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History of Art
Masters of Art by Course Work and Research Report

(Re)presenting the female form: shaped by artists Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi.

Thank you to my family and friends for their support during the research and writing of this master's dissertation, as well as Prof. Anitra Nettleton for her invaluable supervision, input and guidance.

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INTRODUCTION

This research report intends to identify and situate ways in which notions of tradition, ideology and systems of control anchor the representation of the female body, especially the portrayal of Venda and Tsonga women in contemporary South African society. The report combines anthropological and art-historical strategies to investigate how the artists Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi construct figures, imaging women according to particular cultural conventions. By using non-verbal clues – such as body postures, dress and adornment – the research report focuses on the examination of the embodied gender codes and the ways in which these are represented, expressed and reproduced through the sculptural figures. Through the examination of the mode/s of representation that are employed by the artists, the research report identifies how these representations use notions of tradition to reinforce a particular identity for women who identify themselves as “Venda” or “Tsonga”. The embodiment of visual markings associated with such contexts highlights the relationship these marked traces have to social hierarchies and customs, specifically initiation, and the role/s of women in society.

Our understanding of South African post-apartheid society has been repositioned as historiography revisits the construction of a South African cultural identity. The examination of South African history, sociology and politics from numerous perspectives (Richards 1999: 353) establishes useful viewpoints from which one might observe the work of the three above-mentioned artists. Our understanding of “traditional society” has been produced through a Victorian lens (Kasfir 1999: 90), which celebrated victories against “barbarous practices” (Cooper 1994: 1529), while missionaries “distilled traditionalism to its own purposes” (Cooper 1994: 1526) and

colonial rule fixed the boundaries of custom and customary law as the British policies of indirect rule established alliances with “traditional” leaders (Cooper 1994: 1530). Paulme (1963) argues that this colonial strategy prejudiced women in a traditional African setting and placed them in an inferior position to men. This secondary tier, she suggests, was premised on the assumption that “any divergence from the Western ideal [automatically] implies a lower status for women” (Paulme 1963: 4). Paulme furthermore suggests that the influence of the arrival of Europeans altered the distribution of responsibility, which was more disadvantageous for women and has not been considered (Paulme 1963: 8).

Thus Paulme (1963) notes that the newly introduced modes of life imposed new burdens on the women who remained in rural villages where they became responsible for all the work while the majority of men laboured in urban centres. Annie Lebeuf (1963: 94) suggests that, even if earlier forms of social organisation still existed, the new systems imposed upon women meant that their role in society suffered as they were systematically excluded from any participation in the new set-up which had been hastily formulated by the colonial powers. According to Cooper (1994), apartheid appropriated the former colonial power structures, which affected South African women through various kinds of legislation, such as: male-only compounds in the cities, which excluded women from wage-earning labour, as did the policing of migration, the feminisation of rural poverty, and a complex hierarchy of residential rights that separated black workers from their families. These conditions contributed to the increased importance and dependence of “men’s fortunes” on migrant labour (Cooper 1994: 1534). In this regard Marion Arnold (1996) suggests that

the collapse of apartheid has not changed the authoritarian nature of South African patriarchy, but it has made it visible in a way not possible when

almost all debate and all versions of history focussed on racial issues and conflicts (Arnold 1996: 15).

Arnold asserts that figurative sculptures contain multiple realities as “not only do they generate immediate reaction; they [also] evoke *gendered* reaction” (1996: 106).

Viewers tend to respond with reference to their gendered selves as well as their socialised expectation of appearance, behaviour and demeanour. Nonetheless, the figures of women made by artists Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi offer the possibility for the recovery of history and for the production of new meaning within that recovery process. These possibilities offer an alternative to what it meant to be a woman in Venda and Tsonga society, and how that meaning operates in contemporary society.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

ETHNICITY AND ITS “INVENTED” MARKINGS

The development in South Africa of ethnicity as an ideology can be attributed to the linguistic categorisation by missionaries, the construction of ethnic identities by anthropologists and the appropriation of these stereotypes, and what historian Eric Hobsbawm terms, “invented traditions”,¹ to socially engineer the identities and the cultural forms that various South African ethnicities use to express themselves.

Hobsbawm asserts that “invented” traditions are,

normally governed by overtly and tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (1983: 1).

Together, the elements outlined by Hobsbawm have arguably cemented ethnic divides between different groups of South Africans. These new traditions often grafted themselves onto old ones, or borrowed symbolism and symbolic practice from

elsewhere (Hobsbawm 1983: 6), thus creating ethnic divisions that were sophisticated manipulations and formalisations, and the reworking of pre-existing ideas about identity.² Those pre-existing ideas still persist and portray themselves as authentic and pure cultural essences (Hobsbawm 1983; Harries 1989; Ranger 1983; Vail 1989).

Europeans endeavoured to codify and promulgate these invented traditions, thereby transforming flexible custom into hard prescription, creating false models of colonial codified African “tradition”. Ranger suggests that invented traditions provided white colonialists with models of command and offered many Africans a model of “modern” behaviour (Ranger 1983: 212). These invented traditions were marked by their inflexibility. The static nature of these sets of recorded rules and procedures gave Europeans reassurance in a period of continuous change. Ranger (1983: 247) argues that the assertion by whites that African society was profoundly static and conservative was problematic, as it misread and misunderstood the realities of pre-colonial Africa. These misconceptions perpetuated a belief that Africa was a place with no history (Ebron 2002: 93) and, as Kasfir (1999: 90) notes, proposed that in pre-colonial Africa “most African societies were relatively isolated, internally coherent and highly integrated”.

Ranger (1983: 247) points out that African societies valued custom and continuity, but custom was loosely defined and infinitely flexible. He further insists that African “traditions” did not change to accommodate the new circumstances; rather, at a certain point, they had to stop changing. This was the result of the recording of traditions (community identity and land rights) in Western court records, which created new criteria and invented a new customary model, an unchanging body of

tradition (Ranger 1983: 251). Therefore, it is necessary to focus attention on the political strategies and motivations of the anthropologists who studied the people with whom this research report is concerned. A critical view of their theoretical methodologies and personal politics will foster an understanding and appreciation of the complex and dynamic relationship of the Venda and Tsonga cultures,³ as well as an understanding of the role of women within these societies, so that the representational aspects within the sculptures under discussion are made visible and appreciated.

The paradigm shift in the writing and re-writing of the histories requires a meaningful interrogation of what Mary Douglas calls the “smoke screen”, which was created by the “scrupulous setting down of informants’ views’ in order for the so-called truths to be penetrated (Douglas 1967: 670). This notion is echoed by Hobsbawm (1983: 13) in his assertion that all historians, whatever else their objectives, are engaged in the process (consciously or not) of creating, dismantling and restructuring images of the past, and that it is necessary for them to be aware of the resulting effect. Patrick Harries’ examination of the objectives, practices and methodology of Swiss Romande missionary Henri-Alexandre Junod is an example of how our understanding of the Tsonga as an ethnic group is shifted by such an assessment. Anthropologist David Hammond-Tooke considers the theoretical assumptions made by these anthropologists, including the impact (political and administrative) of Junod’s classic account of the Tsonga, *The Life of a South African Tribe* (1913) (1997: 20), H. Stayt’s work *The BaVenda* (1931) and Government Ethnographer N.J. van Warmelo’s works on the Venda people. Hammond-Tooke affirms these anthropologists’ “attempts” to provide as full a description as possible of all aspects of the culture of the people they

dealt with (1997: 1-2). He acknowledges that the texts are concerned with kinship, socialisation, religion and ritual, sometimes looking at symbolism, music and the arts, while attempting to show the complexities of indigenous life. However, Hammond-Tooke suggests that since these texts do not account for the dynamic nature of cultural practice and its various forms, they present a limited and sometimes static (male⁴) point of view.

Furthermore, historians Leroy Vail and Eric Hobsbawm question the motives of journalists and other commentators who have utilised “tribalism as [a] given” when explaining political actions, without probing the possible linkages between political/socio-economic changes and intellectual/cultural changes. Vail asserts that this non-critical approach assists in constituting historical authenticity and legitimates tribalism (1989: xi).

Since the meaning of material culture is not fixed as histories shift, possibilities occur to make new meanings and counter-histories. The study of the figures included in this research report required further knowledge of their relationship to how they were related to their social and cultural (Tsonga and Venda) realities and their representations thereof, as well as their relationship with their user/s (Gwintsa 1998: 33). In turn, this required insight into who wrote what, when, who’s history was considered and which methodologies or theories were applied (Douglas 1967; Doyle & Winkiel 2005).

THE VENDA

The Venda-speaking people are what Stayt refers to as “a composite people who have been gradually welded into a compact whole in the locality which they now occupy” (1968: 9). They are composed of sibs, sections of sibs and groups of unrelated peoples who, despite their previous cultural differences, have identified and created a homogenised nucleus. As Venda lineages trace a long history of migrations into the region, the ethnological origin of this nucleus is uncertain. However, various sibs of the Venda consider themselves to be a part of a single unit and speak a common language, TshiVenda, albeit with slight dialectic differences (Stayt 1968: 9), which appears to have formed from a complex fusion of Shona and Sotho elements (Nettleton, 2002: 96).

Venda oral tradition reveals that the “important” migrations came from north of the Limpopo River. Anthropologist Hugh Stayt notes that two of the migrations, composed of small sibs and sections of sibs, stand out amongst the other smaller infiltrations: the Vhatavhatsinde group, composed chiefly of the VhaKwebo and Ndou, which was later followed by the MaKhwinde⁵ group (Stayt 1968: 9). These two groups form the nucleus of the VhaVenda (Stayt 1968: 13). Although Venda society is patrilineal and chieftainship is generally passed to the eldest son of the deceased chief, this is not automatic and siblings can win a disputed succession through the support of councillors, an army and their popularity (Harries 1989: 91). In addition, John Blacking (1969c: 172) suggests that strong importance is also placed on tracing descent through females. In 1931 the Venda occupied approximately a third of the inhabited territory of the Zoutpansberg district in the then Northern Transvaal, now

Limpopo Province⁶ (Stayt 1968: 1), an area they had at that time occupied for at least the past three centuries (Nettleton 2002: 96; Stayt 1968: 10; van Warmelo 1940: 51-2).

Oral traditions claim that the “original” inhabitants of Venda were the people of Raphulu, who lived at Tshiruluni north of Louis Trichardt and originally came from Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, which they had left “on account of strife” (van Warmelo 1940: 51). The VhaNgoni⁷ also inhabited the Zoutpansberg area, and they were the people that the MaKhwinde (Ramabulana) encountered when they crossed the Limpopo River to settle in the Zoutpansberg⁸ region towards the end of the 17th or the beginning of the 18th century (Stayt 1968: 10; van Warmelo 1940: 51-2). In the 18th and early 19th centuries the Venda polity was at its most extensive and included a large number of Sotho and later Tsonga migrants from Portuguese East Africa, known today as Mozambique (Harries 1989: 83-85). These people were political subjects under the rule of the Venda (Singo) chiefs and considered themselves as “Venda” in the political sense (Nettleton 1992: 204).

In 1871 the Lutheran Berlin Mission founded their first station at Maungani (Stayt 1968: 19; van Warmelo 1940: 58-9), but it was only in the late 1880s that white settlers started to arrive in substantial numbers (Harries 1989: 92). When Chief Makhado⁹ died in 1895, disputes followed between his sons and he was eventually succeeded by Mphephu, his second son¹⁰ (van Warmelo 1940: 59). The Boers (General Joubert) eventually drove Mphephu out of Venda into Mashonaland in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), where he was received by the English. Following the defeat of the Venda by General Joubert in 1897, the Sotho and Tsonga who had been political subjects of the Venda during the 18th and early 19th centuries, reasserted

their independence from the Venda chiefs, while still retaining insignia and customs similar to those associated with Venda chiefship (Nettleton 1992: 204).

Ultimately, the Venda had no option but to accept European domination (Stayt 1968: 19). Mphephu was allowed to return to Venda at the end of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and on his return the country was divided among himself and his two brothers Senthumule and Khuthama, who were recognised as independent chiefs under European rule. Under white rule, chiefs performed the role of paid civil servants, collecting taxes and supplying labour for public works and to farms (Harries 1989: 97-8). This was a manifestation of the Colonial government's desire to rule by using a wide range of collaborators¹¹ rather than a constant military force (Ranger 1983: 229). These policies further entrenched ethnic divisions between the Venda and the Tsonga. In addition, European rule and taxation broke down many customary institutions that regulated relations between the sexes. This breakdown almost always left women economically disadvantaged (Ranger 1983: 257) and in charge of family life in the rural areas. Women became increasingly dependent on wages sent by their migrant husbands, and were forced to take on traditional male roles such as ploughing the fields or tending cattle.¹² Furthermore, African men were "prepared to appeal to the colonial authority to enforce 'custom' upon women" (Ranger 1983: 258).

Since Venda Chiefs were appointed by and accountable to the Native Affairs Department, rather than their own followers, their popularity declined. Chieftaincy as an institution was transformed; chiefs were no longer the sole political representatives of the African population and the democratic element disappeared when the size of the chiefdom was petrified (Harries 1989: 99). In 1924, Mphephu died and was

succeeded by his son Mbulahene/Mbulahani, the first Venda chief to be installed by European officials (Stayt 1968: 16-9; van Warmelo 1940: 61).

The erosion of Chieftaincy as an institution left people looking to other political institutions for leadership. Chiefs had little power to protect their followers living outside the reserves and farming within the reserves was becoming less viable because of the influx of people from the surrounding white farms. It was nonetheless commonly believed that Africans lived in “traditional tribes”¹³ (Harries 1989: 97-98). Anthropologist Hugh Stayt’s¹⁴ monograph, *The BaVenda* (1931), published under the auspices of the International African Institute, became the standard monograph on the Venda people. It contains a detailed account of all aspects of Venda life, which Hammond-Tooke regarded as “remarkably sophisticated” (1997: 75). Despite its potentially historically static position, and an acknowledgement from Stayt of the “almost impossibility to recapture indigenous beliefs” (1968: xi), *The BaVenda* has made a significant contribution to increasing the understanding of Venda traditional life (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 73).

Government Ethnologist (Department of Native Affairs) Nicholas Jacobus van Warmelo¹⁵ (1904-1989) was the commanding figure in the Department for 39 years and its only member for the first 15. He held this post until his retirement in 1969. Van Warmelo’s major activities¹⁶ were the production of the five volumes on Venda Law in collaboration with W.M.D. Phophi, and the extensive body of official files on chiefly genealogies, tribal histories and the details of local politics (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 109-111). This is significant, since the constant disputes relating to the succession of chiefs were the primary focus of the Department’s work (historical and

genealogical material) and van Warmelo limited the department's work almost entirely to the recording of local tribal histories (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 118). Other matters, such as social structure and culture, were treated much more superficially (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 113).

These publications were "ideologically neutral" (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 114) as they were essentially descriptive and non-theoretical (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 114).

Hammond-Tooke attributes this to the fact that van Warmelo, a linguist turned anthropologist, distrusted theory and "preferred to refer to himself as merely the means by which knowledge of theirs could be made public" (Hoernlé 1939). Van Warmelo's rare use of "speculation as to meaning or attempt at interpretation" in his work was aimed at recording these changing cultures as swiftly as possible, leaving the full explanation for future generations. Hammond-Tooke (1997: 114) regards this as the reason for van Warmelo's use of the vernacular text,¹⁷ with translation and comments, in most of his publications. Nonetheless, ethnicities have been escorted and entrenched into existence through the methodologies of missionaries and anthropologists, as well as a history of "divide-and-rule" tactics, cannily employed by colonial governments, and later also by the apartheid regime through the establishment of the homelands.¹⁸

In 1948 the National Party came to power with its policy aimed at transforming the reserves into African homelands, and in 1962 various homelands were created across South Africa. Venda, the smallest of all these homelands, was established for the Venda-speaking people. Its capital was Sibasa and its north-eastern border was the Kruger National Park. Gazankulu, another homeland (see below: page 18), was

situated towards the south-east. Venda was granted self-government in 1973 and independence in 1979, and Chief Patrick Mphephu was declared paramount chief.¹⁹ Following independence, Thohoyandou (which included the old Sibasa administrative district) became the capital. Only South Africa and the other homelands recognised Venda as an independent country. The United Nations Security Council, along with the rest of the world, condemned the homelands policy as a strategy applied by the South African government to promote apartheid.

Vail (1989: 6) suggests that even though ethnicity is a “conscious crafted ideological creation” that is ascribed to people through the characterisation of cultural traits and not by personal choice, it is able to coexist with other types of consciousness, it remains an anachronistic ideological construct and its power is in the division of people. Vail’s argument therefore suggests the possibility for the persistence of ethnicity and tribalism’s continuation in post-apartheid South Africa. As Vail (1989) further expresses the manner in which ethnicity is a tool used by anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists to interpret a moment of observation, without paying much attention to the history of that which was observed, and that whatever history was uncovered in the moment of observation was often considered as mere “background”.

THE TSONGA

The names Tsonga and Shangaan are problematic as they reflect the selected histories with which people choose to align themselves. Owing to complicated histories of migration and external influence (missionaries and anthropologists), the ethnic identities of southern Africa are malleable and mobile, and therefore produce ethnic

labels whose meanings shift over time as they become more or less inclusive, or are politically contested (Becker 1997: 182; Harries 1989: 82). Tsonga ethnicity is one such label, defined at the turn of the 20th century. It was, as Harries emphasises, “of little objective value for it was more a product of their social and intellectual environment than an objective reality” (Harries 1989: 82). Tsonga identity, he states, was a product of

European obsession with social classification; a government policy that attempted to divide Africans along ethnic lines; and, as well, an awareness expressed by many Africans of the numerous benefits that accrued from the mobilization of people along ethnic lines (Harries 1989: 83).

The concept of a Tsonga nation did not exist in either Mozambique²⁰ or South Africa in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Harries 1989: 83). Van Warmelo noted how the Tsonga were “not organized into tribes at all, but represent[ed] a large, formless population, the make-up of which almost defie[d] analysis” (van Warmelo 1935: 90). The Tsonga came into being as a result of colonial imperatives and their singularity was later sustained by apartheid policies of dividing people along ethnic lines. However, the original complexities persist as people continue to describe themselves as Tsonga or Shangaan, sometimes using these descriptions interchangeably. Harries (1989:82) insists that the adoption of and emphasis on cultural symbols that are believed to indicate a shared historical Tsonga identity, are motivated by class and regional interests. The Tsonga in Limpopo Province are descendants of the people described by Junod as Thonga, which was later standardised to Tsonga. However, the use of the term “Tsonga-speaking” with reference to the 19th century is misleading as it invokes an erroneous linguistic unity. Harries insists that

no single language linked the early East Coast refugees who were settled throughout the northern and eastern Transvaal. Instead, they spoke a rich variety of language forms that reflected their diverse geographical origins (Harries 1989: 85).

The categorisation of Tsonga as a language was only undertaken by Junod at the end of the 19th century.

Henri-Alexandre Junod (1863-1934) was a Swiss Romande missionary in charge of the mission work among the Tsonga of Mozambique and the former Eastern Transvaal from 1893 to 1917. Hammond-Tooke (1997: 73) argues that missionaries, by the very nature of their work, spent many years among the people contained by the missionary borders.²¹ Thus he concludes that the process of learning the local language to impart the gospel message allowed Junod to record the customs of the people (Hammond -Tooke 1997: 16).

Junod's ethnographic monograph on the Tsonga people, *The Life of a South African Tribe* (1913), which was reprinted 1962, was organised in a "checklist" fashion, as recommended by the authors of *Notes and Queries in Anthology*, the influential and much-reprinted handbook of the Royal Anthropological Institute. Hammond-Tooke asserts that even though it was based on information obtained from only two or three key informants, Junod's account is remarkably detailed and insightful despite its use of the term "clan" (the term used for a descent group) for political groupings under chiefs. However, Junod was influenced by the evolutionist ideas of his time (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 28), particularly with regard to the concepts of nationalism and "the central role of language in the classification of national groups and characteristics" (Harries 1989: 87). Harries (1989: 88) argues that Junod saw "language as the common thread", and therefore adopted an ethno-linguistic approach.

In the early 19th century, the people of Mozambique, currently known as the Tsonga, occupied the entire area south of the Sabi River, except for the enclaves of territory surrounding and immediately to the south of the town of Inhambane (Harries 1989: 84). Junod proposed that the name Thonga (meaning slave) was given “by the Zulus or Ngoni invaders, who enslaved most of their clans between 1815 and 1830” (Junod 1962: 15). He further suggests that the word Thonga is probably derived from the word Ronga (meaning east) as a result of the variance in the phonetics between the two languages. Junod confirmed that Shangaan – Shangana; Tshangaan; Matshangane – was another name used to identify the Thonga and was derived from Soshagana, one of the names of Manukosi, the Ndwande (Nguni) military leader who subjugated many of the people in the area in the early 19th century (Junod 1962: 15; Becker & Nettleton 1989: 9).

One of the many migrations of Tsonga-speakers to the eastern Highveld²² of South Africa that occurred during the 19th century was instigated by Soshangane’s reoccupation of the lower Limpopo area in the 1830s. This initiated what Harries (1989: 83) calls a “general exodus” between the Nkomati and Limpopo Rivers. In addition the succession struggles and natural disasters of 1858-62 led to a second wave of Tsonga migrations westward towards the then Transvaal, now Limpopo, where they settled among the Venda, Sotho, Lovedu and Ndebele people. Although Tsonga migrants often shifted their political allegiances, they were nonetheless welcomed by the chiefs to whom they paid tribute in labour and goods. Those who remained in southern Mozambique were incorporated into Nguni military and social systems, producing the “Shangaan” – Gaza Nguni (Becker 1998: 119; Harries 1989: 83-84).

The Tsonga-speaking immigrants had no “authentic and pure cultural essences” (Hamilton 1998: 23). Their material culture was not uniform, static or “traditional”, nor was it bound by linguistic affiliations. Cultural markers such as clothing, custom and language were “marked by continual adaptations to changing social and environmental situations” (Harries 1989: 89).

Additional migrations occurred following the introduction of a cash economy and labour-intensive capitalist enterprise, as well as drastic changes in the conditions under which African people were able to hold land (Harries 1989: 92; Vail 1989: 8). The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand²³ in 1886 was a powerful economic factor, requiring large and constant supplies of cheap labour. Government imposed taxes that forced men to work as migrant labourers on the South African goldmines,²⁴ where Tsonga-speakers were called Shangaans.²⁵ The emergence and development of an ethnic consciousness among labourers working on the mines was a result of an absence of organisations for the working class.²⁶ Workers used ethnic ties to mobilise themselves and their interests, to initiate boycotts, work stoppages and strikes, and to influence the recruitment process, which pressurised employers to adhere to contracts. The returning men fed this notion of an ethnic community back to the rural areas where people had a limited notion of this ethnic consciousness (Tsonga or Shangaan). Even though this ethnic consciousness was an institution of the state, people also appropriated it for themselves and their own uses. This development had an effect not only in the cities and on the mines (Harries 1989: 103; Vail 1989: 4-5), but also in the rural areas.

The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand led to a rapid increase in the price of land and a discriminatory tax system drew Africans deeper into the cash economy (Harries 1989: 92-3). The day-to-day survival of a rural family was dependent on their ability to work the land, and in the absence of the men who had left their homes to work as migrant labourers new ethnic ideologies evolved. These included the increased power of local chiefs, who had the permission of these absent men to exercise control over their land and women. The value and status placed on women became entangled in the importance for an ethnic identity (Vail 1989: 14-15).

Vail (1989) argues that as women started to play a more critical role in the working of the land and the survival of their families, their value increased along with their desire to seek independence. The result was that some women obtained divorces or illegally moved to industrial and urban areas. Therefore, migrant workers sought to retain control over their land and women through the local chief. Local chiefs became the protectors of the interests of the migrant labourers and were financially rewarded for their services by the returning men. This system of indirect rule meant that the chiefs played a crucial role in exercising a “degree of surveillance over both women and land in the absence of the men” (Vail 1989: 14-15). This characteristic of ethnic consciousness, easily attributed to other ethnic groups such as the Venda, was an “inadequate” modernisation that resulted in chiefs implementing “rediscovered traditions” while emphasising control through “custom” (Harries 1989: 109; Vail 1989: 14-15) and accelerating the “rediscovery” of culture (Vail 1989: 17).

During the 1930s Tsonga-speakers, who had no paramount chief in South Africa to represent their interests, were divided by the Native Affairs Department into

administrative districts dominated by Venda or Northern Sotho chiefs and were marginalised in the black urban areas (Harries 1989: 101). In 1948 the National Party came to power with a policy aimed at transforming the reserves into African homelands. It was only in 1959 that the Bantu Self-government Act formally declared the Tsonga/Shangaan people “to constitute a ‘national unit’” (Harries 1989: 103-4). In 1962, with the declaration of the Tsonga as a “national unit”, the government removed four Tsonga-speaking Regional Authorities from the old multi-ethnic regional authorities in the northern and eastern Transvaal and combined them to form the Matshangana Territorial Authority, which was to become the Gazankulu homeland.

In 1969, seven years later, a legislative assembly was opened at the newly constructed capital Giyani and a Tsonga-Shangaan commissioner-general was installed. This constituted the establishment of the Tsonga homeland Gazankulu. A year later the apartheid government implemented its policy of ethnic consolidation, which resulted in large-scale forced removals in the Bushbuckridge area²⁷ of the then Eastern Transvaal, as well as the drawing of an ethnic border between the Tsonga and Venda “homelands”. This new border south of the Levubu River resulted in the threatened removal of 40 000 Tsonga speakers living north, and 10 000 Venda speakers living south of the border. Ethnicity instantly became an issue of central importance²⁸ (Harries 1989: 105).

THE SELECTION AND COLLECTION OF MATERIAL CULTURE

Art historian Rayda Becker suggests that it was

inevitable, that as the 20th century progressed with its increasing appeals to nationalism, that political borders would become more firmly entrenched in both the real and imaginative lives of the artists making the objects (Becker 1997: 188).

Objects are collected for their meaning; they carry historical narratives or cultural practices and are usually assigned symbolic values by modern societies. In addition to the paradigm shift in the writing of histories, there has been a shift in the collecting practices of museums and the scholarly studies of art history. The significance of art pieces and art collections has changed over time (Nettleton 2009: 137-138). Curator Nessa Leibhammer (2007:15) maintains that the “tribal” grouping previously used by museums as a category for the classification of the material culture of southern African ethnic groups was narrowly conceived. The system of classification via “tribal” grouping did not account for the mobile and flexible nature of identities, compared to the fixed nature of objects, and therefore created a complex dynamic of “unsatisfactory reflections” since the complex legacies of the material cultures of ethnic groups such as the Tsonga could not be clearly expressed. Art historian Anita Nettleton asserts that

the ways in which objects were made, by whom, for whom, and when are now considered important, as are the ways they have been handled and preserved across generations (Nettleton 2009: 137).

No society is static, and African communities are no exception. They have constantly adjusted to foreigners: fleets sent by the Chinese Emperor to the East African shores; Muslims who settled along the east coast of Africa and Europeans who used the Cape as a refreshment station before settling in and colonising southern Africa (Nettleton 2009: 146). Consequently, the cultural significance of an object and its value are generated as a result of the legacies of a culture inherited from previous generations

and the physically perceivable reality of each object as an authentic trace of historical practice (Nettleton 2009: 137). However, apartheid's establishment of the homelands blocked the process of social integration and cultural hybridization that had existed between South Africans. Harries (1989: 105) proposes that the movement to cities and towns was increasingly directed, both spiritually and materially, along ethnic lines. These segregationist principles forced racial and ethnic groups to develop separately in accordance with their "own" sets of traditions, thus reinforcing cultural differences. Furthermore, black South Africans were denied formal artistic training and entry into the mainstream art sector.

THE ARTISTS' NARRATIVES:

THE FABRICATION OF THE "TRANSITIONAL ARTIST"

In 1985 Ricky Burnett curated *Tributaries*, an exhibition sponsored by BMW South Africa, which incorporated the works of "Urban White, Urban Black, Rural Traditional and Rural Transitional" artists (Burnett 1985). The exhibition included the work of a number of sculptors working in the Gazankulu and Venda homelands, including Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi. Dell suggests that the *Tributaries* exhibition would not have been possible, or "thinkable",²⁹ three years earlier (Dell 1989a: 45). It was the "first major public viewing" (Sack 1988: 27) for many of these African artists.

The *Tributaries* exhibition attracted a significant number of visitors, inspired a great deal of favourable criticism and launched the careers of a number of unknown artists. Even though the exhibition was seen only in Johannesburg before its tour of Germany, it challenged the parameters that dictated the definition and appreciation of art in

South Africa at the time. *Tributaries* and the ensuing debates revealed the conservative and restricted definition and display of art in South Africa (Sack 1988: 27). As a result of the exhibition, established hierarchies of exhibiting work according to Western tradition and the quarantining of African artefacts to ethnographic displays began to shift (Dell 1989a: 45).

Prior to *Tributaries*, European and American academic scholars and collectors of historical African art had placed value on art forms such as bronze portraiture, masks and free-standing figures originating from West and Central Africa. These collectors had generally ignored the indigenous art from southern Africa as most of the ethnic groups did not have a masking tradition and there was a scarce understanding of the traditional use of figurative sculpture (Nettleton 2009: 137-139). Other difficulties included the conservative attitudes of connoisseurs and scholars who perceived Africa and African cultures as static. These sticking points suggested that African art had to be made within very specific criteria in order for it to be seen as authentically “African” (Nettleton 2009: 142).

However, the collecting and exhibiting of African objects was not unheard of and the Standard Bank Collection of African Art,³⁰ the first of its kind, was a collection created for the art gallery of a public institution. The undertaking to form the Collection was significant, especially at that moment in South African history. The repressive culture of apartheid, which ideologically justified the segregation of black Africans from access to education, culture and economic activity, triggered a new form of political unrest and popular uprising with the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of educational instruction. Following the 1976 Soweto Uprising,³¹ the late

70s and early 80s were politically difficult. The 1980s saw the South African government implementing a state of emergency³² in 1985 and again in 1986. Nonetheless, the curators of the Standard Bank Collection of African Art at Wits Art Galleries regarded the historical art of the southern African region as a vitally important. Nettleton (2009: 137-139) suggests that the collection strategy was not solely in opposition to apartheid ideology, but was also intended to challenge the mind-sets of Western collectors. Through this partnership, the combination of financial resources provided by the Bank and the academic and creative skills of the University staff, an unprecedented process of acquisition and study of African art history followed.

Other imperatives that shaped the collecting patterns at Wits were the inclusion of African art into the curriculum of the History of Art Department at the University in 1977, and what Nettleton (2009: 148) emphasises as the “pressing need to collect and preserve extraordinary pieces of art from South Africa, including carved wooden objects, beadwork and ceramics”. This response was motivated by the increase in foreign acquisition of the objects and their ensuing relocation outside of South Africa. The Collection was expanded to include contemporary artworks that demonstrated a clear link to the historical traditions represented in the rest of the Collection and constituted a further subversion of conservative notions of “authentic” African art (Nettleton 2009: 148-150).

Tributaries and subsequent exhibitions,³³ such as *The Neglected Tradition* (1988) curated by Steven Sack, as well as solo exhibitions in elite art galleries, such as the Goodman Gallery, led to increasing acclaim for the artists and a surge in prices

(Marschall 2001: 52). Objects that had previously been regarded as “quaint” rural crafts were now perceived as having “potent aesthetic quality” (Dell 1989a: 44). However, the sculptures produced by the artists from Gazankulu and Venda were initially referred to as “transitional art”. The implication of this was that there was a “transition from one cultural context into another, a cross fertilization between western and African modes” (Sack 1988: 27). This generated a debate amongst critics and scholars as the term “transitional” was deconstructed.

The term “transitional art”, as a categorisation of style, was criticised almost immediately for its “imprecision and patronizing tone” (Marschall 2001: 52), and rejected as “unsuitable to the task of describing this new art” (Sack 1988: 27). Articles in the Weekly Mail generated debate amongst critics and scholars (Sack 1988: 27), who criticised the artificial construction and inadequacies of the term “transitional”:

The more frequently the word ‘transitional’ is used to describe the work of some contemporary South African artists the more unsatisfactory it becomes

...

Irma Stern included a funerary figure from Bakota in a painting, Walter Battiss arranged a number of identical carved birds from Swaziland across a canvas ... no one would dream of describing these as ‘transitional’ (Martin 1987).

Transitional art had become the “plaything” of the contemporary art market and perpetuated extant hierarchies (Dell 1989a: 50-51). Although the term “transitional art” was first used in the Standard Bank Foundation of African Art’s debut catalogue it was, according to art historian Elizabeth Dell (1989a: 45), not used as a specific style term. Dell noted the significance of the original catalogue’s rejection of “Primitive” cultures as static and Nettleton (1988) critiqued the term “transitional art” and its mode of operation, as well as its veiled portrayal of itself.

Nettleton proposed that the definition of the term “transitional art” allocated these objects “to a ‘liminal’ position in the history of South African art”, which in turn restricted them to a “rite of passage” evolutionary process (Nettleton 1988: 301-302), and was therefore comparable to the term “Primitive”. She argued that the term “transitional” imposed hierarchies that rested on predetermined criteria utilising Western media, techniques and aesthetics. There was, she noted, a tendency to treat rurally based artists as less sophisticated (Nettleton 1988: 306), and to regard both the materials and the technical or stylistic simplicity of the works as evidence of the ‘unspoiled’ quality of their producers’ creativity (Nettleton 2000: 30).

She argued that the Western art market interpreted the inclusion of elements of Western material culture or media-inspired images as an “intriguing measure of [the artists’] simultaneous distance from and proximity to modern global culture”, rather than as a reality of the artists’ lives (Nettleton 2000: 30). The artists all had varying experiences of Western education or religion and some, for instance Mukhuba, had worked in the city for various periods of time (Dell 1989a: 47). Furthermore, Mukhuba had access to art books via the Lutheran missionaries at Tshakuma, where he lived (Nettleton 1988: 303). Curator Khwezi Gule (2010) argues that the perception of the advent of modernity as synonymous with colonial occupation is false and patronising, inasmuch as an artists’ use of their traditional heritage was not indicative of a mode of art-making that was simply “left intact without influence of modernity and contemporary existence” (2010: 121). In spite of these debates, the art world had provided artists Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi, among others, with a mainstream platform for the establishment of

relationships with art dealers, collectors, journalists, an urban art market and international fame that they simply had not had access to before.

Artist Avashoni Mainganye and Fiona Nicholson of the Venda Development Corporation initiated the formation of Ditike - The Craft House of Venda (Mainganye 2014; Nicholson 2014). The Venda Development Corporation (VDC) had a mandate to develop small businesses in the area, seventy per cent of which were craft-related informal businesses (Nicholson 2014). Ditike, meaning “self-supportive” (Dell 1989a: 52), focused on bringing arts and crafts from the surrounding areas into a central location for buyers (Nicholson 2014).

Ditike was a hub for the local artists and crafters to meet and sell their work, and established carvers like Nelson Mukhuba, Doctor Phuthuma Seoka and Jackson Hlungwani also displayed their work at the centre (Mainganye 2014; Rankin 1989: 45). The VDC further actively promoted the artists and their work throughout South Africa, including at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival (Mainganye 2014).

In view of the fact that Ditike was based in Venda and was supported by the VDC, the material promoting the art and artists universally described them as “Venda” and failed to acknowledge the inclusion of artists of a different background, such as Johannes Maswanganyi and Jackson Hlungwani. However, these artists, who identified themselves as Tsonga, and Doctor Phuthuma Seoka, who came from a Pedi background, were not concerned about this (Mainganye 2014; Nicholson 2014). Not long after the *Tributaries* exhibition David Rossouw was recruited (Nicholson 2014) to actively assist and promote the work of the artists associated with Ditike. In

addition to the craft centre there was a sales outlet at Sibasa in Venda (Rankin 1989: 44).

In Nicholson's view (2014) there was tension between the expectations of the craft centre as a place where the crafters could congregate and the actual practices of the crafters. The expectation that crafters would travel to the centre to demonstrate their skills to the occasional tourist was unrealistic. This was especially true for the women who usually practised their craft in-between their normal household duties. After Ditike collapsed, in the early 1990s, commercial galleries took on the role of agent for some of the artists. Nettleton has argued that most of these artists chose to remain in the rural areas of Gazankulu and Venda, a choice determined by their wish to retain links with their communities. But, she suggests, they were also coerced by the agencies or individual entrepreneurs who controlled their exposure and access to the art market, and who wished for the artists to maintain image as "unspoiled Africans in the 'bush'" (Nettleton 2000: 26).

Nettleton (2000: 30) argues that for most of these artists the exposure to a Western art market broadened their approach to their work, even if they continued to produce sculptures conceived as essentially figurative. Nevertheless, Rankin (1989: 45-46) suggests that the white buyer's expectations demanded something that was recognisably African: this often involved style, subject matter or technique, and even condoned a "crudity of technique or sentimentality of subject" otherwise not permitted in Western art. She posits that this type of buying may have been the result of a desire for novelty, or reflected an attempt to overcome Eurocentricity with a

sincere interest in African culture. G. Salami and M. Blackbmun Visonà (2013: 3)

suggest that the

exchange of material culture has been accompanied by trade partners' cultural translations and highly selective rejection or incorporation of foreign objects and ideas. Genuine mutual admiration for the trade partner's respective 'Other' at times characterised this traffic in newness. However, significant power imbalances governed the terms of these exchanges during much of their duration, and continue to do so today.

Nonetheless, Nettleton (2009: 150) suggests that the 1980s saw these "rural" artists offering a worldview that asserted both their African identity and their modernity, as seen in works such as Noria Mabasa's clay policemen and Johannes Maswanganyi's portraits of homeland leaders carved in wood. Such works contributed to debates about African identity and how it is affected by modernity, while influencing a number of urban artists such as Marion Arnold and Karel Nel. These "rural" contemporary artists' who straddle two distinct worlds shaped by conditions peculiar to South Africa, produce work for local patrons and art buyers from the urban areas by utilising skills learned from older relatives or community members and grown out of local indigenous traditions, which have frequently been mixed with new religious or cultural influences.

Regrettably the 1990s also marked a decline in the art market and collectors' interest in these rural artists, and as a result fewer visitors sought them out (Becker 2003: 64). Their work was no longer seen on the art circuit and their importance appeared forgotten. However, Nettleton (2009: 152) suggests that they have recently been re-discovered and are experiencing a second phase of exposure to the art market as a new generation of artists, the apprentices and "students" of Noria Mabasa and Jackson Hlungwani, emerge onto the art scene. As the troubled histories, which uncomfortably attach themselves to the artwork, are examined alongside the biographies of the artists

and the narratives of their work, an interval for new dialogue appears, and it is in this interval that new understandings are formed.

The biographies of Nelson Mukhuba (Appendix 1), Noria Mabasa (Appendix 2) and Johannes Maswanganyi (Appendix 3) share various experiences of the city, as well as their reverence for traditional customs and practices. All have maintained their traditional identities while incorporating their life experiences into the subject matter of their work. Despite not having any formal art training, Mukuba and Maswanganyi were apprentices to their fathers; they learnt traditional techniques while carving various utensils, which they sold to surrounding local communities and passing tourists (Appendix 1 & 3). Maswanganyi also carved traditional medicine gourds, *nhunguvani* (Appendix 3). However, the point of inception for Mabasa was the appearance of an old lady in her dreams in 1965. Known as Tshidzeuli,³⁴ the old lady plagued Mabasa until she began making small figurines and clay pots, using the traditional coil-built technique, which she fired in an open pit. Mabasa had had no formal training, apprenticeship or practical knowledge of making such objects (Appendix 2).

Although all three artists draw on their customs, cultural beliefs and historical mythologies, as well as their traditional practices, this has not limited their inclusion or portrayal of contemporary imagery or figures, including political figures, while using traditional modes of production. The artists have found inspiration for their image making in varied sources such as books, magazines, and even television to create pieces that generate political and social commentary (Appendices 1, 2 & 3).

Since both Maswanganyi and Mukhuba made carvings for the urban art market and were involved in the production of traditional or utilitarian pieces for their rural communities, Dell (1989a: 47) suggests that these two artists best exemplify the agency of a traditional local market and the contemporary art market. Nettleton (1988: 308) remarks that although the simplified styles and the basically representational naturalism of Nelson Mukhuba and Noria Mabasa's work aids their communication as artists with their public, it does not lead to any really innovative avenues. Nettleton also suggests that the differences in style between Mukhuba and Maswanganyi's work are minimal, even though Maswanganyi has achieved a naturalistic style, which he has evolved "in fully figurative images from traditional forms which were figuratively truncated and semantically loaded" (Nettleton 1988: 308). She asserts that our ability to distinguish this minimal difference in the artists' individual styles is due to our exposure and that Mukhuba and Maswanganyi's works are in fact stylistically close.

"EMBEDDED" IDENTITY STRUCTURES AND THE MATERIALISATION OF DREAMS

In *The Images of Wood*, Rankin (1989: 58) notes that the commentary made by artists from rural areas, such as Nelson Mukhuba and Johannes Maswanganyi, is not restricted to political imagery, but can also be found in themes such as social custom. The reproduction of visual metaphors and symbols of personal experience, she claims, allows the artists to form social comment that may range from matter-of-fact representation to highly expressive interpretation.

Throughout history the African body has been an instrument of communication through personal adornment: clothing, beadwork, necklaces, arm-bands and

headaddresses. Nooter-Roberts and Roberts (1996b: 86) suggest that memory is attached to the body in the form of such objects, and that some cultures may even inscribe memory onto the body through scarification. They further argue that these forms of configuring the body into “maps” permit the body to be “read”, and propose that the adorned person emerges from such readings as made of memory, and making memory. Pumla Gqola (2005) argues that although historically different societies have used varying regimes to decode messages inscribed on and performed through the body, some representations find wider circulation than others. She suggests that people read and express these markers through the ways in which they negotiate place and authority. They also inform how we attribute a gender or sex role. The embodied self is used to negotiate place and power, suggesting that the body acts as both the site and the language through which this positioning is negotiated (Gqola 2005: 3). Therefore identity, history, memory, traditional techniques, indigenous materials and memory are all important markers when considering the practice of the artists Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi, and their representation of the female figure.

Common to all three artists is the use of dreams in the origination of their work. Dell (1989a: 49) observes how the dream or prophetic vision of the carver is used to warrant the creative act for many of the artists who worked from a rural base in the 1980s, suggesting that skill alone wasn’t an adequate force. However, Arnold (1996) asserts that the interpretation of dreams in a southern African society through a Western or European sense falls short of understanding the significance and/or materialisation of the meaning embedded in dreams as a mode of communication with ancestors. Arnold suggests that such dreams are not the “equivalent of imagination”

(Arnold 1996: 142). As indicated in the biographies of Mukhuba (Appendix 1), Mabasa (Appendix 2) and Maswanganyi (Appendix 3), all three artists drew/draw inspiration from dreams sent by their ancestors. In addition, Nettleton (2000: 32) cites evidence collected by Hugh Stayt in the late 1920s to expand the readers' understanding of the role of ancestors in Venda society. Stayt suggests that individuals' relationships with their dead ancestors are personal and form the basis of Venda religious ideas, since ancestors are able to exert powerful influences on their living relatives (Stayt 1968: 240). Mainganye (2014) refers to the Venda saying, "*Vhutshila ri vhona nga mato*" – Art is something that you learn from others.³⁵ He suggests that this idea relates to exposure to a particular technique, style or environment and people, and that learning takes place within this exposure. He also asserts that dreams create an opportunity and provocation for the creation of content, rather than the capacity for the establishment of technique – a view shared by the artist Mishack Raphalalani (2014). Raphalalani also suggests that once a skill or technique has been learnt, the provocation of a dream enhances one's technical abilities.

The sculptures of Mukhuba, Mabasa and Maswanganyi communicate their historical consciousness and embedded memories, while presenting the artists' personal perspectives on identity. However, they are also open to reinterpretation within a framework that looks to re-examine history and its impact on the present. Through this re-examination the bodies of the figures as depictions and representations of the traditional as the ideal female form allow for the re-examination of their particular collectivities and the role of women within them.

DOMBA: THE EMERGENCE OF A REGULATED VENDA FEMALE FORM

Accounts of the Venda female initiation schools by ethnomusicologist and social anthropologist John Blacking (1928-1990) provide an ideal version of what *Domba* was, so that it is possible to trace the potential alterations in its function and the decline in its prominence over time to its current form. *Domba* is the third and final component of initiation in which a Venda woman must participate.

The first of the initiation schools is³⁶ *Vhusha*, a puberty school for girls who have recently experienced their first menses, therefore not more than four or five girls attend at any given time. *Vhusha* is organised at village level, lasts for three to four weeks and is held several times a year in the various districts. *Tshikanda*, the transitional school between *Vhusha* and *Domba*, is also organised at village level and is the second phase in Venda initiation during which commoners and nobles gather prior to the *Domba*. It is here that differences between the commoners and nobles' versions of *Vhusha* are reconciled.

Unlike *Vhusha* and *Tshikanda*, *Domba* is organised on a regional level under the patronage of the chief or headman. It involves a large number of initiates, both female and, to a lesser extent, male. *Domba*³⁷ is only held when enough initiates have progressed through *Vhusha*, and in the past the school could comprise of up to six hundred initiates. If held biennially, it would continue for at least a year, with girls joining at any time during that period. Girls would travel long distances to attend *Domba* at the village of a neighbouring chief if there was no prospect for the school to take place in their own villages in the near future (Stayt 1968 [1932]: 111).

Blacking (1969d: 24) accepts the tradition of the Thengwe area, which claims that *Domba* originated with the “autochthonous” Mbedzi groups and was later taken over by the ruling Singo invaders. Some of the individuals interviewed by Nettleton claimed that the Singo “nationalised” the *Domba* (Nettleton 1992: 206). Blacking suggests that the ruling Singo introduced a more comprehensive social system which grouped people into territorial units. Government was maintained through chiefs, headmen and formal age-sets. With this new social system *Domba* became “socially rather than physiologically oriented” (Blacking 1969e: 24).

Blacking (1969e) argues that the ritual and symbolism associated with the initiation schools “increased in quantity, if not in style” (1969e: 24) despite only having been introduced hardly more than sixty years ago. Nettleton notes that although Blacking does not provide explicit information regarding the numbers of the women attending the *Domba* during his research, it does appear as if the number of young women attending had dramatically diminished by the late 1970s (Nettleton 1992: 211).³⁸ This shift in attendance and the change in lifestyle – migrant labour, Western-style schooling – meant that *Domba* in the 70s and 80s needed to accommodate these constraints to enable young women to attend their Western-style schools in the mornings and *Domba* in the evenings. This also meant that the duration of the *Domba* was shortened to approximately six months and that it usually took place during the winter³⁹ months (Nettleton 1984: 372-374; 1992: 205).

Today the diminishing number of initiates can also be attributed to influence of the Christian religion and Islam (Hadebe 2014). While in the past no woman was meant to marry before she had progressed through *Domba*, Nettleton (1984: 372-373) asserts

that there were instances when men sent their uninitiated, Western-educated wives to attend *Domba* even after they were married. The three cycles of initiation mentally and emotionally mentor a girl child from girlhood to young womanhood, and finally into an adulthood. They prepare her for the various roles that she will have to assume as she changes physically (Hadebe 2014).

The primary function of *Domba* is to prepare the youth for their adult roles within the Venda nation, as well as for marriage. However young men and women only attain adult status after marriage and the birth of their first child (Nettleton 1984: 372).

Nettleton's informants (1984: 373) insisted that a woman who had borne a child for her husband would not be integrated into the family group, nor attain full adult status unless she had passed through *Domba*. Thandi Hadebe (2014), the deputy director of Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme (TVEP),⁴⁰ insists that marriage is not just the union of one man and one woman; it is the union of two families and their spirituality. The Venda people have a system of patrilocal marriage and patrilineal descent (Nettleton 1984: 372). Therefore, when a woman gets married in the Venda culture, she is not the wife of her husband, she is the wife of the family and therefore she is called *nwedzhi* or *muselwa*, meaning daughter-in-law. Her connection to her own way of life, where she comes from, and her ancestors does not change and this is why, traditionally, a Venda woman keeps her maiden surname (Hadebe 2014).

The teachers in both *Vhusha* and *Domba* make use of objects and figures called *matano*, which are made of clay or wood. The term *matano* is best translated as “shows” (Nettleton 2002: 97). The *matano* are primarily instructive and are accompanied by aphorisms known as *milayo* (Nettleton 1984: 367), meaning “laws”

or “instruction”. However, in the context of initiation, Blacking suggests it might be better translated as “esoteric knowledge” or “wisdom”, as the *milayo* refer to a series of formulae in which certain familiar objects are given special names, rules of conduct and etiquette are reiterated, and the meaning of rites and symbolic objects are explained (Blacking 1969b: 69). Blacking published a total of 322 *milayo*, which are organised according to the topics they address. Reily (1998) notes that Blacking also isolated 14 separate categories for the *milayo*, some of which relate to specific moments in the initiation process, for example rules of conduct, etiquette, aspects of gender relations, social hierarchies and other Venda social values and ideologies.

A graduate will recite the *milayo* when she visits a place where she is not known. This proves that she has been initiated, especially to the senior women, and allows her participation in women’s meetings and the drinking of beer. Blacking suggests that most of the initiates could recite the *milayo* without understanding the symbolism (Blacking 1969e: 21). However, the reiteration of the *milayo* indicates a reinforcement of the lessons learnt and Blacking (1969b: 74) suggests that it also compels a young woman to be more conscious of her body and her new role in society.

According to Suzel Ana Reily, social anthropologist and ethnomusicologist, Blacking’s structural-functionalist approach to fieldwork was informed by his British training (Reily 1998). He arrived in South Africa in 1953 to assist Hugh Tracey in the documentation of African music. Reily further suggests that their short recording expeditions to KwaZulu⁴¹ and Mozambique made Blacking aware of the limitations of such field methods; the short timeframes did not allow the researcher to establish

relationships between the music being recorded and the wider social context of its performance (Reily 1998: 52). Blacking convinced Tracey to allow him to embark on his now-renowned research trip to Venda, where he was able to apply participant-observation field techniques to his musical research. His research lasted from May 1956 to December 1958. Reily records that Blacking learnt to speak Tshivenda and participated in music and dance activities with his Venda hosts throughout his stay. His extensive notes, recordings, photographs and film footage documented his activities and components of the Venda social and cultural universe: the Venda history, political system, local economy, kinship and marriage patterns, ritual life and the vast collection of *milayo* (Reily 1998).

Reily (1998) indicates that Blacking suggested that the *khomba*, the master of ceremonies,⁴² presented the *milayo* in the form of a journey equivalent to the process of the initiation itself. She analyses Blacking's structure of the *milayo* in two parts and argues that the first part presents the common and the second recontextualises the introductory within a metaphorical frame. She further suggests that a comparison between the *milayo* illustrates their "resignification" in terms of a particular "lesson" (Reily 1998:47-48). These lessons were expressed through metaphorical associations (Reily 1998: 56-57). However, during PhD fieldwork conducted from 1978-1981, Nettleton (1984: 367) recorded that Tshimbilumi, a *khomba* at Thengwe with whom Blacking had worked, alleged that Blacking was not as concerned with the wooden figures (*matano*) as he was with their accompanying *milayo*. Nettleton also notes the fact that Blacking scarcely mentioned the figures in his work, but merely described the approach a *khomba* would use in the *matano* shows of *Domba*. In contrast Blacking's investigation of the *Domba* dance presented the interaction of the dance

movements in relation to the musical style to form a symbolic whole (Reily 1998: 58-59). Unfortunately the only sources Blacking used to collect the assigned meanings of the *milayo* were the various *khomba* with whom he worked, and did not evaluate the *Domba* initiates' perceptions and reception of the *milayo* (Reily 1998: 50).

The *khomba* showed the wooden figurative objects and figures in tableau. The initiates were passive observers while the *matano* were manipulated like puppets in order to illustrate their associated *milayo*. Some figures were shown to both the male and female initiates, while others were reserved exclusively for the girls. A suspension of disbelief was required from the girls as Nettleton's (1984: 374) informants suggested that the initiates were supposed to believe that the figures were actual "people" and some of the informants referred to the *matano* figures⁴³ as "photographs" of the Venda people. Nettleton suggests that this analogy with the photograph proposes an intended naturalism or "mimesis" in the making and display of the figures (Nettleton 1984: 374).

Different chieftainships use different figures (Raphalalani 2014; Nettleton 1984), and Nettleton's informants claimed that there was a proliferation of figures in order to compete with *Domba* schools in other districts. The figures form part of a larger category of objects in *Domba* known as *dzingoma*,⁴⁴ the secret mysteries of the Venda culture, and are shown in the same way as other *dzingoma*. However, wooden *matano* are generally only used during the *Domba* of Singo chiefs (Nettleton 1984: 371, 398; 1989: 5). Artist Rebecca Matibe (2014) maintains that there are people who specialise in *matano-a-domba*⁴⁵ and are known for their specialty. It is not something anyone can do and it is in no way connected to pottery making; therefore, by extension, I

would suggest the same would apply to the carving of *matano*. However, Nettleton's (1984: 398) research shows that some chiefs did hire figures from specialist carvers such as artist Nelson Mukhuba.⁴⁶ The four figures, *Matano for Domba*, which are part of the Wits Art Museum collection, are a selection of sculptures by Mukhuba that were used during the *Domba* at Phiphidi, near Tshakuma in c1974.

Reily (1998: 61-62) argues that communal rituals, such as *Domba*, are typically organised to promote a sense of commonality of experience amongst the participants, and that the collective gaze heightens the potential for the emergence of common interpretations of individual experiences. However, the connections and attachments that are formed by participants determine the effectiveness of the communal rites performed. The metaphors utilised within the essential rites and shows for *Domba* produce a locus in which histories, historical consciousness, identity and collective and personal memory express themselves and inform the initiates of their future roles. While the *milayo* represented the preservation of the Venda milieu, maintaining that its coherence was dependent on women, Reily (1998) suggests that it is important to understand the implication of the *milayo* as flexible representations of womanhood, even though

considerable energy [is] expended to instil in the girls a sense of respect for the system of seniority operating amongst women and for the political leaders at all levels of the Venda political system (Reily 1998: 62).

Reily stresses the hierarchies of status amongst the Venda and suggests that these hierarchies are marked by the use of women as instructors during *Vhusha* and *Tshikanda*, while instructors at *Domba* are men. She maintains that this difference indicates a bias in the initiation repertoire. Therefore, as in all social circumstances, in

the cultural milieu, Venda initiation is marked by a multiplicity of competing discourses and agendas.

Nevertheless, Reily (1998: 63) asserts that it would be naïve to suggest that the girls attending *Domba* were unaware of the socio-political messages the instructors strove to instil in them, including those that could be construed as “false consciousness”. She cites James Scott (1985, 1990) as having demonstrated that people’s public acts of acceptance of the status quo cannot be taken as evidence of unreflective ideological indoctrination. She considers initiation to be an interval space of debate in which the role of women in Venda society could be negotiated and argued. Reily further suggests that this debate was produced in the struggles over interpretation; the prescribed meanings of the *milayo* form one kind of dialogue, while the girls’ interpretations of their experiences of initiation form many other meanings. Reily (1998: 63) suggests that initiation creates powerful memorable experiences that are orchestrated to promote a sense of shared experience amongst Venda women.

Reily describes the construction of the initiates’ own interpretations of *Domba* through a selective process of association as emphasising the representations that highlight their rights and privileges as adult women, while de-emphasising messages that reflect women in a sense of subordination.⁴⁷ Therefore, Reily suggests that the metaphoric re-signification of the world within the “expressive repertoire” of *Domba* “generates inchoate associations between womanhood” (1998: 65) and the continuity of a cohesive society. Initiation therefore provides the initiates with the opportunity to construct an idealised image of womanhood, while affirming a vision of a healthy society and recognising life’s hardships. Reily (1998: 65) maintains that these kinds

of experiences, are the result of careful orchestration, and that expressive “media” (*matano* and *milayo*) are used in particular ways to achieve a particular result.

As a result, Reily (1998: 64) argues that *Domba* must be effective in the promotion of a commitment to the responsibilities of womanhood, even though the initiates’ interpretations of these responsibilities may not always coincide with the *khomba*’s view (*milayo*). It is also important to acknowledge that in the past *Domba* was staged more regularly, and Reily argues that these sites would “re-invoke” a woman’s memories of her initiation experience.

Nooter-Roberts and Roberts (1996a: 17) describe memory as active: a dynamic social process of recuperation, reconfiguration, and outright invention that is often engendered, provoked, and promoted by visual images. It is also an approach to understanding memory within an African context, which allows for a deeper appreciation for the history that is evoked and produced through oral narratives (*milayo*) and performances (*matano*). Therefore, the attendance of initiated women and some initiated men during the showing of the figures in tableaux,⁴⁸ which involved a great deal of laughter and commentary from the onlookers (Nettleton 1984: 399), supports the notion of initiation as an interval space of negotiation for the representation of woman.

People everywhere are concerned with their past, and they continually reinvent the past for the present, especially as nationalist and local histories are reconfigured to meet emerging needs of political economy. Nooter-Roberts and Roberts (1996a: 29-30) argue that this is an active construction, transaction, and negotiation, and like

memory, history too is particular to and located in a social and moral universe. Hirsch and Smith (2002: 5) similarly describe cultural memory as a product of personal and collective experiences, expressed through media that “shape even as they transmit memory”, therefore illustrating acts of memory as acts of performance, representation and interpretation.



Fig. 1 Nelson Mukhuba. Wooden figures (*matano*) for the *Domba* initiation ceremony, Tshakuma, Venda, South Africa, 1978. Photo image by Anitra Nettleton.

THE “MARKED” FORM OF VENDA WOMEN AND THEIR STATUS

The separation of different cultures, races and ethnic identities through the apartheid homelands created a fractured understanding of cultural practices in the South African context.⁴⁹ Prior to the establishment of homelands, the work of missionaries and anthropologists⁵⁰ did not consider the traditions of women to be of material importance. Terence Ranger⁵¹ (1983: 258) directs our attention to the work of Caroline Ifeka-Moller (1975), which highlights this flaw in the recording of African

“tradition” by colonialists, and demonstrates how the exclusive use of male informants contributed to the disregard and exclusion of female ideology. In addition, anthropologists such as N.J. van Warmelo treated subject matter such as social structure and culture “much more superficially” than his files on chiefly genealogies, tribal histories and the details of local politics (see above: page 10-11) (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 113). British philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah (1994) suggests that the qualities of racial and ethnic identities contrast with each other in the same way that genders and sexualities are dissimilar. Both are, he says, “essentially contrastive and relate centrally to social and political power” (Appiah 1994:117). Therefore, this fractured state allows the emergence of an investigation, re-evaluation and interpretation of Venda and Tsonga women.

The figurative representations produced by Nelson Mukhuba and Noria Mabasa offer an opportunity for the superimposition of knowledge past and present to demonstrate an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the status of Venda women within their cultural, social and political milieu. I argue that their form is shaped by historical consciousness, personal and collective memory, ethnic history, shared experience of initiation amongst Venda women, invoking not only gender relationships, and social hierarchies, but also other Venda social values and ideologies. An interview I conducted with Thandi Hadebe (2014) shapes and informs the opportunity for a new narrative of the Venda woman. As the deputy director of Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme (TVEP), an organisation that provides human rights services and focuses on responding to the challenges faced by women, girls and children who experience and are confronted with gender-based violence, domestic violence, rape, child abuse, and HIV/AIDS in the Thohoyandou area, Hadebe is able

to provide a cultural context with an explicit understanding of the challenges with which women in today's society have to deal. During this interview I identified an assemblage of markers that acknowledge the past and assist in the creation of new knowledge and appreciation in the present, where the constructs of memory, identity and history are investigated and (re)interpreted. What follows is a summary and distilled form of my interview conducted with Hadebe at Sibasa in Venda on 18 September 2014.

THANDI HADEBE

We live today in a world where everything Venda [not just from an outsider's point of view, but from our own perspectives too], anything that is traditional is considered sinful. Going to *Domba*; churches teach that it is wrong. So you have Venda people who want to go to Heaven, not going to *Domba*. [...] So [the BaVenda] have started to look at culture and traditional practices as things that are not of Heaven. So you either have people who totally reject cultural practice, or people who don't want to be seen as practising their Venda customs. [...] We ourselves [the BaVenda] have been indoctrinated to see [our customs] as ungodly.

[In the past the BaVenda] did not have religion, as in Christianity, Islam and so on, so culture, tradition was [our] way of life. [...] Whereas today [the BaVenda] are Christians, [they] are Muslims. They are following different kinds of religions, getting different kinds of education, therefore, the raising of a Venda girl-child today is very, very different.

I think the challenge today when people practise or talk about traditional customs, specifically the concept of *u losha*,⁵² people often discuss it outside of its context (see Figure 1: second figure from the left). You need to understand where it comes from and you need to understand everything around a particular practice before you can either judge it, or represent it, or even promote it. [...] Women do not *losha* because they are less than men, in fact it is a sign of the power and the necessity, the spiritual power and divinity that women hold.

Among the figures shown in Figure 1 there is a sculpture of a Venda woman in the *losha* pose (second from the right). Thandi Hadebe's detailed description of *losha* (Appendix 6) superimposes the symbolic values inherent in the display and absent from Stayt's description of the greeting: a Venda woman kneeling with her buttocks

on her heels, body bent forward, her head bent down and eyes on the ground; she places her hands together in the same way as the man, but instead of clapping them she lifts the two forefingers up and down (Stayt 1931: 157-159). Hadebe's (2014) description allows the outsider entrance to the Venda conception of a woman in relation to the spiritual world, their position in society and power as a "sustaining force of life". By placing these two dialogues alongside one another, they coexist, articulate and unveil the potential symbolic values embedded in sculptures of "traditional"⁵³ women discussed in this research report.

MUKHUBA'S *MATANO* FOR *DOMBA* (1974)

In 1977, while conducting field research in Venda (in the late 1970s and early 1980s), Anitra Nettleton acquired part of a set of figures for the University Art Gallery Collection (UAGC) from Nelson Mukhuba. The four figures acquired are known as *Matano for Domba* and portray three women during the different stages of the Venda initiation cycles, and a married woman and initiate of the *Domba*. The initiation cycles are distinguishable by the figures' respective dress codes and hairstyles (Nettleton 1989: 5). The figures are entrenched in Venda tradition, figuratively in their representation, and physically in their usage at the 1974 *Domba* in Phiphidi, Venda, yet Mukhuba found inspiration in an unexpected source.

When interviewed by Nettleton (2000) during her field research, Mukhuba revealed his use of photographs from the anthropological source *Contributions towards Venda history, religion and tribal ritual* (1932) by N.J. van Warmelo, which he considered to be authentic as they referenced the "true traditional Venda custom" (2000: 31). For Mukhuba the concept "authentic" was derived from the photographs' age. Nettleton

(2000: 31) identified the sculptures as “fascinating examples of the cross-fertilization between art history, anthropology and cultural heritage”, as evidenced by their clothing. It is therefore important to note that the figures wear clothing items that were no longer in general use in Venda in the 1970s and 1980s, except in the more remote rural areas (Nettleton 1988: 304).

Hirsch (1996: 659-660) states that photographs transmit memory as they are a material connection to the past; they remain beyond the lifespan of their subjects and provide a trace to re-visit memory or, as in this instance, history. Nora (2006: 6) asserts that the concept of identity has undergone a reversal in meaning, moving from “individual and subjective” to “collective, quasi-formal and objective”. Identity now expresses group characteristics, reflecting a merging of the two terms memory and social identity, which indicates the change in the interactions between history and society (Nora 2002: 6).

Such interplay can be seen in the way the different types of figures “represent” the authentic, even though figures can acquire specific relevance in particular contexts (Nettleton 2002: 109). The figures may represent different identities and memories to different audiences, and within an initiation context their representation may change through the reciting of different *milayo*, as discussed earlier, or the way in which they are handled (Nettleton 2002: 109). However, my reading and interpretation of the four figures is reliant upon my ability to read and decode the culturally available clues embedded in the dress of each figure.

As evidenced in my interview with Thandi Hadebe (2014), certain clothing items were used to help people identify the age and status of a man or woman, for the purpose of Venda dress is not only to cover the body – adornment is also a marker of social hierarchy. Therefore meaning is fixed and memory embedded in particular clothing items, which stimulate particular associations and identities. Nooter-Roberts and Roberts (1996b: 86) suggest that memory is always “located on the borderline of the body, at the threshold of self and other(s)” and that it cannot occur isolated or detached from external forces.

Memories are transmittable across spatial and generational boundaries through the use of a particular style of dress or material; for example, in the case of Venda and Tsonga, the introduction of salempore cloth versus the obsolescence of animal skins. Art critic and curator Simon Njami acknowledges that the typical denotation or understanding of identity is through “one’s sense of being in the world” (2005b: 54) and argues that the definition and interpretation of identity not only denotes the individual, but also illustrates the ways in which identity is a “typology” that refers to sameness. He asserts that identity is also used as a marker for identification within a whole, of which individual identity is just one of the elements. The re-visiting of historical anthropological accounts through discussions from contemporary interviews stimulates dialogues between the sculptures and their past and possible future social meanings, as embedded within their visual elements. The re-evaluation of values, beliefs and cultural traits over periods of change assists our understanding of Mukhuba’s figures.

It is also important to note that regardless of the figures' entrenched stereotyping of Venda tradition and their usage in *Domba*, Mukhuba's figures are different from the figures of other *Domba* groups. Nettleton (1988: 308) suggests that Mukhuba's avoidance of enamel paint and actual clothing stems from the artist's understanding of Western canons of "truth to material". In addition, Dell (1989a: 47) and Nettleton (1984: 399 & 1989: 6) assert that Mukhuba's shifts in subject matter, from "traditional" to contemporary, do not signal a variation or alteration in his treatment of or the style of his figures.

Each of the four figures is inscribed with the place of origin, "Tshakuma", the artist's name and the date of production. These traces exhibit a chronology in the production of the sculptures in relationship to each other and also display the artist's concept of authorship. Dell (1989a: 49) suggests that these inscriptions presented a "stumbling block" to the Western artistic canon and its perception of the traditional African artist as anonymous. The anonymous artist was one of the criteria used to define African art as "authentically African" in the 18th century and is still a contentious issue in some museums.⁵⁴

These traces underscore an additional complexity in the *Domba* context. When *matano* are presented to initiates, the initiates are made to assume the position of *losha*, and while their faces are averted the figures are brought out and set up in tableaux by the *khomba*. The initiates are then commanded to look up and are expected "to be astounded by the sudden appearance of the figures in their midst" (Nettleton 1984: 374; van Warmelo 1932: 68). This surprise requires a suspension of disbelief from the initiates, and they are expected to pretend that the figures "emanate

from some other sphere” (Nettleton 1984: 374). The figures are then used by the *khomba* to explain sexual and marital relations. Nettleton asserts that the figures are “rarely manipulated realistically in the manner of puppets”, but are sometimes shown in pairs while explaining “simple physiological facts” (Nettleton 1992: 213). Nettleton (1984) suggests that her informants were openly cynical about the revealing of the *matano* to initiates, as they “laughingly admitted” (1984: 374) that the *Domba* initiates had to realise that the figures had been carved out of wood by a Venda carver.

The four figures, self-consciously marked by Mukhuba’s adze,⁵⁵ are given body postures of crossed hands or folded arms and bowed heads, which suggest a humble and respectful appearance. Careful pokerwork highlights the facial features of the sculptures by marking the eyebrows and averted eyes, which also demonstrate a respectful demeanour. The clothing items of figures have been carved integrally into the bodies of the figures and have had additional pokerwork and/or paint applied to assist in providing detail to the cloth and hides traditionally used by Venda women to clothe themselves. Using the dress codes of the figures as markers of age and social standing, I will discuss the possibility of accessing the knowledge embedded within the physical characteristics of the figures. While an object is static, interpretation accommodates change and evolves, and objects of personal adornment employed by artists such as Mukhuba to identify their figures are as concrete as the body. Vansina argues that personal adornment proves that the memories they invoke are “true” and unchanging as they are embodied in unchanging material things (Vansina 1996: 12).

I have ordered the discussion of the figures according to their representation of the progression of the initiation process in order to enhance the understanding of the

visual markers, which are cued from the developmental stages within the initiation schools.

Blacking (1969a) describes some of the expressions used by the Venda to mark the physical development of women: *phalaphatwa* describes a girl when her breasts begin to show, and her breasts are called *makumba-milora* (lit. pickers up of ashes). When a girl's breasts grow larger she is called *thungamamu* (lit. with budding breasts) (1969a: 9). A girl's first menstruation is called *bata pfeṇe* (to seize a baboon) (Blacking 1969a: 9) and marks the juncture where she must become a responsible member of the community. Before this a girl is called *musidzana*, a small girl, and after her progression through the *Vhusha* initiation school she is referred to as *musidzana vha khomba*. The term *khomba* means "dangerous", which implies that menses is the first sign that a girl may be prepared for the birth of (legitimate) children and sexual intercourse may now result in pregnancy (Blacking 1969e: 33 & Stayt 1968: 106).



Fig. 2 Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano* for *Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 78 x 23 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 3 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano* for *Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 78 x 23 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

“5-11-74, N-Mukhuba Nelson, TSHAKUMA”

A GIRL WHO HAS COMPLETED THE FIRST STAGE OF *VHUSHA*:

MUHULU

This figure wears a skirt made of animal skin, which is evident from the painted markings on the front panel. The back panel of the skirt is solid and hangs down past the figure’s knees. Using the animal skin skirt as a prompt, the detail reveals a series of possibilities for this figure’s characterisation.

The first possibility is that this figure represents a young girl who has just passed through the final rites of *Vhusha*. Blacking (1969a: 18) describes how, once the novice is washed and covered with a mixture of fat and red ochre, she is dressed in her goatskin skirt (*tshirivha*) and given a string of beads (*tshitimbi*) to put round her neck during her final rites. The *tshirivha*, made from the skin of a sheep or a goat, is

worn around the waist and hangs down over the buttocks. The novice's *tshirivha* is made for her by her father, her husband, or her betrothed⁵⁶ (Stayt 1968: 24).

After the initiation seclusion, the novice is sent with a gift of fire-wood to her ritual "mother", who cuts the hair that has grown since the beginning of *muhulu*, the first stage of *Vhusha*. This called *thotshi*, and her hair is cut in the style of *tshivhunḁu* (the "pregnancy" tonsure) (Blacking 1969a: 7). Once a novice has had another period she enters her second stage of *Vhusha* (Blacking 1969a: 8). Following the assumption that the figure represents a novice having just passed through *muhulu* it is probable that the object in the figure's hands is the fire-wood that she will take to her ritual "mother" for *thotshi*. The figure's hair has not yet been cut in the style of *tshivhunḁu* (see Figure 6.) and is depicted by way of pokerwork over her full head and to the bottom of the neckline (see Figure 4.).

At the end of the novice's week of isolation, beer⁵⁷ is brewed in her honour and after this celebration (generally called *muloshiso*) her skin skirt is taken off and the red ochre removed. She will then dress in clothes given to her by the mother of her ritual boy-lover. The novice is taken to her home, where her family slaughters a goat or a fowl in her honour (Blacking 1969a: 18).

The alternative explanation for the figure's skirt is the garment known as the *pale*, which Blacking describes as a skin similar to the *tshirivha*. The *pale* is made from a goat's skin, complete with the head and neck, and is worn by old women who have passed childbearing age. Worn properly the skirt can reach to the ankles (Stayt 1968: 24). However, this explanation seems discordant to the overall portrayal and

characterisation of the figure. In addition, Blacking (1969a) insists that the only other way in which a *tshirivha* is worn is from the shoulder. A woman will wear her *tshirivha* is this way while she is confined after the birth of her first baby and is waiting for the umbilical cord to fall prior to the rite of presentation of the baby (1969a: 7).



Fig. 4 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano* for *Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 78 x 23 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 5 Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 86 x 15 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

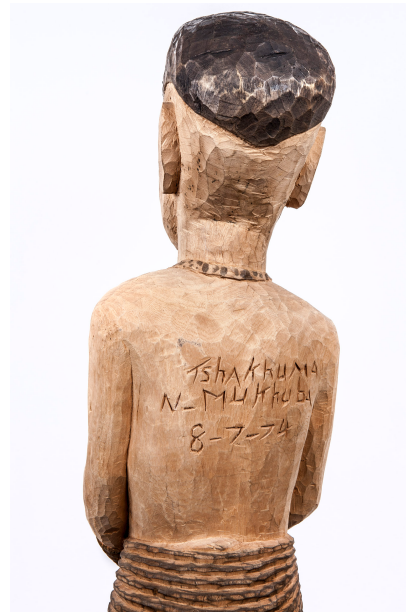


Fig. 6 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 86 x 15 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

“TSHAKUMA, N-Mukhuba, 8-7-74”

A GIRL IN HER SECOND STAGE OF *VHUSHA*: *U LAṬA MAṬAVHA*

This figure wears a *shedo*, a diminutive pubic covering that is worn by young girls at *Vhusha* (Blacking 1969a: 5). The small front apron is marked with cross-hatched lines of pokerwork indicating a fabric covering, which is attached to the body by means of cylindrical lines carved around the circumference of the body at hip height, leaving the buttocks exposed. The lines are highlighted with pokerwork so that the girdle is differentiated from the apron. The figure’s hair is cut in the style known as *tshivhundu* (see Figure 6.), indicated by the V-line of cropped hair that is also emphasised through pokerwork. The capped hairstyle is indicative of a girl who is in her second stage of *Vhusha*, called *U laṭa Maṭavha*.⁵⁸ During this stage the novice is called *mutei wa maṭavha*. *Mutei* means novice (Blacking 1969a: 8 & Stayt 1968: 27).

Since the girls' heads are completely shaven on entry of *Vhusha* and not cut again until the completion of *muhulu* (the first stage of *Vhusha*), the length of their hair is an indication of their rank⁵⁹ (Blacking 1969a: 4). This distinction between girls signifies the number of days the girls have attended the initiation school and is not a result of a girls' noble or commoner birth (Blacking 1969e: 32).



Fig. 7 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 86 x 15 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 8 Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 87 x 16,75 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 9 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 87 x 16,75 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

“TSHAKUMA, N-Mukhuba, 11-11-74”

A GRADUATE OF *TSHIKANDA*

This figure wears a *thahu* tucked into the back of her girdle to indicate her completion of the second cycle of initiation, known as *Tshikanda*⁶⁰ (Nettleton 1998: 175) or the nobles' *Vhusha*⁶¹ (Blacking 1969b: 91). The figure's buttocks are exposed and small front apron is marked with cross-hatched lines of pokerwork indicating a fabric covering, which is attached to the body by means of cylindrical lines carved around the circumference of the body at hip height. Within these cylindrical lines sits the *thahu*. As in Mukhuba's other figure, pokerwork was used to differentiate the girdle from the front apron and the *thahu*. The *thahu* is a temporary marker of social status and is worn by a newly initiated girl for six to eight days after her completion of *Tshikanda* and marks her sexual and social maturity. The *thahu* indicates a girl's

transition from biological readiness for motherhood and her attainment of adult status (Nettleton 1998: 175 & 179). The *thahu* is also a symbol of a girls' "faithfulness" (Nettleton 1984: xxii). Nettleton suggests that the *thahu* belongs to an ensemble, which includes a married woman's apron (*tshiluvhelo*), a beaded girdle (*tshifunga*) and long string of tassels (*mifhunga*) that hangs down the sides of the girl's legs.

During this period the newly initiated girl must adhere to very strict laws of etiquette, except when she is alone. She must round her shoulders and bend her head while walking, she may not stand upright and must greet her superior/s by lying down with her head on the ground (Stayt 1968: 109). Rebecca Matibe (2014) refers to this as *u khotla*, "bending while greeting". Like *losha* it is a sign of respect and is performed in acknowledgement of an older person. One could also lie on one's side to show respect for an elder. The figure's folded arms, bent legs and averted eyes illustrate this etiquette and the "humble" (Blacking 1969e: 33) attitude that initiate is required to demonstrate.

The *thahu* is linked to specific forms of dress and status and can be discarded or handed down to junior women. Stayt notes that the chief's youngest wife, called *muta noni* (little bird of the yard), wears the *thahu* as part of her dress when she first takes up her residence at the *musanda* (the chief's capital). He also suggests in this instance the *thahu* is used as a marker to warn his officials that his new wife is strictly forbidden to them (Stayt 1968: 110).

In the course of *Tshikanda* and *Domba* the *thahu* is shown to and handled by initiates to the accompaniment of *milayo*,⁶² recited by the *khomba* or *nyematei* (mistress of

ceremonies). These aphorisms are recited as questions to which the initiates respond with answers, focusing on different parts of the object while establishing certain metaphoric relationships. In this way the *thahu*'s symbolic value is revealed (Nettleton 1998: 175). Metaphoric associations to the male genital organs, semen and a girl's menses and procreative abilities are linked to various components of the *thahu*.⁶³ Nettleton (1989: 4-5) asserts that further comparisons made between elements of the *thahu* and the *ngoma* (hemispherical bass drum), which is tied into symbolic references of the womb and procreation. The *thahu* is therefore a mnemonic of composite images and symbols in the context of initiation which, according to Nettleton (1998: 179), all adult Venda women would understand. Nettleton (1998: 179) proposes that the meaning of "all adult Venda women" would include Sotho-speaking and Tsonga-speaking women who were betrothed to Venda men, as they too were required to participate in the Venda initiations.



Fig. 10 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood, 87 x 16,75 x 18 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 11 Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood and pigment, 93 x 16,5 x 25 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

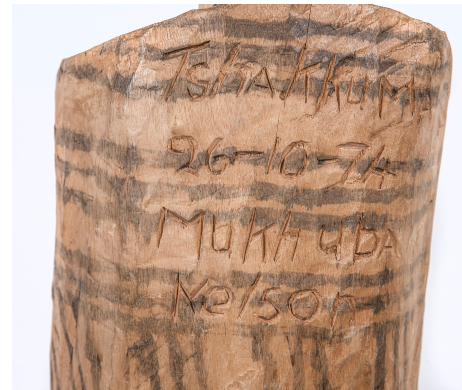


Fig. 12 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano for Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood and pigment, 93 x 16,5 x 25 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

“TSHAKUMA, 26-10-74, Mukhuba Nelson”

A MARRIED WOMAN

This figure wears a salempore cloth skirt and uses another section of salempore cloth to cover her shoulders (*mwenda*⁶⁴). The salempore cloth is distinguishable through Mukhuba’s use of blue pigment, the lines painted on the bottom circumference of the figures skirt and the cylindrical and vertical lines painted around and below the shoulders respectively and together mark out the *mwenda*. The solid blue areas under the *mwenda* constitute a fabric shirt covering the figure’s breasts. The figure is fully clothed, which signifies her status as a married woman (Mishack 2014). In the past, salempore cloth was imported from the coast and was considered a luxury item; however, with increased supply in the 18th century, Venda women could wear cloth skirts for everyday wear. Therefore, for the past 80 years, Venda women have worn

leather skirts made from sheep- or goatskin only on ceremonial occasions (Nettleton 1992: 215-216, Harries 1983: 14).

Salempore cloth is therefore a marker of social change, flexibility and cultural interpenetration. In 1956 and 1957 the name of a beer song, *Lamba-mukalaha*, meaning “refuse the old man”, was given to a popular pattern of salempore cloth. Blacking suggests that the title of this song implies that, due to the increase in migrant labour and the subsequent increase in the financial resources of young men, girls no longer needed to look to older men for wealth and security promised by marriage (Blacking 1969c: 178).

Rebecca Matibe (2014) insists that a married Venda woman (*mufumakadzi*) is distinct from an ordinary woman. Her life is much more prestigious, she also needs to know how to conduct herself in public. The way in which a married woman “upholds” (Matibe 2014) herself in public is an indication that she is married and this demeanour in turn gives the married woman’s family and entire household dignity. An unmarried woman is “light-weighted” (Matibe 2014) as she lacks the prestige or dignity of a married woman. Bringing prestige to the household is the woman’s responsibility (Matibe 2014) because when a Venda woman gets married she is not the wife of her husband, but the wife of the family, so she is called *ya ha Mudau* (Hadebe 2014).

Seniority amongst age-sets and age groups is important to the social organisation of Venda women.⁶⁵ Groups of women who attend the same *Tshikanda* or *Domba* are brought together into an informal age-set which is neither named nor formally recognised. However, these age-sets are important to women, because of the role of

women in ritual and ceremonial life, as well as in women's associations in Venda society. Seniority of age is in general an important principle of Venda social organisation (Blacking 1969e: 22) and as women grow older they become more powerful and respected and will therefore also play a leading role in the ritual and ceremonial life of the household (Blacking 1969c: 151). Therefore the significance of attending *Domba* is paramount. A woman who marries without having attended *Domba* may not attain full adult status even after the birth of children. However, a married woman may qualify for graduation by attending the rites on the last night and day of *Domba* and by paying the fees (Blacking 1969e: 22). It is not necessary for a married woman to strip down to her loin covering, which is compulsory "undress" for *Domba* initiates when they dance, but she will pay a bigger fee for this privilege (Blacking 1969c: 149). Blacking suggests that such variations in the attendance of *Domba* are logical if the importance is the woman's attendance of the initiation school rather than its function. With this attendance the woman is then entitled to certain privileges of group membership (Blacking 1969e: 22).

As much as *Domba* is the dramatic final stage in the series of schools that prepare girls for marriage while stressing the value of institutionalised motherhood, the activity of marriage is, by contrast, inconspicuous and private. The bride is taken to her husband's home at night, accompanied by a few companions, and the transition is completed with minimum ceremony. Blacking (1969c) suggests that this is "primarily because the 'transfer' of the bride is but one small link in the chain of events which consolidate relationships between wife-givers (*vho-makhulu*) and wife-takers (*vhakwa-sha*)" (Blacking 1969c: 150-151).

In the past only a married woman or a woman who was betrothed would have worn the bracelets (*vhukunda tshotshane*) and anklets (*vhukunda ha mulenzhe*) worn by the figure, as they signify an engagement between a man and a woman (Matibe 2014) and were given to a bride or bride-to-be by her husband or his family to mark significant events (Mountain 1998). Every man made bracelets and anklets for his wife and Stayt suggests that the number of bracelets a husband made for his wife illustrated the extent of his affection. Hairs from the tails of cattle were twisted into a circle to form the core of the bracelet, and wire was wound around the hairs until they were covered to form the bracelet (Blacking 1969d: 227; Stayt 1968: 58). Sometimes small copper or metal beads are inserted at intervals to decorate the bracelets (Stayt 1968: 58).



Fig. 13 Detail of Nelson Mukhuba, *Matano* for *Domba*, 1974, Patinated wood and pigment, 93 x 16,5 x 25 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 14 Noria Mabasa, *Mukhali*, 1996, Clay, 88,5 x 37,5 x 22, 5 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 15 Noria Mabasa, *Mukhali*, 1996, Clay, 88,5 x 37,5 x 22, 5 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

MABASA'S *MUKHALI* (1996)

The figure *Mukhali* depicts Noria Mabasa's grandmother, but Elizabeth Rankin (2004: 102) suggests that it should be understood as a commemorative portrait rather than a work of memory, since Mabasa would not have seen her grandmother as a young *Domba* initiate. Furthermore, Mabasa would have had to draw on her own initiation experience to compose the numerous layers of multiple temporalities – both public and private, both individual (as a self-portrait) and cultural – where the self is shaped by, and therefore conveys or represents, a group history and identity (Hirsch & Smith (2002: 2). Initiation rites and the influence of her dreams are a strong focus and are of great importance to Mabasa in her work (Nettleton 2000: 32; Straughan 2003: 28). However, arguing that identity and history are linked to memory, Jan Vansina (1996: 12) suggests that

No person can live without a sense of self, a sense of uniqueness defined in part by the concrete evidence of one's own body and in part by the selective memories that continually forge a unique personal history.

Similarly, he argues, no collectivity can exist without assuming a collective identity: even though it has no concrete body of its own, it must express its "body" through criteria of membership and mutual behaviour, and these two criteria are based on and justified by a shared historical consciousness (Vansina 1996: 12). Therefore, historical consciousness must occur partly through the remembrance and commemoration of written texts and the memories of stories told within families and communities. These memories are made "authentic" through reference to objects such as photographs, monuments or documents and, as Nooter-Roberts and Roberts (1996b: 86) suggest, objects of adornment. *Mukhali* can therefore be argued to embody a collective identity of Venda initiates as much as she does the unique characterisation of an individual.

The title *Mukhali*, which means "guide" or "mentor", is appropriate as Mabasa's grandmother was instrumental in her art practice. Mabasa stated that it was her grandmother who, in the 1970s, had instructed her in a dream to make small clay figures (see Appendix 2). The small figurines, coil-built and fired in an open pit (Younge 1988: 39) drew on Mabasa's cultural beliefs and traditional practice,⁶⁶ and, as Nettleton (1989a; 2000) argues, Mabasa's work continues to reflect "an exploration of Venda customs and images, drawing on historical traditions" (Nettleton 2000: 32). Although Mabasa's first figures consisted of images of women in traditional dress and ritual pose, Becker (2003: 70) suggests that they were "types", not individuals, whether they depicted Venda initiates performing the *Domba* dance or were of uniformed policemen and clergymen. Rankin further argues that Mabasa "rarely

represents an identifiable person and has treated *Mukhali* rather differently from her other clay figures” (Rankin 2004: 102).

Rankin (2004: 102) claims that *Mukhali* is “unique in [Mabasa’s] oeuvre”. She is a young, nubile woman “with stocky legs, a sturdy torso and well-formed breasts” (Rankin 2004: 102) and stands 88,5cm tall. *Mukhali*’s upright stance projects the principal aesthetic concerns of strength and nobility that are associated with a young *Domba* initiate. The figure’s untreated clay surface is carefully detailed with the addition of elaborately worked clay pieces that mark the fine details embellished on the figure. These clay additions form the intricate beaded decorations and garments such as the decorated *shedo*, which is a customary part of initiation attire. Rankin (2004: 102) observes the intricacies of the beadwork, which is “captured through repeated lines and dots painstakingly inscribed on the clay surface, providing a textured counterpoint to the broader areas of modelling”. Although, historically the Venda have not worn much beadwork and most of their clothing is made from skin, hide and/or salempore cloth, (Nettleton 1989a) suggests that the little beadwork there is associated with women’s initiation such as the *Domba*, and consists of girdles worn around the hips with a front and/or back apron that hangs down. Beadwork is predominantly made of “white beads with coloured motifs composed of chevrons running parallel to each other or forming diamonds between them” (Nettleton 1989a: 7). In addition to the minimal beadwork noted, Nettleton (1989a) refers to instances where beads have been replaced by safety pins and arranged in symmetrical designs on the *shedo*.

Although *Mukhali*'s elaborately dressed head and hair appear to be covered with beadwork, headwear of this kind is not described or photographically depicted anywhere in Blacking's texts. A possible alternative to this detail is the use of bangles, whereby ordinary bangles are doubled over and fixed to a string, which is tied round the head (Blacking 1969b: 108). These doubled-over bangles are "worn over the head and attached to the tassels of the skirt"⁶⁷ (1969b: 99). Blacking describes this headwear as part of the novices' "graduation" (Blacking 1969b: 97) or "passing-out" uniform, which is given to them by the chief during an event called *mahundoni*⁶⁸ (Blacking 1969b: 99). *Mahundoni* is held in the late afternoon of the last day of initiation, as well as on the following morning. Each girl pays her fee (in 1958 it was two shillings and sixpence) and in return receives the *milayo* of the concluding rites of *Domba* and their passing-out uniform, especially the bangles and the married woman's skirt, *tshirivha*⁶⁹ (Blacking 1969b: 99). Positioned on her nubile body her face, outlined by the headwear that enhances *Mukhali*'s eyes, lips and nose, personifies the idealised type of an initiate at the graduation of the *Domba* initiation school.



Fig. 16 Detail of Noria Mabasa, *Mukhali*, 1996, Clay, 88,5 x 37,5 x 22, 5 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 17 Johannes Maswanganyi, *Tsonga-Shangana Girl Dancing*, 1985, Patinated marula wood, 125 x 27 x 30 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.



Fig. 18 Johannes Maswanganyi, *Tsonga-Shangana Girl Dancing*, 1985, Patinated marula wood, 125 x 27 x 30 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

MASWANGANYI'S *TSONGA-SHANGANA GIRL DANCING* (1985)

Johannes Maswanganyi's figure *Tsonga-Shangana Girl Dancing* wears the *xibelani* skirt, an indication that the figure is a graduate (*khomba*⁷⁰) of the Tsonga female initiation school *vukhomba*. She is 20-22 years of age and is fit to be married (Maswanganyi visually indicates the girl's maturity by lifting his hands up and gesturing breasts in his 2014 interview). *The xibelani* visually marks and acknowledges a matured woman who is no longer a girl, as the *xibelani* is presented to the initiation graduates on the completion of *vukhomba* (Johnston 1972: 344; Maswanganyi 2014). Graduates are also presented with a special type of beaded belt for the waist, known as *xanga*, which is made by the paternal aunt. The *xanga* is worn throughout the processes of maturation and has ritual connections to a woman's

reproductive cycle. However, Maswanganyi's figure does not appear to be wearing the *xanga*.⁷¹ As seen in Maswanganyi's figure *Tsonga-Shangana Girl Dancing*, the abundance of salempore cloth, an entire bolt of fabric (32 metres), and the double pleating of the *xibelani* skirt produces an asymmetrical body image on the wearer, as the skirt doubles the size of the pelvic region⁷² (Nettleton 2007: 88). Maswanganyi has burnt the upper edge of the marula wood to highlight the pleated structure of the *xibelani* and these markings are reminiscent of the striped character of the salempore cloth. In addition the pokerwork creates an appearance of movement usually produced by the folds in the fabric. The texture of the carving of the *xibelani* contrasts with the smooth surface of the figure's highly finished body; here Maswanganyi's approach is differentiated from that of Mukhuba, whose figures are animated with the marks made by his adze.

The pokerwork on the figure's face picks out the carved elements of the facial features and eyes, while the carved cross-hatched hair detail is accentuated through the use of pokerwork highlighting the delicate ringlets of hair. The beaded necklace, called *shihekisana*⁷³ (Junod 1962 [1913] Volume 2: 103), is an object of personal adornment (Maswanganyi 2014), and visually supports the figure's head. Although the head is removable, Maswanganyi (2014) insists it is not like that of his *nyamisworo* figures (see Appendix 3 and 5). Rather, it is designed to allow the figure to see from all angles as she turns her head.

Maswanganyi (2014) refers to the figure's wrist bracelets as *vusenga* which, according to Junod, are made of wire wrapped around a ring of hide and worn as adornment. Junod maintains that the *vusenga* were first bought in Natal and

introduced to the “Northern clans” by the Ma-Lemba (1962 [1913] Volume 2: 102). Like Mukhuba’s figures, *Matano* for *Domba*, Maswanganyi’s figure maintains a respectful posture with her hands gently placed at her waist. For Judith Butler (1988: 482) “identity [is] tenuously constituted in time” as it is instituted in the stylised repetition of acts such as those found in initiation contexts. Butler (1988: 483) suggests that the corporeal acts and their stylisation, which is applied to the body, are responsible for the construction of gender.

The figures created by Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi construct and illustrate the feminine ideal using the female initiate “type(s)” to portray the stylisation and representation of the various stages of Venda and Tsonga initiation and journey to womanhood. Their bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the appearance of a gendered self in addition to the entrenchment of an ethnic marker of identity (Butler 1988: 483). Through their strong, youthful and nubile physical forms the figures portray the collective identity of initiates in an idealised female form and express their affiliation and subscription of mutual behaviour via these body markers and dress codes, therefore, placing importance on the feminine ideal as youthful. These markers, such as memories, are transmittable across spatial and generational boundaries through the use of a particular style of dress or material (Nooter-Roberts & Roberts 1996b: 86). Nelson Mukhuba’s “TSHAKUMA, 26-10-74, Mukhuba Nelson” – a married woman – therefore does not conform to this examination, as a married woman has already achieved womanhood and the culmination of the previous types through her completion of initiation. In traditional Tsonga culture, a woman who does not attend *vukhomba* would not be allowed to marry; she would be called *xuvurhu*, meaning one

who has not been to *vukhomba* (Maswanganyi 2014), which is comparable to the importance of graduation from *Domba* for the ideal Venda wife. Rebecca Matibe's (2014) assertion that a married Venda woman (*mufumakadzi*) is distinct from ordinary women highlights these distinctions, while the dress of a married woman expands and supports the relationship that marked traces have to the social hierarchies and custom of the Venda and Tsonga and the role/s of women in society.



Fig. 19 Detail of Johannes Maswanganyi, *Tsonga-Shangana Girl Dancing*, 1985, Patinated marula wood, 125 x 27 x 30 cm, Wits Art Museum, South Africa. Photo image by Mark Lewis.

CONCLUSION

Not forgetting that identity markers have been over emphasised, exaggerated or invented, anthropologist Allen Roberts (1996: 216) writes that social identity is situational because people identify themselves in multiple ways: via lineage; clan; chiefdom; tribe; ethnicity; region; membership to guild professions; and religious sects. Roberts suggests that underlying all these categories of identification are "... the commonalities of language and cosmology" (Roberts 1996: 216). The figures created by Nelson Mukhuba, Noria Mabasa and Johannes Maswanganyi, which were

analysed above, construct idealised images of womanhood, which affirm a vision of a healthy society and expresses and maintains the criteria of membership and mutually agreed upon behaviour through the careful orchestration of form, such as dress and gesture. The result reproduces the appearance and demeanour that young Venda or Tsonga women “should” traditionally assume.

Apartheid policies bound people to fixed ethnic identities and influenced radical changes in style and taste, entrenching and cementing the ethnic divide amongst South Africans. As a result, dress became the most immediately recognisable marker for identity and ethnic difference. Therefore the appropriation of a particular style of dress used to mark the identity of a Tsonga woman living in the Gazankulu homeland⁷⁴ became an “overtly political proclamation of identity [and heritage] during the mid-twentieth century” (Becker 1997: 188). This proclamation of identity fixed what had previously been “marked by continual adaptations to changing social and environmental situations” (Harries 1989: 89). Furthermore, it is important to note that this style of dress was outdated and no longer in use in the eastern Transvaal, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, except by some healers, and its roots lay in early 18th century Mozambique, from where it was taken by Tsonga migrants to the Transvaal in the 1880s.

Such retrospective identity is questioned by Simon Njami:

contemporaneity is and always has been history on the move. A history that makes us rethink ourselves, not in reference to one fixed, outmoded identity, but as protean beings with multiple changeable identities (2005a: 22).

Bozzoli (1983: 150) draws our attention to the “markedly distorted pattern” of labour division documented by the early 20th-century anthropologists in most rural African

societies and suggests (Bozzoli 1983: 143) that there is no explanation for the fact that it was the women who remained behind in the rural areas while men left for Johannesburg and the mines,⁷⁵ and for this reason it is conceivable that particular styles of dress may have been employed as a measure of the “degree of surveillance over both women and land in the absence of the men” (Vail 1989: 14-15). However, the extent to which internal and external domestic struggles and gendered social hierarchies are communicated and are visually identifiable requires further investigation of the visual archive. Blacking’s (1969c: 178) account and translation of the beer song *Lamba-mukalaha*, meaning “refuse the old man” (see above: page 59), suggests a possibility that further markers of female resistance to gendered social hierarchies conceivably exist. An investigation into such markers would allow an opportunity for new and emergent narratives of the Venda and Tsonga woman to shape the continual re-evaluation of values, beliefs and cultural traits embodied in markers such as dress and gesture, as well as informing further evolutions and adaptations of dress after the dismantling of apartheid and the removal of the homeland structures.

The potential for a productive investigation and analysis into possible visual markers that negotiate narratives of authority, development and historical change conceivably exist in the film archive of The John Blacking Collection, which is held at The Callaway Centre at The University of Western Australia. The master of ceremonies (*khomba*), as seen in the YouTube video link “Venda Domba Master”,⁷⁶ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6gRfYiZARY>) and Appendix 6 wears a European military- styled jacket – a manifestation of the invented traditions and hybrid types. This points to the possible existence of other markers – a forgotten or

buried truth that resides in the archive. These possible markers could promote our understanding of the effects of migrant-labour practices on the women left behind in the rural areas and how such practices took hold of communities and reshaped societies' traditional practices while visually constructing themselves on the body through dress and gesture.

Traditionally anthropologists used photography and film as a methodological approach for a piece of critical writing; however, an epistemological, practice-led approach to The John Blacking Archive at The Callaway Centre would establish a cyclical relationship between the visual and the written. An interdisciplinary approach to this film archive,⁷⁷ which is effectively inaccessible as there are no online portals allowing the material to be accessed or viewed, means that it can only be viewed at The Callaway Centre at The University of Western Australia. Blacking's published film outputs are accessible through the film *Domba 1956-1958: A personal record of Venda initiation rites, songs and dances* (2002),⁷⁸ which is available only on VHS from the Society of Ethnomusicology, and Blacking's series on *Dance* for Ulster Television in the 1980s, which "is notoriously difficult to find" (Emberly 2015). The difficulty of access of the now archived film reels highlights the dominance of the textual, the scientific and traditionally academic over the visual and reinforces the hierarchy of the textual, which is far more accessible through academic online databases. Nevertheless, the archive offers the possibility of correcting the skewing of the way that Venda and Tsongas culture and women have been portrayed by placing them in a virtual contact zone for the creation of new knowledge.

People everywhere are concerned with their past, which they continually reinvent for the present. The revision of particular narratives in a postcolonial and post-apartheid South African society is essential because of the omnipresence of media and the historical and hierarchical misbalance of certain histories and versions of histories that obscure the history of others. Therefore, the future investigation of visual archives could reveal unwritten histories of a society in the tradition of oral histories. They could further expose and unfix the static records of what tradition and traditional law was, and its appropriation through invented traditions to form static and/or hybrid types. The unravelling of the representation of Venda and Tsonga women and their position in society creates a space of negotiation for the representation of Venda and Tsonga women and the multiple identities they take on in constantly evolving and shifting contexts.

Historian Pierre Nora suggests that memory is life and

remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived (1989: 8).

While memory attaches itself to sites, history attaches itself to events (1989: 22).

Memory locates itself in the concrete: spaces, gestures, images and objects, and history is bound strictly to temporal continuities, progressions and to relations between things (Nora 1989: 9). Therefore, changes in the interpretation of subjects and objects are influenced by paradigm shifts in the writing of the histories; political strategies and the motivations of anthropologists; and the shifting of values of classification and cultural significance of a particular subject or object, as seen in the way the status of some objects change from being ethnographic objects to being art object. The examination of “new” archives offer opportunities for further exposing

areas in which visual elements played important roles in marking ethnic divisions that were sophisticated manipulations, formalising and reworking pre-existing ideas about identity used by Europeans and the apartheid regime, which still persist and portray themselves as authentic and pure cultural essences (Hobsbawm 1983; Harries 1989; Ranger 1983; Vail 1989).

However, this analysis should not reduce a culture to a single, “original” way of being. The analysis must take into account the urban and rural conditions of Venda and Tsonga women and the dynamics of economics and travel between the two conditions in order to break down the influence of apartheid engineering and migration, a potential post-apartheid condition or expression, as well the possibilities for changes of expression in a present-day South African context. These numerous layers of multiple temporalities, public and private, shape the expression of self as a product of personal and collective experiences that convey or represent a group history and identity as cultural memory (Hirsch & Smith 2002: 2-5).

APPENDIX 1:

MUKHUBA, NELSON: BIOGRAPHY

Nelson Mukhuba was born 1925 and grew up at Tshakuma,⁷⁹ a Lutheran mission station. A modern man of large stature and presence, Mukhuba dressed in suits while still maintaining his Venda identity. As a member of the Lutheran Church Mukhuba balanced his two identities, and this may also account for the inclusion of Christian iconography in some of his works, such as *Christ on the Cross* (1973) and *Nebuchadnezzar* (1979) (Becker 2006a; Mainganye 2014).

In 1945 Mukhuba settled in Sophiatown, Johannesburg (Mukhuba 2014; Ogilvie 1988), where he was employed as, among other things, a painter, welder, carpenter and gardener. As a stage electrician's assistant, Mukhuba watched famous groups, such as the *Shadows*, perform at whites-only theatres like the Colosseum and the Empire. He went on to form several of his own Marabi bands, including *Nelson and the Phiri Boys*, who recorded with groups like the *Zoutpansberg Merry Makers* (Becker 2006a; Younge 1988: 47-48). On his return to Venda in around 1958, he started carving traditional items like drums (*dzingoma*)⁸⁰ and figures (*matano*)⁸¹ while also producing work for sale to tourists on the roadside (Nettleton 2000; Mukhuba 2014). He came from a long line of wood carvers and his father and grandfather had both carved utensils. However, he had no formal institutional art training (Mukhuba 2014).

Mukhuba set up a stall along the road leading to Punda Milia, one of the gates to the Kruger National Park, with a large puppet-like sculpture to attract the passing tourists.

The arm of the sculpture, a man wearing a hat and carrying a basket, was tied to a fishing line that enabled Mukhuba to move the arm, which encouraged passing vehicles to stop (Becker 2006a; Mukhuba 2014; Nettleton 2000: 31). Here Mukhuba sold his works, which consisted of animals and traditional figures. Inspired by his surroundings, as well as images from postcards, magazines and books, Mukhuba carved centaurs, Egyptian figures, boxers, football players, ballroom dancers and a ballet dancer (Nettleton 2000: 31). De Becker and Parry (2014: 42) and also Mainganye (2014) suggest that this referencing of two-dimensional images may account for the “peculiar two-dimensionality” of one of the *Ballet Dancer*’s (1974) hands.

Mukhuba was interested in creating the impression of movement and mobility in static sculpture. He used pieces of found and carved wood to create the suggestion of movement and sometimes used wire, nails and metal to join these two types of wood together to simulate an action or gesture, as can be seen in the *Dancing Figures* (1984). He preferred a natural finish to his sculptures and occasionally used pokerwork and enamel paints to add definition (Becker 2006a; Proud 2006).

As much as Mukhuba was inspired by the images found in books, he also found inspiration in his dreams and visions (Mukhuba 2014). Prompted by these dreams, Mukhuba would go up to the mountains to fetch wood to bring back home, waiting as long as six months to a year for a piece to dry. Only then could he start carving. A skilled carver, passionate about his work, Mukhuba often went without eating for hours while he worked (Mukhuba 2014). Nettleton (2000: 31) noted that:

most of Mukhuba's figures were executed in a style of simplified naturalism evident in much of the sculpture produced for initiation ceremonies by unidentified artists.

He allowed the wood to direct the form of the sculpture (Raphalalani 2014). Of his sculpture *Self Portrait* (Date unknown), which depicts a man literally holding open his ripped chest, Mukhuba said:

That picture (here he points to the sculpture) with his chest open, with his heart, lungs, everything open, shows you that I am an artist that can see inside wood ... I can see the picture while the wood is still on the tree. I am the doctor of wood because I can see inside the wood. By carving, I make people see my talent, see that I can see inside the wood, to see the figure and the shape of the sculpture (Nelson Mukhuba cited in Younge 1988: 47).

Nettleton (2000: 31-32) argues that Mukhuba was concerned with "notions of originality" and the "iconographic aspects" of all his works, and this too was evident in his treatment of his *matano* figures,⁸² which he signed. He was accused of witchcraft by the Tshakuma community because of the exposure of his *matano* figures "outside their 'proper' context". Despite this misconception, Mukhuba's relationship with young artists in the area was one of vibrant interaction and he taught both Mishack Raphalalani and Churchill Madzivhandila how to use a chisel (Mukhuba 2014; Raphalalani 2014). In turn they showed him how to create a more polished look for some of his works (Raphalalani 2014).

During interviews conducted by Nettleton with Nelson Mukhuba between 1978 and 1980, Mukhuba seemed aware of the different demands made by his local patrons and the contemporary art market. As much as the production of his work explored his personal experience, it was also driven by economic factors and his perceptions of the demands of the two markets (Nettleton 2000: 31). However, his tendency to repeat the same subject in an almost identical fashion in more than one work concerned the contemporary art market. They did not recognise that his tradition, in which he still

actively participated, might expect the repetition of successful works,⁸³ unlike the contemporary art market, which demanded that Mukhuba and other artists of the same background abide by the Western standard of uniqueness (Nettleton 1988: 304).

With no formal exhibition spaces, Mukhuba displayed his work at agricultural shows (Mainganye 2014; Nettleton 2000). The promotion of Mukhuba's work by the "independent" Venda government at the Rand Easter Show in 1980 and 1981 led to its appropriation for use on the Venda postal stamps.⁸⁴ Sun International also utilised his sculptures as free décor in the Venda Sun Hotel, Thohoyandou (Younge 1988: 48; Nettleton 2000: 31). In 1985, Mukhuba's inclusion in *Tributaries* saw the artist's work reach critical acclaim. His artworks were collected by the major South Africa institutional collections: Johannesburg Art Gallery; University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; Durban Art Gallery; University of South Africa; and Iziko South Africa National Gallery. Following this success, Mukhuba saw visitors from around the world⁸⁵ calling on him at his home in Tshakuma. The blast on his *phala phala*⁸⁶ signalled the arrival of visitors, who were often greeted by himself, his wife and other dancers who made up the dance group *Mahlombe a Muthandabinyuka*. Mukhuba would take part on his stilts, carved to resemble the legs of a giraffe (Becker 2006a).

Mukhuba was one of the first artists to be exposed to the high art market. His works were exhibited across South Africa, as well as internationally in Germany and the United Kingdom (Becker 2006a). In 1987 Mukhuba, upon his return from an exhibition⁸⁷ in Johannesburg, committed suicide. After cutting down all his fruit trees and pouring petrol throughout his storeroom and house he set it alight, killing his wife and two of his daughters. Mukhuba, unable to bear the heat of the flames, crawled

through a window and hanged himself from a tree. Most of his works were destroyed and those that survived bore the scars of the tragedy (Becker 2006a; Raphalalani 2014; Younge 1988: 46).

APPENDIX 2:

MABASA, NORIA: BIOGRAPHY

Owing to Noria Mabasa's refusal to participate in an interview, this narrative was compiled entirely from second-hand sources and interviews conducted with individuals who worked with Mabasa.

Mabasa was born Noria Muelelwa Luvhimbi in the village Xigalo⁸⁸ in the Ramukhumba district⁸⁹ in 1938. She currently lives and works as a potter and woodcarver at Tshino Village in the Vuwani area, Limpopo (Younge 1988; Becker 2006b). In 1952 Mabasa, then aged fourteen, moved to White City, a section of Soweto in Johannesburg to assist the wife of one of her brothers who had become blind during childbirth. Mabasa was responsible for all the household chores, as well as taking care of the new-born infant. When her sister-in-law's eyesight was restored a year later, she went to live with a cousin in Alexandra, in the northern part of Johannesburg,

It was during Mabasa's time in Alexandra that she met her husband-to-be, Jim Mabasa, an older Shangaan⁹⁰ man. They returned to Venda in December 1955 and settled in Hamutsha (now called Vuwani). It was there that Mabasa began to speak TshiVenda. Even though Mabasa's ancestry is VhaVenda, which she considers herself to be, she had spoken Shangaan throughout her life (Straughan 2003: 18).

Straughan (2003: 18-21) notes that Mabasa's dreams, the source of her creativity, started in Johannesburg and continued in Venda. In 1965 an old lady appeared to her in a dream and told her that she should work with clay. Not knowing anyone who

worked with clay Mabasa, as a young wife and mother of two children, was reluctant to pursue these dreams. Her refusal to acknowledge the dreams caused the deterioration of her health. Her husband disowned her and sent her back to Xigalo with their children. Mabasa remained ill from 1965 till 1967, and the dreams of the old woman she now calls Tshidzeuli⁹¹ continued to plague her. All her attempts to terminate the dreams and alleviate the effects of her physical ailments they were causing were unsuccessful. It was not until Mabasa dreamed of her father that she began to understand the meaning of the old lady Tshidzeuli's messages. It was then that Mabasa began to collect clay from the riverbanks to sculpt clay pots and figurines. Younge (1988: 38) recounts that it was through this activity that Mabasa found the spiritual release and relief from what she calls her "bad dreams". But, according to Becker (2003: 64), the clay pots and figures also provided Mabasa with a way out of her impoverished situation.

Despite Mabasa's lack of formal institutional art training (Becker 2006b), she began making clay pots and small figurines, coil-built and fired in an open pit (Younge 1988: 39). Becker (2003), Nettleton (2000) and Straughan (2003) have all drawn attention to the ways in which Mabasa's choice of subjects is shaped by her cultural beliefs, traditional practice and her place in relationship to local systems. Nettleton (1989a & 2000) suggests that Mabasa's work reflects "an exploration of Venda customs and images, drawing on historical traditions" (2000: 32). Mabasa's inspiration for the figurines was derived from the *matano*⁹² figures used in the first and third stages of Venda women's initiation, *Vhusha*⁹³ and *Domba*.⁹⁴ These figures portray women in traditional dress and ritual pose (Becker 2003: 70).

Fellow artist Avashoni Mainganye (2015) first met Noria in 1983 while organising a group show, the VhaVenda Art Exhibition (1984), which was held at the then Venda Sun Hotel, now Khoroni. Mainganye (2015), Nicholson (2014), and Raphalalani (2014) suggest that Mabasa's idea to carve first emerged when she witnessed the purchase of Mishack Raphalalani's semi abstract wood sculpture. At the time, participation by women in the production of woodcarving was unheard of.

Woodcarving was traditionally a male domain, and Mabasa's decision to change the medium in which she worked from clay to wood had a significant effect on Mabasa's work. Nettleton (2000) and Becker (2006b) suggest that wood, as a medium, offered Mabasa opportunities for artistic growth and development, allowing her to make unique works that were much larger in scale than anything she had previously made. This, in turn, allowed new themes to be developed and resulted in more complex compositions.

Different sources of information on how Mabasa acquired her carving skills are inconsistent. In a personal interview with Elizabeth Rankin (October 1988), and again in an interview with myself (2014), Fiona Nicholson stated that Mabasa was given carving tools by Avashoni Mainganye and Mishack Raphalalani after the VhaVenda Art Exhibition. This was also confirmed in an interview with Raphalalani (2014). In other sources and interviews with Elizabeth Dell (April 1988) and Anitra Nettleton (2000: 32), Mabasa has acknowledged a debt to Nelson Mukhuba for her tutelage in woodcarving. In addition to these inconsistencies Mabasa, in a personal interview with Rankin (October 1988), denied having been taught to carve. She claimed that,

like her original clay figures, the woodcarving had been inspired by her dreams (Rankin 1989: 72).

Ditike promoted Mabasa's work from 1985 until its collapse in the early 1990s (Dell 1989b: 120). In 1985, Mabasa's *Portrait of President Mphephu* (Date unknown) was included in the *Tributaries* exhibition⁹⁵ held in Johannesburg. This led to an increased demand for her work and in 1986 the Goodman Gallery hosted the solo exhibition *Parade* (Burnett 1985; Dell 1989b: 120; Straughan 2003: 21), for which Mabasa produced figures of soldiers and policemen. Nettleton (2009: 150) suggests that these figures followed in the tradition of the *matano* figures used in Venda initiation, using the traditional coiling technique, but on a larger scale. They were recognisable despite their unnatural proportions, such as their oversized heads, and faced forward, their bodies fixed due to the limitation of working with coarse clay. Mabasa applied enamel paints to the baked forms to add details to complete the figures. However, she uses *luvhundi*, red ochre soil, and graphite to stain other figurative sculptures and pots (Straughan 2003: 21-22; Becker 2006b). Rayda Becker (2006b) describes Mabasa's figures as "generic types" with only a few of the figures made as portraits, such as the *Portrait of President Mphephu*. However, Sack (1988: 29) maintains that her figures mostly depict real people: bureaucrats, policeman and military personnel.

In contrast to men who are dressed in Western style suits or uniforms, sometimes making small gestures like lighting a cigarette, the women in Mabasa's works are dressed in traditional garments. The exceptions to the traditional female figure are her images of nurses, prostitutes and white women. Becker (2003: 71) suggests that their

clothes are an indication that they are women who operate outside of the conventions, or are outsiders to the rural world.

Becker (2003: 72-73) suggests that, from the outset, the iconography of Mabasa's wood pieces differed from her works in clay as they were large, complex and narrative. Their sources were multiple and were found in the news media, mythology and history. Mabasa described how she was instructed, in a dream, to collect a piece of wood that had been washed up by the floods⁹⁶ and carve it to produce the large-scale works *Carnage I* and *Carnage II* (1987). These two sculptures include traditional Venda icons such as crocodiles and snakes (Nettleton 1997: 175), combining the images of her dreams with traditional Venda mythology. Nettleton (1989b & 2000) argues that Mabasa continued this trend with the sculpture *Nongoma Lungundu* (1995), which refers to the migration myth of the Singo,⁹⁷ and that the title *Nongoma Lungundu* was "a title given in this case by Noria [Mabasa] herself, [which] clearly refers to a Venda myth", and that the driftwood itself evokes the power of the drum to bring rain.

Nettleton further postulates that

Mabasa herself has 'transgressed' by producing works in wood, a medium traditionally associated with men, but she continues to plunder the imagery of male traditional carving and Venda mythology to produce works that have a particular meaning for her and for those with some knowledge of Venda history. To outsiders these meanings become shrouded in a kind of undifferentiated African mystique, reliant also on a recourse to notions of a historical but unknown 'tradition' (Nettleton 2000: 34).

Becker (2003 73-74) points to Mabasa's retention of the natural form of the wood, which directs the composition of the sculpture. Mabasa "neither alters the form radically nor changes the colour", there is no additional or unnecessary detail and composition manifests itself in a kind of relief sculpture around the form of the wood.

Becker also suggests that the “developments and explorations” in Mabasa’s carving have influenced her later clay works Becker (2003 73-74).

Mabasa is still one of the few female woodcarvers in South Africa today. Her work can be found in collections such as those of the Department of Arts and Culture, South Africa; Guildford College, USA; Johannesburg Art Gallery; Leshiba Wilderness, Limpopo; Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK; Pretoria Art Museum; SABC, Johannesburg; Sandton Convention Centre; Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town; Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg; University of Fort Hare; University of South Africa; Wits University (Standard Bank Collection); University of the Western Cape and the William Humphrey Art Gallery, Kimberley. She has exhibited across South Africa, including her participation in the first Johannesburg Biennale (1994), and internationally at the Venice Biennale (1993), in Germany and the Netherlands, as well as at multiple exhibitions in the United Kingdom (Becker 2006b).

APPENDIX 3:

MASWANGANYI, JOHANNES: BIOGRAPHY

Johannes Maswanganyi was born in 1949 at Msengi Village, near Giyani.⁹⁸ He currently lives in Noblehoek Village in the Greater Giyani Municipality area, where he continues to produce his art while imparting skills, such as carving, beadwork and making clay pots, to school children (Maswanganyi 2014).

Maswanganyi received no formal institutional art training and began as an apprentice to his father, a traditional wood carver (Becker 2006c; Dell 1989a: 47) who made a range of functional utensils: wooden spoons that were used to cook maize pap;⁹⁹ spoons with chains; wooden plates for pap; wooden plates used by healers; mortars for the pounding of maize; and milk pails. Through this apprenticeship Maswanganyi learnt to carve similar utensils and *nhunguvani* (medicine gourds). These objects were sold to the local communities at Mooketsi and Duiwelskloof, and to tourists in the Tzaneen area (Dell 1989a: 47; Maswanganyi 2014).

Dreams have a powerful effect on the objects and figures Maswanganyi carves: while asleep, he receives images that he must carve, and he feels compelled to fashion the images that come from those visions. He insists that the traditional Tsonga figures he carves are products of dreams through which he has been instructed to showcase his Tsonga culture to others via the wooden sculptures (Maswanganyi 2014).

Sack (1988: 28) reports that Maswanganyi (2014) confirmed that he started carving “healers” and other figurative sculptures when prompted by a dream, and as a result of a commission he received from a *sangoma*¹⁰⁰ in Soweto for a “traditional”

medicine container. Such prompts gave rise to Maswanganyi's innovative figure sculptures called *vanyamisworo* (pl. for *nyamisworo*: Tsonga traditional healers who use their noses and a fly whisk for diagnosis).¹⁰¹

The *nyamisworo* is Maswanganyi's interpretation of the traditional Tsonga *nhunguvani*.¹⁰² The *nyamisworo* figures, which are much larger than the old small gourd with stoppers and carved entirely of wood, do not utilise calabashes to create the bodies of the traditional healers depicted. Maswanganyi's hollows out the body of the *nyamisworo* from a single piece of wood and, like the *nhunguvani*, it is used for the storage of the traditional medicine and so also has a stopper (Burnett 1985; Maswanganyi 2014). The long, removable stopper, shaped like a head, is used by the *sangoma* to apply the medicine. The pokerwork across the torso section of the figure indicates the thick strings of beads that the *nyamisworo* wears. Maswanganyi (2014) noted that although a *nyamisworo* does not use any specific kinds of beads, white beads are most commonly used. He added that when the *nyamisworo* kneels down (a variation of the figure), she is snorting out ailments, whereas the standing figure shows the *nyamisworo* dancing (Maswanganyi 2014). Maswanganyi uses pokerwork to pick out the details on the light wood of his *nyamisworo* figures. This method for providing a dark contrast for detail is a technique that has been employed by African carvers since at least the nineteenth-century (Rankin 1989: 61).

In the exhibition catalogue compiled for *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art* (1988), Steven Sack noted that the *nyamisworo* supplied to the *sangomas* are:

‘completed’ by the *sangoma* through the addition of various ‘charms’, whereas the sculptures sold to the white market are painted with enamel paints [by Maswanganyi] (Sack 1988: 29).

Rayda Becker (2006c) suggests that the *nyamisworo* figures were “important not only for the development of Maswanganyi’s work, but also because they provided a way towards more recognisable figurative imagery”. They became prototypes for Maswanganyi’s carved portraits of local and national leaders. The application of enamel paint to these political portraits obscures the quality of the wood, a quality which, by “modern” standards, Rankin (1989: 61) suggests may seem less acceptable to many collectors. However, this technique was common in Ancient, Mediaeval and Renaissance carving and was used to enrich or heighten the reality of the three-dimensional form. Maswanganyi’s unreserved use of paint in his contemporary figures allows him to pick out details in his carvings through a technique that is similar to the traditional use of clay pigments used to colour initiation figures (Rankin 1989: 72).

In 1985 two of Maswanganyi’s seated *nyamisworo* figures were selected for the *Tributaries* exhibition. Dell suggests that this resulted in a healthy white market for these and the variety of figures that were to follow (1989a: 47). At this point Maswanganyi (2014) realised the artistic value of his work, despite the duality of the figures as “products of the ancestors”. Elizabeth Dell elaborated as follows on this dual condition in the catalogue *Ten Years of Collecting 1979-1989*:

The white buyers undermined his work’s functionality, decontextualized the figures and installed them as decorative objects evoking the (symbolic) magic of Africa. The carved figures sold to *sangomas* are completed and made potent by the purchaser, through the addition of various charms. Those intended for a white market however, demonstrate their comparative innocuousness by Maswanganyi’s application of enamel paints (1989a: 47).

Maswanganyi developed other concepts and subject matter: Christian and historical subjects showed more complex compositions with a number of figures, and the works varied in size depending on the wood available (Becker 2006c). Rankin (1989: 56) suggests that the political figures carved by Johannes Maswanganyi, like his Dr Verwoerd (1987) and the enormous image of P.W. Botha (Date unknown) seem uncomplicated in their enamelled representation, while they offer the possibility for tongue-in-cheek commentary.

With a growing interest from the art market, Maswanganyi supplied the Goodman Gallery with his artworks. The income he generated in this way meant that he was able to provide for his family, sustain his cattle and even buy a car. This gave him the confidence to become his own dealer and middleman. He acquired a truck for transporting his work and this allowed him to sell directly to galleries, shops, collectors and dealers in urban areas (Maswanganyi 2014). Becker (2006c) suggests that Maswanganyi

was responsive to and influenced by what he saw in the cities both as an artist and entrepreneur. Some of the changes in his sculpture can be attributed to works he saw in galleries; importantly this alerted him to the prices paid for art in the cities.

Maswanganyi (2014) receives visitors from as far as Cape Town who are interested in his art and art education at his home in Noblehoek. His work can be found in collections such as the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town; Durban Art Gallery; University of the Witwatersrand; Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Sanlam Art Collection, Bellville, Cape (Becker 2006c). He has exhibited across South Africa and internationally at the Venice Biennale (1993) and multiple exhibitions in Germany (Maswanganyi Curriculum Vitae).

APPENDIX 4:

NELSON MUKHUBA (Video)

Appendix 4 is compiled from video interviews conducted with Avashoni Mainganye, Tshwingala Mukhuba and Mishack Raphalalani. The interviews were recorded 17 and 18 September 2014 during fieldwork in Limpopo and Gauteng Province, South Africa.

APPENDIX 5:

JOHANNES MASWANGANYI (Video)

Appendix 5 is compiled from video interview conducted with Johannes Maswanganyi. The interview was recorded at Maswanganyi's home in Noblehoek Village, 15 September 2014, during fieldwork in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

APPENDIX 6:

THANDI HADEBE (Video)

Appendix 6 is compiled from video interview conducted with Thandi Hadebe and visuals. The interview with Hadebe was recorded in Sibasa, 18 September 2014, during fieldwork in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The visuals were filmed during fieldwork from 15-18 September 2014 and the archive of the *khomba* (master of ceremonies) and *Domba* initiates was sourced from the YouTube video link titled "Venda Domba Master" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6gRfYiZARY>).¹⁰³

GLOSSARY OF PLACES

Bushbuckridge (Bosbokrand) nature reserve and town in Limpopo, on the border of Mpumalanga

Dzata, regarded as the ancestral home of the Venda in the Zoutpansberg

Gauteng, one of South Africa's nine provinces, formerly the southern part of Transvaal

Gazankulu, former apartheid-era "homeland", in present-day Limpopo Province

Giyani, a town in the eastern part of the Limpopo Province

Highveld, the inland plateau – "high land" – of southern Africa, usually associated with the area around Johannesburg and Pretoria. The Highveld comprises most of the high-plateau country of Southern Africa. Except in Lesotho, where it extends well above 2 500 metres and even above 3 400 metres in places, all of it lies between 4 000 and 6 000 feet 1 200 and 1 800 metres above sea level. The South African part of the region is bounded to the east and south by the Great Escarpment, which consists of the Drakensberg and Cape mountain ranges, and by the Lesotho Highlands. Its less clearly defined northern and western boundaries coincide roughly with the 1 219 metre contour.

Johannesburg, capital of Gauteng (formerly Transvaal)

KwaZulu, former apartheid-era "homeland", in present-day KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal, one of South Africa's nine provinces, formerly Natal

Limpopo, Limpopo Province, one of South Africa's nine provinces, formerly northern part of Transvaal

Mashonaland, a region in northern Zimbabwe. It is the home of the Shona people.

Mpumalanga, one of South Africa's nine provinces, formerly the eastern part of Transvaal

Mozambique, a country to the north-east of South Africa, formerly Portuguese East Africa

Pietersburg, see **Polokwane**

Polokwane, formerly Pietersburg, capital of Limpopo Province

Pretoria (Tshwane), administrative capital of South Africa, in Gauteng

Rhodesia, see **Zimbabwe**

Sibasa, suburb in Limpopo, former capital of the Venda homeland

Soutpansberg/Zoutpansberg, mountain range in north-eastern part of Limpopo Province

Soweto, formerly a township to the south-west of Johannesburg, now incorporated into greater Johannesburg

Thohoyandou, capital of the former Venda homeland

Transvaal, former province of South Africa before democracy (1994)

Tshakuma district in Venda, Limpopo

Venda, former apartheid-era “homeland”, in present-day Limpopo Province

Witwatersrand, area around Johannesburg famous for its gold deposits, which were discovered in 1886

Zimbabwe, country to the north of South Africa, formerly Rhodesia

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bata pfeṇe (Venda)

A girl's first menstruation, translated as "to seize a baboon"

Domba sing. ***Madomba*** pl. (Venda)

The third and final stage of Venda female initiation

Khomba sing. ***VhaKhomba*** pl. (Venda)

The master of ceremonies at ***Domba***, the man who presents the wooden figures (***matano***) to the initiates (Also means "virgin")

Khomba (Tsonga)

A female initiate of the ***vukhomba***

U Khotha (Venda)

Bending while greeting

U Losha (Venda)

Greeting with designated poses

Luvhundi (Venda)

Red ochre soil

Mahundoni (Venda)

The event when initiates are given the ***milayo*** of the concluding rites of ***Domba*** and their passing-out uniform

Mambo (Venda)

Signifies chief

Matano (Venda)

The clay and wooden figures used in the first and third Venda female initiations, ***Vhusha*** and ***Domba***. The wooden figures are reserved exclusively for ***Domba***, but clay figures may be used in both.

Makhadzi (Venda)

She is responsible, together with the oldest or most senior male of the lineage, for conducting ceremonies honouring the ancestors.

On a national level the ***Makhadzi*** is the senior sister of the chief. She is the ***Makhadzi*** of the chiefdom and is referred to as ***Makhadzi*** by everyone. She also controls the sacred objects of the tribe (Nettleton 1984: 207, 258) and represents the female aspect of chiefship. The chief may not perform ceremonies involving his ancestors without the presence or consent of the ***Makhadzi***.

Mashikambe (Tsonga)

Salempore cloth

Mifhunga (Venda)

Long string tassels

Milayo (Venda)

Aphorisms (“laws”) are recited by the ***Khomba*** during girls’ initiation schools (***Vhusha*** and ***Domba***) alongside while they are being shown the figures (***matano***). They are riddle-like, demanding a symbolically constructed or allegorical interpretation.

Musanda (Venda)

King’s or chief’s capital. The capital was a stone-walled, terraced town in which the king and members of the royalty resided, with members of the commoner lineages living beyond the walls.

Musidzana (Venda)

The expression used to describe a small girl before her first menstruation

Musidzana vha khomba (Venda)

The expression used to describe a girl after her progression through the ***Vhusha*** initiation school. The term ***khomba*** means “dangerous”. The implication is that sexual intercourse may now result in pregnancy.

Mufumakadzi (Venda)

A married woman

Muhulu (Venda)

The first stage of ***Vhusha***

Muselwa (Venda)

Daughter-in-law

Musevetho (Tsonga)

The first of the Tsonga initiation schools

Mutei wa matavha (Venda)

What a girl is called during her second stage of ***Vhusha***. ***Mutei*** means novice.

Nceka sing. ***Minceka*** pl. (Tsonga)

Traditional beaded cloths/large rectangular pieces of fabric (factory printed and/or decorated). Worn across the shoulder to cover the upper torso and skirt

Nyematei (Venda)

The mistress of ceremonies during initiation

Nhlontswa sing. ***Tinhhlontswa*** pl. (Tsonga)

Carved stopper/s used for medicine containers

Nhunguvani sing. ***Tinhunguvani*** pl. (Tsonga)

A medicine gourd or calabash containing medicine

Nanga (Zulu)

Traditional doctor/diviner

The word **nanga** is also used as the colloquial across ethnic groups.

Nsati (Tsonga)

A married woman

Ngoma sing. **Dzingnoma** pl. (Venda)

Large four-handled drums used in the chief's court. **Ngoma** drums also lend their name to the category of objects known as **Dzingnoma**, which are the secret mysteries of the Venda culture.

Nwedzhi (Venda)

Daughter-in-law

Nyamiswa sing. **Vanyamiswa** pl. (Tsonga)

Traditional healers who do not use divination bones for diagnosis, but rather their noses and a fly whisk

Nyematei (Venda)

Mistress of ceremonies at **Domba**

Phalaphatwa

Describes a girl when her breasts begin to show; her breasts are called **makumba-milora** (lit. pickers up of ashes)

Salempore

Blue cotton "slave" cloth formerly made at Nellore in India

Sangoma

A Zulu term for a traditional healer, it has been adopted as the colloquial term for describing all types of traditional healers in Southern Africa.

Shedo (Venda)

A diminutive pubic covering worn during initiation

Sib (Anthropological term)

A group of people consisting of all those who trace their lineage through their patriline or matriline to common ancestors

Singo (Venda)

Members of the Venda lineages who trace their ancestry back to Dyambeu or Thohoya-Ndou, who are said to have migrated from the north to Venda country. Singo constitute the bulk of Venda royalty (also called VhaSenzi).

Siyhandana (Tsonga)

Exorcist's wig

Switsembe (Tsonga)

Calabash

Thathu (Venda)

Literally means “tear it off”, which refers to the method of manufacture

Thavatsindi (Venda)

Subgroup of the Venda

Thondo (Venda)

The Venda initiation school for men, believed to have died out near the end of the nineteenth century

Thotshi (Venda)

When the ritual “mother” of an initiate cuts the hair that has grown since the beginning of *muhulu*, the first stage of *Vhusha*

Thumula-mutate (Venda)

Bracelets for prepubescent girls as a token that their betrothal has definitely been agreed to

Thungamamu (Venda)

Literally meaning “with budding breasts”

Describes a girl’s breasts when they have grown larger

Titho (Tsonga)

Young girl’s front apron (pubic covering) or beaded apron used during initiation

Tshikanda (Venda)

Second stage of female initiation among the Venda, in which young women are prepared for their entry to the ***Domba***

Tshifunga (Venda)

A beaded girdle

Tshiluvhelo (Venda)

Married woman’s apron

Tshirivha (Venda)

The skirt worn by young women at certain stages of initiation

Also the ***tshirivha*** of a chief’s wife is ***tshirivhela*** (Stayt 1968: 24)

TshiVenda (Venda)

The language of the Venda people, also known as Luvenda or Venda

Tshivhunḁu (Venda)

The “pregnancy” tonsure

Tsonga

A word adopted into South African English vocabulary to describe a member of a southern African people living in the area. The vernacular terms are: **Mutsonga** sing.; **Vatsonga** pl.; **Xitsonga** language

Vukhomba (Tsonga)

The second of the Tsonga initiation schools for girls

Vhakololo (Venda)

Royalty, i.e. members of the Singo lineages

Vhukunda tshotshane (Venda)

A married woman's bracelets

Vhukunda ha mulenzhe (Venda)

A married woman's anklets

Xanga (Tsonga)

A beaded belt made by the paternal aunt and worn by women throughout the processes of maturation. It has ritual connections to a woman's reproductive cycle and contains blood from a girl's first menstruation that is hidden under the beadwork.

Xibelani (Tsonga)

A married woman's skirt. Also ***tinguvu***

Xinghontsana (Tsonga)

A calabash that does not contain medicine

Xipereta (Tsonga)

Pin

Xuvurhu (Tsonga)

A girl who has not been to ***vukhomba***

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¹ Terrence Ranger suggests that there are many complex connections between the “great flowering” of European invented tradition and the “rush” to Africa. The Empire was a central concept to the process of inventing tradition within Europe itself, but deployed in Africa these new traditions took on a peculiar character. They displayed their effects rather than the tradition, as seen in the European and Asian Imperial forms (Ranger 1983: 211).

² Although the European colonialists created invented traditions, they were later used by the apartheid regime to further segregate the people of South Africa.

³ Mary Douglas argues for approaches and strategies of these kinds in *If the Dogon ...*

⁴ Junod’s missionary activities restricted his fieldwork and he had to rely on social interpreters rather than on personal observation for his collection of ethnographic data (Harries 1981: 43). He used male informants whose backgrounds and origins were questionable (Harries 1981: 40). They were Spoon, Tobane, Mankhelu, Mawewe and Mboza (Junod 1962: 3-6). Harries suggests that this gives Junod’s work an “androcentric and rather gerontocratic bias” (Harries 1981: 44). Stayt’s two successive non-Christian male interpreters were Mafunsa Masia Senthumule and Mashinya Mbizaan (1968: xi), which could also mean that he offered a more androcentric view of Venda culture and history.

⁵ The MaKhwinde are of the Singo lineage, i.e. members of the Venda lineages who trace their ancestry back to Dyambeu or Thoho-ya-Ndou. The Singo constitute the bulk of Venda royalty (also called VhaSenzi).

⁶ Limpopo is one of South Africa’s nine provinces, formerly the northern part of Transvaal.

⁷ Stayt refers to the BaNgona, van Warmelo to the VhaNgona

⁸ Also Soutpansberg. The mountain range in north-eastern part of Limpopo Province.

⁹ Makhado, the Lion of the North, stood against the attempts at European occupation in a long and embattled attack (Stayt 1968: 16-19; van Warmelo 1940: 57).

¹⁰ Mphephu was working in Kimberley at the time. He was not alone, but had a number of men of his age-grade as well as some elders with him (van Warmelo 1940: 59).

¹¹ These were Africans who were brought into the neo-traditions of subordination (Ranger 1983: 229).

¹² Bozzoli (1983: 143) maintains that there is no explanation for the fact that the women remained behind while the men left. In some parts of the world, including certain pockets of Boer society, young girls had been the first to leave the rural areas, while in other situations whole families had left.

¹³ At the time, sixty per cent of the African population in South Africa lived as tenants on white farms or in cities (Harries 1989: 98).

¹⁴ Stayt was brought up in the Zoutpansberg; blinded in World War I, he studied anthropology at Cambridge under A.C. Haddon, and received a three-year Frank Smart Studentship from Gonville and Caius College. Additional grants received from the University of Cape Town and the Rivers Memorial Fund enabled Stayt and his wife to work among the Venda in both the then northern Transvaal (Limpopo) and the then Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to produce his doctoral thesis *The BaVenda* (1931) at the University of Cape Town (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 73).

¹⁵ Van Warmelo was born in Pretoria and graduated MA *cum laude* in Classics at the University of Stellenbosch. In 1925 he moved to Hamburg where he was a member of Carl Meinhof's *Seminar für Afrikanische Sprachen* and also studied under the anthropologist Thilenius. He achieved his doctorate (*summa cum laude*) in African Languages in 1927, with a thesis entitled *Die Gliederung der südafrikanischen Bantusprachen* (The Classification of the Bantu Languages of South Africa). In 1928 he briefly served as lecturer in the Seminar before returning to South Africa in 1929 to take up a position as a locum for Professor C.M. Doke in the Department of Bantu Languages at the University of the Witwatersrand (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 110).

¹⁶ Although fairly extensive literature in the form of journals existed at that time, there was little systematic knowledge of the Bantu-speaking peoples as a whole. Certainly no detailed field studies had been done of any group – apart from Junod's *The Life of a South African Tribe* (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 110). Van Warmelo saw his job as defining the ethnographic field and it is obvious that at the time his motives were scientific and pragmatic; his aim was to provide a database (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 112).

¹⁷ Van Warmelo was fluent in *all* the Bantu languages of South Africa (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 116).

¹⁸ Also known as bantustans.

¹⁹ Du Plessis (1945:10) found that Mphephu's followers were mostly residents on white farms (Nettleton 1992: 224).

²⁰ A country to the north-east of South Africa, formerly Portuguese East Africa.

²¹ These boundary lines reflected the Swiss Romande Mission (North Sotho and Thonga, later to be known as the Tsonga) and the Berlin Mission's (for Venda and some North Sotho) agreement to restrict their activities so as not to compete with one another (Harries 1989: 86).

²² The inland plateau – "high land" – of southern Africa, usually associated with the area around Johannesburg and Pretoria. The Highveld comprises most of the high-plateau country of Southern Africa. Except in Lesotho, where it extends well above 2 500 metres and even above 3 400 metres in places, all of it is situated between 1 200 and 1 800 metres above sea level. The South African part of the region is bounded to the east and south by the Great Escarpment, which consists of the Drakensberg and Cape mountain ranges, and by the Lesotho Highlands. Its less clearly defined northern and western boundaries coincide roughly with the 1 219 metre contour.

²³ The area around Johannesburg famous for its gold deposits discovered in 1886

²⁴ A series of ecological disasters and the great rinderpest epidemic of the mid-1890s, which killed livestock throughout southern Africa, weakened the African societies. Because the possession of livestock was widely perceived as the embodiment of wealth, the rinderpest epidemic effectively “bankrupted” many societies. It therefore became necessary to work for money in order to restock the herds or to use money as a substitute for *lobola* (the exchange of cattle for wives through a system of bridewealth) (Vail 1989: 8).

²⁵ A term which, used correctly, should be applied to Gaza Nguni. However, it has become an all-embracing term used to refer to the Tsonga-speaking peoples of southeast Africa and, in a more general way, to all Mozambicans employed on the South African mines (Harries 1989: 86).

²⁶ White miners also drew upon the invented rituals of European craft unionism, partly because they were rituals of exclusiveness, and used term to prevent Africans being defined as workers (Ranger 1983: 211).

²⁷ A nature reserve and town in Limpopo, bordering Mpumalanga

²⁸ Missionaries used a European conceptual framework to classify the two groups; therefore the differences between the Venda and Tsonga were synonymous with those between the Germans and French. As a result, disputes between Tsonga and North Sotho or Venda-speaking chiefdoms were interpreted not as clashes between chiefdoms, but as “race conflicts” (Harries 1989: 90).

²⁹ Dell considers an observation made by Andrew Verster in 1979 at the *State of the Art Conference* at the University of Cape Town:

[the art of the black person] is defeated before it starts. It cannot rise above the level of ‘folk art’ which, in 20th century terms means it is ‘irrelevant as art and of tourist value and anthropological interest only’ (1979: 28).

³⁰ The establishment of Standard Bank Collection of African Art was a joint project undertaken by the Standard Bank and the University of Witwatersrand, the first South African institution to collect African cultural objects. The University approached Standard Bank and in 1979 the Standard Bank Foundation of African Art was formed. This acknowledged the importance and relevance of investment, especially corporate, in African Art and its exhibition. It was indicative of the growing appraisal of African Art, a shift that can be attributed to an influence of postmodernist discourses; increasing interest in marginal cultures; a blurring of boundaries between “high” and “low” art; socio-political awareness of apartheid policies due to growing political unrest; and a new generation of artists and art historians. Today the Standard Bank Collection of African Art comprises of art objects from across the African continent that are of national and international importance (Dell 1989a: 45; Marschall 2001: 51; Nettleton 2009: 137-139).

³¹ The 1976 Soweto Uprising saw between 3 000 and 10 000 students mobilize to peacefully demonstrate and march against the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction and the political status quo. The march was meant to culminate at a rally in Orlando Stadium, but the students were met with a heavy military and police presence, and the firing of teargas and later live ammunition. While the uprising began in Soweto, it quickly spread across the country, continuing until the following year and profoundly changing the socio-political landscape.

³² A state of emergency is usually declared when the welfare of a nation is threatened by war, invasion, general insurrection, disorder and natural disaster. However, the President of South Africa used it as a way to rule by decree, heighten the powers of both the SADF and the SAP, and restrict and censor any reportage of political unrest. The first State of Emergency was declared on 20 July 1985, initially covering the Eastern Cape and the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) area. Thousands were detained. A few months later, the State of Emergency was extended to the Western Cape. On 5 March 1986, P.W. Botha announced that he would lift the State of Emergency, and on 7 March the announcement was made law, however, the lifting of the Emergency was short-lived as on 12 June 1986, four days before the 10th Anniversary of the Soweto Uprising, government declared a country-wide State of Emergency.

Unlike the 1985 State of Emergency, the second declaration was implemented nation-wide and the press was completely restricted from covering political unrest.

³³ On his appointment (1983) as Director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), Christopher Till stated that it was a grave omission that JAG had no southern African traditional art collection and was therefore unrepresentative of the majority of people in the region. But it was only in 1987 that the JAG started to collect southern African traditional art (Leibhammer 2010: 83-84).

³⁴ Tshidzeuli means “chewing the cud” or “remembering nicely”.

³⁵ *Vhutshila* = art; *ri* = we; *vhona* = see; *nga* = with; *eato* = eyes

³⁶ My use of the present tense indicates the continuing practice of the initiation rites in Venda and the new forms in which they prevail.

³⁷ The frequency with which *Domba* is held depends largely on the number of girls ready to participate and as a result of the harvest. If it coincides with the installation of a new chief it is called *domba la tshifularo* (Blacking 1969c: 150) or when the son or daughter of a chief has attained marriageable age and ought to be married and betrothed (van Warmelo 1932: 58). Blacking maintains that an aspect of the school is its function as a labour pool (Blacking 1969c: 150). Stayt observes that while the school generally lasts for about three months, it could continue for as long as eight or nine months, and sometimes even for a whole year (Stayt 1968: 111). According to Blacking (1969c: 149-150), “*madomba* lasted as long as there was work to done” and could continue for two years.

³⁸ Nettleton notes that since the *Domba* was poorly documented during the period between Blacking’s research in the 1950s and her own in the late 1970s, it is difficult to reconstruct the pattern of change (Nettleton 1992: 212). This decrease in attendance at *Domba* may also be important in relation to the collapse of the separate *Domba* that were held for commoners and nobles, which Nettleton describes as having disappeared by the late 70s (1992: 205) and their consolidation into a single ceremony.

³⁹ Blacking (1962: 73) reports that during the first week in May (1958) girls began going to the initiation schools of *Tshikanda* and *Domba*.

⁴⁰ TVEP is an organisation that provides human rights services. It focuses on responding to the challenges women, girls and children face with regard to gender-based violence, domestic violence, rape, child abuse and HIV/AIDS.

⁴¹ KwaZulu was a bantustan in South Africa intended for the Zulu people.

⁴² Also meaning “virgin”, the *khomba* is the man who presents the wooden figures to the initiates at *Domba*.

⁴³ Generally female figures are presented nude or dressed in “traditional” styles of clothing. The figures are either dressed in actual clothing or the clothing is carved as an integral part of the figure (Nettleton 1992: 215).

⁴⁴ The word *dzingoma* (pl.) is usually used to denote the *ngoma* (sing.)-type drums. As sacred objects the *ngoma* drums lend their name to all objects within this class. This wider application denotes a category of sacred objects, which includes objects of ritual association with the ancestors. Within this context the term *dzingoma* may be translated as “mysteries”. *Matano* figures are kept hidden in the house of the chief’s sister, his first wife, or the *Khomba* who is in charge of the proceedings. The figures are brought out for display only on certain days during *Domba* and, unlike the drums, are never used or shown at any other time (Nettleton 1984: 185, 188 & 261).

⁴⁵ Nettleton (1984: 370) suggests that it is important to note that the clay figurines were/are made by the women who were/are responsible for conducting the puberty initiations and who were/are the potters in these societies. In contrast, wood-carving is a male occupation and the wooden figures used in *Domba* are made by Venda men and are displayed by the *Khomba* himself. In most instances the

Khomba made his own figures. While clay figures were/are discarded after use, wooden figures were/are kept for use in future *Domba* schools.

⁴⁶ Nettleton's field research (1970s/80s) indicates that there were very few carvers of *matano* and that only a small number of new sets of *matano* figures were made in the past twenty years (Nettleton 1984: 190).

⁴⁷ Initiation emphasised the instruction girls had already learnt informally from other women during their everyday social life (Hadebe 2014; Reily 1998: 64).

⁴⁸ Nettleton suggests there was entertainment value in the showing of the figures in tableaux (1984: 399).

⁴⁹ Douglas suggests that the "pressure of living distorts the actual pattern from its ideal form" (1967: 670).

⁵⁰ British Anthropological techniques reduced the universe to small-scale abstract models, such as genealogies and tables of village composition, which Douglas (1967) suggests are designed to isolate the dynamic conflict of politics and conscience, as they require a suspension of respect for the symbolic order. Therefore, it was not a priority to find the meanings attached to verbal symbols or their alternative readings (Douglas 1967: 669).

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⁵² Stayt (1931) describes the Venda as having a rigid code of etiquette, in which superiors and elders are treated with respect and reverence, and the chief and his sister with praise and adoration, and everyday formalities between husband and wife that are strictly defined and adhered to.

Stayt's (1931) structuralist analysis of the describes *losha* as a greeting and means to salute or honour, as well as the variations according to the sex and position of the person giving the salute, in accordance to the position of the person receiving the salute. Stayt outlines the differences displayed in the male and female versions of the greeting.

A Venda man will greet an ordinary person in one way and a chief in another, while a Venda woman has an entirely different method of greeting to the Venda man. Venda social etiquette requires a Venda man to always sit when he takes on the body position of *losha*. He must bend his head and shoulders slightly, eyes looking downwards and elbows pressed to the side, forearms extended in front of him, and finger-tips touching, he claps his hand together very gently. In contrast a woman will kneel with her buttocks on her heels, body bending forward, her head bent down and eyes on the ground. She will place her hands together in the same way as the man, but instead of clapping them she lifts the two forefingers up and down. In the presence of the chief a woman kneels down with her forehead on the ground and her hands together under her face. She always shuffles on her hands and knees in the chief's presence or in his hut. This is known as *u luvha*.

Children are taught to *losha* from a young age, but are not expected to strictly follow the rules of etiquette until after they have entered puberty and *Vhusha*, the first of three initiation schools for girls. Stayt asserts that girls must *losha* their older brothers and all married women. Women must always keep their eyes on the ground when talking to a superior, and they should also always kneel when presenting anything to, or receiving anything from a man. Although everyone is expected to *losha* their plate before they eat, and again at the end of the meal, the only person who need not *losha* at a meal is the owner⁵² of the house, but even he will *losha* after eating if he is entertaining an important visitor (Stayt 1931: 157-159).

⁵³ According to Nettleton, the term "traditional" might suggest a static and unchanging and long-established historical convention, essentially denoting a lack of "outside" influence (Nettleton 1991: 32). However, my analysis of the figures will highlight the markers of social change and cultural interpenetration discussed above.

⁵⁴ Contention still exists regarding the implementation of policy in museums such as the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB), where the names of some of the artists (of non-European identities) represented are misspelt or are seemingly treated with less importance than the French explorers, military figures and collectors involved in the collection of the objects, even when the artists' names are easily accessible and "painstakingly" recorded (Price 2013: 449-450).

⁵⁵ A tool similar to an axe with an arched blade at right angles to the handle, used for cutting or shaping large pieces of wood.

⁵⁶ While still very young, a girl child is presented with a skin called *tsindela-mavu* (the skin of a goat). It is a present from her future husband and will be used to make her *tshirivha* (van Warmelo 1932: 39).

⁵⁷ *Halwa ha u fhelekedza hayani*

⁵⁸ *Maṭavha* equals "sand", although van Warmelo also translates it as "midday". Some of Blacking's informants say that *u laṭa maṭavha* means "to throw away the dirt", referring to the completion of the first stage of *Vhusha* in which a novice is humiliated and literally made dirty by covering her in "dirty" red ochre (Blacking 1969a: 7).

⁵⁹ A senior commoner will have a higher status than a junior noble, although her rank is generally lower than that of nobles of her own age. However, in later life, she can improve her position by marrying a noble (Blacking 1969a: 4).

⁶⁰ Stayt recorded the meaning of *Tshikanda* as "little skin", but was unable to discover its significance (Stayt 1968: 112). In 1958 the cost of *Tshikanda* was ten shillings and thirty to forty pots of beer, which was paid during the course of the proceeding *Domba* (Blacking 1969e: 32). The existence of *Tshikanda* ensures that noble women are aware of "the songs, dances and 'wisdom' of *Vhusha*" (Blacking 1969e: 24).

⁶¹ Nettleton remarked that in the period of her field research between 1978 and 1981, she never saw the *thahu* being worn at *Domba*, nor at *Tshikanda*. However, during her personal communication with Johan van Schalkwyk he confirmed that he had photographed *thahu* being worn in 1979 (Nettleton 1998: 173).

⁶² By recognising the dress code of a novice, perfect strangers are able to inculcate knowledge of the *milayo*. Should she not know the answers she is ridiculed, bothered and nagged until she finds out what it is (van Warmelo 1932: 49).

⁶³ See Nettleton 1998 for a detailed analysis of the *thahu*. Stayt gives a detailed description of the manufacture of the *thahu*.

⁶⁴ The *mwemda* is a piece of cloth worn by young girls and is wrapped around the chest or pulled down and tucked around the waist. When worn by older women, it is generally fastened over one shoulder. The cloth measures approximately 1 metre by 2 to 3 metres (Stayt 1968: 24).

⁶⁵ Venda men no longer use formal age-sets, *mirole*, because the *thondo* initiations at which these were established have become obsolete (Blacking 1969e: 22).

⁶⁶ In 2003 Straughan (2003: 17) noted that Mabasa had not cut her hair since 1989 because she strongly believes that should she cut her dreadlocks, she would cut off her creativity.

⁶⁷ Shown in Plates 8D, 9B, 9C and 9D in Part 2 of Blacking's *Songs, Dances, Mimes and Symbolism of Venda Girls' initiation schools*

⁶⁸ Blacking suggests that the name of the event *Mahundo* refers to the tying of the skirt and of the bangles, which are both worn over the head and attached to the tassels of the skirt, since *mapfundo* is similar to *mahundo*, which means knots. However, he also suggests that *mahundo* it could be derived from – *hunda* meaning close up, draw together (Blacking 1969b: 99).

⁶⁹ *Tshirivha* can also be given out at *Tshikanda* and is referred to as *tshirivha*, *nguvho* and *tshikanda*.

⁷⁰ Although the landscape of traditional practice has changed, the rites of passage still draw individuals to connect with their tradition (Knight 2007: 72), even despite the decline in the attendance at *musevetho* as a result of Westernised lifestyles, a shift in ideologies, migrant labour and religions (Maswanganyi 2014). A Tsonga girl first attends *musevetho*, the first of the Tsonga initiation schools, and it is here that she gives herself a new name for future use. Once a girl reaches puberty, she is taken to the second school, *vukhomba* (Maswanganyi 2014). The initiation rites are thought to protect Tsonga women against barrenness caused by witchcraft and throughout the secret river rites, known as *khomba*, various mimes and dances are performed. Fast drumming accompanies special songs related to parts of the rites and both the songs and the drumming are mime-specific. The purpose of the performances is to attain a strong cultural imperative of fertility among the young women as great importance is placed on procreation (Johnston 1974).

⁷¹ *Xanga* refers to the hollow pin and not the entire string of beads. It contains some blood that indicates that the young woman has been to the *vukhomba*. The *xanga* is bequeathed to the woman's first child (Maswanganyi 2014). See Dederen (Chapter 5) in "*Dungamanzi: stirring waters*".

⁷² This bulk from the skirt is still visible once a married woman (*nsati*) starts wearing other cloths tied over her shoulders and covering her upper body as well as her hips (Nettleton 2007: 89).

⁷³ Junod maintains that beads are merely ornament and have no ritual value, however, the exhibition "*Dungamanzi: stirring waters*" looks at the intricacies of the patterns found in Tsonga beadwork.

⁷⁴ Nettleton (1984) also notes Dicke's (1926) report that the Magwamba Tsonga were scornfully called *Matsheka* by other groups in the area. The word *Matsheka* is the plural of *Mtsheke*, meaning a length of cloth. It refers to a Tsonga woman's skirt, but was used to suggest "rags" (1984: 226).

⁷⁵ This is not always the situation in other parts of the world, including certain pockets of Boer society where young girls were the first to leave the rural areas (Bozzoli 1983: 143).

⁷⁶ The original source of this video is unknown.

⁷⁷ The "films" in The John Blacking archival collection are fieldwork footage that has not been edited or screened by community members (Emberly 2015).

⁷⁸ The film *Domba* "provide[s] a vivid impression of girls' initiation rites as practised in the 1950s, which augments and informs Blacking's other Venda texts". *Domba* was filmed and edited by John Blacking, who was also responsible for the voice-over commentary. However, it would be necessary to look beyond Blacking's construction of the form and explore outside the existing available framework. Available at The Society for Ethnomusicology Online Store (<https://ethnomusicology.site-ym.com/store/ViewProduct.aspx?ID=1237959>)

⁷⁹ At the time Tshakuma was part of former Transvaal, but was later incorporated into the "independent" Venda homeland.

⁸⁰ Large four-handled drums were used in the chief's court, but smaller versions were also used.

⁸¹ Wooden figures used in *Domba*, the third and final stage of the Venda women's initiation.

⁸² The *Domba* initiates, to whom these figures are shown, are not supposed to acknowledge that the figures are manmade (Nettleton 1992).

⁸³ This was expected in the figures carved for and used in the *Domba* (Nettleton 1988: 304).

⁸⁴ Mukhuba was not acknowledged, instead the photographer was credited.

⁸⁵ His visitor's book has entries made by visitors from all around the world (Younge 1988: 48).

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- ⁸⁶ A traditional Venda musical instrument, in this instance made from a kudu horn
- ⁸⁷ Mukhuba was the guest of honour at the exhibition held in Johannesburg.
- ⁸⁸ Xigalo is a predominantly Tsonga area. The name is pronounced Shigalo and is spelled alternatively as Tshigalo. The X in Tsonga is pronounced “sh”, influenced by the Portuguese pronunciation.
- ⁸⁹ The Ramukhumba district was a part of the former Transvaal before it was incorporated into the Gazankulu homeland.
- ⁹⁰ Tsonga and Shangaan are sometimes used interchangeably, although these names and groupings have different histories.
- ⁹¹ Tshidzeuli means “chewing the cud” or “remembering nicely”.
- ⁹² The clay and wood figures used in the first and third Venda female initiations, *Vhusha* and *Domba*, respectively. The wooden figures are reserved exclusively for *Domba*, but clay figures may be used in both.
- ⁹³ The first stage of Venda female initiation
- ⁹⁴ The third and final stage of Venda female initiation
- ⁹⁵ The exhibition, sponsored by BMW South Africa, travelled to Germany after closing in Johannesburg.
- ⁹⁶ Mabasa had seen the devastation of the 1987 Natal (now known as KwaZulu-Natal) floods on television.
- ⁹⁷ The Singo travelled from the north (possibly Rhodesia) with the sacred drum, *Nongoma Lungundu* (of the same name) to Venda, where they settled. The sacred drum was so large that it had to be carried by a number of people; it was not allowed to touch the ground (van Warmelo 1940).
- ⁹⁸ At that time Msengi Village was part of the former Transvaal, now Limpopo. Giyani was the capital of the Gazakulu homeland.
- ⁹⁹ Pap, also known as mieliepap, is a traditional porridge and staple food made from ground maize.
- ¹⁰⁰ Although this is a Zulu term for a traditional healer, it has become the colloquial for describing all types of traditional healers in Southern Africa.
- ¹⁰¹ When someone is ill, the healer will use the fly whisk as a diagnostic tool to catch the ailments. While using the whisk, the healer snorts in the ailments caught by the whisk and the patient is cured immediately. There is also another type of traditional healer who uses divination bones to explain the client’s ailments/problems (Maswanganyi 2014).
- ¹⁰² The *nhunguvani* is made from a calabash (*switsembe*), which is called *xinghontsana* when it does not contain medicine, and *nhunguvani* when it does. Ordinary people also use calabashes, but they very seldom have carved stoppers (*nhlontswa*) to seal them. The *nhlontswa* are often made by the diviners or commissioned artists (Sikhauli, Niehaus, & Makhubele 2007: 179).
- ¹⁰³ The original source of this video is unknown.