

WITCHCRAFT IN VENDA:
HEALING, VIOLENCE AND THE SYMBOLISM OF EVIL

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that witchcraft in Venda must be understood in relation to both traditional healing and traditional ways of symbolising evil. While outlining the basic Venda vocabulary of witchcraft, the thesis places that discourse about witches in the context of beliefs and practices relating to healing. As explored in detail in Chapter Three, knowledge about medicines provides a crucial background to the basic concept of witchcraft. Within the community, the healer or nanga is seen as the central figure. Without the protection provided by a nanga, witches are believed to be able to operate freely in causing harm to persons and property. By virtue of his knowledge in healing, however, a nanga can be regarded as a witch. This irony introduces a certain ambiguity into the roles performed by traditional healers, sometimes blurring the line that divides good and evil applications of powerful medicines. The context of traditional healing, however, with its traditional medicines, roles, and techniques, provides the basic environment for identifying the harmful effects of witchcraft that are examined in detail in Chapter Four. Proceeding from healing to the symbolism of evil, the concluding chapter of the thesis, Chapter Five, examines the violence of witchcraft not only as a traditional way of identifying anti-social conduct but also as a modern symptom of economic competition and political rivalry.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I try to show that methods of healing have influenced witchcraft accusations and practices which in turn have both reflected and intensified social conflicts. Most of the Venda people who grew up in the old Venda Districts of Vuwani, Dzanani I and II, Mutale and Sibasa have common knowledge of healing and different medicines. This knowledge is also extended in the healing methods which were transferred orally from one person to another. The transference of knowledge may differ but the knowledge gained is generally the same. There are diseases which are regarded as harmless and people can cure themselves without seeking help from the healer because of their basic knowledge of medicines.

Healing practices in Venda are usually associated with the involvement of the ancestors. Healers believe that they receive healing power from them. Without their involvement, healing does not become active. They also believe that the ancestors visit them in dreams and in visions and it is during this time where they are shown or taught how to heal and the place where they can get medicines. Healing involves the body and the soul. When one is complaining about misfortune, such as failure to get a child within a family, a person's soul becomes unsettled. This misfortune must be addressed to the ancestors and the only person who can perform such rituals is either a diviner or a healer. In most cases, the diviner will attribute such a misfortune to a witch, who is often a close relative. Once the cause of this misfortune is known, healing can begin.

As part of the healing process, the victim can ask a healer how such a witch can be punished destroyed completely.

There are different types of diviners with different tasks assigned to them by the ancestors. There is a nanga (doctor), who is regarded as the chief of all the healers. He or she can relate the purpose of the medicine with confidence. One of the nanga's functions is to protect the homestead against vhaloi (witches). Although the nanga evokes ancestors, he or she basically operates as a doctor who specialises in certain medicines and techniques for healing. There are specialists in u lumula—to suck out of a patient's body things such as snakes, needles, polecats, money, or crystals. All these objects are believed to be the work of the witches in order to harm the body. A country is regarded as a homestead which should be protected against invading enemies and there is a specialist nanga for u dzivhela, to doctor the land. The same specialist might treat the seeds before each summer season starts to ensure good harvest. It is here that human body parts are allegedly mixed with the seeds from each ward and with other powerful plants. That is regarded as healing in itself, but it shows that healing and medicines can be part of practices associated with witchcraft.

In addition to the nanga, the mungome (diviner) has the special responsibility for revealing secrets and naming witches. Many people consult a mungome when they experience misfortune. Witch hunting and witch burning can be authorised by a mungome. He is believed to be very helpful in time of accusations. When there is a conflict, people consult diviner. Any person suspected would also prefer to visit consult a diviner for clarification, because accusation defiles a person's character. Working with healers, the mungome often refer people to a nanga with strong

medicines. Again, knowledge of medicines and healing techniques are involved in witch beliefs.

Healers claim to have dangerous medicines to protect or to destroy any property or a person. This can be in the form of tshipfula (poisoning magically by taking soil upon which victim's foot had touched) or u doba (bewitching). The same applied to the medicines to protect the family members and the homestead against a lightning strikes (ndadzi). Every member of the family must be immunised (u thavhela) and put strong medicines into the incisions. Thereafter, medicines are placed in the roof of a hut and also in the corners of the homestead. This is done to prevent any misfortune or prevent evil influences from entering into the homestead or the hut. It is also believed that witches have powerful medicines to counter against this practice. They obtain all their medicines from the healers. This suggests therefore that a healer plays a double role within a community, to heal or to destroy.

Many researchers have done valuable work on witchcraft. The main aim of most research has been to address the problem of witchcraft accusations. When doing this they have tried to cover all the problem areas which were regarded as the cause of witchcraft accusation. It is important to consider their work before anything else and to use their findings as the foundation for further research. Their work can be divided into four major categories—social tension, social consensus, scapegoating, and sinister healing. A brief discussion on each of these categories will in this chapter serve to highlight the importance of further research on witchcraft accusations.

1. Social Tensions

The introduction of a new system or policy usually brings chaos and tensions. People usually feel uncertainty and frustration when facing such challenges. The best example given by Isak Niehaus is the resettlement in a new place different from the previous one. The condition of the place will determine the living standard of the group concerned. It is sometimes evident that a group of people who were forcibly removed from a fertile ground ended up getting a barren one where food and other resources became very scarce. These people will live with deep-seated problems, especially when there would be no means of reversing the situation.

The first priority of any group would be enough living space that which would cater for both people and cattle, goats and other domestic animals. The living space in any resettlement is usually small. Each stand can be fifteen metres by thirty metres and the number of people who are suppose to occupy that stand usually become many in such a way that houses become even too small to suit the space. The result of all this would be an over-crowded home. Most of the people may have no job, with the result that other means of living would be provided, such as brewing beer or selling drugs. The main objective would be to get food and other commodities. Those who possess more resources than others usually fall suspect. Domestic animals are the main concern. Cattle, goats, sheep and other animals are usually looked after in and around the stands where there is good grazing. Those who do not have animals usually resent and regard

this as a challenge because at times the cattle would pick up other plants within one's yard. Tensions may result in a hot debate. For example, those who do not have cattle might use the cow dung of the very same cattle they are chasing away to polish their courtyards and even to get manure for their garden plants. The struggle here is about the reciprocal process that those who do not have should share with others. But because of the scarce resources chaos is prevalent. Animals such as dogs and cats also cause problems among neighbours. They are at times suspected as the familiars used by witches to send misfortune. This is because neighbours usually do not trust each other for the very reason that they do not know each other well. Should a dog get into one's stand, it can be stoned to death or chased away for it might have stolen things or bring some other misfortune.

The problem of social tensions as Niehaus has pointed out is highlighted by the phrase, a "witch has no horn," which leaves everyone within the local community as a potential suspect. As I have indicated, neighbours envy each other as a result of social tensions and social conflicts. Any misfortune within the family is caused by a witch. By day, witches were ordinary people who are friendly, sociable, kind, and hospitable, but at night, when everyone else slept, witches committed malicious deeds (Niehaus, 1997: 254). This is how a witch is perceived within a community. In addition, within some communities, day witches were regarded as also fearful because they were believed to use poison in a tactful way, employing techniques such as u shelela (to put poison into a drink), u doba (to pick up one's urine), and u pfula (to prick by means of taking the soil where one has set a foot).

In his research, Niehaus has pointed out that witches cannot be seen, but they can see their victims. They have medicines which can change their shapes into that of an animal, a cat or a dog. In other areas there are witches who can take a shape of a baboon in order to get food. Of all the animal forms assumed by witches, the tokoloshi is the most fearful. It can be used to cause a miscarriage in pregnant women or to have sexual intercourse with any woman of its choice on behalf of its masters.

Lightning is one of the common witchcraft practices used by the witches. Lightning is never regarded as a natural phenomena but an act of evil persons. There are various ways through which the witches can send lightning to strike their victims. People believe that witches can fly from one place to another or they can send spells (u posela) that attract lightning when it rains. It is very fearful amongst the villages, especially for people living in the areas around Dzanani II (Sinthumule Area). It is quite common that during rainy seasons healers (dzinanga) are invited by the villagers to immunise (u thavhela) them as an insurance against lightning.

Witches who can be identified within the community have little chance to defend themselves. There are various methods of killing them, such as necklacing, stoning to death, or dousing with petrol. Those who are fortunate enough can be driven out of the local community. For example the establishment of Mpheni location near Elim Hospital (Vuwani District) and Tshitungulwana was the result of witchcraft accusations. Witches were forced to stay there. The members of the community get satisfaction when a witch is identified and dealt with. As Niehaus has shown, when there is a decline in productivity and a visible lack of resources, social tensions and conflicts are prevalent. There are more personal grudges than communal feeling. At

the same time, however, knowledge about medicines and the role of healers is important in the process. The accusers usually consult healers who will help them to identify their victims. In addition to social tensions, therefore, witchcraft accusations depend upon specialised knowledge and techniques for both healing and harming.

2. Social Consensus

Social life is usually characterised by fortune or misfortune. When people are prospering and there are less quarrels peace dominates; but when there are misfortunes, other people become victims of situation and that brings instability with the community. In other areas, chaos which is influenced by misfortune and mistrust amongst the local community is prevalent. Members of the community accused each other as witches and as a result killings do occur. Such killings may be sanctioned by the chief's council or the comrades. The main aim of such killings is to keep the community safe from witchcraft, thereby healing itself from fear of death.

In his research on witch accusations, Basil Sansom has discovered that it is important for the local community to have a common understanding on certain issues that affects human life. According to Sansom, the local community is responsible for its decisions and actions. Its decisions will determine the people's worldview. For example, if members of a community believe in witchcraft practice, they will live by it and continue managing their daily lives based on witchcraft beliefs. Sansom's study examined a community which has set its own values and norms in order to regulate daily life. According to Sansom, the Megwang community does not name other people as

witches because as they have laid down their principles. The Megwang members also experience misfortunes, but it is difficult for community members to accuse one another, because if the accuser failed to convince the community and the council with concrete evidence, he or she will in turn be accused.

Together with their chief, the Megwang community members have realised that witchcraft practice is a complex issue which cannot easily be proved with evidence. Nevertheless, if the accuser has a witness, an accusation can be brought forward. However, the accuser must be able to mobilise sufficient public support. If the accuser failed to get the support after he or she has indicated someone as a witch, that will turn to be an individual case which creates enmity between the individuals. When the matter has reached up to this standard, the accuser is the one to be rejected by the community. Through this standard, the community members of Megwang do not accuse each other for witchcraft practices because no one would like to be accused.

The Megwang became more successful in this matter because they also involved their chief as the sole judge if there are witchcraft cases. The chief does not work alone but with his council. If the chief and his council are more determined to curb the witchcraft accusation, the rest can just abide by the rule. It is only when the chief has no power over his people that people would gain power and create confusion. This was also evident in Chidester research work where he indicated that "with the destruction of these independent polities, the ritual killing of alleged witches became the only means of excluding evil agents from society, giving rise to an increase in witch eradication activity requiring the execution of witches in African societies under colonial domination" (Chidester, 1992: 16).

Diviners, healers, and prophets are generally regarded as the most important people within African communities. They have different duties to perform. Diviners are visited when one is intending to know the cause of misfortune, whereas healers have got medicines to cure or to destroy. The prophets tell the people about their future, but they might also give a client medicines in the form of “water”. The diviners and healers are the preferred specialists to consult because they discover and address the cause of misfortune. Amongst the Megwang chiefdom, the diviners and healers are also available and they are regarded as the most important people. The community members do visit the healers, but what is important is the secrecy between the healer and the client. Secrecy of consultation is routine and there is a general suspicion that doctors seduce female patients, accepting sexual favours as payment (Sansom 1972: 209). Many diviners have more than four wives and it can be through this seduction that they eventually become wives. The diviner gave his / her client the necessary information and gained confidence. The necessary information and gained confidence in his/her practices is important. The clients are expected to pay a certain amount of money. What is important, however, is that the diviners do not mention the witch in their divination. It is common to lay blame for misfortune on ancestral spirits or on the client for having neglected to observe family rules. The reason for not naming a witch is in accordance with the local rule and lack of information to convince the community. Any other information other than that will be regarded as gossip. Visiting diviners and healers is made public and paying them can be regarded at the source of income because they get paid for the job they have done.

Sansom's research indicates that witchcraft can only exist in the mind of the people if members of the community want it to exist. In places where it exists many people are killing each other without any evidence being brought forward. Victims are killed just because they are not wanted but not that they have committed an offence. Any person who can mobilize the support of the people when accusing someone emerges as a victor. In places where witchcraft is regarded as nul and void it is difficult for any person to accuse another person because strong evidences will be needed to build up a case. In most cases people do not want to come in public when accusing and therefore would fail to put a strong case as it is the case with the Megwang people.

3. Scapegoating

The problem of scapegoating can be traced as far back as biblical times. Cain and Abel were loving brothers who stayed together peacefully until the third party comes in. The third party in this sense is the sacrifice which divided them. Misfortune, failures and misunderstanding are viewed differently. There are those who accept failures as an edge towards perfection. They usually do not blame others of their failures. Sometimes people fail because of ill-informed or totally lack of information, but the blame will be put on the other.

Many people regarded a failure as rather something which defiled and change the character of a person, the one who would not be accepted by his own group or people. For example the story of Cain and Abel shows us how angry was Cain after his sacrificial offerings had failed. He was bitter and unfriendly against his beloved brother

and anger forced him to kill his brother. Unsuccessful people are often unfriendly and even cruel. They are always arrogant, unfriendly, liars, brutal and even rude. Girard has indicated that the scapegoat is only effective when human relations have broken down in crisis (Girard, 1986: 43). The relations may be between an individual and the community or between an individual and the ancestral spirits. The broken fabric of human relations can only be repaired when the victim is found and dealt with.

The victim can be either an animal or a person. There are some instances where animals are sacrificed for the sake of healing. Before an animal is sought the healer (nanga) must be consulted and gave out the cause of misfortune and how it can be taken away. The victim is described fully and must be sacrificed in the manner prescribed by the healer or diviner. For example, if one is experiencing misfortune caused by the ancestral spirits, a black goat must be killed by pressing it deep into a drum full of water until it suffocates. The aim is to evoke the spirits. There are diseases which can be cured by leaving an animal on the way aiming that any one who would touch it would automatically inherit the sickness. The animal would first be smeared with medicines. Where an animal needs to be slaughtered, a special person within the family is responsible and it must be killed in a cruel manner because the cry of the animal is important in communicating with the ancestor (Chidester, 1992: 9). If one would imagine the manner in which it is treated before sacrificed, indeed one would conclude that scapegoating mechanism is that sufferings bring peace, fortune, and even prosperity.

Not only are the animals sacrificed as victims but also humans beings. Long ago blacks had also military army to defend their own country and its own people. Each

country needed a strong defence, and for that reason human flesh and bones were important to make the defensive attack. Medicines for this purpose would be prescribed by a healer. It is believed that a good sacrificial human person would be a male. They would kill him and take bones. After mixing flesh with other medicines, the bones would be buried all along the boundaries. Young men would then be forced to drink his blood in order to become brave and fearless. This process is called udzivhela zwirova (to make the country strong by using human bones. This type of sacrifice disregarded the importance of human life. The victim in this regard is a scapegoat for defending the country against enemies. As Girard has indicated, the victims are chosen not for the crimes they are accused of, but for the victims' signs that they bear for everything that suggests their guilt relationship with the crisis (Girard, 1982: 29).

When the competition for higher positions or for running business becomes tougher, human sacrifices become prevalent. People do not believe in hard work or higher academic qualifications in order to be promoted, but rather in visiting a healer for medicines. The healers believe the human potions are the best medicines for both business and advancement to higher positions. It usually happens that when there are new buildings for business there are reports of people being found dead with some of the parts missing. For business purposes it is believed that lips, eyes, genitals, hands, and flesh on the buttocks are important. The parts must be removed when the victim is alive. The cry of a scapegoat is very important (Stadler, 1948: 146-149). This practice of ritual killing is still reputed to be rife in some parts of the old Venda.

Once human relations have broken down, suspicion replaces trust. There are many factors which influence mistrust. For example, when a new resettlement has been established and members of the community do not know each other well, suspicion and mistrust set in and people compare themselves with each other. Usually those who are working become the targets. People would start asking questions of how such person has gotten such assets. No one should be seen enjoying higher status than any other person. They must be of the same status. Those who may have more than others must be accused as being witches. The accusation must get local support.

The victims may not be even aware of their actions. Those who are against them usually mobilize the support and finalise the plans before he or she is attacked. The success of each accusation depends on the support it gains. It may happen that people oppose each other before the execution of the plan because people in groups are subject to sudden variations in their relationships, for better or worse (Girard, 1986: 44). The mechanism of scapegoating is that a victim is never given a chance to defend himself because the victim is condemned in advance and his trial has already taken place but at least there is a trial no matter how prejudiced. The victim is not killed because he or she is guilty but because he or she is sacred for the ritual. In ritualized scapegoating, a sense of normality might be restored when the punishment has been carried out.

4. Sinister Healing

The research by Harriet Ngubane presents a good comparison between western doctors and the indigenous healers. According to Ngubane, both doctors regard human life as important and for that reason each had acquired knowledge and skills to deal with diseases. While the Western doctors acquired knowledge of healing from a particular institution in an academic and professional way, the indigenous healers on the other hand got the knowledge and skills from the ancestors who visit them in different ways such as in dreams and visions.

The visit by the ancestors is important because knowledge of different medicines and types of diseases that the healer can treat are revealed. Ngubane's research indicated that all the indigenous healers have common knowledge which had been gained through discussion amongst themselves and accordingly have transferred that knowledge from one generation to the next. Different diseases were treated using such medicines which were obtained in the veld. The Western doctors as a matter of comparison dealt first with the causes of the disease and then continue with healing process. The indigenous healers on the other hand involve their ancestors as they believed they got healing powers from them. The indigenous healers depended on their bones to reveal the sickness and a discussion thereafter to make certain findings. This process of divination also needed full co-operation of the client and in most cases sick people usually visited their healers in order to find who had caused the sickness and not what caused the sickness. That usually leads to social conflicts and revenge by sending back the spells. In this way, healing becomes harmful rather than helpful.

Knowledge is subject to being shared, especially in the healing profession, but Ngubane indicated that unlike the Western doctors the indigenous healers, with all their powerful knowledge, do not share and that leads to malpractice. No healer can be able to treat all the diseases but that is the case with the indigenous healers and even today there are healers who pretend to treat all the diseases. They do not have books to refer but in most cases guess work takes place and there is no clear distinction between those who specialise and generalise. Ngubane suggested that it would have been better for them to form a union through which they can share problems which they encounter as individuals. The union may also help to organise itself with workshops, but this is not generally happening. Usually healers criticise each other instead of co-operating in a common organisation.

I would just like to add that in some areas where there are unions of healers still opposed to one another and differing in many aspects. I once had an opportunity to attend one of their conferences. Each group leader blames the other and unless this can be solved, problems of accusing others will bring more confusion amongst themselves and spoil their job. Ngubane's suggestion was to see the comradeship within the healing profession that would limit the temptation of relying on the ancestors and individual skills which at times are deceiving because others were ill trained. With all their skills and techniques Ngubane said that in the eyes of their clients they consider themselves as professionals with best skills and that is how they expected to be treated by their clients (Ngubane, 1986: 190).

As professionals, healers would always wanted to perform to the best expectation of the client and in many cases human-beings are killed in order to restore health in others. The clients have influence on this practice as Ngubane had recorded. When there are positions at work, people do not think of hardworking or their academic achievements to gain promotion, but they turn instead to powerful medicines from their healers. In most cases, human body parts provide the best medicines and that is how human beings are sacrificed for others to be prosperous. The Western doctors on the other hand would discourage such practice. But the indigenous healers in the first place are self-employed and usually, they would like to impress their clients by giving them what they think would be the best, although it is regarded as inhuman and harmful. Victims are chosen because they are regarded as sacred. As Minaar and his colleagues have indicated, among certain Venda people any form of success, be it political, establishing a successful business, or even scholastic achievements, can be attributed to the supernatural and not to the individuals own effort (Minaar et al 1992: 21). People develop an antihuman culture where people are sacrificed for the sake of poor management in business and other achievements. What Ngubane suggested is that people should be encouraged to work hard for higher positions and to resist the temptation of thinking that medicines are their only chance to get promotion or to become successful. In Ngubane's account of the "sinister healer," therefore, social conflict and competition are recognized as forces in witchcraft beliefs, but she also stresses the important role of expert knowledge and use of medicines in the economy of healing and harm.

CHAPTER TWO:

WITCH DETECTION AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

Human beings are creative beings. In order to communicate they have created language. Language is used to explain and interpret what the eyes see or what the ears believe. The same language can be used to express dissatisfaction or satisfaction. When using a language, the significance of a word or statement is its meaning. The meaning can best be understood by the people for whom the language is a mother tongue. The meaning and interpretation become clear. In Venda, one word may mean many things. For example, when one says that a person is a muloi (a witch) it can mean that the person excels in work or that the person is always quiet, never engaging in arguments with others. The same applies to the word vhaloi (witchcraft). It has several meanings, such as killing any animal in a cruel way or wishing other people bad luck. A vhuloi expression, such as, "I wish they would die in a accident", is unacceptable in Venda. It can cause violence.

Everyday such words are being used consciously and unconsciously. What is important is Needham's warning that "a word does not entail the existence of a thing that corresponds to it" (Sodipo, 1986: 54). This is similar to a set of beliefs. It may happen that on many occasions people believe what they do not know. Each group has its own beliefs and norms which set life in motion. Africans nearly have the same beliefs and norms with respect to witchcraft. The idea of witchcraft in African context is chronic to such an extent that each

generation that has gone past and the one that still has to come carries its stigma unconsciously. It is rare to find people discussing witchcraft in public because it is fearful.

1. Witch Detection

African societies do not draw an academic distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil, magic, evil eye, and other ways of employing mystical power to do harm to someone or his belongings. The idea of what witchcraft is so vague that in simple terms it can be regarded as all anti-social acts against any creature particularly a human being. This inclusive perception of witchcraft by Africans can be summarily taken as indicative of some unsettled social condition. According to Thomas (1973: 531) the essence of malevolent witchcraft was the ability to inflict damage by occult means. Here the agent is a muloi (witch). This muloi uses other agents such as hyenas, polecats, owls, tokoloshi and baboons to bewitch people. The derivation of the word “witch” is not known in the African context, but one could suggest that it derived from the noun witchcraft since the word to bewitch is a verb. Other words can be added to this word to change the form and meaning. For example:

witch	witch-hunt
witch	witch-like
witch	to bewitch
witch	the witching-hour

This word is associated with the violent actions of a person or a negative attitude towards other human beings. According to the Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957, identification of a witch is by law illegal and a punishable offence (Ralushai, 1995: 52-53). But witchcraft accusation is prevalent in the Northern Province. Traditionally, a muloi (witch) must be exposed to the public to heal the community. This is done by a mungome (a diviner) who uses his divining set. Despite the role of a mungome to identify a witch the community itself has its way of pointing a finger at a witch. By the general standards of the community, any person's actions or facial expression or appearance may by misfortune let him be labelled as a witch. Terms such as ugly, envious, stingy, cruel, hardworking, and anti-social are in many instances used to describe a witch (Chidester 1992: 13 -17).

UGLY: All persons in Venda society who are regarded as ugly, being pitch black in colour, will fall suspect. Such a person is seen as a threat and cannot live with her/his own people. Any ugly person is a witch and people fear such a person. Eyes, toes, one's attitude, and teeth are things to be looked at when passing a judgement or accusation. Any of these which is out of proportion is the result of being a witch or witchcraft. Hence the Venda saying: "U itiswa nga vhuloi hawe (it is because of his/her witchcraft)". At times it can be referred to one's ancestors who are inflicting him/her for the negligence of not remembering them.

ENVIIOUS: The word envy is associated with the attitude of mind towards one's property. Some people do not wish well for others. They become happy when someone suffers a misfortune. Usually envy exists in the polygamous family where there has been friction; in business and also in government posts. Magic means and medicines are usually applied to cause misfortunes to someone else. Any envious person is a witch.

STINGY: In Venda they say "Muthu ndi muthu mga munwe (a person is a person because of the other person). It is therefore imperative that in a communal life one is expected to share with others. People should share what they have lest they be considered witches.

CRUEL: Africans associated cruelty with witchcraft. Any person who fails to show emotions when ill-treated brings a shock to the people. Only a muloi can resist pain. His/her cruelty is likely to be compared with that of a snake.

HARDWORKING: Any person who works hard in such a way that he exceeds the expectation of the people is likely to be suspected of being a witch. Endurance is associated with

magical practice. Any hardworking person is likely to be called a zombie.

SPEAKING ALONE: In general, therefore, a witch is regarded as an anti-social person. The anti-social character of the witch can be revealed when a person speak alone. Normally, no person is expected to talk alone. Any person who speaks alone is associated with a wolf, an agent of witches. By way of contrast, in Venda any person who speaks alone because he/she is unwell is likely to be excused because that person has been bewitched.

RITUAL KILLERS: In Venda ritual killers—maviavhathu—are hated people. They are regarded as witches because of their acts. Children are taught to run away whenever they see a ritual killer. Usually the ritual killers are men; women are suspected of enticing the victims.

Witches are associated with animals such as owls, polecats, wolves, cats, and hyenas, baboons, and tokoloshi. By contrast, other animals are regarded with high esteem. For example, baboons are regarded as the ancestors by the Lwamondo people. Whatever undertaking they intend to do they must first consult them. Witch familiars are used to send spells to their victims. The most fearful agent is tolokoshi. The criteria used to identify a witch leaves every individual within a community exposed to threats of being a witch or an agent

of witchcraft. A witch is a fearful person within a community and no one can challenge him or her.

The Vhavenda have maintained that there are night-witches and day-witches. Of the two types of witchcraft, night witchcraft is the more fearful one. Usually night witches walk in darkness and darkness is associated with death. Night witches use agents such as owls, hyenas, cats, polecats, wolves, snakes and tokoloshi. These animals are believed to have skills to communicate with their masters. The day witches are usually women. This type of witchcraft needs people who are skilful and humble and very quick to act since most of the medicines are put into drinks such as beer. There is a belief that women excel in this type of witchcraft because they are always welcome by the community. No one can suspect them. Agents used for day-witchcrafting are those such as snakes, cats, polecats, monkeys and baboons. Whether practised by men or women, in the light of day or the dark of night, witchcraft is understood to cause harm by secret means. As developed in Chapter 4, witchcraft practices are directed towards producing four basic types of harm:

1. To cause physical illness	<u>U shelela</u> (to poison) <u>Tshiliso</u> (to cause to eat) <u>U doba</u> (to use urine or other discharge) <u>Tshipfula</u> (to make sick at a distance) <u>U shululwa</u> (to make impotent)
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	<p><u>U sikela</u> (to bewitch a thief)</p> <p><u>U kupulela</u> (to transfer disease)</p> <p><u>U wela devhuni</u> (to have intercourse with a woman who has had an abortion)</p>
2. To cause misfortune	<p><u>U tsimbela</u> (to bewitch others to fail)</p> <p><u>U swoga mavheie</u> (to appropriate mealies from another's field)</p>
3. To create conflict	<p><u>U livhanya</u> (to cause quarrels)</p> <p><u>U posela</u> (to cast spells over homesteads)</p> <p><u>Phaladzane</u> (to cause chaos)</p>
4. To gain control	<p><u>Gaputshete</u> (to make men submit to their wives)</p> <p><u>U dzivhela</u> (to protect land)</p> <p><u>U rea</u> (to trap)</p> <p><u>U thavhela</u> (to immunise for strength in fighting or sex)</p> <p><u>U kata</u> (to make someone dull)</p> <p><u>U livhadza</u> (to make someone forget)</p>

Some of the witches are forced into that practice by their ancestors. It is common in the possession cult for one to inherit the ancestral spirit of a witch. When possessed, he/she is compelled to go and bewitch other people lest he/she become ill. It is ironic that while others bewitch to injure their victims others bewitch in order to be healed. Such a healing under normal circumstances is considered to be evil and the cause of violence. You do not kill others to stay alive and healthy, but such a practise is claimed to be existing and maintained. Usually the ancestral spirits from the mother's side are the ones to be condemned. To appease them the possession cult has to be staged.

The belief in witchcraft practice has its origin in traditional medicines and healing. There is a logical connection between traditional medicines and witchcraft which cannot be denied. Every Muvenda (Venda person) seems to have a general knowledge about these traditional medicines. There is a belief that Mwali (the God of the Vhavenda) provided medicines for them to use. On behalf of this Mwali, the ancestors are the ones that choose the healers. Within these hierarchical forces a human being is at the mercy of the traditional healers. They have the power to cure or to destroy when consulted. Witches and patients, business people and even kings both consult him/her, and he/she pays allegiance to the ancestors. This chain of forces keeps life in motion. Ancestors reveal themselves in visions, dreams, accidents, misfortune and in illness. On the basis of the traditional healing with a nanga (healer) at the centre we cannot separate traditional healing from witchcraft. Traditional medicines in this idiom of economic war and hatred serve as the ingredients of violence.

2. Social Conflict

Witchcraft is the idiom of social conflict. In the past, it was used as a defensive wall against enemies. Each group had to be difficult to be attacked because of what it had, its warriors and its weapons. The use of witchcraft by a community was aimed at discouraging an enemy. When you were not wanted within a community, the people mobilised against you. The Vhavenda cannot go in public to criticise an enemy. The most effective way is to talk in secrecy. When talking about witchcraft they start with a small group of people who should support them. In the past children (youths) were never allowed to be part of the conspiracy. Usually conspiracy happens in beer-halls or shebeens, but it is rare for others to know it because of the language being used. During the 1980s period elderly people started sharing their sentiments with the youths. Talking about those who were considered to be witches became a common practice. Children may even be warned not to play with their children thereby drawing a line between them. In this case the war of elderly people is being extended to the children. Psychologically, children of the accused family suffer the most. They are attacked with a stigma which will deter their participation in their daily lives.

In African society no one wishes to be associated with witchcraft. That should be avoided at all costs. You can talk ill against a person but not associate with witchcraft, in a way that will never be harmful, and any dispute of this nature can be settled in good spirit. Any witchcraft accusation can raise acrimonious

debate that may end up at the mungome (diviner) for clarification. In Venda, no one can crack a joke about witchcraft with someone else. It is real and it is fearful. As Baholo (1994) noted, one is inclined to ask why certain individuals are accused of witchcraft without objective evidence. The answer is simple: "muloi ga ana mmala (a witch has no colour)". This illustrates that anyone can be suspected of being a witch. It will depend on the whim of the community members and their relationships. As the idiom of social conflict, witchcraft symbolises an abnormal community which is at war with its enemy. Normality can only be gained when the culprit is identified and punished.

Mary Douglas (1970: 14) maintained that where witchcraft beliefs are active in social life there are two levels of analysis, namely, the individual and community. An individual uses the accusation of witchcraft as a weapon of attack where the relationship is ambiguous and this may be for one of two reasons. It may be that between such an individual and the group there is a relationship which is dominated by competition between haves and have-nots which is not regulated. Or there may be an attempt to promote factional rivalry, split the community, and bring confusion.

Amongst the Vhavenda community, witchcraft beliefs can be clarified by the analysis of Douglas. Socially and economically, this community had maintained a co-operative unit and a subsistence economy and there was no competition of haves and have-nots. The Chief was by moral norm allowed to have as much as possible. This suddenly disappeared during the advent of the white man. Social life changed completely as new forms of money systems were introduced. The

whole system of sharing died its natural death. The white man also brought new jobs that needed skills instead of power (strength). To be hired would mean that the employer was convinced that you had the capacity to do the job. That was new to the Vhavenda and to their state-of-mind it suggested that any one who was hired might have used strong medicines or bewitched others not to be hired (see Mabogo 1990: 77). Any person who failed to satisfy the employer or to meet the requirements, needed usually to put the blame on witches (Minaar, et al., 1991: 92) This remark can be passed jokingly. The main objective is to give a person samba (a bad name). No Venda person likes to be associated with a derogatory word because it destroys the character of a person forever. Hence the Vhavenda proverb: "Na u tamba wa dola, senenge a li tsha tuwa" (Once you have committed a shameful crime, even if you can later please the people, the crime committed will always be remembered). It remains as a stain or defilement (Chidester 1987:7; see also Ricoeur 1969:25)

A samba is a derogatory word, a vile expression, especially a samba of being a witch or associated with vhuloi (witchcraft). It brings shame and feelings of embarrassment and humiliation in relation to ethical obligation (Chidester 1987:70). As a weapon to put another person out of place, the Vhavenda use it more frequently. When a person is not feeling well the first thing to come to his/her mind is a witch. It is a common practice too, for the family members to ask what you have eaten and where. The main idea is to find the cause not prevention. The anthropologist E.E. Evans Prichard has observed that the Azande people do not pose the general, abstract question of why people suffer but rather seek to identify the underlying cause of a specific misfortune within a

particular situation. The Vhavenda adopt a similar approach to misfortune, suffering and evil.

A muvenda does not like samba and those who apply it do so purposefully to alienate the culprit. It is used to discourage those who are courageous, prosperous and enthusiastic in working. It is a defilement which remains with him however much he/she can achieve. It remains recorded in the minds of the citizens. A historian of religions, Raffaele Pettazoni, defined defilement as “an act that involves an evil, an impurity, a fluid, a mysterious and harmful something that acts dynamically i.e. magically” (cited in Ricoeur, 1967: 25). The act of defilement gives ethical infection which contaminates the person who has associated with whatever may be prescribed from contact. This is what the envious people desire to achieve.

People will definitely use the language best known to them to discredit an accused citizen before the community. A man is defiled in the sight of certain men, in the language of certain men. The main objective is to make a community clear about who it should alienate. Alienation reduces a human being to a sub-human being. It is for this reason that a defiled person is symbolised as dirt or stain or pollution (Chidester 1987: 71, Magau 1984: 21). Whenever an accusation is made as a result of witchcraft practice, a mungome (diviner) is likely to be approached. This will involve the accused party and the accuser’s party. The chief is likely to be informed of all the proceedings.

The defiled person has very little chance to defend him/herself because in most cases the judgement is taken before confrontation. Children of the accused are sometimes forced to join the accusing party in cases involving their fathers or mothers. This is done to strengthen the act of accusing. The neighbours may also be warned not to accept him/her. Such a person should not be given asylum. Hence the idiom of war and hatred. As long as you hold a position that is likely to challenge the existence of their world-view, you will exile yourself, lest you die. At the centre of all this violence is the belief in traditional healing.

The wave of change that swept the old order of Vhavenda society did not occur un-noticed. The most important thing was the manner in which such imbalances should be addressed. Within one ethnic group, the other group emerged that changed with the change, whilst the other one remained with the old order. The most powerful group was the one that pulled the crowd, in this instance, the old order. In fear of being alienated, defiled, or polluted various people in Venda, despite the church, addressed the problem of witchcraft differently. The dramatists in radio Venda and Thohoyandou wrote plays on witchcraft beliefs. For example, Mulifho wa zwivhi ndi lufu hone tshelede i a amba was produced by Dzivhani Mashudu. This play depicted the belief in zombies and other supernatural powers used by Vhavenda. Apart from plays, the Venda authors Mahamba, Maumela, Ramaite and Magau came out strongly against this set of beliefs. Magau in particular, in his book Mitsheto ya wa, maintained how the Vhavenda fight with an “enemy”. He used the word alienation. The problem of witchcraft, however remained unsolved.

I want to suggest that the Vhavenda do not appreciate the achievement of the other. Every achievement is looked upon with contempt. The Venda proverb, Ndi vho Masea khole mbiluni zwi si ho, depicts a true community. A Muvenda enjoys when one is suffering and sometimes such sufferings or misfortune can be associated with witchcraft; for example, u khou tambudzwa nga vhuloi hawe (he is being suffering because of his witchcraft). When you consult the accusers in whatever problem you have they assume it as the norm. On the surface you can draw a conclusion that Africans love each other. The existing relationship is tied with a thin thread - an outsider, an enemy - but the true love is found within an in-group. When there is an enemy they fight together to defeat it. Hence the Venda proverb: A dzimana u la malombe mukosi a phalalana (They may not give you food, but during the war they fight together). They put their differences behind them until victory is achieved. As Mbiti pointed out:

A weak point in African community is that everybody is loosely or intensely a relative, a fellow human being, a brother, father or sister. Therefore everybody within degrees, knows everybody else and everybody else's affairs fairly well too within certain limits. This corporate form of relations, is paradoxically the centre of joy and sorrow, generosity, tenderness and bitter jealousies, a sense of security and insecurity, forces of building and forces of destroying the community and the individual. It is within this context that frustration, psychic disturbances, emotional tensions and other states of the inner person become

externalised, formulated in such a way that blame is laid on an eternal agent - muloi, every form of misfortune, sickness, illness, pain, sorrow suffering, every death, every failure of the crops in the fields, or hunting or fishing are explained in the form of laying the blame of one or more numbers of the Corporate community. (Mbiti 1969: 209)

Mbiti's quotation clearly displays a real Venda structure and *mu Venda* pattern of thinking. The war between individuals results from the achievement of the other within the community. Hence an economic war and hatred associated with jealousy and envy. Anyone who champions the other can be suspected of practising some form of magical powers. That is how the community shocks and alienates an enemy. Once you produce more than what is expected you are by implication crossing the borderline that divides the normal and abnormal. Self interest may often be in conflict with moral ethics (Chidester, 1987: 59).

Traditionally, all members of the community should be equal. The equality should not be confused with seniority but equality in the form of material wealth. This wealth should be the basis of moral ethics and be shared in one way or another. For example, marriage was in the form an exchange of eight head of cattle. That was sharing. If one has a big field he would have to invite the members of the community to come and work from the morning till late in the afternoon. That is commonly known as dayha (a communal work). An ox should be slaughtered and beer should dominate the feast. This process of reciprocal support marked the co-operation between the members of the

community. They lived as "one family". The Chief was allowed to accumulate as much as possible because he would receive many visitors and his subjects would also get food from him/her if there was famine. To date, no chief has ever been accused of practising witchcraft.

In witchcraft accusation, the real accusers do not surface, but rather mobilise the crowd and indoctrinate it. The crowd is controlled by a mob psychology and the choice of a victim may be totally random to appease its appetite for violence (Girard 1986: 16,17). It may be possible that the crimes for which the victims are accused are not real, but the real accusers know the meaning of prosecution.

The belief in and fear of witchcraft is a strategic spiritual disease apart from religious considerations (Douglas, 1970). People interviewed on this subject agreed that many victims are being killed because of a spiritual disease - hatred. This spiritual disease is being nurtured by the belief in the healing power of the traditional healers. When one is experiencing difficulties the first person who can help him is the traditional healer. These traditional healers are not faithful enough to their customers. They can attend two customers who are fighting each other and give them the same medicines as long as they consult him at different times. A traditional healer encourages corruption and violence within a community. Even though he knows that he was lying, he would comfort the complainant by ensuring him good results.

The community members also influence the violence within the community. Even before they could decide to visit a mungome for clarification they would already have their minds set. A mungome relies on their suggestion. That is the reason why he uses true and false statements to get their side. The traditional healer convinces them by using strange names for his medicines. Strange names were meant to give their profession a well deserved dignity, yet healers used plants well known to the community.

The social status of a nanga (traditional healer) and a mungome (diviner) is greater than that of a chief, despite the position he holds as chief priest during all the religious activities. A chief will never undertake a journey or to get into a new homestead without the advice of a nanga. A chief has his own nanga or maine. When he is not feeling well he is the first person to be consulted. The so-called Christians also visit dzinanga (plural form of nanga) and mungome (diviners) by night when nobody sees them. This kind of practice makes them believe themselves to be indispensable persons within the community. This practice is known to the non-Christians who regard Christianity as nothing but a mere social practice by a clique for a definite reason: to socialise. Hence the Venda saying: "Ndi u sokou tambula ha vharudi vha no vhofha thoho i sa remi" (it is just a mere suffering similar to that of Christians who tie their heads up without any headache. That has reduced Christianity to nothing). The non-Christians are boastful about the work of dzinanga and mingome and they do not hesitate to defend (argue) the existence of witches and other magical practices. The dzinanga are also boastful that even Christians do visit them. They can even go by night to their homesteads to protect their homesteads

against evil acts. My research proved this claim beyond any doubt to be genuine and the argument about Christians visiting dzinanga and mingome holds water.

The person at the centre of witch accusations and killings is a nanga or mungome but they remain the faithful friends of the society because they were chosen by the ancestors and they cannot be challenged. Many people in Venda believe in traditional medicines irrespective of whether they are genuine or not. The traditional healers on the other hand have different knowledge as far as healing is concerned. It became evident during my research that some traditional healers have scant knowledge about medicines. They used to ask from others. No training was ever received. These traditional healers may have been forced into the profession and in order to get more customers they must rely on naming witches. In the next chapter, we will review the knowledge and practices of indigenous healing that provide the context for beliefs in witchcraft.

CHAPTER THREE:

HEALING

The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines medicines as the art and science of the prevention and cure of disease. This line of thought is similar to that of the Africans. Africans define medicine as art and science which can only be acquired through training. Medicines bring healthy life. The main aim of the medicines as Idowu has pointed out is to help the body to help itself (Idowu 1976: 197). Medicines can be taken through the mouth in the form of powder or liquid. It can be rubbed into the small incisions made by a sharp razor. Other medicines can be in the form of twigs, leaves or a mixture of all concoctions.

Medicines are obtained from the veldt by those who have powers and ability to do so. Usually the dzinanga (traditional healers) themselves take pains to gather them and to that effect the Africans regard the natural environment as important as human life. The two are inseparable. According to the Hebrew Bible, God has made nature for man to control it (Genesis 1:26-30). Africans also have the same thought regarding the natural environment. They believe Mwali (God of the Venda) created the earth for them in order to preserve life through medicines that are available there.

For the Venda-speaking people, Mwali created the natural environment but left the power and ability to control it in the hands of the ancestors. Through this belief the ancestors are the ones who can give direction and wisdom to the chosen few. Hence not all can be traditional healers. The natural environment is rich in traditional medicines. It is evident that although some medicines are drawn from human organs, animals, soil, most medicines used by the Venda-speaking people are from plants. Such belief is chronic in that whoever heals

would refer you to mishonga (medicines) and in many traditional healer's surgery they are well displayed. To every mu Venda, the use of mushonga (medicine) is fearful, no one can publicly argue about the use of it. It is a taboo.

The belief in the healing power of plants, trees, roots and herbs, I will argue, forms the basic foundation of the witchcraft beliefs and practices that are widespread among the Venda-speaking people. In this chapter, I will outline basic knowledge and techniques of healing.

1. Healing Knowledge

Traditionally, the Venda people live a common life where each thing, however small, has to be shared. This practice of sharing extended to the sharing of healing knowledge in an informal way. People discuss with each other different kinds of problems and the solutions they encounter. Today, nearly every member of the community has knowledge to heal minor ailments such as nose bleeding, stomach upset, heart burn, whooping cough, flu and sprain. When one feels ill it is a common practice amongst Africans to consult traditional healers. A Western medical doctor is seen as the last person to consult.

Such a practice has influenced the traditional healers to form their own unions, but this has started recently as a way of mobilising themselves. They usually meet each year to discuss their own problems and to share knowledge of healing. In Venda tradition, ailments such as whooping cough, cold, flu, diarrhoea, sneezing, measles and sexually transmitted diseases are considered as less dangerous. One need not consult traditional specialists because such illness may not cause one's death. They are regarded as mukhushwane (minor

ailments). Within the community women are well-known for the treatment of children and women's diseases while men specialise in both men's and women's diseases. In some other cases they can consult women specialists before treatment is done. Based on this division of labour in society, the community is united by an "organic solidarity" in the area of healing (Lawrence 1982:302).

In order to understand the importance of natural environment and the firm belief in witchcraft which has its roots in the belief in the healing properties of plants, trees, roots, and herbs, we must first investigate the African concept of medicine. The etymology of terms for medicine suggests an underlying concept - the healing tree. Africans identify medicines with a tree. In Zulu, for example, the term for medicine Umuthi means a tree. Likewise in Sotho, the term mori refers to a tree. In Venda, the vocabulary of medicine is also based on the parts of a tree. Crucial terms for medicine such as thanda (stick), muri (tree), mudzi (root) and thasana (twigs) are all drawn from the basic symbolism of a healing tree. This vocabulary is known to every adult mu Venda-speaking person. This knowledge or vocabulary is shared orally in an informal way.

One may wonder why the belief in the healing power of plants, trees, roots and herbs has become so central in the minds of every mu Venda, including the youth. To answer the question it is important to note that healing in Venda concept is closely associated with the Mwali religion (Mwali religion is the one which the Venda-speaking people believe; Mwali is the provider, and everything should first be introduced to Him). When a baby has been born there is a ritual which must be performed by elderly women called u thuswa (to protect a child with medicines). The baby has to be introduced to the new physical world and to the world of spirits by this rite of u thuswa (Chidester,

1990: 65). A special maine (a family doctor) for children or babies is summoned by the parents of the baby. (Parents in Venda tradition would refer to elderly people of the family rather than the child's biological parents). The ceremony begins by taking the child by the feet and turning him/her upside down over the boiling pot full of different medicines prepared by a maine. The steam from the pot must strike at the centre of the baby's head called ngoma (the fontanel of the infant's skull). There is a belief that the steam from the pot would dissolve through the head. The baby would then be turned again. This time the child should be placed in an upright position to allow the steam to penetrate through the anus. The baby is now completely protected against evil, O lundwa (he/she is holy healed or protected). The maine takes out a sharp razor and make small incisions in each joint of the body. The last part to be attended to is the fontanel of the infant's skull where strong medicines should be applied after incisions. The ritual ends up by giving or tying a cotton girdle around the waist and the neck of the baby. The child's mother will from time to time smear the child's body with medicines to protect him/her from evil people (Mbiti, 1975:84). This is a complete healing.

The introducing of the child to his/her ancestors remains a process which goes according to the stages of development. The elderly people, especially women, are the teachers within the society. The child is taught from an early stage that each elderly person is the parent. Children are taught different types of tribal laws. These laws are basic for each person. They make a person. The teaching of laws is done in an informal way. There are the ones who usually collect herbs and roots as medicines on many occasions and learn the use of each plant from an early stage. There is a belief amongst the Venda people that medicines collected by zwipofu (children who are not matured yet) are powerful because they are pure. The same myth is applied when sawing pumpkins. The zwipofu

are encourage to saw and there is a general belief that the pumpkins would bear healthy fruits.

Mwali religion extends from birth to grave. As Junod indicated, there are two religions being practised by the Venda-speaking people. The two are inseparable. Mwali or Raluvhimba (another name for Mwali, the bird that float in the sky) is regarded as the great or chief God who has created everything and is the provider. This God is distant and cannot be consulted. Below Him are the ancestral spirits which are closer to the people and are more involved in day-to-day activities of human beings. They exert a great influence in the lives of the vhavenda-speaking people.

In addition to informal learning, a more formal programme of initiation introduces children to the way of the ancestors. In the first stage, the puberty school vhusha (initiation school for girls) shows or marks the beginning of that process by introducing girls to the secret knowledge and wisdom of how to become a useful and responsible citizen within the society. During this period, a girl is placed under the supervision of an elderly woman who serves as a ritual guide called mme wa vhusha (a fictitious mother). Such a mother has to lead her throughout the initiation period teaching her the laws of the community. That will start from respecting each family and community member, ending up with how to build a good family. All these laws are at times dramatised. Boys start initial training with the elderly fictitious fathers. They have got their special place called khroni (a special place at the home entrance). The boys are taught to greet the elders and to respect them. These laws need to be practised from time to time to avoid punishment. Later on boys have to attend murundu (circumcision school) while at the same time girls attend musevhetho

(circumcision school). In both schools the emphasis lies on the precept covering sexual intercourse between boys and girls.

The second stage is tshitambo tsha vhutuka (initiation school for boys at puberty stage) when they receive instruction on how to build a family. That shows the importance of a man within the community. Girls will be attending tshikanda (a secret initiation rite for females held prior to the domba; it is also called tshikanda because a piece of hide is shown the novices and there are certain laws and formulae in connection with it).

The third stage or phase is the crucial one. It is the continuation of the second stage. This is the stage where both girls and boys attend together. This stage is called the pre-marital school or domba (group rites as preliminary to marriage). Domba is danced by all sexes during the night. They are supposed to be half naked, which symbolises the nature of the living-dead. It is characterised by matano (special rites, dramas and songs). All these are meant to put an emphasis on how to run a good family and to avoid sexual diseases. As Blacking has indicated, the entire process, therefore, marked out a woman's knowledge, position and power in Venda traditional religion (Blacking 1964).

Life in the Venda world view is an asset. Living a long and prosperous life depends on the willingness of the traditional healers and the ancestors. That has been shown by all the stages one has to pass through. No Venda ritual can be successful without the help of the traditional healer and in the same vein a traditional healer holds a central part in all stages. For example, at the domba dance he/she is the one who teaches the initiates the laws using the ngoma (drum) as the teaching aid. The ngoma is the human physiology of the Venda-speaking people, while the domba represents life in practice. True life is

represented by the ever-burning fire lit by a medicine man. There is a transposition of character in all activities. This fire must not go out while the domba is still in progress, otherwise the drums must be reversed and all activities cease until the medicine-man re-lights it with the fire sticks (Stayt 1968:105-125, Van Warmelo 1932:58-73). The phrase which the vhavenda use to give a sound warning to all these sexual and religious instructions is Khombe a i lwali, ya lwala yo silinga (a bachelor does not get sick, if he gets sick he has sexual intercourse).

There is a general assumption that no nation other than the Venda hold domba but the Mwali people hold domba in the world. They substantially claim that the ngoma is the Bible of the Venda because it has all laws for them. This God is considered to have created everything on earth, but has also given the ancestors powers to have control over His creation. Human beings cannot do anything without consulting them. These spirits are found in mountains, rivers, lakes, trees, plants, herbs, pools, and in big forests. There are two kinds of spirits, those that are good and those that are bad. The bad spirits are the ones which kill or destroy while the good spirits save or restore life. Apart from the natural spirits which are found in objects, there are human spirits. Mbiti described these as those people who were once ordinary men and women who after their death turned into an ancestor (Mbiti 1975: 71). This idea of spirits is central to the Venda religion. The belief is that only good spirits turn into ancestors, the bad spirits turn into zwipuku (ghosts) and miphogoli (a skeleton that goes about the night). These zwipuku and miphogoli keep on roaming and hunting their resting place. They even return to their own people. To stop them a traditional healer might use the hoof of a horse or change the entrance of a home.

The ancestors are the ones that choose the medicine men and women. They provide them with magical powers and wisdom to heal. Hence the Venda proverb "Nanga yanga na Mudzimu wanga" (my traditional healer and my God). This is done when he/she is divining. It is an invitational prayer before divining which evokes the powers of the ancestors. These ancestors visit the diviners in dreams and visions and show them various kinds of plants, herbs, roots and all healing tactics. This knowledge is claimed by all traditional healers. After being visited the diviner will have to remember all the instructions given. Failure to carry out the instructions leads to misfortunes and death in one's lineage. The diviners claim to have more powerful knowledge to heal all kinds of diseases including Aids. Medicinal trees, plants, herbs and roots which they use are given new, strange names known to them only. For example tshivhoni (garlic), Bindamutshe (aloe), Mulautshinya (*Annano Chrysophylla Harv*), Muangaila (*millettia stuhlmannii* Taub) and Shambola vhadzimu (*Gunnera perpensa*). The names are revealed to them during the initiation period or in dreams and visions. Each name is associated with the action or the character of that particular plant, animal or object.

The diviners claim that there are medicinal trees which are more powerful or sacred than the other and therefore need special attention or techniques when gathering them. For example when approaching Mutavhatsindi (*Brackenridgea Zanuebarica*) one needs to be cool and address it as one is addressing a Venda chief or king. Muangaila, another powerful tree, can only be approached by a lunatic and she/he should be naked. By following strict rules of etiquette, diviners claim to have received their healing power and knowledge from their ancestors and they often boast of this power and knowledge especially in the phrase "yanga or dzanga dza balelwa ndi a lata" (should mine fail to divine or

heal I will throw them away) and thereby provide a kind of insurance policy against illness, accidents and many other misfortunes.

Traditionally, healers do not get paid for their work, but the patient or the relative of the patient, after realising that he/she is convalescing, can give out a gift of any form ranging from a goat to any amount of money but not more than twenty-five cents. That was a general norm. Comaroff has indicated, healing everywhere concerns human intervention and it has to be affected by cultural transformation (Comaroff 1981: 367). Unlike the western medical practitioner other traditional healers require the payment of a fee - the luputulula thevhele or tshidzimu (payment of a fee before healing process begins) - which varies according to the traditional healer. Normally it is ten rand. This payment is made in the name of ancestors to evoke them. The diviner will then be possessed by ancestral spirit(s) that will lead him in the process of healing. Cultural transformation also involves or determines who should be the one with the power. In the past only elderly people were the ones to consult a diviner; children were never involved. Since the 1980s the youth took control of the religious matters. They are the ones to visit the diviners and to decide the fate of the witches. When this is done, people have to collect monies for visiting a diviner/traditional healer (Stadler 1996:87-88). On visiting a diviner or traditional healer co-operation between the client and a traditional healer is essential. There are herbalists who use thangu (bones) and those who do not use them, but they are all known as dzinanga. My focus here will be on the one who uses bones. After payment is made, the patient is asked to blow air into the divination set to reveal his/her illness. This is an act of negotiation between the ancestor and the patient with the diviner as the interpreter. According to Idowu, traditional healers or diviners were chosen by the spirits, taught medicines by the spirits and guided by spirits (Idowu 1973:178). They

are therefore the telepathists. The process of healing ends up when a diviner reveals to the patient the cause of the illness or even the name of the witch/wizard. The patient is given the medicines for protection and for the sending back of the spells to the evil-doer if he desires. Usually the ingroup becomes the target because they know each other well. This pattern of divination is likely to be the brain child of all violence. Relation takes all forms of violence. Under the political authority of a chief exclusion could be accomplished by confiscating the property and banishing the person of the accused from the chieftom. Although evidence of the torture and execution of convicted witches and sorcerers has been found, execution seems to have been a ritual of exclusion of last resort (Chidester 1992:16). It was the task of the elderly people only and the accused were never the children.

Under the political authority of youths, witches are usually old men and women. Those who are stingy, ugly and half dependent are the most likely victims. Once they are detected as witches the community is informed about the bewitched person. The main aim is to mobilise support and to alienate the victim (Stadler 1996: 101). Victims would be taken from their houses and sacrificed by means of necklacing, stoned to death, cut into pieces or dosed with petrol and set alight. That is the sacrifice of exclusion. Human sacrifice by other humans is a source of violence. When all is done the patient or the concerned group is healed and harmony is restored.

Healing is a complex concept but in the Venda world view what is important is to satisfy the soul or (muya), the inner being. When the "truth" has been revealed then harmony is restored. The body which is the custodian of the soul becomes comfortable and relieved from stress and tensions. Muya wanga wo rula (my soul is comfortable). That in itself is healing.

Healing is complete when the body and the soul have been cooled down through sacrifices. Venda sacrifices are directed not only to the living but also the living-dead as far as they are remembered. The ancestral spirits take interest in the welfare of the descendants and for that reason they must be told of all important events and they are entitled to take part of what is in the homestead. The ancestors are represented by various objects such as a black goat (makhulu) or a black bull given the same name as that of the goat. Other groups have got plants, snakes, stones or baboons. All these are to be honoured. Should they be neglected they visit the young ones with sickness. Sickness is not a punishment but a reminder, correcting and involving them in the day to day activities. For example by brewing beer for sacrifice you are inviting them and that in itself is healing (Van Warmelo 1932:156-164 and Mayer 1980: 212). These sacrifices, supplemented by the power of healing plants, trees and herbs, express the contrast between the homestead and the forest. The homestead is regarded as the centre of the earth where life starts and continues its rhythm. Spatial order, ritual form and every day activity expressed the contrast between motse (settlement) and naga (bush) and ranged along a continuum from centre to periphery (Comaroff 1981:367).

The Venda homestead is to be made sacred for it is the place for the ancestors. Other space outside the homestead is inhabited by wild animals such as polecats, hyenas, wolves, owls, and baboons which are regarded as the agents of the witches. The traditional specialists have knowledge of powerful plants which are used to keep them away. It is worth noting that the wild space inhabited by the agents of the witches is ironically regarded as the defensive wall against the witches by the traditional healers. When they are attacked within the homestead, they extend the periphery to include the world of

medicines - the veldt. Their powers have ability to neutralise those of the witches.

Some of the most important plants used to create a space for healing and protection of mudi can be indicated.

First, the mufhata (*brachylaena*) muthathavhanna (*herteromorpha* *brenscens*) and murevhe (*halleria lucidia*) are the well-known plants used to protect the homestead, especially new houses against lightning and ill-wishers. The twigs are placed in the roof, at the door step or at the entrance to deter witches from entering. These plants are supplemented with shambolavhadzimu (*burnneraperpensa*) whose rhizome is an ingredient in medicines that are mixed with stagnant water, especially sea water, to protect the homestead. If a witch should visit the homestead during the night, he or she would see a pool of water with this plant spreading all over the surface of the property. No bewitching can take place because the witch will fear being drawn into the water.

Second, a specific plant is Muobadali or Muombandadzi. The Venda name has been derived from the verb omba - to grab and ndadzi - a noun meaning lightning. The name is related magically to protect the homesteads against lightning, especially when used in witchcraft. The root bark is beaten into a powder and then mixed with other magical powders to guard the homestead against other evils. This plant may not be collected during the rainy season because it may attract lightning instead of driving it away (see also Mabogo 1990: 72).

Third, a plant by that is feared by all the people in Northeastern Venda, the Vhatavhatsindi or Thengwe, is Mutavhatshindi. The root and the stem bark as well as the leaf are rarely used magically to protect homesteads and the country against the witches and enemies. The country also needs healing and this is done by specialists. The act of healing is called u dzivhela (to protect land by magical plants). Just like healing a person, the country is healed by placing powerful magical plants on its boundaries. This is done during the night.

It is believed that the use of this plant discourages enemies from entering the area or homestead by making them feel afraid and reluctant to invade. The plant is tabooed from entering any homestead unless a certain ritual is performed. The same applies to the collection of medicines from the plant. Failure to observe the taboo may result in death (Mabogo 1990: 111) People are reluctant to talk about it and any permission to see it can only be obtained from Chief Nethengwe.

Last, Muangaila is believed to be found at Ha-Makhuvha only. This is plant regarded with reverence. The person approaching it must be naked and should collect its root bark in the darkness relating to the manner and time of witchcraft. The root bark is used to protect homestead and persons against supernatural forces such as sorcery and witchcraft.

2. Diviners

Traditionally, Venda healers claim to have knowledge about all diseases, although some traditional healers become specialists in certain fields of medical practice. According to the saying, Nanga dzi a fhirana (traditional healers have different healing powers) there are traditional healers who have much more

knowledge than others. These are called dzembelekete (powerful traditional healer). Their knowledge and powers to heal can be inherited by one of their children, especially by boys or a close relative from their in-group, but this can only happen after the death of the healer. However, another traditional saying suggests that the knowledge and power of healing can be not only inherited but also acquired by instruction. According to this saying, Hu bikelwa vhunanga, vhutsila vha vhona nga mato, one can be taught by a traditional practitioner, but to become an artist requires curiosity.

To date we have a larger number of traditional healers than in the past. Both claimed to have been visited in dreams and visions by their ancestors before coming into this profession. They have different knowledge of healing and divining because they were trained by different teachers. Acculturation and migration also influenced changes in the healing profession. Although they usually know themselves as dzinanga, five basic types of traditional healers can be identified in vhavenda practice. All claim to have been chosen by the ancestors and whatever they preach they are acting as the intermediaries. They regard themselves as the agent of their ancestors.

First, maine (doctor) is regarded as the central figure within the community. When one gets ill, instead of going to a hospital a person might consult the maine who will, after listening, give the medicine. He knows magical plants for healing. Usually when the new settlement starts he is the one who doctors it by his magical sticks. Soccer managers, musicians, and business people are known to consult a maine. A maine's knowledge is regarded as so authoritative that no one would think to challenge it. This is usually expressed at the initiation school for boys. The place is so fearful that even the bird that passes by comes down, or so it is claimed. A maine is also responsible for the possession cult.

He has the knowledge and power to evoke the ancestral spirits by his powerful plants. He might require clients to wear special clothes and after dancing around she falls down and speaks in a foreign language, tshikalanga, the language of the ancestors (the language of the Kalangas from Zimbabwe). To the beating of drums clients dance around waving a horse's tail. In the practice of maine, therefore, ritual plays an important role. The maine therefore has expert knowledge and ability that is used in the ritual concept of healing, protection and initiation. The term is so important in Venda discourse that anyone with expert knowledge and ability might be referred to as maine, hence the Venda saying, "Ndi maine wazwo hoyu" (he/she is an expert healer).

Second, Tshigomamutanda refers to a traditional healer that is less skilful than a maine. These traditional healers attract public attention by dressing in funny or old clothes, a practice, however, that often has the effect of scaring people. Associated with the night these traditional healers are believed to have magical powers that enable them to get into one's room unnoticed. They are also associated with the tokoloshi, a small animal that looks like a cat which is thought to be employed by the Tshigomamutanda to bewitch people. The vhavenda regard this type of traditional healer as the one that is acquired by offering money to the true healer. In all these respects the Tshigomamutanda is generally feared as an agent of witchcraft.

However, the Tshigomamutanda does have a following that regards him or her as a healer. Although less skilled than the maine, such a practitioner would also have a knowledge of medicines and use divination, employing a set of dice, in diagnosing the cause of illness. The specialised knowledge and ability of a Tshigomamutanda is not inherited.

Third, the Nyamusolo is expert in divination but does not employ divining dice. Rather, the Nyamusolo "smells out" the disease. Usually a woman, this traditional healer works in conjunction with other healers to identify the cause of illness and refer the client to an appropriate course of treatment.

Fourth, the mungome is a diviner and a seer. The term mungome in Venda is associated with both witches and doctors so it is at times difficult to distinguish mungome from maine. Both can be regarded within the community as traditional healers who work with herbalists. At times, however, a mungome works alone. His/her primary duty is to discover hidden things that are needed by clients such as the cause of death. This is done by thangu dza nnda (dice that are divined at a home entrance usually to discover what had happened to the deceased). When one undertakes a journey he visits a mungome (diviner) and if in his divination evil is diagnosed it becomes imperative that he cancel it. This may need a ritual to appease the ancestors. Usually a white chicken is used (Van Warmelo 1932: 197)

Generally, the most powerful mingome are regarded as foreign diviners, especially Shangaan diviners, who people travel from Venda to consult. They are reputed to be competent but expensive. Their expertise lies in discerning how matters have occurred in a certain way. For example, in business competition, a mungome can tell who might have worked evil magic or witchcraft against a business that is not profitable, or in the cases of family conflict a mungome might work to bring about harmony in the family through communication with ancestors. Accordingly, a mungome is an expert in discerning the cause of any misfortune whether the cause is attributed to the work of witches or the wrath of ancestors (Chidester, 1992: 18).

The role of mungome is acquired by means of a special calling by the ancestors. Certain signs or symptoms, strange dreams, visions, accidents, losing of a job, or prolonged illness indicate this calling. In response to the ancestral calling, a mungome is thoroughly trained by an expert teacher in using pebbles, numbers, dice, water, and a stick as instruments of divination (Maccallum, 1993: 204-207). The training involves a period of isolation in which the novice receives instruction in communicating with the ancestors during the practice of divination.

Communication with ancestors can appear as if the diviner is talking alone to himself or herself. Generally Venda regarded talking to oneself as evil. For example, mission education, which involved forms of memorisation that seemed like talking to oneself was held in suspicion. However, although such acts of talking alone are ordinarily rejected, they are required in the communication established between diviners and ancestors. From the perspective of the diviner, of course, this form of communication does not involve talking alone because the ancestors are present. In this extraordinary communication, mingome develop their own language, even giving strange names to the plants used in traditional medicine. In addition, a mungome learns special techniques of dance that sometimes produce trance-like states.

A mungome discerns the cause of events through the use of divining dice. Before throwing down the dice, the mungome has the client blow air on them. This act opens communication with the ancestors. The dice themselves form a set that comprises sixteen different combinations. Traditionally there is no Mungome in Venda but a Nanga or maine with only four dice. This is evident in the language they use when divining "Siavuma" ! Si a vuma! (we agree! we agree!). This is a confirmation of divination. Due to cultural transformation the

Venda added their bones to make a set of sixteen, similar to that of the Shangaan and Sotho. In Venda, the names for these combinations are as follows (see Stayt, 1932: 287-290):

Mufhirifhiri means trouble, if it falls continually it symbolises unrest. It can also symbolise chaos in the family.

Mutangula is derived from the verb tangula, to strip naked or to take away everything. It symbolises a very good sign. There will be no trouble. In sickness recovery will be quick.

Hwami means forceful. In war the people will be driven from their village. It is usually connected with the spirit of the grandfather.

Tshilume means a male. It indicates sorrow. If a girl has eloped with a man who has not paid lobola, then the child gets sick. The child's uncle must be approached to sacrifice for the child.

Lunwe means the other. It indicates a bad omen. In a dispute between a man and a woman it is the woman who is at fault.

Thwalima is something dangerous. It symbolises fire. There is danger in every thing that is under taken. It symbolises conflict and bloodshed.

Vhukata is derived from the verb kata, “to roll,” and the noun suffix vhu. If it falls three times no journey must be undertaken. Again it indicates that an enemy will not be successful. This is in case where one is being bewitched.

Mahemavhili indicates a good omen. It is also connected with the head of the family.

Marubi is the plural form of Shumbi meaning a deserted place or village. It is connected with the mother and her side of the family. In case of a trouble the mother’s spirits are the ones who are causing trouble.

Thambadzivha is a compound word derived from the verb tamba (wash) plus dzivha, a noun meaning a pool. It indicates the crocodile. It shows a good omen. No illness. A man with no relatives will not be admitted to the village.

Muhuluri is something black. Some say it is a plant which is used to make the dice; but muhuluri here is the name of a dice. It indicates a good omen and happiness.

Tshitangu means a shield. It indicates a good omen for the traveller. If an illness is caused because of the quarrels of two brothers over their father’s cattle, the father of the sick person must end the quarrel.

- Murorwane indicates bad omen. In illness the muloi (witch) has sent a thuri (polecat) to enter the sick person. If one was about to undertake a journey it must be cancelled for fear of harm from a snake or other evil thing.
- Mahe-a-khadzi is from mahe, meaning any throw, and khadzi which means the sister to a chief or king. This is a combination of divining dice in which thwalima shows its obverse. Lost property will be recovered. If the wife of a man married to his malume's daughter runs away the man must get his cattle back as she will never be any good.
- Muraru-muhulu indicates prosperity in the village. In illness, the sick person must personally approach the spirit.
- Makulela is always connected with the head of the lineage. In illness the fathers' spirit is worrying the sick person and the spears must be brought and phasa madi or "appease the spirit". If there is quarrelling the head of the village must be approached at thevhula, a function of remembering the ancestors.

Apart from these sixteen combinations, some diviners do have additional thangu. The shells from the sea are associated with joy and sorrow. Falling positively they are ululating. Things are good. Negatively, they signify a bad omen and sorrow (see Stayt 1932: 262-267). A stone from the sea is associated with the domestic animals, whether they are healthy or not. If there

is a quarrel then it signifies that the cause of the quarrel is the head of the homestead. A Mufula fruit has a positive and negative side. Falling positively, it signifies that a muloi (witch, wizard) is coming to interfere with a nanga or client. In order to learn the names of thangu and the interpretation properly one has to use the fingers starting from the smallest up to the thumb as well as the outer part and the inner part of the palm.

The Venda use religious language in their arts and crafts in a symbolic way. I have said this when explaining the Venda drums. Each part has a deeper meaning, both socially and politically. Coming to thangu, the male ones depict a stretching crocodile, which symbolises the power of men. Such a thangu is Tshilume, meaning a young man. A young woman (lunwe) is represented by interwoven or running lines which signifies a fertile women (Huffman, 1987; 40-41). In the same vein, able men and women are signified by colours in their drawings. Red stands for a young woman of child-bearing age. White symbolises the sperm or semen of a man whilst the yellow and black represent men and women nearing the end of their lives. This is taught at the domba initiation school (Stayt 1932:117). Dzithangu are carried by a small bag made out of a skin of a polecat or a wolf skin. It depends on the choice given by the ancestor.

In Shangaan practice, although different names are given, the same number of combinations can be found. In addition to the dice, a Mungome must have a tail of a wild animal or a wooden spoon; a beaded dancing stick, and a wooden four-pronged stick to put the dice side by side. Reading the dice demands techniques of interpretation that are suited to the varying nature of problems that arise. A Mungome is skilled in reading the instruments of divination as if they were a text. A Mungome has his own people who help him in divining by

clapping hands and stamping on the ground saying, Siavuma! Siavuma! He becomes ecstatic and filled with spirit as soon as he gets his victims. The diviner is also regarded as having special knowledge and power that can only be achieved through inner sight or contact with the spirit (see Mbiti 1975: 156).

Fifth, and finally, a nanga or dokotela is regarded as the chief amongst all traditional doctors. A nanga is claimed to have the knowledge of all the herbs and how to use them to cure different diseases. Each nanga's treatment varies, although most of them have a purely magical element in common. Although it is not always easy to distinguish between a nanga and other types of traditional healers, this herbalist is especially adept in the use of medicines. When visiting the houses of a herbalist one sees herbs, bones and skins of all types. Bottles of liquid or powdered medicines are displayed. A nanga can relate the purpose of each medicine with confidence for the sole reason that he is the agent of his/her ancestors and he/she is able to cure the patients at their will. People assume their ancestors will steadfastly serve their best interest, that it is the ancestor's abiding function to guard their well-being, welfare and prosperity, and that they possess the power to carry out this function. Within its defined limits, the benevolence of ancestors is a stable and continuous exception (Kiernan 1982 : 291).

Many people bring their complaints to the home and chemists of the dzinanga. For example, people come to have their homesteads protected against evil or bad fortune. Boys and girls as well as young men obtain certain medicines such as mpesu (*secudaca longipedunculata* freshen), mufhanda (*Lonchocarpus capassa*) and musunzi to activate their sexual desires. Although a nanga often invokes the ancestors in their work, they basically operate as doctors who specialise in certain medicines and techniques for healing. First, there is a

specialist who sprinkles water, consecrates weapons, and makes new fire for the domba and murundu. He is associated with the bringing of rain and all things connected with the earth. He is maine wa fhungo (a doctor who brings prosperity). Second, there is Maine wa u lumulula (a doctor who sucks out something from a patient's body). Traditionally there is a belief that witches can put stones, snakes, monkeys, lizards, polecats and crystals in the body and this specialist can suck them out from the body. Third, nanga ya shango (a doctor of land or a country), is responsible for the strengthening of the boundaries of the country against the enemies. Fourth, maine wa mbeu is a doctor who mixes seeds before ploughing begins. He is summoned by the chief. Traditionally, during summer and autumn cultivation time ancestors are to be informed that the Mwali people want to cultivate and they ask for rain. This is done by a nanga of seeds who works in connection with fertilising seeds and crops. Human portions are mixed with treated seeds to ensure a good harvest. The treating of seeds is done at the chief's kraal as he is regarded as the chief priest on behalf of his people (see also Stayt 1932: 263-264). Consulted on all matters of fortune and misfortune, a nanga is particularly expert in providing means of protection against the evil effects of witchcraft. Alternatively, however, a nanga can be suspected of helping witches with powerful medicines used in their evil work.

Due to their power and influence, the position of dzinanga is central to the community. They perform a distinctively political role. The King or Paramount Chief pays allegiance to them. In the past, dzinanga played an important role in warfare (see Mabogo 1990 : 255). They were consulted on behalf of the chief for zwirovha (medicines made from human organs) that could be used to weaken enemies. They were employed to perform rituals to protect and strengthen warriors before going into battle. Today this ritual is

confirmed by the comrades who fought against the white ruled governments, be it in South Africa or Zimbabwe. A newly installed chief would strengthen his position by getting medicines that would protect him from witchcraft. For example, a nanga would prevent witches from entering the home of a chief by using medicines, known as chibata varoyi, that were placed on the door step. If a witch could enter, he or she would be overpowered by the medicines and would fall down paralysed (Gelifand, 1967: 151). The practice of placing ashes at tshitulwini (a place where ashes are poured) is believed to be another way of weakening the power of the witches from entering the homestead of the chief's kraal. In addition to gaining this protection, a chief or king could rely on a nanga for medicine to attract strangers to bind his people more firmly to himself. In all these respects, a nanga performed important political functions (see Ritchken, 1988: 2).

In the present, however, the powerful social role of the nanga has generally shifted from political to competitive fields of business and sports. Businessmen regularly consult a nanga (see Minnaar et al. 1992: 59). In cases of ritual killing for medicine, businessmen are most often suspected of employing a nanga to gain powerful medicine that would give them a competitive advantage. Likewise, the use of medicines in sporting competitions is common. For example, a football match during April 1995 between the Chiefs and Vaal Professionals was delayed for twenty minutes because the Chiefs entered the field by way of the grandstand to avoid being exposed to the medicines in their opponent's dressing room. The fact that they won the match 1-0 was seen to justify this avoidance (Star 31 April 1995). A local football club in Venda, the Fondwe Mighty Blues, was divided when some players demanded medicines, yelling for thanda (medicine) that would give them an edge against their opponents. Although dzinanga and their medicines do operate to some extent

in party politics, their power has extended into a wider field of social and economic competition.

For the most part, dzinanga inherit their professions from their fathers or mothers, with boys inheriting from fathers and girls from mothers. It is worth nothing that dzinanga believe in high esteem, that all illness connected with blood come from the mothers side of the family because they menstruate and that the foetus gets blood from the mother. The illness connected with bones comes from father's side of the family because a man produces sperm which is white in colour (Stayt 1932: 260). However, the number of dzinanga seem to be much larger in the present than in the past, suggesting that many are acquiring rather than inheriting the specialised knowledge and power of the mastery of medicines. Held in high regard by the community, the nanga is seen as the principal enemy of witches. Without the protection provided by a nanga, witches are believed to be able to operate freely in causing harm to persons and property.

Different people have different perspectives regarding the natural environment. Some people regard the natural environment as a hive of witches, filled with agents of witches such as polecats, owls, hyenas and monkeys. The Venda world view is that the natural environment is a home of medicines. This idea originated from their religious perspective. Mwali, their God, is regarded as the creator of living and non-living things. Below him are the midzimu (ancestors) who have much influence in their day-to-day activities. This influence is experienced in the election of the traditional healers. These midzimu are the guardians of every homestead. Misfortune and suffering are regarded as the work of evil persons. Suffering brought by ancestors is not regarded as evil but

is really something good; it is a just punishment for negligence, disobedience or crimes committed, a corrective and therefore rehabilitating process (Kiernan 1982: 290). Individuals and groups are fenced off from surrounding evil by a protecting agent. Evil can touch them only if the ancestor relaxes his vigilance. Ancestor's power is supplemented by the powers of the traditional healers. They are believed to be capable of healing the most complicated disease, Aids. Five types of them can be identified, the most powerful being a nanga.

Within the community, the nanga is seen as the central figure. Without the protection provided by a nanga witches are believed to be able to operate freely in causing harm to persons and property. By virtue of his knowledge in healing, a nanga can be a witch. This is a general belief amongst the Venda people (Stayt 1952: 29). This idea was also highlighted by Geoffrey Parrinder, who has suggested that a nanga has to behave like a witch in order to catch a witch (Parrinder 1970: 183). This irony introduces a certain ambiguity into the roles performed by traditional healers, sometimes blurring the line that divides good and evil applications of powerful medicines. The context of traditional healing, however, with its traditional medicines, roles and techniques, provides the basic context for establishing the line between good and evil.

CHAPTER FOUR:

HARMING

Witchcraft belief is a spiritual disease which had affected both whites and blacks in the past. The term witchcraft was differently used by different groups of people. In Europe during the period of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witch-hunting was at its most intense (Cohn 1977: 99). Witchcraft was regarded as the employment of some supernatural means of doing harm to other people in a way that was generally disapproved of by the mass of society (Douglas 1970: 48). Europeans distinguished witchcraft from sorcery. Witchcraft was understood as an imaginary, psychological, and involuntary act, whereas sorcery was regarded as the employment of destructive spells, charms and medicines. Without medicines there could be no effective sorcery (ibid. 1970: 51).

In African societies the problem of witchcraft became more significant during the advent of Europeans man. This is true when one observes the lack of a specific definition of witchcraft. African societies do not draw an academic distinction between witchcraft and sorcery, evil eye, evil magic and other ways of employing mystical power to do harm to someone or his/her belongings. To the Pedi, witchcraft represents all that is evil and destructive (Mönnig, 1978: 71) In general, Africans have a similar understanding of witchcraft; the difference may be in the employment or practice of it but the difference would be very little. Witchcraft amongst Africans is feared more than anything else in such a way that no one can argue about it. This force is even recognised by those who regard themselves as Christians (ibid. 1978: 71). Africans do not distinguish between a male and a female witch as the Europeans did. The word

witch is used inclusively (Stayt 1931: 274, Bahola 1994, Mönnig 1978: 71; Ndou 1992).

Many researchers have ignored this problem of gender equity but had focused and have only on the practice of witchcraft. This has put the lives of women in a vulnerable position. No wonder a larger number of witches are said to be women. To put the record straight, like the Europeans, the Vhavenda also have different words for a male witch and a female witch. The word muloi (witch) in Venda stands for a female and a male muloi (witch) is called tshivhimbili (a man supposed to be able to go around by night). The word derived from the verb vhimbila (to roam about by night). This word is not usually used, perhaps because many researchers in the past were men.

The problem of witchcraft practice is discussed in a rather general way without objective evidence. It is common that all Africans distinguish between night-witchcraft and day-witchcraft. The same distinction is drawn between night-witches and day-witches but the distinction made by the Africans lacks the detail shown by the Europeans. The Africans failed to define night-witchcraft as well as day-witchcraft practice, making the distinction as a sweeping statement. The main aim would be to degrade the status of the accused. Many practices that are regarded by the Vhavenda as witchcraft are sorcery in so far as the European's definition is concerned. Any misfortune that occurs to someone after a quarrel is regarded as a witchcraft practice.

It is a common practice to the Vhavenda to hear a person says Ndi u tou lowa masiari? (are you bewitching by day?). This usually refers to a person who is doing a cruel act, for example beating a child using a stick, that is out of proportion. There are night-witches as well as day-witches. The night witches

are believed to take long journeys on hyenas, cats, polecats or owls to harm people purely for the sake of the pleasure they derive (Cohn 1977: 100; Mönnig 1978: 72). The most fearful familiars are owls, hyenas, polecats and zombies. These familiars are used as transport or as dzithunwa (agents) of the witches.

Witchcraft practices can also be employed by children of the witches. The children inherit from their parents or can be trained from birth. The ability to do evil coincides with the inheritance of the quality of heat. The Vhavenda idiom: "vha a fhisa" - (be hot) confirms that quality of heat. The other Venda idioms that refer to witchcraft are U silinga, u tota, u buba, u vha muhulwane. The Pedi believe that a child of a night-witch can even at birth be thrown against a wall without coming to harm. It will land softly against the wall like a cat on its hands and feet, and cling there like a bat. This proves that the child will also be a muloi (witch) (Mönnig 1978: 729, Gluckman 1972: 204). In Venda a child inherits this quality by going out every time with his/her mother, father, grandmother or grandfather.

It is also believed that other people are elected by their ancestors to become witches. Failure to bewitch or to practise witchcraft will result in a long suffering that can only be healed when the process of bewitching is in place. It is ironic that while others bewitch for pleasure others bewitch in order to restore good relationship with their ancestors.

The term u lowa (to bewitch) implies various activities which are considered to be dangerous and fearful towards mankind. The following are some of the well considered witchcraft practices amongst the Vhavenda:

1. To Cause Physical Illness

U shelela (to poison) is the most common and popular witchcraft in Venda. Women are specialists in this type of witchcraft. Usually such practice needs a kind person and women are by nature too kind. U shelela (to poison) is an activity that uses any form of poison which is put into one's food or drink. This should be done in secrecy and in a snappy way. The Vhavenda's most popular poison is tshiganame (poison) which is obtained from the crocodile's brain. It is usually employed by those who drink beer. The poison is usually placed in the finger nails which can be deepened into the calabash.

Apart from the crocodile's brain the seed of gwanda (kakieweek), mupfure (ricinus communise) and tshinyagu (cucumis Africans), when ground into powder are very poisonous. The powder is placed into a drink or food. A small amount of poison is enough to take one's life. People are afraid to drink or eat one's food and alternatively one should be aware not to expose his food or drink to other people. Each servant should place his/her food safely. No person is allowed to go near it nor to replace it. If someone does, the owner would not eat it. Sharing of food is nowadays not appreciated as in the past. If one shares a drink with friends it is a common practice that the owner should first have a sip, which is called u bvisa mushonga (to have a sip as a sign that it is poison-free). This act assures the partners that the food is free from poison. This practice of witchcraft is so common that children are allegedly using poison at school. Recently parents in rural areas in the Northern Transvaal have urged their children to stop eating food at school as food poisoning has become the order of the day (Sowetan, April, 1995). They have tshiganame and it is rumoured to be too expensive. In Venda there is a place called Tshamuganame which is believed to be a place where tshiganame is available in large quantity.

Traditionally, a dead crocodile should be reported to the Chief and its body must be burnt to ashes. This practice is done to avoid any chance of getting the crocodile's brain.

Tshiliso (to cause to eat) is derived from the causative verb lisa which denotes that a person has been given something to eat unwillingly and unconsciously. This should not be confused with forcing a sick person to eat but refers to the mystical power. The bewitched person is forced to swallow a piece of meat mixed with powders. On reaching the stomach of the victim that piece of meat will change into a living organism that will control the functioning of the body system. A bewitched person will lose his appetite. At times the person vomits or get pains in the body. It may also cause undesirable discharge in the form of liquid. People who are suffering from tshiliso have the symptoms usually on the chest, arms, or neck, which the Vhavenda refer to as mulilo (fire). There are small marks which are white in colour. The victim is usually bewitched when he/she is asleep at night. The diviners are the only people who can discover that a person has been given something to cause him/her to be ill. The researcher had an opportunity to visit the healer at Raliphaswa. The researcher's mother was bewitched and was sent to Matshivha, better known as Dzagana the elder. The patient was instructed to bring a litre of a fresh milk which was then mixed with other medicines. The patient was forced to drink and rest in the sun. After a while the patient started vomiting small pieces that resembled meat. The process of healing is referred to as u tanzwiswa tshiliso (to cause to vomit that which was magically and unconsciously eaten).

U doba (to bewitch a person through his/her discharge). The Vhavenda strongly believe that a person can be bewitched by taking any article or discharge from him/her. Urine is one of the discharges that is commonly used in

the case of men, although women are also bewitched by means of discharges. The diviners maintained that witches have an ability to take the urine and mix it up with magical plants. The mixture will be poured into the bladder of a chicken which after that will be buried in a secret place. The idea behind this is that when the bladder gets rotten and bursts, the victim's (the bewitched person's) stomach will become bigger and burst also. That will be the end.

This disease is becoming too common in Venda and the most victims are men. The other version related to this type of disease is that when a young man has sexual intercourse with a woman who has passed her menopause his stomach swells and become shiny. This is called tshikwilimimba (swelling of the stomach caused by having sexual intercourse with old women). This can affect either party.

In addition to the urine that is used, sweat, hair and underclothes are targeted. Women, unlike men, are afraid to leave a piece of clothing outside. Its disappearance may cause one to visit a diviner. This type of witchcraft is common where a man has more than one wife, or where there are daughters of different mothers in an extended family. Even if it can be recovered, it will never be used again. In women there is a fear that her chances of becoming pregnant can be tampered with. A man may no longer be strong enough to produce children. Witches use the sweat from his pants to make the sperm too weak. When underclothing is torn it must be put in the fire. The Vhavenda do not appreciate the idea of changing clothes with others or giving out old clothes to the poor. That is not meanness but fear of being bewitched. Another example is the use of bath water used by the husband. The unfaithful woman will, when pregnant, wash herself with that dirty water and drink it. There is a

belief that the child born will be like his/her father. This is to avoid any suspicion.

Tshipfula (to make sick at a distance). Related to u doba, the term, tshipfula, is derived from u pfula (to prick). Tshipfula usually attacks the foot or upper leg and upper arm. This kind of sore is at times called cancer. This is painful and victims regard it as the work of the witches. The same applies with urine, when witches scoop the soil that a victim has touched and mix it with magical plants. The next day you feel an itchy pain which will develop into a deep sore that will penetrate flesh to the bone.

U shululwa (to become barren). Normally all men are believed to have an ability to conceive children. Witches can make it possible that his sperm becomes too weak to produce fruits. To bewitch him, his sperm is taken by the woman with whom he is making love. When they are making love, the woman would put a piece of cloth underneath them. She will cause the man to let the sperm come out on the cloth. The sperm is mixed with some strong medicines. That mixture is tied up and placed into an anthill to be eaten by termites. A man bewitched in such a manner will never produce children again.

U sikela (to bewitch a thief). Thieves are the enemies of the well-to-do people. To discourage thieving the owners usually apply strong medicines that will cripple the thief. The medicines are placed into contact with anything left behind. For example, if it is a goat which has been stolen, a hair or its skin or manure will be enough to carry out an effective punishment. Through this witchcraft, a victim's hand or eyes or any part of the body can be crippled. This is called u sikela. Such stories are common amongst the Vhavenda. It is alleged that thieves, on the other hand, had to counteract the magical effect of that

witchcraft by throwing away all the internal organs of the goat, such as liver, lungs and intestines (Mabogo 1990:36). During our earlier days, boys used to steal sugar cane, oranges, green mealies, peaches and mangoes. The owner had to apply black stuff on them to deter thieves or even to announce publicly that any one who would steal this or that would be crippled. That was enough to stop thieves. No one in my experience had ever been crippled, but people can even mention names of such victims who are far away and had been crippled through such witchcraft practice.

U kupulela (to transfer the disease to another magically). The transference of a disease from one person to the other is magically done. This is done by a traditional healer using his/her strong medicines. Though he/she is adored by the community, in this respect he/she is performing witchcraft because the activities being performed would make the unfortunate victim become ill. The researcher has personally experienced such practice. When a sick person does not get well the healers believe that the sickness had been cemented into the body - vho ri u lowa, vha sulela (to use magical or powerful plants to make the disease incurable). According to the healers the only way to make him/her well again is to kupulela (transfer) the sickness to another person. The healer asks the patient to bring a chicken or one cent that will be treated together with the patient's hair and nails from both fingers and toes. The toes of the chicken are cut mainly to get blood. He/she mixes the blood of a patient together with the blood from the chicken. The mixture together with the hair and nails are burnt down and the patient is covered with a blanket to force him/her to inhale the smoke. After that treatment the healer instructs the patient to take the chicken(s) home. On the way it must be abandoned. Any one who will catch it will inherit the illness. In case of a cent the patient just drops it on the path and any one who will pick it up, gets that tshilombo (a decoy). This type of

witchcraft is feared because many coins are usually found in shops, streets and shopping complexes. No person can pick them up, even those who are in dire need of money. This also applies to any money from a stranger. It is fearful.

U wela devhuni (to have sexual intercourse with a woman who has had an abortion). This type of witchcraft is believed to be fatally dangerous to any man who may have sex with such a woman. When one is suffering because of such sexual relationship it is termed u wela devhuni. This disease affects the whole circulation system. This kind of disease is usually diagnosed by the diviners as cause of death or illness. This disease is employed by women who are not faithful to their lovers. The man would start losing weight and become frail. This will be followed by a non-stop headache. Sooner or later the man may have a disease, which the symptom considered characteristic is a sunken fontanel (Mabogo 1990:35). He urinates blood and it is very painful. Once this symptom is realised, the chance of surviving is small. Many men in Venda pass away through this disease. No action by the community has ever been taken. It remains the issue of the family concerned. Women who usually commit such witchcraft are feared and usually after the crime they leave for another place which is far from their own people. It is believed that after sexual intercourse the woman may return to the spot where relationship had taken place and tie up the grass on which they had slept. A man will never tell anybody, even when he feels pain, until his last day. It is important to note that any sudden illness or death of a man is likely to be associated with u wela devhuni.

2. To Cause Misfortune

U tsimbela (to bewitch others to have misfortune). This is done by hunters for game. Hunters usually use dogs and snares to catch birds and wild animals and

in cases where only one person is fortunate enough to get more than others, he/she is likely to be accused of using medicines that prevent others getting more. Such practice is regarded as witchcraft. The process is called mutsimbe from the verb tsimba (to press down). If it continuously happens that others do not catch as much as he does, the only way of avoiding this misfortune is to cast him out from the group.

U swoga mavhele (to drive the mealies from the owner's field to the witch's field). This type of witchcraft is associated with a person who usually has a good harvest. People believe him/her as having the magic power to take the mealies from others' fields. (Mbiti 1975:166). I had an opportunity during my youth to hear and see an old man who was supposed to have such magical powers. He was a well-to-do person who had goats, sheep, cattle and big fields of mealies and finger millet. Many people in the village were afraid of him and he was associated with zombies. No one would like to see him coming close to his/her mealie field. He is long dead but no one is prospering like he did, even his children.

3. To Create Conflict

U livhanya (to cause quarrels) refers to a belief amongst the Vhavenda that witches can bewitch a person to fight with one person from time to time. This can usually happen between a son and a father or mother. When one does a thing in an excessive way it is because of being bewitched. For example, if a man loves women more than is expected, such a person is being driven by the mystical force beyond his control (Meer 1988:79). Where a person does not stay long in one employment the diviners may be consulted and usually the ancestors or the makhadzi (aunt) might have bewitched him/her. Laziness

cannot be taken or cited as the reason for the changing of jobs, which is common for one bewitched for his/her own money. People who are arrogant and have no respect for others are the slaves of the forces of the witches. A normal person feels ashamed to utter vulgar words in front of other normal people. In education, failing one grade many a time cannot be accepted as the norm. Witches have cast their spells. Learners even indicate that they suffer from forgetfulness and at times they do not see the letters. It usually happens during examination time because it has been livhanywa (made to happen through him/her). If this happens it would mean witches do not wish to see his/her progress. There were cases of girls being bewitched in such a way. Some people associate that kind of misfortune with the possession cult. Her ancestors are not pleased to see her being educated in the Western perspective. These ancestors can be consulted and the patient be given a copper bangle which represents the ancestors. That is another way of appeasing them.

U posela (to cast spells in the homesteads). Witches are believed to be jealous people. They do not appreciate the welfare of others. This type of witchcraft is employed to cause quarrels in the family. Witches go about by night or by day checking peaceful couples and businesses. What the witches want is chaos and bloodshed. Where there is peace they will revisit by night and throw magical substances. The business will start to lose customers. The only way to restore peace or effectiveness of the business will be by human organs, preferably hands, eyes, lips and genitals.

Phaladzane (medicine to cause chaos and quarrels). A witch blows medicine or spells from a horn in the direction of the person who is to be harmed or killed or divorced, or the family will never enjoy happiness until there is death or divorce. If it is a business it may close down with people refusing to pay

their debts. When a Muvenda really experiences this he consults a nanga (traditional healer) who would visit the home or a business at night and place some powerful medicines there. In a business human organs would be needed to encourage customers to support the business again.

4. To Gain Control

Gaputshete (food that tames men and makes them submissive to their wives). Traditionally, a man is always right in the family. Members of the family are treated as objects rather than as people. A man's word in the family is final and does not need to be reasoned or to be put in another way. That is a real Muvenda homestead, according to their tradition. Some women are believed to have powers over their husbands. When a man succumbs to his wife it is because he has eaten gaputshete. This gaputshete is a mixture of top piece of faeces, nails from fingers, and toes, hair, eye lashes and a small piece of left-over porridge. The small piece of left-over porridge will be rolled all over the body, especially between legs and vagina. All these will be mixed with the glance from the tongue. This gaputshete is prepared by one's wife in the form of vegetable or can be in put in black tea or coffee. It should be prepared alone in secrecy and the only person to know should be the wife's mother. When all is done, the mixture would then be placed between her legs when sitting in a squatting position to allow the sweat from the vagina to trickle into the food. The main objective is to make a man witless. Once the man has eaten he becomes a stupid, witless person. Henceforth, anything that comes from his wife would be taken as it is. The wife can have a love affair with another man, yet he will never burst into anger. Relatives can intervene when things become worse but he will never take any action. For example, at the end of the month, the wife can take his whole salary. He will never quarrel about it. Men of this

nature have no place in the world of men and in the community. They are ridiculed. It is important to note that this act of making a husband witless should be renewed from time to time or he will turn against the wife for ever.

U dzivhela (to doctor a land against evil). The land needs to be protected against evil. It should have a dignity that deters its enemies from invading it. This is done by calling the dzembelekete (powerful, strong and fearful healer) to come and place medicines all round it, similar to vaccinating against smallpox. He uses zwirovha (medicines made out of human bones) which are placed on the boundaries. When an enemy reaches the boundary he feels tired and becomes weak. At last he falls into a deep sleep, being weakened by the magical powerful plants. This u dzivhela is done by night only. This is done to avoid other witches who may wish to weaken one's boundary.

U rea (to trap). This u rea practice is usually employed by men against their wives. It is alleged that such witchcraft has been adopted from Zimbabwe. Medicines from powerful plants are mixed with a male dog's sperm. Medicines are applied on a knife's edge and the knife is placed at a distance unfolded. It is a taboo in Venda to hand over an unfolded knife to someone. The husband who wants to trap his wife would ask her to bring the knife. When handing it over, the husband would ask her to fold it. It is alleged that by folding it she would be locking herself. Any man who would have sexual intercourse with her would be unable to get out after he has ejaculated, until the owner of the wife is called to the scene. Some people confirm this to be true. Another technique of u rea is used by ritual killers to trap their victims. They place their medicines on the way or path. When a victim comes to the spot and steps over the medicine there is very little chance of survival. The victim becomes confused

and loses direction. When the ritual killers approach him/her, she/he cannot run away. The victim is weak and controlled, unable to put up any resistance.

U thavhela (to immunise by medicine for fighting or sex). During our youth boys who were more powerful and had high concentration when fighting were believed to have been given powers by healers. The same applies to a man who loves women excessively. He is believed to have tshitunde tsha pfene (hyracious, urine of rock rabbits), which dries on rocks to a pitch-like substance and is scraped off and used as an aphrodisiac for men. That of baboons (pfene) is usually well known as tshitunde tsha pfene (urine of a baboon). A man bewitched through this medicine can have sex with many women in a day. He is known to have many lovers. Such a man is commonly known as lupfimbi (lover of women), the opposite to tshifevhi (lover of men). He dislikes his acts but cannot abandon them because he has been bewitched. Bewitched men boastfully argue that there is no Aids and that the only way to avoid venereal disease is to be healed by a placenta. This is done by traditional healers.

U kata/U phuphudza (to make someone dull). This witchcraft is done by ritual killers by placing treated sticks on the path. The one who steps over the treated sticks will immediately get lost and confused on the way. He or she will easily follow the instructions of his or her killers. There is the practice of putting medicine into a drink in order to make a victim dull. Most of the victims of ritual killing in Venda have been associated with shebeens or beer halls.

U livhadza (to cause to forget). Similar to u kata, this activity is usually employed by elderly people on young ones after the death of a family member. This is a form of night witchcraft. They let the children fall asleep and shout at them. For example: Mamedzi o lovha ha tsha ambiwa (Mamedzi is dead, do not

call his/her name again). From henceforth the children will forget the deceased. Although it can be performed for protection, u livhadza can also be used to harm someone by making them forget who they are or where they live.

5. Evil Eye, Cursing, Familiars, Lightning, and Zombies

U lowa nga mato (to bewitch by using eyes). The notion of the “evil eye” plays an important role in the process of identifying who the witch is. A person whose eyes are red or big is likely to be suspected. If a person feels threatened when looked at it means he or she is being bewitched. It is difficult to explain how the spells get into the body. Mbiti (1975: 167) indicated that a witch can cause harm by a mere look or by speaking words intended to inflict harm. Brain and Lewton maintained that practically adults and very often women bear physical stigmas such as red eyes or devil eyes or a mark. By the devil’s mark they refer to something like merocephalus or hydrasyphilis or a person whose body is hairy (Brain and Lewton 1987: 56) These are the characteristics of a witch. He/she is feared instead of being honoured. In Lugbara the evil eye is referred to as oleu and to them such a person is the real witch who would be known by external signs (Middleton 1967: 160). In Venda witches who are identified by means of red eyes are usually women, mostly those who are black in colour. Such women are too cunning and would not hesitate to defend themselves if attacked or accused. This type of witchcraft can be regarded as day-witchcraft.

U sema (to curse). Chaos and conflicts are normal within a normal society but the words should not harm a person who is being cursed. The Vhavenda believe that a person who claims to be a witch may deliberately curse someone or cast a spell over him. A person harmed in such a way is then seen as having

been bewitched (Minaar et al. 1992: 16). People may change words in a debate but that should not be directed to cause harm, lest you be accused of having employed witchcraft. A person may simply curse another in anger although such a person does not necessarily view him/herself as a witch. Should harm befall the person cursed he/she can also be seen as having been bewitched. The Vhavenda would say Ipfi livhi a li yi mulwadzeni (a curse should not result into a harm lest you are likely to be a witch). Gluckman (1972: 204) indicated that the Lugbara refer to curse as an oral witchcraft. This type of witchcraft can be classified as both the night and the day witchcraft. It is evident that any person within the community is capable of committing this type of witchcraft.

Familiars: Witches are believed to use their agents to carry out their tasks. These agents are believed to be polecats, baboons, owls, snakes, cats as well as hyenas. The appearance of an owl at home is a sign of an omen and to a Muvenda an owl brings spells to the home. The only way of chasing it away is to throw a burning branch. There is a general belief that it will never come back again. Polecats can be put into one's body and if that happens a person would keep on talking alone and at times laughing. Those who suppose to have them harbour them usually in a tshitemba (calabash) and place it in the kitchen. Others have snakes and baboons to carry out their duties. In time of famine baboons are sent out to fetch mielies or the owner takes the form of a baboon (Stayt 1975: 238-240). It is interesting to note that baboons' bones are strongly recommended for thangu (divining dice) because they are said to be always sensitive and watchful. Snakes are sent to bewitch people. The most fearful agent is tokoloshi. This is believed to be used by tshivhimbili and tshigomamutanda (less important healer) to bewitch others and also to have sexual intercourse with women by night. Traditional healers claim that tokoloshi is used by the Pedi and the Shangaans. In Shangaan they call it

xinwakadzi a kind of small animal that is believed to be like a monkey, is used by the witches).

Tokoloshi is like a monkey. The Pedi are said to use it when bewitching. For this reason Pedi hate and fear the monkey as much as they hate the cat. In Soweto (especially at Tshiawelo) they use this tokoloshi to brew beer, sift it, and make it never to run out when selling it. Due to migration, the Vhavenda now have the tokoloshi, whereas originally they did not have it. The Vhavenda also have thuri (polecats), baboons and monkeys as their taboos. You can be penalised if you are found harassing these animals. Tokoloshi is believed to have a long penis that can penetrate a vagina unnoticed. Tokoloshi makes love with women. This normally happens to a woman who the tshivhimbili (male witch) has proposed love to and has been refused. It also happens to those who have accepted love with a man, but he is unable to conceive children (tshivhimbili). The tshivhimbili is said to use tokoloshi. Witches with familiars are feared instead of being honoured. When you want to slaughter a goat, sheep, or chicken, you must let the tokoloshi know in advance and it must be given a piece of meat, with pieces of all the internal organs and blood. Tokoloshi also has wife to take care of. The wife is the only person who understands the language of the tokoloshi and if it is necessary for the family to know, the wife will gather the family and let them know the problem.

Lightning: When summer season comes people have mixed feelings in Venda. While some are welcoming the summer rain, others prepare to strike their enemies. It is the time when people's bodies should be renewed. The renewal is done by the traditional healers by immunising new, strong medicines to protect them from ndadzi (lightning). There is a strong belief among Africans that some witches can fly from one place to another. It is easy for a witch who

is in Cape Town to strike a person who is in Durban. They smear medicines on their bodies that cause thunderstorms and lightning. Some people believe that the Ndebele people practise it openly and to them lightning is used as a measure to protect oneself. The Pedi also use it to get firewood. In Soweto lightning is used to kill people and to take bags of mealie meal and groceries. In Venda lightning is fearful and any person associated with it is likely to be ostracised. Many lightning strikers were forced to leave the place or burnt to death. Those who believe in this type of witchcraft maintained that after striking a house or a herd of cattle he/she runs to the river to take out the feathers. Those who are usually by the riverside during thunderstorms are likely to fall suspect.

Maduxwane (Zombies). Maduxwane are the catapults of witches. They do not get tired and it is for this reason that all people who have big orchards and mealie fields are suspected of having zombies. Zombies do not live in the homestead but live somewhere far away in the thick bush. They cannot talk the language of an ordinary person because their tongues have been cut out. This happens when a person dies mysteriously in an accident or from no apparent cause. After death the witches change him into a zombie. Witches hide him or her behind the door and put a pole of musenzhe (*cussonia spicata* thumb) inside the coffin. In Pedi a Zombie is called tholwane and it is similar to setseetse which is the thief of the witches (Mönnig 1978: 73). The Pedi, unlike the Vhavenda, maintained that after the burial the witches go to a grave and call the dead person and the grave will immediately begin to shake and he/she comes out. The tholwane then becomes the workaholic of the witches. This is referred to as night witchcraft.

In this chapter, we have considered the different types of harm associated with witchcraft. While witches might use other techniques, such as cursing or the evil eye, the use of medicines runs through all the practices that cause physical illness, misfortune, conflict, or loss of control. Healing and harming, therefore, are both achieved through the use of medicines. In the case of the harm that is thought to be caused by witchcraft, however, medicines appear in a larger symbolism of evil that accounts for illness, suffering, and misfortune. The next chapter will conclude with a discussion of the ethical and political aspects of that symbolism of evil.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SYMBOLISM OF EVIL

Religion plays an important role in the life of an individual and the community as a whole. It can be regarded as the basis of belief and action. In creating a religious way of life, human beings distinguish evil from non-evil to make life bearable and to set a pattern of social function, encouraging people to observe basic social norms (Hunter, 1936: 108). Through beliefs, actions, and symbols, religious life represents experiments in being human (Chidester, 1990: 39). In religious terms, some animals and objects are regarded as sacred, while others are regarded as profane. Within this context of the sacred and profane, there is an element of evil. One might be tempted to say that the origin of religion was the fear of death, because death itself is the ultimate symbol of evil.

1. The Ethics of Evil

Evil can only be defined as evil within the context of each religion. The Venda religion does not explain evil in an academic way and at times the word sin can be used as a synonym for evil. The two words are only limited to their area of meaning (Van Rooy, 1971: 181). By definition, all anti-social acts towards any creature will be regarded as evil. Within a community some people are feared but not honoured. These are the people who are regarded by other members as having magical powers to manipulate others as well as natural forces. In Venda they are called vhaloi (witches). Within the community, vhaloi are feared to

such an extent that no one is likely to challenge them. Any person who is regarded as muloi (a witch) within a community carries the stigma of evil and he/she is the symbol of evil. The witch is subject to being ostracised by the community and by his/her own people. Mbiti (1975: 165) and Chidester (1992: 16) shared the same thought when they indicate that witches, evil magicians, and sorcerers are the most hated persons in their communities. No one would like to associate with them since they carry an evil stigma. This evil stigma is like a black spot in white linen which everybody sees. It cannot be washed away. A Venda proverb states: Na u tamba wa dola senenga a li tuwi (even though you can wash yourself and smear Vaseline the accusation never disappears).

During the advent of Christians missionaries, those who were accused as witches went to the mission stations and became Christians but the missionaries were regarded by the community as evil because they were harbouring the witches. It was in that regard that amongst the community Christians were labelled as Madzhagane (a derogatory term for lawless people), who do not have respect for moral norms. It is normative according to the community's moral standards that a witch is never accommodated once he is exposed. Any one who interferes with this rule is also a symbol of evil. This dissociation from a witch happens regardless of close relationship. The extreme dissociation of a witch requires killing, but death alone is not sufficient. It is necessary to make certain that he/she is dead and to destroy the body completely. The body must be cut into pieces in order to see blood flowing and then burned to ashes.

Burning the witch is the ultimate act of dissociation from evil (Minaar et al., 1992: 72)

As the primary symbol of evil, witches are the most rejected people within the community. The dissociation from a witch happens regardless of close relationship. It becomes evident when an accusation is made. Traditionally, the accuser should have a basis for support. The accuser first consults with his own people and then goes secretly to the mungome (diviner) to verify that the accused is indeed an evil person. When the matter is finally reported to the chief, it must be clearly known that the accused would be charged. At the chief's kraal the accused is in a vulnerable position. No one can defend him/her. In the chief's kraal the chief would need only the support of his council and other people to allow them to consult a mungome (diviner). The isolation of a muloi (a witch) becomes more evident at the mungome where he/she is humiliated by the initiates (trainees). He can be tortured before a strip on the side of the head is shaved. The strip on the head expresses the act of humiliation and also for identification when the entourage returns to the chief's kraal (Niehaus, 1993: 20). Traditionally, the identification of a witch by a mungome is considered to be a purifying healing not only of the accuser but even of the community as a whole. The Venda proverb - Nowa yo vho nalaho a i lumi (a known secret is less dangerous) - indicates that once the problem is identified nothing can be considered dangerous. For a mungome to tell the accusing party their victim they know what type of medicines they can use to render him powerless. After the identification of a witch, a mungome also gives advice. The advice can either inform the accusers about the traditional healer

who can help them or he may visit them by night with medicines to prevent a witch from entering their homestead.

Witches as the symbol of evil are believed to have supernatural powers to control nature. For example, they can use storms which can damage the mielie fields of the one they dislike. They are believed to have an ability to fly from one place to another in a form of ndadzi (lightning). When practising this, they also change their shape and develop wings. Not only can they modify their hands into wings, but they can also take the form of any animal. It is for this reason that they are feared, but not honoured within the community.

Witches can also inflict harm on their victims in a mysterious way. A witch may use incantations, for example. To do this he/she may use anything that is attached to the victim, such as hair, nails, dirt from clothes, and other clothes of the victim which he/she may wish to harm. There is a belief that by inflicting harm on what once belonged to a person, that person is automatically harmed. People with protruding or swelling stomachs are believed to be the victim of such evil practices (Mbiti, 1975: 166). Many people live in constant fear of witches. The most feared witches are those who can turn a person into a zombie, a person who works for others without being paid.

Usually men are the ones who practice this form of evil. It is rare in Venda to hear allegations of women harbouring zombies. Women are associated with poisoning. Children, irrespective of sex, inherit the evil powers to do harm to the victims. The training of a child starts from birth. It is believed that a child

who is to be a witch can be thrown to the wall and be able to adhere on it without any feeling or sign of pain. Daughters learn from their mothers, while boys learn from their fathers (Niehaus, 1993: 6). It is for this reason that all diseases related to blood are associated with women because of their monthly cycle, while those diseases related to bones are associated with men because of their sperm.

The most believable symbol of evil in the opinion of the Venda people is the one which is visible. In this respect, certain animals are regarded as symbols of evil. Such animals are those that are associated with the evil acts of the witches. There is a close relationship between such animals and witches. At times witches have to travel long distances by night to carry out their duties. Animals such as owls and hyenas can be used as transport or can be sent to inflict harm on the victim. By day they are kept at a secret place. There is a belief that they feed on human flesh. They have an ability to talk or manipulate animals. Hence they are fearsome and unfriendly. Their children are warned not to reveal to anyone, but it is hard for them to do so.

Owls are the most hated birds because they are believed to have a close connection with the witches. They are the agents of witches. Each time they are sent to bewitch people. A cry of an owl each night at one place raises a concern. It is possible for an owl to come and perch on the top of a roof and hoot. This signifies trouble to come and all members of the family should visit a traditional specialist. The homestead should be protected against such evils

from an owl. To chase it off forever, a piece of burning brand is thrown at it. It is a taboo to throw a stone at it because your hand will become crippled.

Another animal is a polecat which can get into a human's body. A person bewitched through thuri (polecat) is at times restless or becomes quiet. He /she can just talk or laugh alone because of thuri. For this reason, the Venda hate it and regard it as the symbol of evil. Those who have them are called witches. Polecats live in a small calabash that is placed in the kitchen and it is not known what type of food they eat, but they are believed to stay with people. The belief in the evil of polecats is similar to that of lukhohe (slender mongoose). The appearance of this animal shows bad luck to any traveller. Once you come across a lukhohe be sure of a misfortune that lies ahead. The belief of a slender mongoose as an evil by the Venda is equal to that of the Sotho people who hate a cat. The Sotho believe that witches bewitch by using a cat because it is a kind animal. They regard it as the symbol of evil.

People perceive evil differently. Sometimes blessings can be considered as a curse or an evil. The understanding of evil focuses what is normal and abnormal within a society. For example, the birth of twins, triplets, and even more than what is normally expected can be regarded as a misfortune within the Venda world-view. A human person should have one child at a time and that is believed to be a blessing from the ancestors. There are women within the Venda culture who are regarded as a symbol of shame for giving birth to more than one child. The elderly women are the mid-wives in Venda culture. If a multiple birth occurs, they choose a healthier one to remain, while the sickly

will disappear without trace. The main objective is to remove that defilement and to reinstate the mother into the women's world. In the Venda idiom, Muthu a si mbudzi i no dzwala mafhata, a person is not a goat which gives birth to twins). Anything which is beyond their understanding is either evil or madambi (miracle). According to this world-view, any wife who continuously has twins or more runs the risk of losing her marriage. The family members are the ones who play an important role in the final decision of sending the wife back. A woman who has twins is similar to the one who is in her monthly cycle. The elderly women of the community regard her as impure and she is forbidden to have contact with other members of the family. She could be secluded, not allowed to get into the house where her husband sleeps, until she has finished her menstruation. The same applies to a mudzadze, a woman from a maternity ward. She is not allowed into the house she was using with her husband. Alternatively, the men are also not allowed into a house in which a mudzadze sleeps. It is evil since the husband would be involved with other women. He is believed to have a heat that may eventually cause death to the newly born child. Through such associations and restrictions, the Venda symbolism of evil has reinforced a certain ethos that represents the order of life.

Death disrupts the order of life. Although described by scholars in different ways, death nevertheless remains a fearful event. Sigmund Freud, for example, held that death was the total and complete extinction of the human person (Chidester 1987: 184). The belief in the Venda world-view is that a community is made out of the social relations of its members and when one member dies a community itself "dies" (Ibid., 1990: 35). The Venda say, Ri vhana vha Mwali

(we are children of the same God). This symbolises the members of one community. It is within this context that death is seen as evil that brings frustration, violence and social divisions within one group of people which is evil in itself. Evil operates through the medium of human beings (Krige 1970: 237) called vhaloi (witches) and to control them, they must be identified and dealt with. The methods of dealing with them vary according to the crime they have committed. In the past it was the khosi (chief) and his council who had the power to decide the type of punishment, but after the period of 1980s the youths took over. When a misfortune happens the youths would visit a mungome (diviner) who would identify a victim. Upon their return the youth usually summoned all the members of the community together and informed them about the findings. At times they played cassette recordings with the voice of a mungome (Niehaus, 1993: 18). The victim would then be tortured publicly in front of the comrades with the aim of eliminating their interests and well being. Steadman (1985) also maintained that the public's punishment of witches communicates a willingness by the accusers to use violence to protect their interests and to dispose of future offenders who threaten them. Usually the comrades conducted meetings under the influence of liquor in violent ways. Members of the community could not resist, since they feared being victimised. Alternatively, the accused at times were not given a chance to defend themselves. Many questions can be put forward simultaneously with the aim of confusing the victim. This mental torture often caused the victim to surrender and thereby confirmed the accusations. Then came the punishment, which could either be necklacing or stoning to death. The lucky ones were those who would only be severely sjamboked or verbally warned (Niehaus, 1993: 15).

There were those whose lives were saved because of the presence of the police. The main objective of torturing and killing a muloi is an attempt to negotiate peace and to live without fear of death because there is a myth which portrays a witch as an agent of any misfortune, including death.

After the death of a family member, the family gets frustrated and starts to be ruled by fear. The dead person and all his/her belongings are regarded as the other. No person can use them before a traditional healer cleanses them from pollution. They should be feared. The clothes and other articles are collected and the house or room that he/she was using is to be closed to prevent the evil from attacking other members of the family. The name of the deceased is to be erased from their minds forthwith. There is a belief that death can contaminate other members of the family, especially a death from tuberculosis. It is for this reason that only elderly people are allowed to stay with the corpse until the funeral day. The evil nature of death is characterised by the suspension of certain social activities by the bereaved family. Mourners may wear special clothing, refrain from certain foods, and observe other regulations and prohibitions. For example, if it is the husband who had passed away, his wife would refrain from sexual intercourse with another man until it is certain that the body is decomposed. In Venda, rituals would be performed to clean her. It is believed that failure to observe these rituals cause all men who have sexual intercourse with her to suffer from khundu, a disease which attacks the waist of a man who has sexual intercourse with a woman whose husband has passed away.

It is compulsory that before a coffin leaves for the burial site the youngest child of the deceased should crawl underneath. This ritual is performed in order to protect a child from mafa, a contagion of death. When an unmarried man has passed away, the elderly people of the family together with a nanga go to the mafhandeni (cross roads) with all the objects that will be used to prepare marriage rituals, the idea being to reconcile his soul with the ancestors.

Colour symbolism may indicate this special world of death. Black is commonly used, because it symbolises darkness and darkness is the symbol of evil. The case of a woman having black clothing will serve as a warning to men. Burial rites are performed to appease the soul which is crossing the bridge to the "living dead". It is common practice in some Venda funerals to hear the mourners say: Ni tshimbile zwavhudi na rine ri do ni tevhela (have a good journey, we shall also follow you). All his/her belongings will be put into the coffin. To indicate that such a person is on a journey, a calabash full of water will be placed on the head-site of the grave. Seeds will be sown using the left hand. All of these rituals symbolise and mediate the evil of death. In this respect, they respond to the breakdown in the ethical order that is so often represented by witchcraft.

2. The Politics of Evil

Another form of evil is the force of oppression used by a human being over another human being. Nelson and Eigen (1984: 63) understand evil as the distortion of the nature of humanity by oppressive forces of society. South African society was the victim of the evil during the period of apartheid. Apartheid classified people under the categories where some people were considered to be superhuman while others were sub-human. This classification, as Chidester has indicated, might have been applied to minerals, animals and vegetables, but also could be applied to the structural dehumanization of blacks under apartheid (Chidester, 1992: 4). This classification made the life of a black person cheap and miserable. Blacks had to depend on whites for work and food because of bad health and working conditions. Bad health is considered to be evil because it interferes with individualisation and promotes dependency (Nelson and Eigen, 1984: 64). As a result of apartheid, blacks were placed at the receiving end, but to the whites it was the only way of giving blacks self-determination, yet it was actually a fulcrum of evil. This was an artificial racial classification whose objective was to look down upon others and to exploit them. Sansom (1972: 13) proposed that where groups maintain separate social identities, yet where their members are required to interact with frequency, there is a high probability that any differential allocation of power between the groups will lead to increasing exploitation of the weaker by the stronger. It is this exploitation of the weaker which is regarded as evil with special reference to the general golden rule.

As a symbol of the politics of evil, apartheid was given other names, such as cultural autonomy, self-determination, and separate development. It was an irony that people who were to exercise their own culture had their culture totally changed and they had no land to exercise self-determination but only blocks to live in. The sinfulness of apartheid was confirmed by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches on the basis "that it was based on the anti-Christian premise that human beings were irreconcilable; it was applied through racial structures that provided exclusive privileges for whites at the expense of millions of people in South Africa (Chidester, 1992: 203). The same element of evil was echoed by De Klerk during the unveiling of the colours, logo, and flag of the New National Party. He specifically indicated that apartheid has been damaging when it came to the forced removal of District Six, job reservation, and pass laws. Forced removals left many people without their land and their loved ones. Elderly people died on the way. To date, many people, mostly in the rural areas, are still suffering from the aftermath of forced removal. They do not have a space to live or to work on. In order to survive, they depend on farm work. Both parents and children are the subjects of the employer. They earn too little. What is painful is that they do not have a space for living and over-crowded living conditions is the breeding place of evil. It is evil for the elderly people to share the same room with the young ones. Because of apartheid, they have no choice.

The sub-classification of human beings eventually leads to violence, even though the sub-classification of persons is already a violent act (Chidester,

1992: 17). The introduction of Bantu education in 1953 was an obvious mission by the white government to dehumanise the blacks. The blacks saw the introduction of Bantu education as an insult and defilement. Many people left their mother country in search for better education. From that point, the white South African government was sitting on a time bomb. Protest marches were the order of the day. The violent reality of apartheid received international attention on 21 March 1960 when police responded to a peaceful protest march by opening fire on black men, women, and children that left sixty-nine dead and wounding a hundred and eighty six. That happened in the small town of Sharpeville in the Transvaal (Chidester, 1992: 202). From that day onwards until the unbanning of liberation organisations, there was indeed separate development. Socially, economically and politically, separate development created poverty amongst the blacks. The 1976 riots marked the beginning of the holocaust of blacks. The evil of apartheid was felt mostly by the youths who crossed the border in larger numbers. Security forces were strengthened and violence was staged by the oppressors. The oppressed people turned on each other, resulting in killing each other like flies through conspiracy. After the unbanning of the liberation organisations in 1990, "black on black" violence took a new course. As a term such as impimpi (spy) became a synonym for the witch, there was a move to wipe away all the witches to free a new South Africa.

The militant youths took the place of the elders in the administration of all structures. The mahosi (chiefs) were regarded as the collaborators of apartheid. They were accused of allowing the whites to take a large part of the land. They

were attacked for accepting foreign law and religion. Therefore, the chief's kraal was regarded as profane, polluted by chiefs and councillors. There was a need to cut the tie between a chief and the people. Madzunde (communal work) and other traditional activities were abolished as they were regarded with contempt. Militant youths established their own courts to try cases for corruption, witchcraft, and ritual murder. Members of the community were to be politicised and conscientised to the changes. Not only were the chiefs regarded as puppets, but also all the people who were associated with them, regardless of sex or education. Relatives of the chief were never trusted. Any success or achievement they might achieve was associated with corruption. The main objective was to detach the people from the chief in order to pave the way for politicising them.

The activities of the youth did not continue unopposed. The elders on the other hand regarded the militant youths as lawless people who did not respect their parents. Traditionally, the youth have no power over their parents while they are still alive. Social, economic, and political power should be something that is inherited. Hence, elders regarded the activities of the youth as evil and a coup-d'etat. According to the basic social norms, all elderly people are regarded as "your" parents. Within a family no person can be regarded as independent until he takes over the leadership after the death of his father. A female has nothing to inherit. After the unbanning of liberation organisations, not only boys were in the forefront, but girls were also in the thick of struggle. Elders saw this as a violation of social order, because a female can play no public role within a community or society. She is regarded as a weak person within the community.

Hence any male whose character is unacceptable will be ridiculed as musadzi, a woman, an unimportant person whose personality is weak. Most elderly people in Venda are still echoing this conviction by complaining, Hoyu muvhuso wa Mandela ndi wa vhatukana na vhasidzana, zwenezwo a ri nga u pfi (This government of Mandela is for boys and girls, therefore we cannot listen to it and be ruled by boys and girls).

Police structures were also regarded by the youths as agents of oppression which needed to be changed. Police Stations were regarded as soft targets. Policemen were the most hated people in the community, although there were a few who were collaborating with the youth. Any person who had an association with the police was likely to be accused of being a government-sponsored spy. Anything associated with the police structures, such as clothes, was regarded with suspicion. It was not understandable for any person other than a policeman to have shoes or a jersey from that structure. Policemen were regarded as the other, simply because they were working for the oppressive regime. For being a spy, such a person could be removed from the community. A spy was no less than a witch. To deal with spies, comrades convened meetings to discuss witches and sometimes to allow others to name them. It is possible to call them to a gathering for questioning or to be killed. At times the gathering would decide the amount of money which each person or village would pay in order to visit a mungome (diviner). The contribution was not voluntary. It is likely for one to lose life for resisting to pay (Niehaus, 1993: 17-19; Sowetan, April 26, 1996).

If violence can be defined as direct harm to persons or property, it was here that it can be defined as evil. The youth established their own court, so-called Kangaroo courts, to try the cases of impimpis and witches. The accusers and those who established the courts were the youths better known as comrades. Throughout South Africa the accusations were nearly the same and the accused were mostly the old women and men. Any misfortune was explained as witchcraft. Witches were killed by necklacing, stoned to death, buried alive, or burnt to death while singing. The eradication of witches expressed a desire by the youths to cleanse the world of impurities before the new world could be ushered in (Stadler, 1996: 109). The gross human violations were shown clearly during hearings before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accused spies, traitors, or collaborators were killed in painful ways as witches. Others were tortured and are now paralysed or disabled.

These conflicts also had an economic dimension. A Venda expression, U di ita mukhuwa (he/she regards himself/herself as a white person), summarises the Venda world-view concerning wealth. This expression is used when a person excels in anything. In the black community, to do better than others is a sign of anti-social ambition, which is evil in itself. Whatever you do you must appear at the level of others. Alternatively, if you do something excessively, you have been bewitched. An achievement should happen according to the peoples' expectations. People should accept and approve what is normative. Traditionally, wealth is to be shared amongst the members of the community or family. All are equal members of the same community, with the exception of

the chief. No one should be seen to have more than others. The wealth of an individual within the black community can be regarded as the source of evil. He has acquired that through magical means. It should either be destroyed or be shared equally amongst the members of the community.

Traditionally, the chief or king is allowed to accumulate much wealth because he/she is the leader of the community. By virtue of his or her status he/she receives many visitors. Despite visitors, any member of the community within his/her jurisdiction has an obligation to ask food from the chief, especially during famine. The chief or king usually shares food with the community during different festivals such as dzunde, a communal ritual for ploughing and weeding the fields. That is culturally and traditionally normative. After the unbanning of liberation movements, not only witches were killed, but even those who had more wealth than others who were believed to have the supernatural power of zombies at work for them. Whites were not included, even though they could produce large quantities of farm products. The farm workers were not perceived as zombies. Prospering black workers, mostly those who were marginalised, liminal, or borderline persons, became victims of the situation. Big orchards were allegedly the result of zombies who were working there. The owners were hunted down and prosecuted. Those who admitted having zombies were admonished or prevented from working the fields. This practice resulted in a tendency of reluctance to work harder in order to produce more and thus bring back the traditional subsistence economy. Most of the fields or orchards were left unattended because the owners were dzithundu (immigrants) (Niehaus, 1993: 10). This process created a working and living space for the

real owners. It can be concluded therefore that when a living space becomes small and overcrowding begins, people turn to accuse each other and that brings mivhango (social instability) which is traditionally evil. Many victims were those who were suspected of having zombies.

According to the Venda world-view, people should share. Owing to the limited good, an increase in good will or wealth for an individual means an equal decrease of good will or wealth for another (Van Rooy, 1978: 7-8). The Venda proverb, Vhana vha khotsi vha thukukana thoho ya nzie (children of the same father share a head of a locust) indicates that there is a need for sharing to avoid falling suspect. Many men are suspected of harbouring zombies to work on their fields and orchards, because they do not share with the community, but instead they export their products. That is regarded as greedy and greediness is evil. Such a person is misusing the wealth of the community. They are feared by the community to such an extent that even their products may be boycotted. A man who produces more than the community expected shocks it. He should be using supernatural powers or magic power to help others not to get more. That is evil. The methods of ploughing and the fertiliser applied that produce prosperity may be seen as the result of witchcraft. The farmer has mutsimbe (the power to bewitch others to have misfortune) or it may mean the fertiliser used was treated in a magical way to ensure a bountiful crop (Minaar, et al., 1992 : 28).

The dissatisfaction of the community to a community member is a continuous disease which is causing infighting that is evil because it violates the moral

norm of the community. The belief in traditional healing and traditional medicines is pivotal in all this mistrust and violence. When a business is successful, it is because of the mishonga (medicines) used, not because of good management, and when it is unprofitable it is because no medicine was employed. Such a belief leaves many members of the community as victims of ritual killings. The mastermind behind this evil act is inevitably a nanga (traditional healer or herbalist). Any business without the involvement of a nanga cannot prosper. This confirms a belief that medicines play an important role in the black community.

Traditionally, ritual killing was only done by chiefs or kings. In the past ritual murder was only done in secret by the appointed people known by senior members of the royal family. It was not done at random as it is today. It would be done during the burial of the chief or king to make kutovho, a small mat whereupon the corpse would be placed. Usually the victim would be a commoner who was too close to royalty. During the installation of the chief or king ritual murder was necessary to strengthen his authority. The aim of ritual killing was to get zwirovha, medicines obtained from a human body, especially bones, for the purpose of u dzivhela, to protect the land against invasion. The perfect victim, therefore, would have to be a liminal or borderline person who was both inside and outside the community (Chidester, 1992: 32).

In other countries a chief or a king who is too old is in risk of losing his life. He may be killed by his own people in order to get a stone from his stomach, with the aim of transferring his power to a new ruler. This is traditionally and

culturally normative because the main objective for this ritual killing would be to bestow the chief or king with the power to rule over his people and to live longer. That is strengthened by a ritual called u pembela, to render the chief/king less important in sexual activity once the heirs have been begotten and the ancestors have approved them. There are tales that good harvest may be ensured by the sowing of grain from a dead man's skull. The main objective was to seek the fertile leaven from Mwali. In Venda, traditionally during summer before ploughing begins, all members of the community are summoned to bring a few seeds to the kraal for the purpose of u suka (mixing). In this instance, the seeds from each village would be mixed with medicines by a traditional healer summoned by the chief. After this function the chief or king's messenger would go from one village to another giving them the treated seeds. This exercise was done by the chief/king only and was legally allowed. Traditionally it is not evil.

Mbiti (1970: 205) has maintained that it is not the act itself that should be regarded as wrong, but the relationship involved in the act. If relationships are not hurt or damaged and there is no discovery of breach of custom or regulation, then the act is not evil. But this act had to be changed, forced by a changing political order. As Chidester (1992: 16) has indicated, with the disappearance of those independent policies, the ritual killing of alleged witches became the only means of excluding evil agents from society, thus giving rise to an increase in witch-eradication activity (see also Niehaus, 1993: 10). Those activities were conducted by the youths who wanted to replace the old order by a new order. During the political crisis of the 1980s the youth became more

influenced by the belief in the power and the role of the mingome (diviners) and dzinanga (traditional healers). Traditional healers and diviners also increased in large numbers. Youths were the ones to visit diviners whenever there was a suspect. Any quarrel or fighting which resulted in death was attributed to the practice of witchcraft. As noted, any person who differed with the youths was considered to be a witch. The concept of natural death was not in their vocabulary. Death is caused by a muloi (witch) and therefore eradication of witches was necessary.

Modern rivalry in the business or political field has brought violence. When a business person does not prosper, he usually visits a traditional healer for muti (medicines). The best medicines for making business profitable are human body parts such as eyes, genitals, breasts, a head, lips, and palms. The proportions are taken while the victim is alive and crying. The crying is an invitational prayer. In politics, when there is a jockeying for position, the rate of ritual murder becomes high. The main aim is to overpower other opponents; but that may not be the only reason for ritual killing. Looking at the rate of ritual killing in Venda during the Presidency of Ravele, it would be naive to believe that ritual killing was meant only for medicines. Within a period of one year, more than five cases of ritual killing were reported. It is believed that Ravele's opponents, specifically government ministers, went out organising against him, demanding his resignation. Hence the call, fhasi na Ravele fhasi (down with Ravele down) (Chidester, 1991: 164). Innocent people were killed for selfishness. When innocent victims are killed for selfish interests, ritual murder is culturally and traditionally evil because there is a breach of custom (Mbiti,

In complex ways African religion has influenced violence against human persons. The belief in witches and sorcerers would not have been so strong had it not been for the belief in the ancestors. The ancestors which have been regarded as the protectors of human beings are at times undermined by those who become healers without a calling. The number of traditional healers has multiplied. They do not have respect for their "profession" and therefore do not hesitate to name a person as a witch or sorcerer. That in itself undermines human dignity and it brings violence. People do not argue or reject their findings because they fully believe that whoever becomes a healer has been chosen by the ancestors. That influences violation of humankind and reduces the dignity of human persons to sub-humans. There are so-called witches and sorcerers who are innocent but because of personal grudges or political ambition they have been ruthlessly killed.

The other form of evil was the apartheid system which was instituted by the South African Government. The apartheid system was violent in two obvious ways - it was a violation of humanity and it was reinforced by direct physical harm (Chidester, 1992: 17). Many people were killed in a brutal way in order to justify the white government which was based on racism. Those who escaped the wrath of the security forces often migrated to other countries, while others were given long sentences in jail. That was a violation of human rights.

The evil of apartheid was fully realised when it became “black-on-black” violence. Violence was racist, created by the apartheid regime, and influenced the blacks to betray each other to promote aims of the regime. The naming of witches, spies, and impimpi dominated the violent situation. Those who were pointed out as witches, spies and impimpi were killed ruthlessly, while those who escaped the wrath of the youth exiled themselves in police stations. They were killed because they were seen as the symbol of evil. The aim of the killing was to prepare for the new world to come. Government was impotent in this context of anarchy. Failure by the government, which has power to restore order and to protect the lives of defenceless people, can be regarded as evil. In all these evil deeds, the accusers were in most cases the youth and the accused were elderly people. The youth aimed at ending the old to bring in the new. Since people were regarded as symbols of oppression, they had to be rooted out to introduce new authority (Stadler, 1996: 105, Minaar, et al., 54-56). During the 1980s and 1990s, therefore, an indigenous African symbolism of evil was mobilised in new conflicts—generational, economic, and political—of a changing South Africa.

APPENDIX:

SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

My area of research is the old Venda Districts of Dzanani, Mutale, Sibasa and Vuwani which are part of the Northern Province. These areas cover nearly the whole parts of the former Venda homeland, but they are very close to each other. In this research, I gained much information from oral knowledge. All knowledge that I gained by upbringing and social interaction helped make this research possible. As a young boy, I used to hear other local community members discussing their misfortunes and visiting healers and diviners in order to find out the cause. When I was young, I experienced the unexpected death of my grandfather, Mr Raphalalni, who was suspected to have been struck by lightning. Some years later, when lightning struck the house again, rumours started that it had been the work of a witch. An accused witch, who was suspected to use a wolf, snakes, and other familiars, was identified by a mungome and chased out of the village. In addition to that early experience of witch detection, accusation, and exclusion, I was influenced by my grandmother, Ms Nyamulambili Netshidzivhe, who is an indigenous healer. I spent many years staying with her learning what she knew about witches and how to protect oneself against them. My grandmother and I used to help people by protecting their homesteads against evil. This was done by night. She used to send me to the veldt to collect different plants and bring them home and for that reason many medicines indicated in Mabogo (1990) and my research were already well known to me. Further information was gained through interviews with healers and diviners. During my research, I conducted the following interviews:

10 September 1996: J. Mathivha, a male of about 53 years of age, the president of the indigenous leaders in the Northern Province. I visited his home in Makhado township, Dzanani District, at 8h00 after I had heard that he was president of an association of traditional healers. Dr Mathivha indicated to me that there is a muloi (witch) who walks by night and has power to send bad omens (u rumela or u posela) to cause hatred and chaos. He knew many medicines and claimed to be able to cure many diseases.

Dr. Mathivha indicated that there are five types of healers or diviners who perform different tasks: (1) the maine is responsible for the possession cult. He is the one who invokes the ancestral spirits; (2) the tshigomamutanda is a healer who specialises in one type of disease, using bones, but also walking by night using tokoloshi to bewitch others; (3) the mungome is a diviner who uses bones and dice, but also a vulture and a wolf's heart, to control spirits; (4) the nyamsolo is a prophet who uses tactics of "smelling out" in order to detect illness and prescribe medicines; and (5) the nanga, the most important doctor, who uses bones and prescribes medicines.

In conclusion, Dr Mathivha said a muloi is a jealous person. But there are people who use medicines in order to kill others and they are also called witches. As the president of healers, he said, "We discourage our people from using tshivhoni (garlic) to detect witches because this method is too dangerous. Many people are being killed through this practice." Explaining this use of garlic, he said, "The diviner pours water into a dish and puts garlic in the water and asks the accuser to look into the dish of water to see the face of the person he is suspecting."

1 October 1996: Agnes Mutshotsho, a female about 45 years old, living at Mbilwi in the Sibasa district. She is a chemist with all sorts of medicines. I went to her after I had heard that she is an expert in healing tshipfula. Her room was full of bones of different birds and animals. When I asked her how she became a nanga, she told me that from her youth she was sick and that it took her a long time to conceive, but after consulting the healer she was told to go and evoke her ancestors. She told me that her ancestors are the ones who trained her how to heal people and that is why she sprinkles snuff every time she is about to heal. She indicated to me that as diviners or healers they have powers to send spells if asked to do so. The most dangerous disease is tshipfula (to prick a person by taking soil from where his or her foot was). She used medicines from muangaila plants. She indicated that ancestors should be consulted from time to time and the divining bone known as maheakhadzi was the most important in this regard because it showed the direction to be followed.

31 October 1996: Joseph Mulaudzi, a male of about 58 years old, staying in the district of Mutale. He is regarded as one of the most powerful healers in the Northern Province. By the time of my visit there I found many people from Lebowa, Tzaneen and some from Gauteng. He has a very big yard and all over there are houses of those who are seriously ill. He allows them to stay with him until they are healed. There were mad people, some where screaming at the top of their voices while being tied around trees by chains. On the other side, there was a small house wherein people with misfortune are healed through tshivholovholo (to allow the body to be heated by the steam from burning stones until the body becomes dehydrated), which is regarded as the best way of healing misfortunes. One has to make an appointment to see him and

the one who came first should be the one to see him first. All those would like to consult him sit in one place surrounded by a brick wall. Since there was no other way in which I would get information, I pretended to be ill. When my turn came, I went into his surgery, leaving my shoes on the door step as it is the rule. I sat on the mat facing him.

The first thing he did was to take out his divining bones and ask me to blow air on them and cooperate with him in the process of healing. He told me personal things which were true and I confirmed. Mr Joseph believed that medicines were meant to heal the mind, the body and the spirit. He believed in his ancestors and that each family is being guided by them. They protect against evil people such as witches. But on the other hand witches have also got powerful plants to use. It is for this reason that each homestead must be protected by powerful plants so that every person could respect you. He believed that the natural environment is full of medicines and they become more useful when they are fresh. It is not allowed in the real healing process to store the bark of powerful plants, roots and leaves for later use. Mr Joseph believed that witches can get into your house while you are asleep and bewitch you. According to him, there are day-witches and night-witches. The most difficult disease to heal according to him is the mental illness, tshipengo. He indicated that even Western doctors cannot heal it but they can control it. He said that healing tshipengo is easier for him. Many people bring their mad men and women to him and within a month they are co-operating.

Asking him about the diseases he can cure, he indicated that he considers himself as an expert in all the diseases except AIDS. He said AIDS is a new disease and healers are

still struggling to get a cure. Mr Joseph said the ancestors are the ones who choose the healers and after that they even pay visits by night showing different kinds of plants and healing tactics. He complained about the ill-trained healers who are spoiling the healing profession. He proposed that the formation of the union would help to detect the frauds. For the whole work done I paid only R50 and I was given different medicines with instructions and warned not to say good bye. "You just take your things and go without looking backwards," he said.

12 January 1997: Mr Luhaha, known as Vhafunzi, "the priest," who stays at Shakadza in the district of Mutale. He visited me early in the morning at about 9H00 at my house because I was ill. The first thing he told me was that he was a Christian mufunzi (priest) by calling, but his ancestors visited him frequently so he decided to do both Christianity and tradition. He demanded ten Rand before he could start with his job, as it is the norm and failure to do so the ancestors would not help him. In his divination he asked me to blow air on the dice and even asked my own ancestors to help me. His divining bones showed him that there were people who were jealous of me because I looked to be prosperous. He asked me if I had protected by homestead against the evil (u dzivhela) and when I said no he was very furious. He indicated that it is the problem with educated people. They ignore the healers, yet they are useful. Lastly, he gave me different medicines in the form of powder. Some of them should be poured in the bath when washing myself, while others should be placed at the corner of the homestead to protect against any attack by witches. He took out long needles which should be placed at any place within the homestead. These needles will prick the witches when they come. He said he can create snakes to protect one's homestead. For this service, he required R250, which I still owe him.

2 February 1997: M. P. Munyai, a male healer of about 48 years old, residing at Duthuni in the district that was then Sibasa. He uses divining bones. Asking him if he was a healer or diviner or a herbalist, he indicated to me that he does everything. His house was full of animal bones and skins. He believed firmly in the existence of witches. He believed witches use different tactics to bewitch such as u doba, making zombies, making women barren, and many others. He does not specialise in any disease, but can treat many of them, such as sexual transmitted diseases, tshipfula, and flu. He helps women to fall pregnant and protects homesteads. Asking him if indeed there are people who can fly in the form of lighting, he said the they can only send medicines to cause lighting. Asking him how witches can be stopped from practicing witchcraft, he indicated that it is their gift from their ancestors and they cannot stop practicing because that can evoke the anger of the ancestors. He told me that dzinanga have powerful plants to send every misfortune back. They can also make someone suffer if asked to do so.

22 February 1997: Mamogale Dorcus, a female of about 38 years, residing at Itsani in what was then Sibasa district. She uses divine bones which are eight in number. Asking her how she became a diviner, she answered that she had experienced many misfortunes and one day at daylight she saw a vision. In that vision her ancestors revealed to her different medicines and where she could get them. She got trained and paid an amount of 30 Rand. She believed there are powerful plants to protect people. The guilty ones get medicines in order to escape the police. There are medicines for luck. There are day witches and night witches. There are those who can just look at you and you feel ill. Their eyes are always red. Other witches tokoloshi to bewitch

their victims. She demanded R50 for the interview, saying that the ancestors would be very angry should I fail to pay her.

24 February 1997: Tshinakaho Ramuhulu, a female of about 55 years, residing at Khalavha in the district off Sibasa. She became a diviner after experiencing long illness. It became difficult for her to conceive. She was taken to a diviner who trained her to become a healer. She inherited this from her grandmother. She believed in the miracles performed by witches and that witches do exist. She had resisted becoming a healer. She had been baptised and attended church. To fulfill her obligation to her ancestors, however, she had been forced to become a healer.

Asking her about lighting which is caused by the people, she confirmed it to be true. She indicated that they are people who specialize in this practice associated with poisoning (u shelela). The most dangerous poison, she said, is the brain of a crocodile. She indicated that most divorces and quarrels are caused by the witches (envious people) who come and throw their medicines (phaladzane). That is the reason why a homestead should be protected against evil people. Lastly, she indicated that healing (vhunanga) is getting spoiled because of western style of life

1 March 1997: G. Matidza, a female of about 60 years of age. She is now a Christian. Before that she became very ill to the extent that she was taken to Joyce Tshirinda in Pimville in Johannesburg where she received training. The first thing which Tshirinda did was to take bile of a goat and mix it with some medicines and give it to Matidza. From that day, Matidza started to dream seeing herbs. Ancestors used to visit Matidza and teach her how to heal. This could happen by day or by night. According to

Matidza, witches do exist and they are forced by their ancestors as we do when healing. They cannot escape that. Diseases which she could heal by then were heat of the body, constipation, epilepsy, whooping cough, and gokhonya (a disease which causes a woman to lose children after birth due to a growth in the woman's vagina). Matidza believes that there are healers who are also witches and that is the reason why healing usually breeds violence and chaos. She believed it is necessary for every homestead to be protected against evil agents.

22 March 1997: I attended a conference of the indigenous healers known as Mbofho under Neluvhola Mbulaheni as the □ □their president. The conference was held at Thohoyandou Show Ground. It was attended by healers from different districts within the old Venda. I attended the conference in order to interview the healers and I was given permission to do so by the president. The following were interviewed:

S. Mamphwe, a male of about 70 years of age, residing at Dzanani next to the chief's kraal. Mamphwe indicated to me that he generalized in all diseases and that he uses his thangu (diving bones) to find out what was wrong. When a person is suffering from tshipfula Mamphwe he does not just cut the affected part but he uses medicines to heal the wound. He also believes in witches. He has only four bones, Lunwe, Tshilume, Thwalima, and Hwami. Asking him how he became a healer, he indicated that it was the gift from his ancestors. They visited him in dreams and visions and that he had experienced hardships. Later on he went to the trainer for the healers. For the whole training he paid a lot of money.

W. Mpofo, a male about 55 years old, residing at Maini in what was then the Sibasa district. Mpofo believed that vhaloi (witches) are there and healers are also there to protect the people of Mwali, the Vhavenda God. Mpofo has four thangu which help him to find out what is wrong with the patient. When healing he starts by diagnosing the intestine to find out what is wrong and then gives out the medicines. He has medicines to prevent vhavhi, evil people, from causing harm.

J. Bulanga, a female of about 48 years, residing at Sibasa. She believed in her ancestors for healing. The ancestors are the ones who show the way and without their guidance nothing can happen. Witches are the product of ancestors and they cannot abandon that practice. It is their obligation.

R. Nemukongwe, a female from Muledane. She has thangu that she received from her ancestors. She specialises in u simitshela (to help women conceive). She uses different medicines from the veld. She also heals tshipfula and AIDS, but she said that in their language AIDS is the same as thusula (syphilis). This was confirmed by other healers who were present.

F. Mariam, a female of about 47 years old, residing at Zwikwengani in what was then the Vuwani District. She uses thangu and believes in the practice of witchcraft. According to her, witches are envious and jealous people. Witches cannot abandon witchcraft because they were chosen by their ancestors to bewitch others. If they try to stop being witches, they can experience difficulties and even die.

M. Esther, a female of about 46 years, residing in the district of Vuwani. She believed in witchcraft and the existence of witches. She specialized in the following: tshipfula, u vhea mudu (to protect a homestead by placing medicines), and u wela divhuni (a disease caused by having sexual intercourse with a woman who has had an abortion). This last disease was particularly fearful. She believed in the existence of zombies, stressing that a healer can bring a zombie into a normal person by means of strong medicines. This was confirmed by other healers at the conference. She explained that the act of blowing air into the bones is an attempt to see the sickness.

N. Ndou, a male of about 53 from Tshiulungoma. He believed in the existence of witches and that medicines can fight against their evil acts. The ancestors visit them during the night and by day in the form of visions. Asking him whether he is a diviner or a nanga, Ndou told me that he practices both as most of the healers do.

J. Mudau, a female of about 46 from Manini. Her work is to protect homesteads from evil people because without such practice the homestead becomes easier to be attacked by witches. She does not have a special disease to treat but can treat all of them.

M. Neluvhola, a male of about 44 years, president of the indigenous healers, holding authority over them. He believes in the existence of witches and witchcraft practices. In answer to the question of how many types of healers there are, he indicated that there are only two, the maine and the nanga. Those who envy them use the derogator terms, tshigomamutanda and nyamusolo. Neluvhola indicated that AIDS can be easily cured because it is not new to indigenous healers since they have known as an old disease called thusula.

20 April 1997: T. Tshiovhe, a male of about 48 years. Although not a healer nor a diviner, Tshiovhe has a vast knowledge of healing tactics that he acquired from his father who got it from his father. He has the ability to take away phundululo (worms that destroys crops) and can treat sexually transmitted diseases. He believed that the country should be protected (u elulwa or u dzivhela) from enemies and that this protection needs to be renewed from time to time. This can only be done by special healers using the bones of people and other ingredients. He also believed that witches do exist and that as long as people do exist witchcraft cannot disappear because it is the inborn evil. Any person with that spirit may want to abandon it, but will experience misfortunes that would force him to practice it again. There are more powerful healers and those who are only cheating people because of unemployment.

29 April 1997: Nemaguvhini Muofhe, a female of about 78 years old, residing at Fondwe location. She specialises in sexual diseases, especially the disease resulting from having sexual intercourse with a woman who has had an abortion. Many people visit her. She is also a Christian.

30 May 1997: Elisa Mudau, a female of about 70 years of age, residing at Fondwe. She started healing by getting ill to such extent that she even became blind. Her belongs were once burned down, but the truck tin was never burned. She is a well known healer with a certificate. In 1997 she spent a considerable period at Baragwanath Chris Hani Hospital in Johannesburg healing people. She specialises in tshipfula. Although she has thangu, she seldom uses them. She is also a nanga of a

possession cult (malombo). Women who are unable to fall pregnant come to her for help.

13 June 1997: A. W. Magau, a male of about 58 years old, residing at Khalavha. A teacher by profession, Magau has written books on witch accusations. He showed me how people fight with each other. According to Magau, the Vhavenda do not want to spill blood when fighting so instead they use masamba—derogatory words—to discredit a person. He argued that witch familiars such as tokoloshi or polecats do not actually exist. They have been imagined to exist, however, to support the derogatory words used in accusations when people are in conflict with each other.

27 June 1997: Makhadzi Fhethani, a female of about 78, residing at Vuvha in the district of Dzanani/Sinthumule. She uses thangu. She believed that she had been given this work by her ancestors. She does not have any specialisation but works as a general healer. I visited her when I was ill and she gave me medicines. She told me to bring wood to cook the herbs. I used to visit her by night, but I was never healed.

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