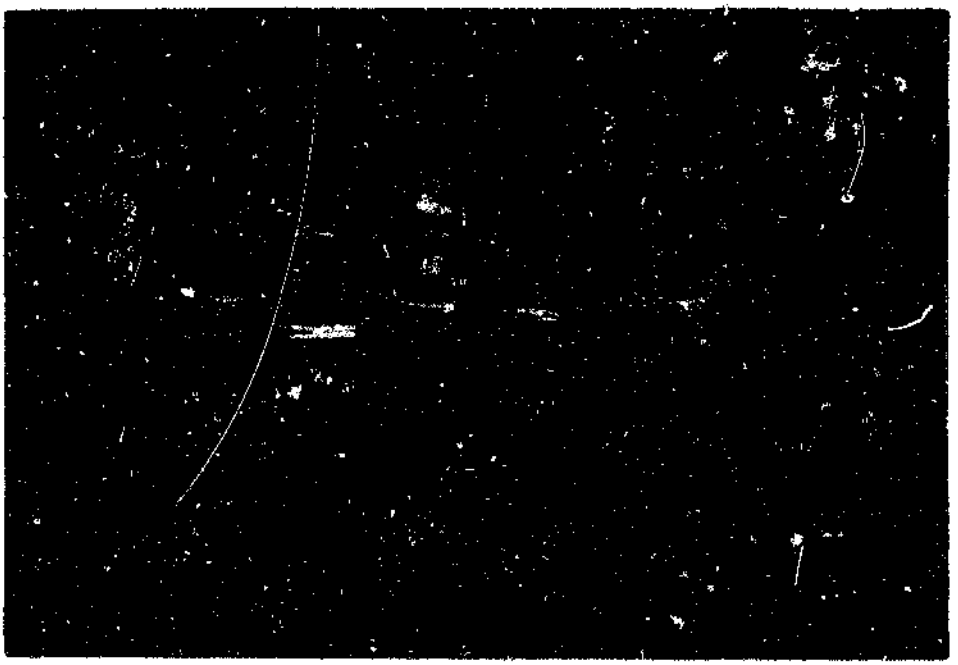


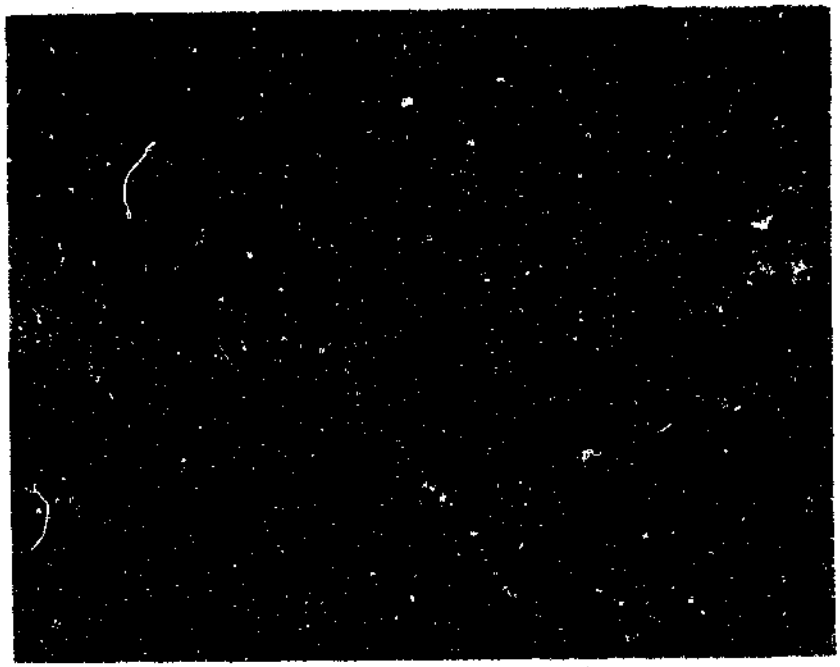
2.17 The Ntepane (small replica of married women's rear apron), which is usually adorned with a leather version of the lekgabi (loose swinging vertical strings of beads) found on the married woman's ntepa (rearskirt), November 1985.



2.18 Female initiates wearing unadorned rear aprons, November 1985.



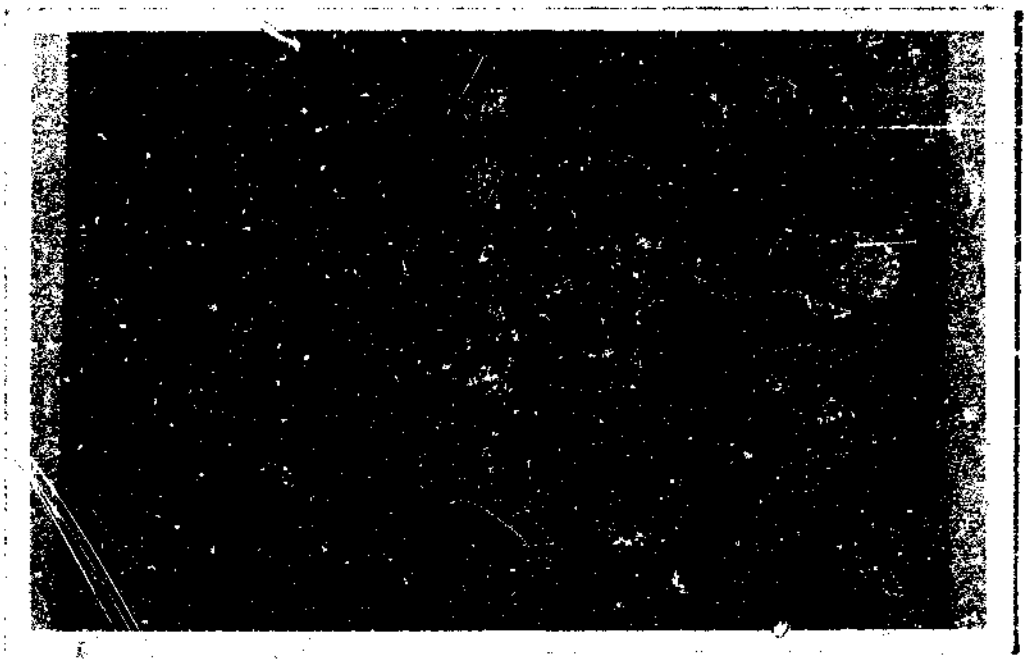
2.19Ntepa, worn by married women, December 1985.



2.20 Mphato (lodge) for female initiates, where Ntwane initiates are instructed in sexual and domestic matters, as well as undergo the stretching of the labia minora, July 1986.



2.21 Another example of a traditional <u>gimwane</u> (fertility doll), July 1987.



2.22 Mogope (domestic calabashes), made from hollowed pumpkins and butter nuts, c.1967, D.P. Stoffberg.



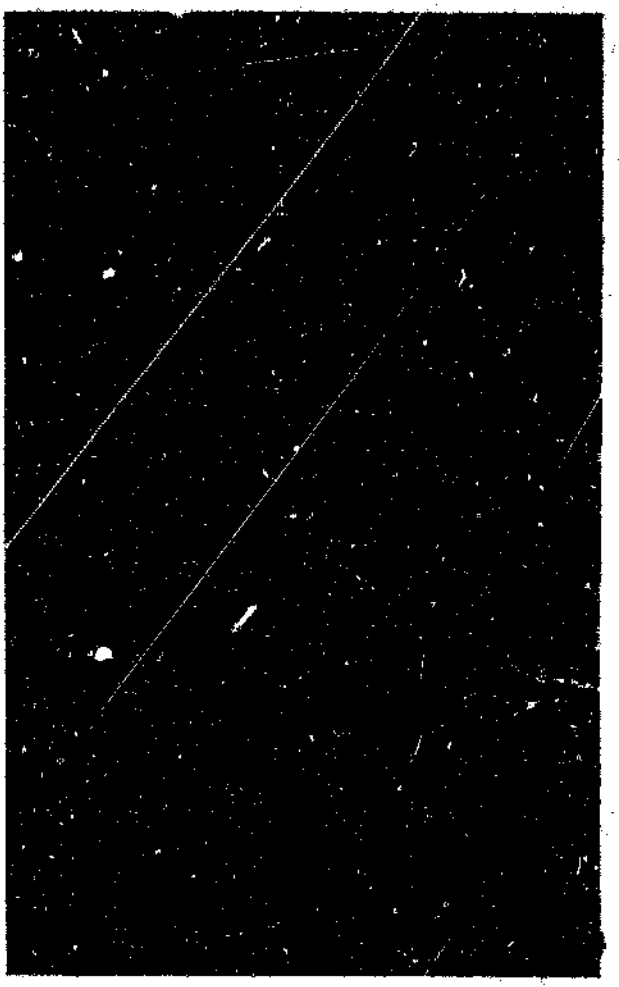
2.23 Ntwane bride dressed in traditional regalia, December 1987



2.24 A Christian wedding, celebrated by members of the Pedi community residing in Moutse, December 1987.



2.25 The bride's tlopo (hairstyle), which is decorated with konopi (buttons) and incised patterns, c. 1967.
D.P. Stoffberg.



2.26 The tlopo resembles both a helmet and bicycle seat in shape. It is styled, using a razor-blade. Then letsopa (river mud) is mixed with cattle fat and rubbed into the hair until it hardens, after which intricate patterns are incised onto the surface. Finally sibilo (special black soil found after the rains) is smeared over the hairstyle to make it shine.



2.27 The red feather worn by the Ntwane bride is echoed in the colour of her bridesmaid's headscarf, December 1987



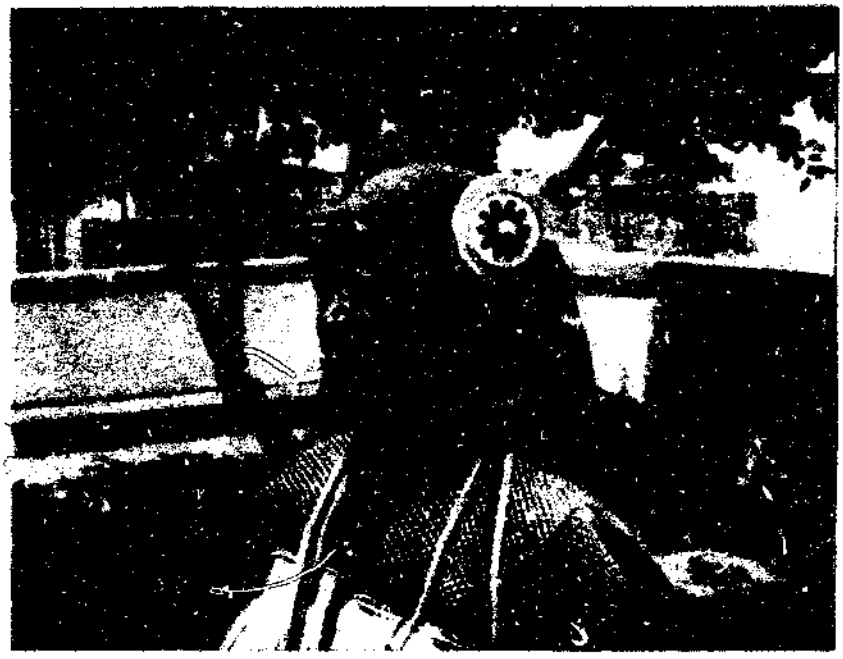
2.28 The bride's mother-in-law wears a headscarf in a contrasting colour.



2.29 Relatives of the bride (right) and groom (left) prepare the wedding feast, December 1987.



2.30 Type 1 Thetho (foreskirt) , worn by married women, consisting of a largely unadorned surface made from animal hide. The lower left hand side consists of two dipeshana (white beaded squares). Adjacent to these beaded squares are two square beaded motifs with beaded tassles below, called tetisane. The dihlora are rosette-like motifs comprising beaded concentric circles in white on the outside, black and yellow in the inner circles and red and white in the centre, c.1986.
Gertrude Posel Gallery, Wits.



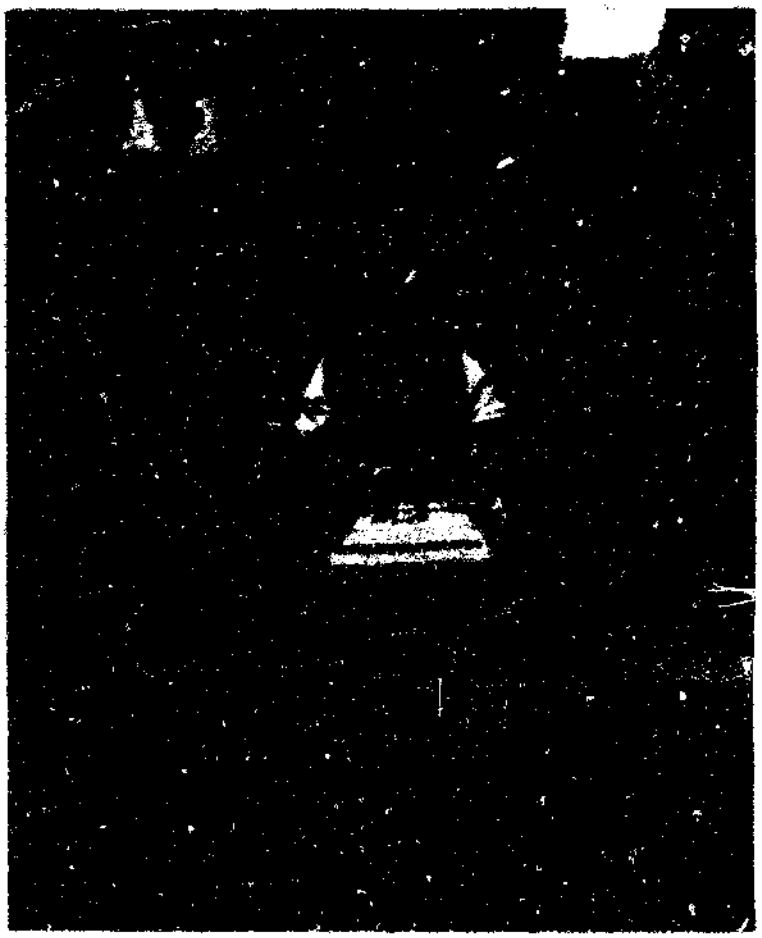
2.31 Ntwane woman wearing a sehlora on the side of her head. It appears to be of great significance to the Ntwane for it recurs on most of their traditional objects, November 1990.



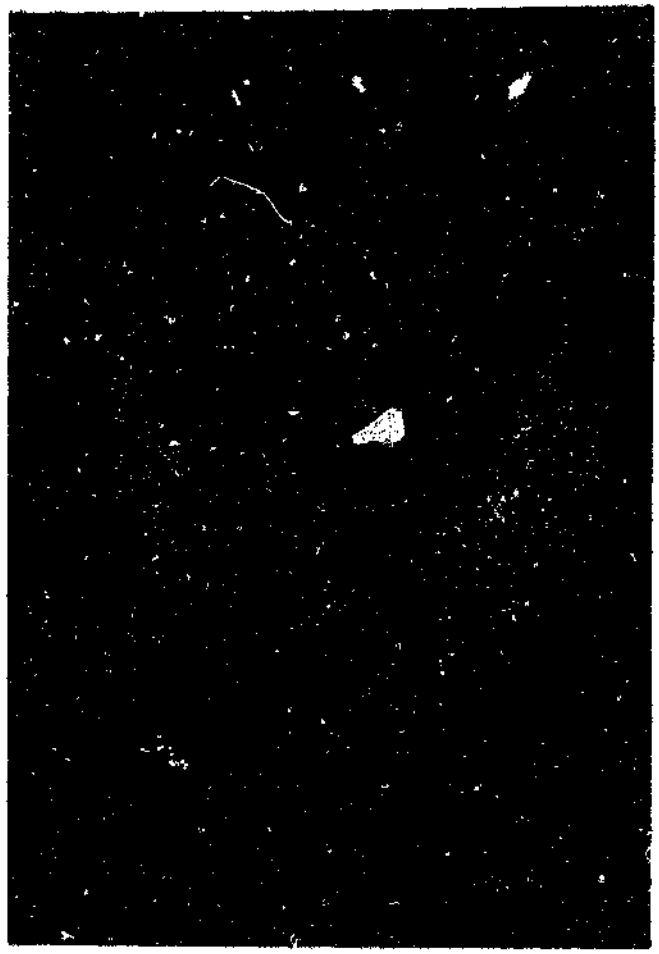
2.32 Thetho (foreskirt) representing Type 2. This apron differs from Type 1 in terms of its distinctive beadwork - vertically set, red, white and blue beaded strips, called kgwayila - and the colour, shape, and position of the diblora, December 1985.



2.33 Titwane (foreskirt worn by female diviners, with grass-like patterns called dikulusane. The titwane differ from the aprons worn by Ntwane basadi in terms of their decoration, as well as in the predominance of the white-red-black colour triad, July 1986.



2.34 Motseka (rear apron worn by female diviners, which is divided into three horizontal sections, the upper and lower comprising black hide and white beads, and the middle section being adorned with red material, July 1986.



2.35 Ntepa (rear apron), shaped into an inverted "V" formed by a triangular gap which is framed by two lekobe (tapering flaps), c.1986. Gertrude Posel Gallery, Wits.



2.36 - Rear and side views of thetho, c.1986
2.37



2.37 Ntwane informants have stated that the shape of the ntepa represents the hind legs of a goat.

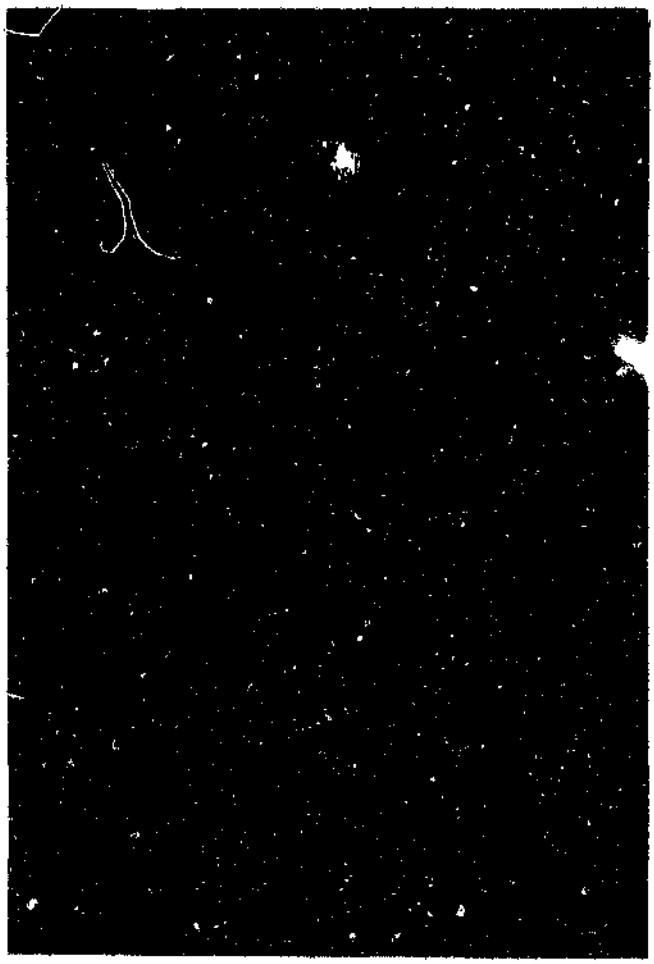


2.38 Ntwaro woma with beaded hoops arranged in uniform colour pattern: two white bands are placed on top, followed by one red, one blue or black hoop, then one pink and sometimes one white hoop at the bottom, c.1986.

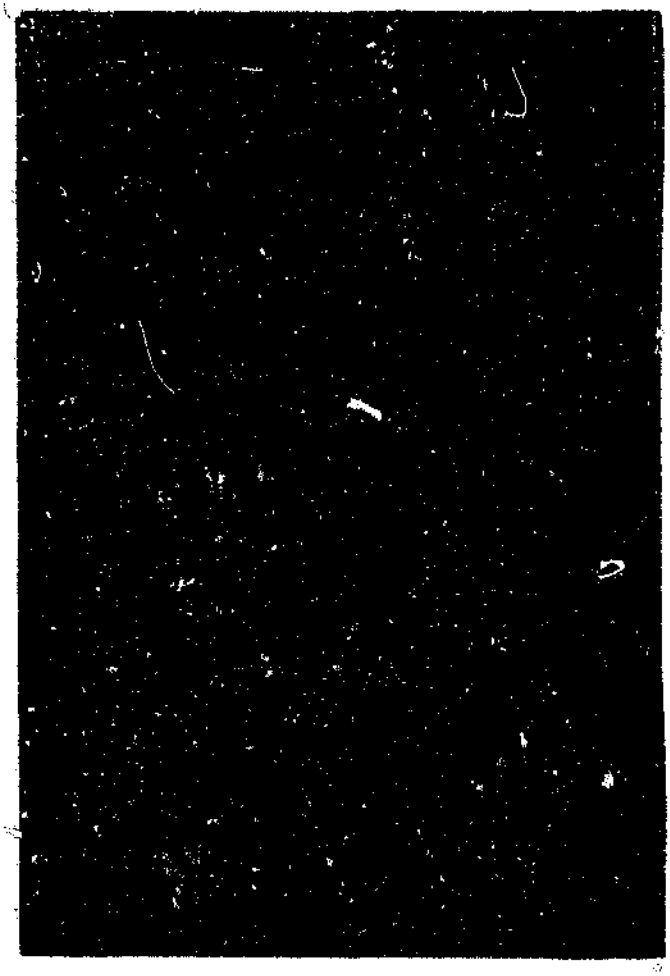
CHAPTER THREE



3.1 Spitskop, c.1978.
D.F.Coetzee.



3.2 Chief Paledi Mathebe, Ntwane Regent from 1896 - 1923, c.1978, D.F. Coetzee.



3.3 Chief Mohlamme Mathebe from 1923 - 1939, c.1978. D.F. Coetzee.



3.4 William Malephatlo, respected war veteran and ngaka (witchdoctor), December 1985.

CHAPTER FOUR



4.1 A view of the inner wall of the homestead belonging to Sophie Modise and her husband, Johannes, July 1987.



4.2 A view of the courtyard and decorated inner walls of an Ntwane homestead. Occasionally, geometric motifs are incorporated into the mural design in separate panels. But the basic decoration remains largely unchanged, with understated, earth-hued patterns being favoured by Ntwane women, July 1987.



4.3 An Ntwane woman in traditional dress, standing outside a reed enclosure, c. 1930s. Reproduced 1967. D.P. Stoffberg.



4.3 An Ntwane woman in traditional dress, standing outside a reed enclosure, c. 1930s. Reproduced 1967. D.P. Stoffberg.



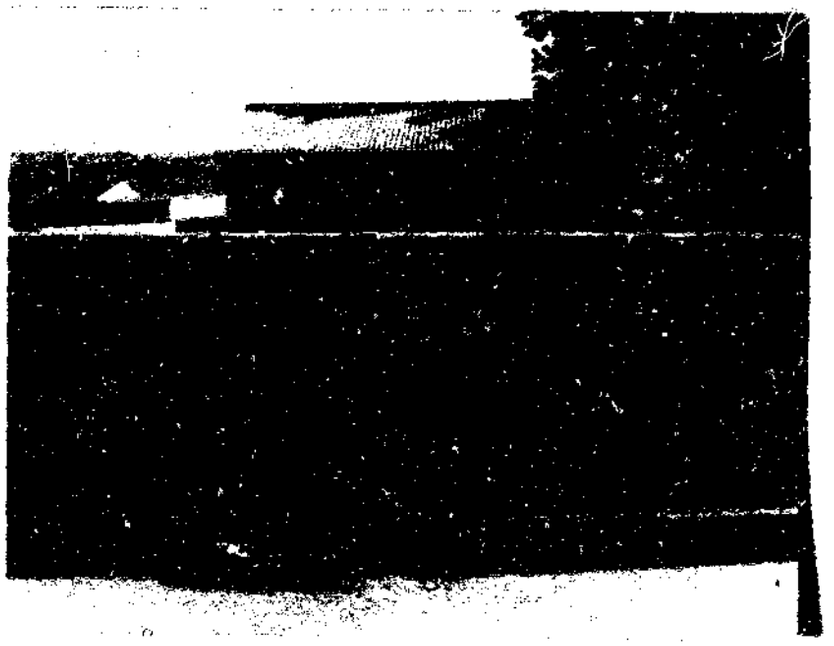
4.4 Yellow and blue outlines embellish the outer walls of a homestead belonging to an Ntwane man whose wife is of Ndebele origin, November 1985.

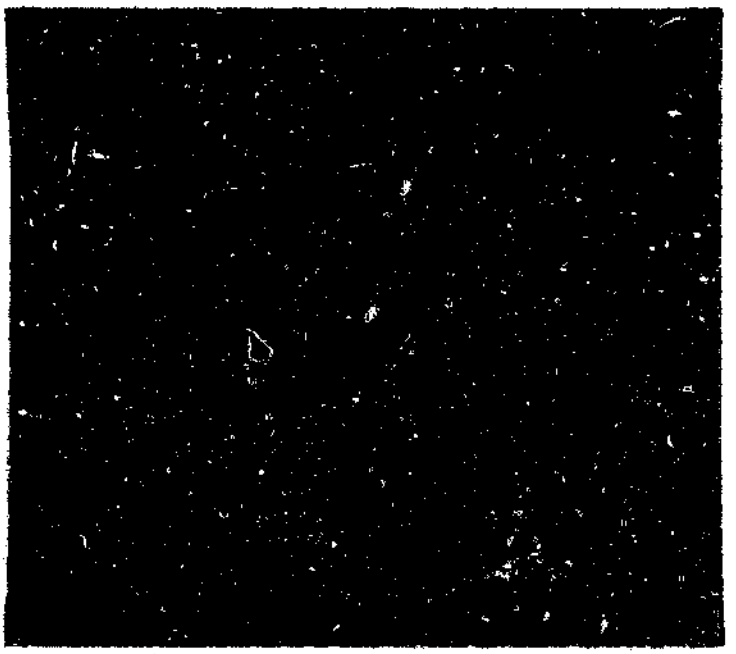


4.5 The outer walls of an Ndebele homestead in Kwarrielaagte which was destroyed in 1986, as a result of conflict between the Ntwane and Ndebele inhabitants of Moutse, November 1985.

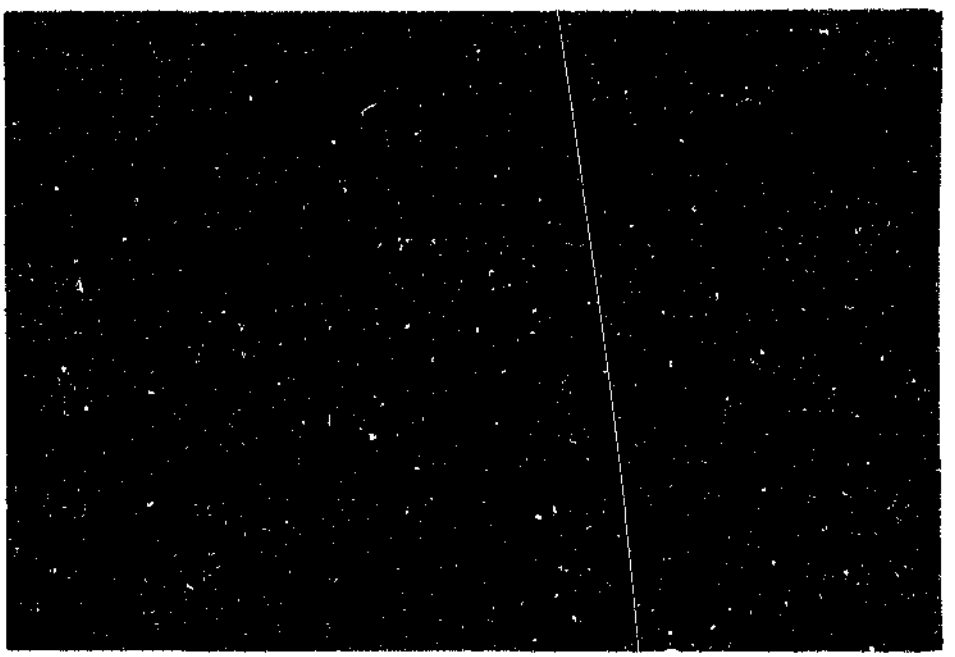


4.6 Examples of Ntwane mural decorations
4.9 which represent Type A, c. 1985.

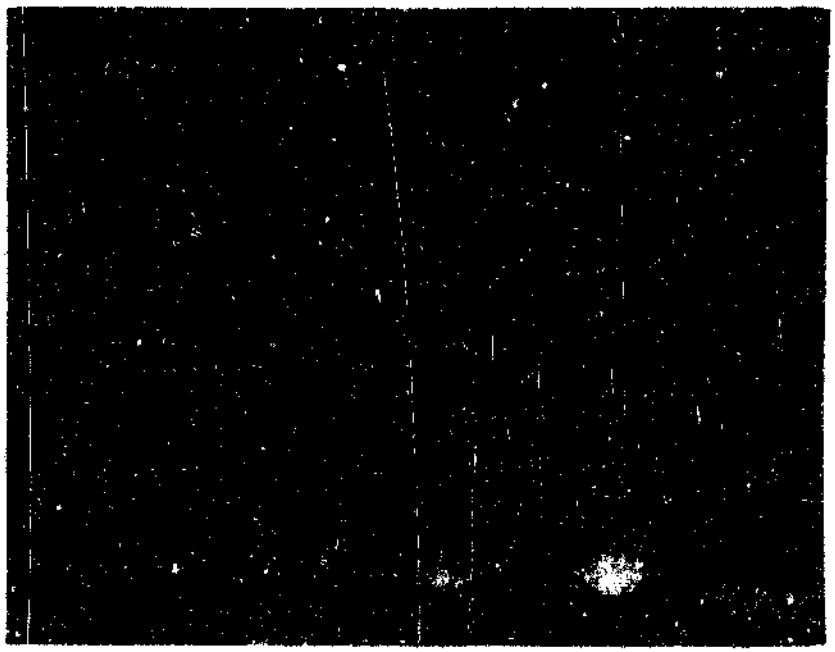




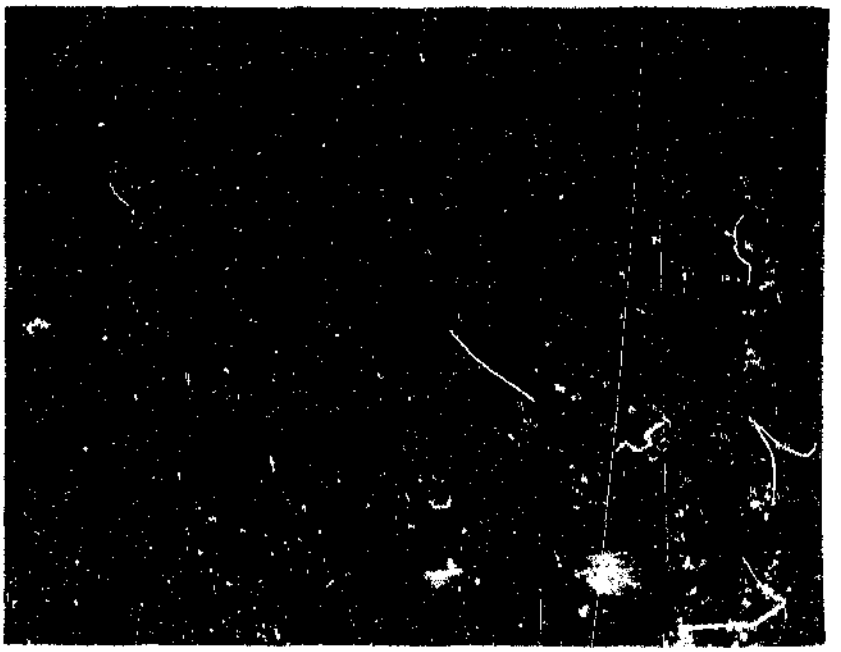




4.10 An example of Ntwane mural decoration, representing Type B, in which motifs which resemble continous, elongated figures of eight (8) are painted in a horizontal position, with each "8" intersecting the next, November 1985.



4.11 Makwala is the term given by the Ntwane to both their mural decorations and the designs on their calabashes, July 1986.



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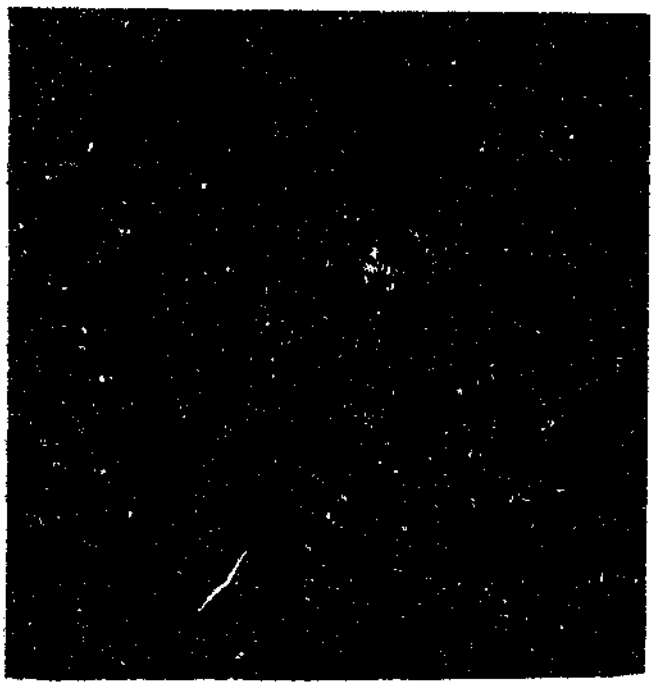
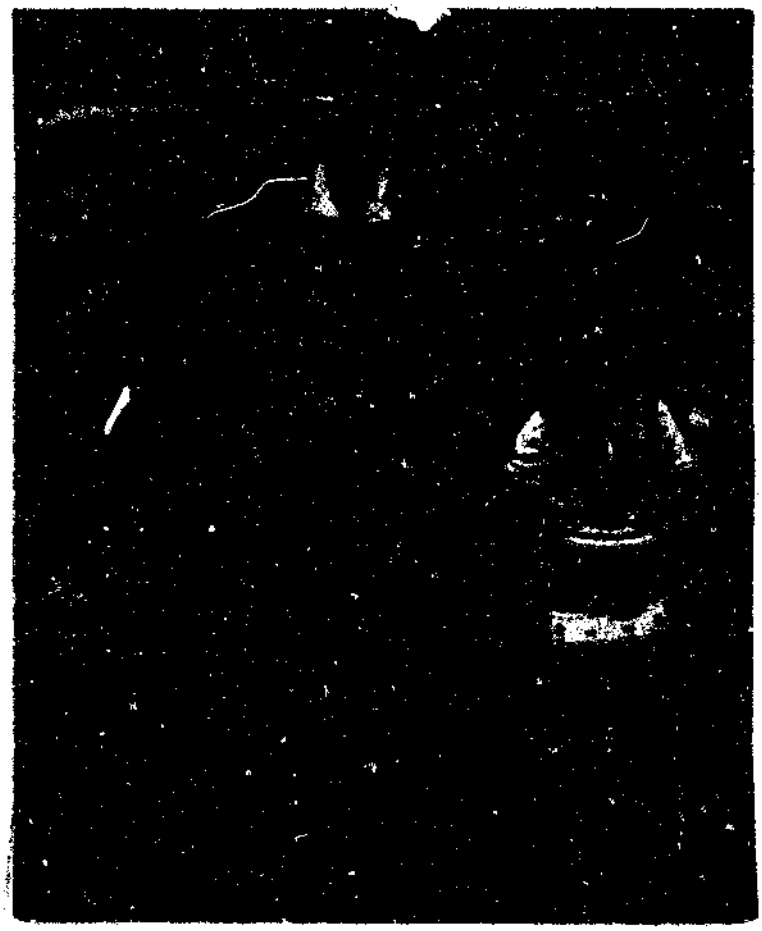
CHAPTER FIVE



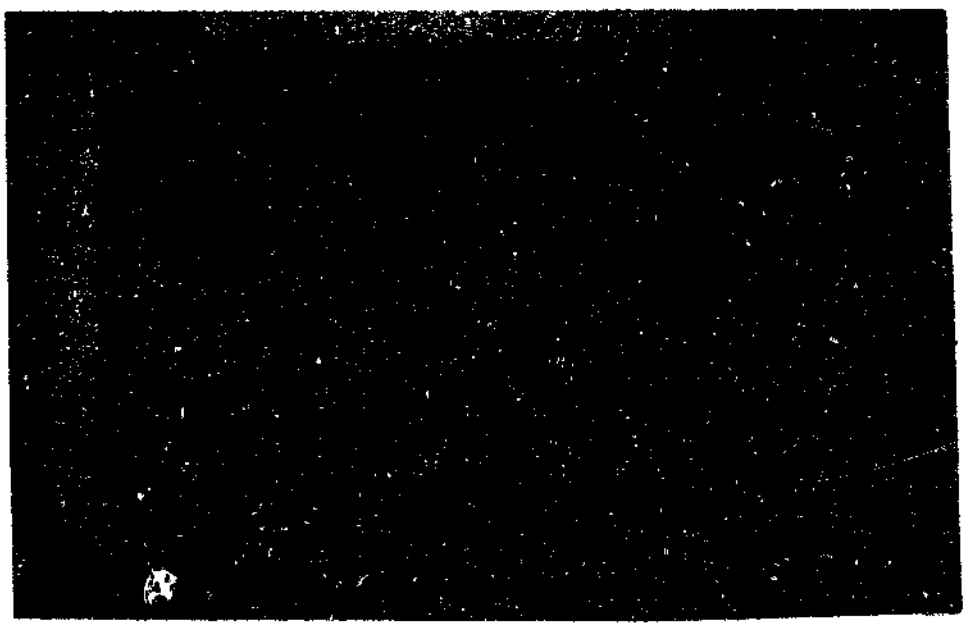
5.1 The *lehadima* is an object fashioned from an ox horn, which is used by the *ngaka* (witchdoctor) to "trap" the *tladi* (lightning bird), December, 1987.



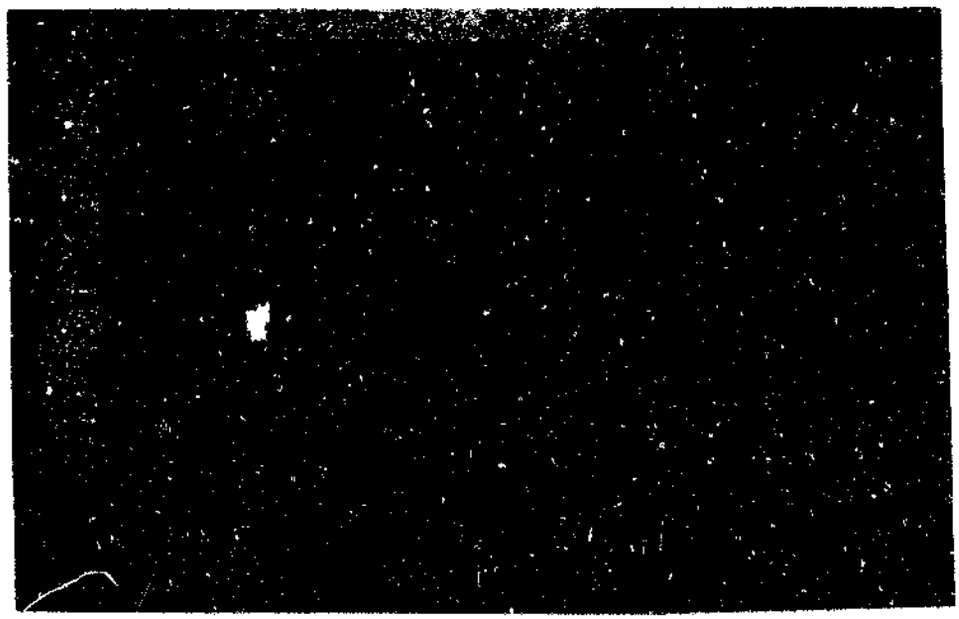
5.2 William Malephatlo, personal ngaka (witchdoctor) to Chief Mathebe, throws the bones, December 1987.



5.3 Mapale (female diviner), regarded by the rest of the group as both healer and outside, December 1985.



5.4 Newly circumcised male initiates, dressed in female paraphernalia, c. 1978. D.F. Coetzee.



5.4 Newly circumcised male initiates, dressed in female paraphernalia, c. 1978. D.F. Coetzee.



5.5 Female initiates wearing beaded grass hoops arranged in the following descending order: white, red, black or blue, followed by pink, July 1986.



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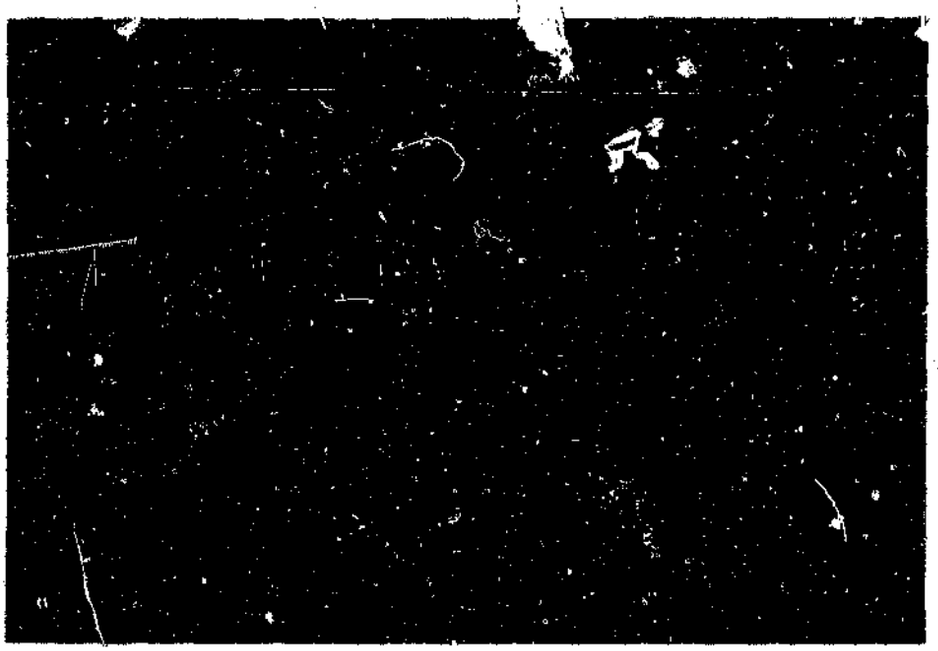


5.6 Male Initiation Lodge July 1985.

5.7 The lodge is shaped in the form of a tunnel, with only a roof overhead and no sealed exits and entrances .





5.8 The colour triad white, red and blue or black forms the decorative basis of Ntwane brides' apparel, December 1986.

CHAPTER SIX



6.1 Selina Ditsego and her husband Edward who works as a miner in Johannesburg returns to Kwarrielaagte every six months.
December, 1985.



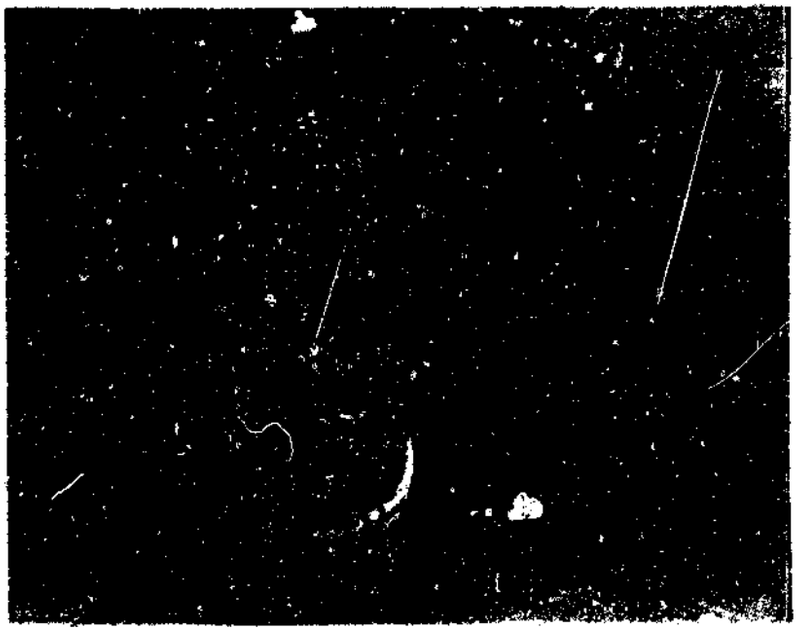
6.2 Richmond Phorwa flanked by his two wives Betty (left) and Beauty (right), December 1986.



6.3 Ntwane elder wearing a traditional "jas", July 1987.



6.4 Ntwane fertility dolls on exhibition at the Gertrude Posel Gallery, Wits University, c. 1986.



6.5 An example of a more traditional Ntwane fertility doll, c. 1986.



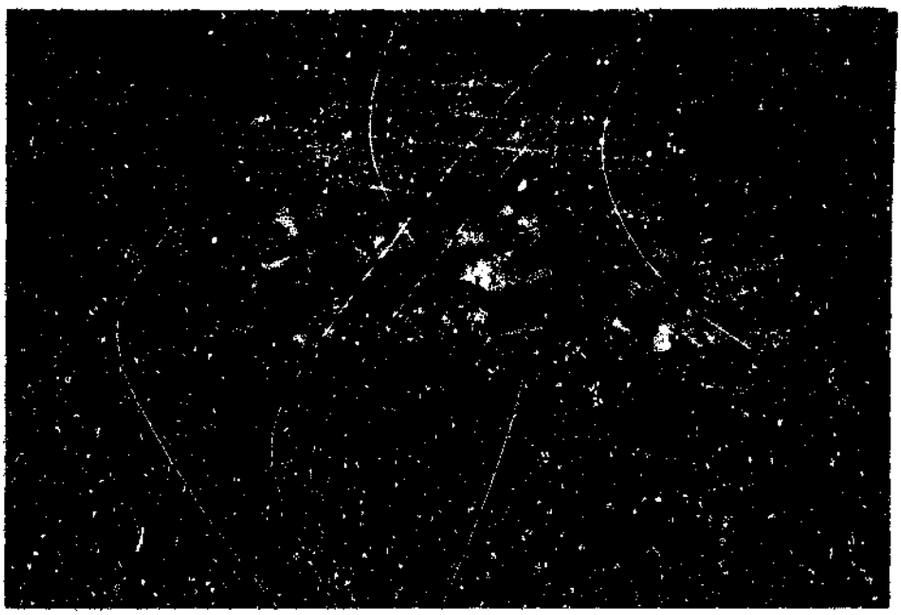
6.6 Some of the exhibits at Moutse's annual
6.9 prize-giving day, organised by the
Zenzele Women's Association,
July 1986.



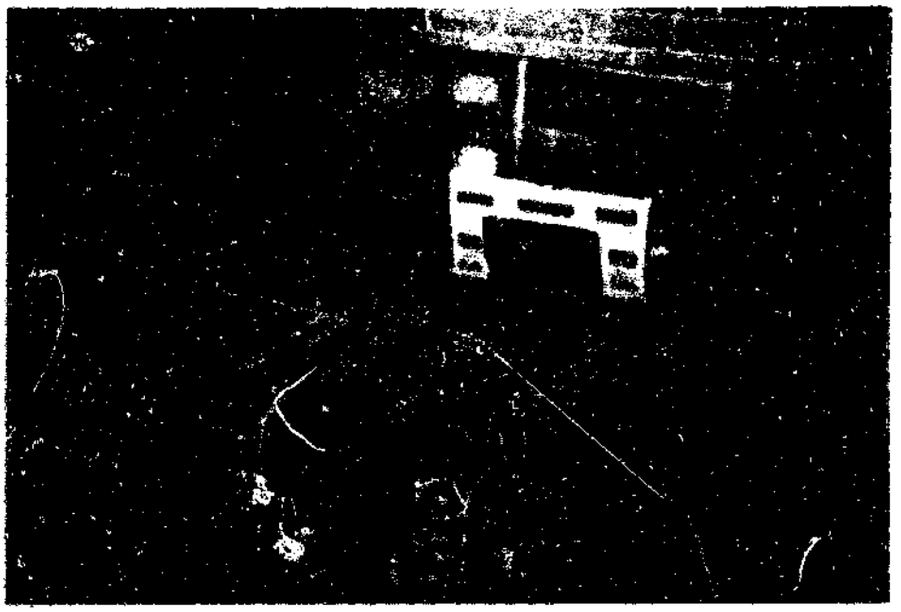
6.7



6.7



6.8



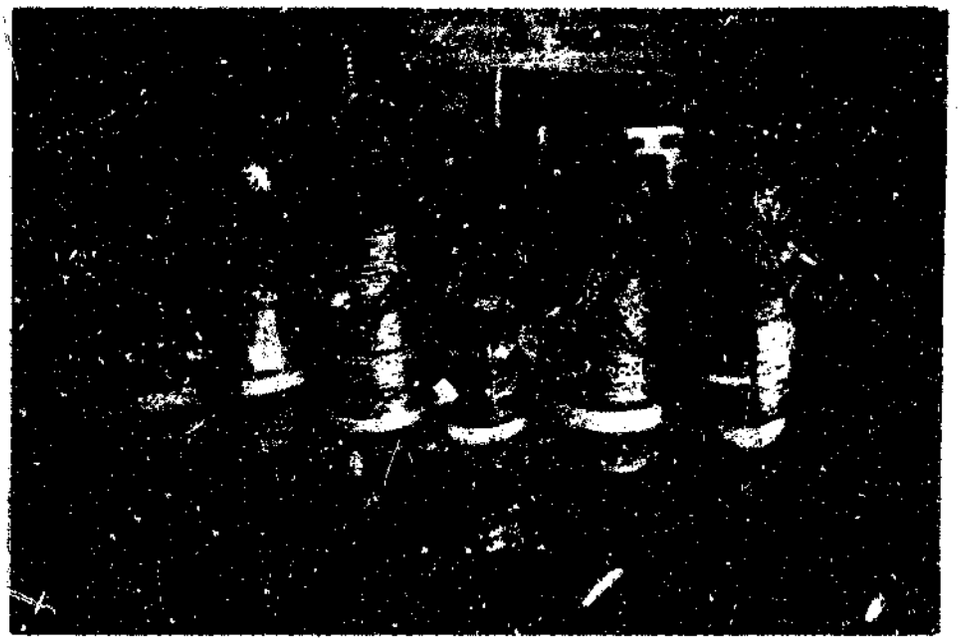
6.9



6.10 & 6.11 Ntwane gourds and fertility dolls on display during prize-giving day, July, 1986.



6.10 & 6.11 Ntwane gourds and fertility dolls on display during prize-giving day, July, 1986.



6.11

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Name of thesis: The Iconology Of Women's Paraphernalia Among The Ntwane.

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