

**THE ROLE OF SYMBOLISM IN TSHIVENDA DISCOURSE: A
SEMANTIC ANALYSIS**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Nengovhela Rofhiwa Emmanuel, declare that the mini-dissertation submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree of MA in Translation Studies and Linguistics is my work and has not previously been submitted to any university.

.....

SIGNATURE

.....

DATE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother Nengovhela Takalani Hellen who planted in me the seeds of courage and confidence, and to my family that is always there for me.

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SUMMARY

Chapter one deals with the background problem; the aim of the study; significance of the study, objectives, methodology and literature review.

Chapter two deals with symbolism in colours.

Chapter three deals with symbolism through animals.

Chapter four deals with symbolism in rituals.

Chapter five deals with symbolism through birds and numbers.

Chapter six deals with conclusion, findings and recommendations.

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1 Introduction

Understanding symbolism, what it is, how it functions, and what kinds of meaning it can communicate requires a certain amount of effort because it does not function in quite the same way as any other literary device and in some ways it is more complex than any other literary device. As a result, there is frequent misinterpreting of symbolism and symbols. Hopefully, this study will provide useful information about the role symbolism plays in Tshivenda.

The thoughts of emergence (2008) notes that “in simple terms, symbolism is a way of conveying meaning through the use of imagery, ideas, sound or metaphor. As such, all languages are symbolic. In the modern age, symbolism is used by commercial interests to associate meaning with product brands”. For example, the Coca-Cola brand has one of the most recognisable logos in the world. In fact the brand is so deeply ingrained in most people’s minds that it can immediately be recognised from just a small portion of the logo.

Symbols are part of a secret language which speakers are expected to recognise. Therefore, symbols form an incredible part of our daily lives. Even in religion, symbols are presented as emblems of belonging. Many of the symbols we take for granted today as static signs of religious or secular life were created long ago. Over time, they have acquired layers of increasingly complex meaning, and this development of meaning reveals much about how we developed our ideas about the nature of life and the world.

Symbols used in religious and traditions share a common origin that dates before the creation of writing. These symbols are powerful because they are standard and even cultures that do not share language share an innate understanding of symbols. This study investigates the development of symbolism by examining the necessary elements that constitute more complex symbolism.

Reading symbolism is much like reading or comprehending any other language; one simply needs to know the associations created by certain symbols. Tshivenda is abounds with symbolism, and therefore presents the perfect opportunity to get to grips with how multiple symbolical meanings within a single image can give detailed amounts of information.

Wiki outlines that:

the circle is the most common and universal signal, found in all cultures. It has no beginning or end, and no divisions, making it the perfect symbol of completeness, eternity, and the soul. The circle is also the symbol of boundary and area, of completion, and returning cycles. The circle symbol most familiar to us is that of the wedding ring which encircles the finger associated in ancient times with the heart. The wedding ring symbolises not just a pledge of eternal love, but the enclosure of the heart and oath of reliability.

However, since there is no essential similarity between a symbol and what it represents, the meaning of the symbol cannot necessarily be derived by identifying some similarity between the two. Among other things, this means that, unlike with a metaphor, the meaning of a symbol is not necessarily readily or easily apparent.

1.1 Background to the problem

Symbolism is a key concept in communicating a message. It contains the message that is hidden and it takes an effort for one to interpret it correctly. Symbolism is culture bound, as some forms of symbols have different meanings across various cultures. This means that one symbol can be used to refer to different meanings in different cultures. Even though meanings derived from symbols vary, there are many symbols that are common in different cultures. For example, the green colour symbolises life in both Tshivenda and Western cultures.

Like any other language, Tshivenda uses symbols in everyday life. People tend to use symbols to show their feelings, impressions and affections they have. They tend to consider the meaning attached to the symbol more than what is said by the speakers in words. This means that symbols tend to donate a concrete message than the words themselves.

Symbolism is also a form of communication. The symbol used by the speaker (communicator) has a meaning that is often likely to be hidden and communicated without the use of words. Like any other form of communication, there are also problems experienced with regard to the understanding and the interpretation of the symbols. The difficulties may arise when the communicator is not aware of the message he or she is sending through the symbol used, since symbols are culture based. This tends to be a problem when one is unable to know how the receiver of the message is going to interpret the message that is attached to the symbol used by the communicator (speaker).

Some of the problems arise in the use of symbols because of the different knowledge systems that exist in the various cultures and also because of the many meanings that can be attached to one particular symbol (ambiguity).

1.2 Major areas where problems with symbolism prevail

1.2.1 Colours

Rankine (2007) comments that colours are more than a combination of red and blue or yellow and black. They are part of non-verbal communication. Colours have symbolism and color meanings that go beyond ink. When using colours, it is helpful to keep in mind how the eye and the mind perceive certain colours and the colour meanings we associate with each colour. Sometimes colours create a physical reaction (red has been shown to raise blood pressure) and at other times it is a cultural reaction (in the U.S. white is for weddings, but in some Eastern cultures, white is the colour for mourning and funerals). Colours follow trends as well.

He goes on to point out that red is often used in North America to indicate stop, as with a stop sign, or danger, as with a warning light. At the same time red symbolizes love, as with Valentine's Day. A person not familiar with the cultural coding of red in North America could, theoretically, confuse the symbolism of red and mistaken a red Valentine's Day heart for a warning. Cross-cultural diversity is found in the symbolism of white, which historically has signified purity, virginity, or death.

Colour symbolism can vary dramatically between cultures. So, although some colours do have negative connotations (such as black for a funeral or for evil) in Western culture, the same colour may have positive connotations in Tshivenda (where black represents fertility and ancestors). People's age also has an effect on how colours are perceived.

1.2.2 Animals

In Africa, the use of animals in artwork is not merely for the sake of it. Each animal has a specific meaning to the artist, and certain animals signify certain character qualities. This is why one will see so many carvings of animals, or even animals embroidered onto African clothing.

The elephant is the common animal that signifies strength, royalty, dignity, patience, wisdom, longevity, and happiness. The elephant represents status and power since royalty used to ride on elephants. For Christians in Africa, the elephant is a symbol of clarity. In contrast, the hyena symbolises wickedness, impatience, unhappiness, and bad luck. What both these animals and others represent requires an in-depth study.

1.2.3 Rituals

Ritual is acting out or watching someone else acting out a symbolic role in order to bring about changes in one's mind. Rituals may be performed individually, but often involve a number of practitioners. It is a set of repeated actions, often thought to have symbolic value, the performance of which is usually prescribed by a religion or by the traditions of a

community by religious or political laws because of the perceived efficacy of those actions. Ritual actions often involve some form of symbolic transformation, purification, gift, and danger prevention activities after death. This is common in Tshivenda culture. This study will examine the interface between rituals and symbolism and the impact thereof regarding communication.

1.2.4 Birds

Birds are also used as a symbol to express a variety of meanings. Many kinds of birds are used in Christian symbolism. The first to be so employed was the dove; for when Jesus was baptised the Holy Ghost descended upon Him in bodily shape as a dove (Luke 3:22). The dove was also used as a symbol of peace. A dove brought to Noah a bough of an olive-tree as a sign that the deluge of wrath was at an end. Sometimes in symbolical writing it stands for rest: so I said, “oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest” (psalm 55: 6)

The dove is often used for simplicity, innocence, and love.

Furthermore, in Christianity an eagle is a symbol of high note, strength and success. This has been confirmed in The Holy Bible. 1989(Isaiah 40:31):

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew
their strength; they shall mount up with wings
as EAGLES they shall run, and not be weary;
and they shall walk and not faint.

Birds are also used in Tshivenda in a symbolic sense. For example, the owl is a symbol of darkness, evil and death. Owls are symbolically associated with witchcraft. There is a belief that if an owl hoots on a rooftop, it symbolises that witches will visit the family during the night or else there will be a death in the family.

1.2.5 Numbers

According to art history “the interpretation of number varies according to culture and traditions. This simply means that one number can be interpreted differently in different cultures. What follows is a brief description and interpretation of numerical symbols in Christianity”.

In Christianity the number one signifies unity; both the unity of God and the unity of members of the Church. Tshivenda for example, and this is true in many African cultures, one symbolises the beginning. It now differs from the Christian interpretation of the number. It thus requires one to know the way in which numbers are used in different cultures and religions.

Six represents creation, because God created the earth in six days, or it represents imperfection, because it falls short of the perfect number seven. This is according to the biblical interpretation which is different from the Tshivenda interpretation. In Tshivenda, the number six is a symbol of crossing to another side. It is called *rathi*, which is derived from *ratha* or *u ratha*, meaning to cross. As can be observed, it is completely different from what the number represents in Christianity. It, therefore, requires one to be careful when using a number as a symbol because one number can mean different things in different cultures. The variation in number interpretation is problematic, especially to people living in a cosmopolitan country such as South Africa.

1.2. 6 Symbols

Universal dictionary (1987:1553) defines “symbolism” as:

something that represents or stands for or as though to typify, something else by association resemblance or convention especially, a material object used to represent something invisible such as an idea.

The above explanation indicates that an object can be represented by something which is visible or invisible. A symbol is a representation rather than a comparison. The writers make the abstract concrete by way of symbols. They suggest that what an author wishes to say can lend itself to several different meanings.

Symbols guide and direct our choices in everyday life. Whether we realise it or not, symbols are one of the keys that indicates that we are civilised, or conditioned to behave according to our community's mores. As a species, no matter our race, culture, or religion, we are triggered to react in a specific way when we see certain symbols. It is not that simple to distinguish signs from symbols since they are closely related. Some of this conditioning is universal and very useful. Symbols guide us; they help us to make good choices, and to avoid chaos in our lives. For example in Tshivenda culture a sheep is used when performing *u vhuisa* (to bring back) rituals. This is performed when a person has died far from home and did not receive a proper funeral. In this ritual, a sheep is slaughtered and its head is placed on the bowel and is buried after a *rianga* (medicine man) has played his role. In this instance, the head of the sheep is used as a symbol of the person who is dead.

1.2.7 Gestures

People usually differ in the way of doing things. Different cultures present gestures in different ways. Honour for example is presented in different ways as it varies according to culture. For example, in Western culture, people stand up and observe silence to symbolize or show respect to people with a high profile. This differs from African culture. In Tshivenda, for example, when the king or chief arrives, people kneel down and make praise noise (*u luvha*) to show respect and honour.

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to investigate the meaning and use of symbols in Tshivenda life.

1.4. Objectives

The objectives of the study are to determine:

- The meaning of colours among Vhavenda.
- The role of animal interpretation among Vhavenda.
- The meaning of rituals among Vhavenda.
- The meaning of birds.
- The role played by symbols among Vhavenda

1.5 Rationale for the study

Since the use of symbols varies across cultures, this study is aimed at examining the use of this occurrence. Although languages differ in some or many cases, some symbols are similar in all languages. Therefore, the rationale for this study is to investigate the different ways in which the Tshivenda speakers use and interpret symbols, and to clarify the issue of ambiguity in the use of symbols.

1.6 Significance of the study

The present study is of great significance as it will reveal why people usually depend more on the meaning attached to a symbol than the spoken words. It is also important as the study will endeavour to show that culture cannot be taken for granted when it comes to the interpretation of symbols. Lastly, the study is crucial because it will reveal some unpublished knowledge from Vhavenḡa with regard to the use of symbols.

1.7 Methodology

The research method that will be used in the study is qualitative. This method will be used to compare, in a descriptive form, the use of symbolism in Tshivenḡa and other cultures.

1.7.1 Primary sources

With regard to information gathering, the researcher will consult the relevant people in the field of study as well as members of the communities. The interview will be done through the use of unstructured questions.

The sample population will be as follows:

- 15 pastors for Christian perspective.
- 15 traditional healers for traditional perspective
- 15 linguists from different universities, namely University of Limpopo and University of Venḡa.
- 10 people from Rastafarian religion.
- 20 people from the society, elderly, males and females.

1.7.2 Secondary sources

The purpose of using this method is to obtain and utilize the already collected information by other academics about the topic. The information will be obtained from library sources such as dissertations, books, theses, journals and also from the internet.

1.8 Scope and delimitation

Even though there will be reference to the work already done by other scholars, the research will emphasise the use of symbolism in Tshivenda compared to other cultures.

1.9 Literature review

The main objective of the literature review is to study work done by other scholars on the subject under discussion. The following are some of the scholars who have contributed to the study of symbolism and their work will serve as the framework for this study.

1.9.1 Rooney (1999)

Rooney (1999:181) defines symbolism as “the use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning”.

From Rooney’s definition, one can conclude that meaning that is attached to the symbol used does not exactly donate the same meaning as it does in words. There is more in a symbol than the words uttered. This means that the meaning that the speaker attaches to the symbol he or she uses can be given different meanings by the listeners depending on their interpretation. Since the interpretation of the symbol depends on one’s culture, it, therefore, means that one must have knowledge of the culture of the people he or she is communicating with. This will help to outline some of the situations wherein the receiver of the message differs with what the speaker is trying to express with the symbol he or she using.

1.9.2 Mtumane (2000)

Mtumane (2000:242) defines a symbolism as “the use of an object, idea or incident to stand for or represent another”. This means that the object, idea or incident used would be referred to as a symbol. Mtumane’s definition of symbolism is closely related to the one given by Rooney (1999) because they are all referring to a symbol as an object that represents something. The difference is that Mtumane also includes the idea or incident as a representation of another thing.

1.9.3 Leighton (1981)

Leighton (1981:71) defines a symbol as an essence form of representation, an object that typifies or stands for something else by resemblance or association. From this definition one observes that symbolism represents something that is closely related to it, either by thought, shape or action. A symbol represents; it does not give the meaning but there is a meaning behind each symbol that needs to be interpreted in order to be understood.

1.9.4 Hense and Lawton (1979)

Hense and Lawton (1979:256) regard a symbol as:

A thing regarded by general consent as typifying or representing something by association in fact or thought.
A symbol stands for something or other thing than itself.
A symbol is a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or calling something by its relations in facts or thought entitled to it.

This quotation leads us to the notion that a symbol is a mental concept which can be interpreted in different ways by the listener (in verbal or spoken communication) or reader (in written communication).

1.9.5 Culpepper (1983)

According to Culpepper (1983:149-202), symbolism is one of the ways in which the Fourth Gospel silently yet effectively communicates with the reader. Together with misunderstanding and irony, symbolism displays the signature of the evangelist's insight and art. In the use of symbols, messages are delivered to the masses where the understanding of the messages depends on the interpretation of the receiver. In this situation, one message can be interpreted in many ways.

1.9.6 Milubi (2007)

Milubi (2007:02) indicates that "symbols may be representational or presentational in outlook. Representational symbols point to or stand for what they symbolize. They do not participate in or have the quality of the thing they symbolize. For example: the word fire signifies heat and flame, but the word itself is not hot".

Analysing what Milubi outlined above, one can conclude that a symbol can sharpen one's mind and think beyond what is used as a symbol. If fire is used as a symbol, one can have in mind all things that happen when a fire is kindled even if the word itself cannot produce all these things.

1.9.7 Macgregor (1928)

Macgregor (1928:xxv) claims: "No understanding of the Gospel is possible without an appreciation of the part played by symbolism." Similarly, the story of John 9 cannot be fully understood unless one can appreciate the way John interprets and uses symbols in this narrative, because John 9 is particularly significant for an understanding of John's symbolic discourse. If one can understand the role played by symbolism one can fully understand the Gospel preached by John in the symbols he used.

1.9.8 Du Rand (1994)

Du Rand (1994:250) states that symbolism is an attempt to present the divine communication in an understandable way. It is important to note, however, that symbols must be distinguished from metaphors, parables, allegories, or motifs. From this definition, it is obvious that symbolism is used to simplify communication. In some instances, the opposite is the case because the interpretation of symbols varies. The speaker may expect that the symbol will be interpreted in his or her way of understanding whereas the receivers of the message will interpret it the other way round.

1.9.9 Painter (1986)

According to Painter (1986:52), in Christianity the symbols bring a new understanding about God through Jesus to those who believe. In short, he states that: “the symbols are the means by which Jesus is disclosed in such a way as to evoke faith or provoke unbelief”. The symbols by nature contain the elements of both revelation and concealment as in the case of the parables. In Christianity, symbols are heavenly messages given to a man through the Holy Spirit. For one to interpret them one must be led by the Holy Spirit. For example: Jesus said to the Jews, “You will destroy this house and I will build it in three days” (Mark 26:58). Jesus used the house as a symbol to referring to his body and the Jews never understood it because their interpretation was a human kind of view. Only the Holy Spirit can help one to interpret the symbols used in the Holy Bible, as far as the Christian belief is concerned.

1.9.10 Mutwa (2003)

Some of sicknesses that people go through are symbols of many things in a human’s body. Mutwa explains in his book that he was sick for more than two years without a cure for his sickness. When he tried to take medication from the medical doctor, the sickness just persisted. He kept on seeing strange things and had nightmares. This continued until he was taken to a traditional healer who finally told him that his sickness and suffering from was a symbol of the ancestral call to be a traditional healer. This suggests that sickness in this instance has been a symbol of ancestral calling for spiritual fulfillment, (2003:1-18).

1.10 Conclusion

Symbols are phenomena that have a much deeper meaning than what they appear to be. What the meaning is depends on the individual, as it could mean different things to different people. The difference in culture makes interpretation of symbolism differ from each other, but there are instances where symbols are universal.

Chapter two

2 Symbolism in colours

Colour symbolism is culturally constructed linkages that vary with time, place and culture. In fact, one colour may perform very different symbolic or psychological functions in the same place. Cross-cultural diversity is found in the symbolism of many colours. Colour symbolism can vary dramatically between cultures and religions. Some colours do have negative connotations in Christian perspective. For example, in Christian perspective, black colour is primarily associated with the negative aspects of human experience including death, disease, famine, and sorrow, all of which are the results of sin as indicated in The Holy Bible (Job 6:15-16). The same colour may have positive connotations in Tshivenda culture (where black represents fertility and ancestors).

People's age also has an effect on how colours are perceived. This determines the way in which one has to use the colours to people of different ages. Old people in Tshivenda culture will of course associate the black colour with the ancestors and young people can use it associate it with evil and all sort of bad things. This proves that colour can still be used to refer to different things in the very same culture or religion. If one uses black colour in symbolising evil or bad thing as used in the following sentence "*řwana uyu u na mbilu ntswu*" that literally means that "this child has a black heart", that can be figuratively interpreted as this child is evil, will contradict with the use of black colour used in symbolising the ancestors because the appearance of ancestors is a symbol of good things to the people. According to the above example, black colour is used to symbolise the evil in a person. The word evil is mostly referred to the works of darkness because darkness is black in colour.

Understanding symbolism in regard to colours can help to bring more meaning to words that contain such. The Tshivenda culture has many instances wherein the colours are used to symbolise different things. This is also supplemented in the Christian perspective wherein colours are used in the illustrations of stories that help to bring more meaning to what is being read.

2.1 White colour

White colour is one of the brighter colours that one can simply recognize. It is a common colour that is associated with many things in people's lives. The interpretation of the meaning of the white colour varies with time and place. Pastor Radzilani commented in the interview that "white is a colour of purity and righteousness in biblical sense. It is mostly used to describe things in nature. Sometimes it is used when describing the body, primarily when healthy and beautiful but also when sick. It is mostly used to symbolise a good thing of nature, the purity of the work of a man and God's creation".

White colour can physically be used as a symbol of the following:

- Mental clarity
- Encourages us to clear clutter or obstacles
- Evokes purification of thoughts or actions
- Enables fresh beginnings

Pastor Radzilani continued commenting that "white is the total expression of light as the sum of all colours. Thus it may be utilised for every magical purpose. It is used to symbolise a person, place or thing. It represents the Goddess, the Moon, the Maiden, freshness, snow, cold, potential, peace, purity, truth, perfection, nobility, the disk of the sun, freedom, love, health, initiation, good will, illumination, spirituality, devotional magic, the cycle of life, blessings, feminine mysteries, the Element Spirit, protection, purification, and the ancient mother".

White colour is used in Tshivenda culture to symbolise success. It is a common symbol of great achievement or success. The expression "*zwo mu tshenela*" is commonly used in Tshivenda. It literally mean that things are white on his/her side and it figuratively means that things went well or things are going well. For example, when someone has been to a job interview, one can simply say "*zwo mu tshenela*" meaning that it went well with him or her.

It can also be used in the negative to symbolise that things did not go well or as expected. This can be presented as “*a zwo ngo mu tshenela*” that literally means that things are not well with him/her. In this situation white colour becomes a symbol of good things. This can vary according to the different cultures.

White colour can also be used to symbolize good luck. White colour is bright and is a great symbol of fortune. When someone is about to do something, it is common in Tshivenda to hear people saying “*ndi tama uri zwi ni tshenele kha zwine na khou ya u ita zwone*”. Meaning that I wish you good luck for what you are going to do.

Nwenda mutshena (white traditional cloth) is used in Tshivenda culture in traditional ritual dance called *malombo*. *Malombo* is performed seasonally in Tshivenda culture unless there are some obligations from the ancestors that it must be performed at a particular time for a certain reason. This ritual dance is performed when there is a person who has an ancestral call that he or she must start operating. The person cannot start operating without the connection to the ancestors. For the person to be connected, the *malombo* ritual dance must be performed first. It is called *u tika ngoma*. The most important part of this ritual is *u wisa midzimu* (to settle the spirit of the gods). In the instance where the ritual is performed, there are special clothes that are worn by the dancers. One of the cloths is *nwenda mutshena*. *Nwenda mutshena* is used to protect family members who are around from the bad luck that can be passed to them when the ritual is being performed. It is believed that the spirits that are in the dancers; can be passed to the people around if they are not protected. So for their protection from bad luck, they must wear *nwenda mutshena*.

One of the respondents commented that in some instances white colour is used to indicate purity. When a person has been cleaned from “*tshinyama*” (bad luck) by the traditional healer, he or she dresses in white or uses “*ludede lutshena*” (white griddle). This is done to give courage that he or she is pure and clean from the evil things that were attached to him or her. In some cases a white belt is placed on the head of the person who has received cleaning so that people are sure that the individual is now clean and pure.

A white belt is also used at female's rituals. It is used when young girls are from virginity test (*u folwa*). If the girl is still a virgin she is given a white belt that she ties on her forehead where every one can see it. This is done to show that she is clean and she thus needs to be respected because “*u tshe musidzana si*” (she is still a virgin girl). In this instance white colour is used to indicate cleanness and virginity.

In Tshivenda culture a woman dresses in black for some days after loosing her husband. This is done to symbolise that she is forbidden to have an affair with a man because she is unclean. For her to be able to see another man, there is a ritual that is performed called “*u bvula nguvho*” (to undress). The family throws a big party for the woman and family members are invited so that the woman must choose a man from one of the family members. The in-laws of the widow will dress her in white. This is done to symbolise that she is clean and they allow her to marry another man. The white colour will be symbol happiness, showing that she is no longer in mourning and that she is ready to start a new family. At the party it will be declared that *tshiila* “*tsho fhela*” (she is no longer forbidden from seeing a man)

There are many cases in Tshivenda culture whereby people are told that they have “*tshinyama*” (bad luck). This can be said relating to a person who has, several times, tried to get something, but has not been able to find what he or she wants. That thing can be a job or life partner. Such a person will have to consult a traditional healer so that he or she is cleaned or protected from “*tshinyama*”. When a person is been cleaned for “*tshinyama*” they use white a chicken. *Tshinyama* is said to be contagious so it must be stopped.

U fanzwa tshinyama is done in the following way:

Maine will take a white chicken and slaughter it and let the blood flow on the body of the person who is being cleaned. The person will then have to bath using water prepared by *maine*. This water is mixed with *mushonga* (medicine). After bathing, the water will be shed on a path where people pass so that someone will take that bad luck. The blood of a chicken in this ritual is playing a symbolic role of washing away the bad luck as it happens in Christianity wherein Jesus Christ was crucified and his precious blood washed away the sins of the world.

White colour can also be used to symbolise victory. Traditionally, there used to be a sport in Tshivenda culture called “*Musangwe*” (more or the less like boxing but the rules differ). People would be fighting in a ring and the one who wins will wait for the next challenger. The winner will have to eliminate all who come for a challenge until there is no man standing against him. Towards the end of the day, he will be given a well designed trophy called *khare* in Tshivenda (crown). It is made of dry grass and it is white in colour. The grass used is mixed with some white chemicals. Designed by the elder in the village, the crown is given to “*ngweḽa*” (the champion) to symbolise that he is the victor. On his way back to home, the women will be ululating to celebrate the victory.

Victory is also symbolised by white colour in Christianity. This is indicated in the book of Revelation 6:2 where in it reads “ And I saw: and behold, a white horse, and he that sat upon it having a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering and that he might conquer”.

White colour plays a vital role in most Tshivenda rituals. This also applies in *u palula* ritual. *U palula* is a ritual that is performed for a person who has ancestral calling from two different gods. For such a person to be able to perform the calling he or she has, the gods must be united and be one through the *u palula* ritual. Fro this ritual to be performed, *maine* must be the foreman as it is in many rituals. A white goat is required in this ritual because it is the only animal according to Tshivenda that can be use for sacrifice.

U palula is performed in the following way:

The goat is peared in the neck for the blood to come out. The client has to suck the blood as it comes out from the goat. After sucking, the remaining blood is poured all over his or her body. After this step he or she will have to bath with water that with *mushonga*. The water must be from the fountain and some from *ḽhanganyoni* (the point where two rivers intersect). After having had a bath he or she must go to the river where the water was fetched so that the next step can be performed there. After bathing, the water must be poured into the river. The next step is for the ritual taker to get into the river and cross it. From here he or she must go

home and drink some medicine prepared by *maine* and by so doing the spirits will be united, and the calling on his or her life will start operating without any inconvenience.

2.2 Black colour

Black derives its significance from the notion that new things get darker as they mature; and physical aging comes with spiritual maturity. It symbolises an intensified spiritual energy, communion with the ancestral spirits, antiquity, spiritual maturity and spiritual potency. Considered the negation of colour, black is traditional, goes well with almost any color except the very dark. It also has conflicting connotations. It can be serious and conventional.

Black colour symbolism is culturally constructed linkages that vary with time, place and culture. In fact, one colour may perform very different symbolic or psychological functions in the same place. Cross-cultural diversity is found in the symbolism of many colours. Black is primarily associated with the negative aspects of human experience including death, disease, famine, and sorrow all of which are the results of sin in Tshivenda culture which gives the variation in the same culture because the colour black has positive connotation in Tshivenda culture, being associated with ancestors as has been seen previously.

The meaning of the symbol is more tied to the actions than the words. This can be proven using the example of Tshivenda culture, where black culture is associated with death. It is common for people to dress in black when mourning. Wearing black is a symbol that indicates that people are in deep pain. If one goes to give condolences to a family of the deceased dressed in white, one may be scolded because the attire will be symbolising that the person is in joy. It thus means that one is expected to act in accordance with the social expectation of the particular group of society.

There is an expression in Tshivenda culture which says “*vho ambara nguvho ntswu*” that literally means that “they are dressed in black”, figuratively meaning that there is a death in the family. In the above expression black colour is used as a symbol of pain, bad feeling, and

sadness and heartbrokenness too. The expression “*vho ambara nguvho ntswu*” is commonly used when there is a funeral in the family.

One of the respondents comments that “it is true that black colour is commonly associated with bad luck or evil things but black colour can still be used as a symbol of something positive in people’s lives”. The farmers joyously celebrate when they see the black cloud in the sky. A black cloud is a symbol of heavy rain. Without a black cloud there is no rain. It thus means that there are also positive connotations in black colour. The black cloud can still be used to symbolise a bad thing or sickness in a person. For example: “*afha muḑini ho alama gole fitswu*” (there is a black cloud above this family). The black cloud in this instance is used to symbolise bad luck on the family. This is mostly said if something bad is continuously happening in the family within a short period of time.

Black colour can also be used to symbolise protection. In Tshivenda culture, if there is a sick person in the house and people are always coming to visit, the *maine* (traditional healer) will prepare some black medicine (*muuluso*) and give it to the sick person to protect him or her from contagious diseases that may come with the visitors. In this instance, black colour is associated with protection.

In Tshivenda culture a woman dresses in black after the death of her husband. She is expected to dress in black for some days up until some rituals are performed. She dressed in black to symbolise that “*o tshikafhala*” (she is not clean). It is a taboo for such a woman to be proposed for a certain period of time, so her way of dressing will simply indicate it to all the men who see her that “*u kha tshiila tsha vhanna*” (she is forbidden from man). In this context the black colour is used to symbolise uncleanness. This practice is also common in Western cultures where people dress in black when in mourning. In this case it has no variation of meaning.

Black colour can be used in a Christian perception as a symbol of disease as indicated in the Holy Bible (Job 30:30)

My skin is black upon me, and
my bones are burned with heat.

The use of black colour above is symbolising the disease that Job has at that particular time. It proves that black colour can be used as a symbol of sickness in the Christian perspective. In this case, one must have the knowledge of the symbolic representation of the black colour when using it because the meaning varies depending on the culture and also in religion.

The Holy Bible in Jude 1:12-13 states: “these are spots in your love-feasts, feasting together (with you) without fear, pasturing themselves; clouds without water, carried along by (the) winds; autumnal trees, without fruit, twice dead, rooted up; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames; wandering stars, to whom has been reserved the gloom of darkness for eternity”.

From the above quotation, the colour black is represented by the darkness because darkness is black in colour. This means that the black colour is used to symbolise death. The gloom for darkness for eternity is indicating complete death, that there will be no hope for life. This also applies in the Tshivenḁa culture. The black colour is used to symbolise the eternal death of a person. When burying a person, it is common that people say “o ya maswiswini a sa gumi-ho” meaning that the person is facing the eternal darkness. This is an indication that the black colour is being used to symbolise the death, not just a death though, but eternal death.

Black colour can be used to symbolise sins. This means that one must be careful in the use of the colours because one can unintentionally use black colour to people that hold a different interpretation of the colour.

2.3 Green colour

Like any other colour, green has meanings and interpretations that are attached to it. In Tshivenda culture green is a symbol of life, peace, and harmony. Abundant in nature, green signifies growth, renewal, health, and environment. After heavy rains the land turns into green colour. Grass and trees will be growing. As a result, the elders in the community will therefore say “*lo lala lo tou sina na midzi, shango lo dalaqhala*” (it is peacefully so, the land is green). The life symbolism of green colour is from the green grass and trees. They have the green colour only when they live but they turn brown when dead. It is a restful colour with some calming attributes.

Green is the national colour of Jamaica and is strongly associated with that country. It is the colour that is mostly used in their religion, Rastafarian. They believe that smoking dagga is a way to be close to God who gives them life, life associated with the green colour of dagga. It is even green when dry. For that reason they believe that there is internal life in it as well.

Because of all the green in nature the colour is a symbol of spring. Green is the colour of nature, fertility, life. Grass green is the most restful color. In Tshivenda culture, it also symbolises learning, growth, and harmony. When a tree is still growing, it is naturally expected to have the pure green colour, depending on its nature. It is because of its freshness and short life time it spent. For this reason, green colour can be used to symbolise someone who is still learning something new. If one can associate this meaning with students at a university, one can conclude that the green colour symbolises first year students.

Green colour contains powerful energies of nature, growth, and the desire to expand or increase. Balance and a sense of order are found in the color green. Change and transformation is necessary for growth, and so this ability to sustain changes is also a part of the energy of green.

The common meanings that are associated with green colours are the following:

- a new state of balance
- change or growth
- freedom to pursue new ideas
- protection from fears and anxieties connected with the demands of others
- good health
- continuous life

The word green is closely related to the Old English verb *growan*, “to grow”. It is used to describe plants or the ocean. Sometimes it can also describe someone who is inexperienced, jealous, or sick. In America, green is a slang term for money, among other things. Several colloquialisms have derived from these meanings, such as “green around the gills”, a phrase used to describe a person who looks ill (Entertainment: 19 Oct 2007).

Culturally, green has broad and sometimes contradictory meanings. In some cultures such as Tshivenda and Rastafarian, green symbolises hope and growth, but it also has some bad connotations. It is associated with death and sickness. In some instances, when a person or an animal is sick it can develop some greenish colour. The colour symbolises that there is a problem with the flow of blood. As a result, the person or the animal can die. For the healthy person, the blood is expected to be red not green. For this reason, the green colour can be associated with sicknesses and death.

In Tshivenda culture, green can also be a symbol of sickness and decay. Life is green, but humans are not, and a human whose face has taken on the pallor of illness is often said to be looking a little green. This is based on the fact that the living body of a human being has blood flowing while the absence of blood results in death. The opposite colour for red, which symbolises life, is green colour. This can be justified by this common expression in Tshivenda that is says “*o dzhena hatsi vhudala*”. It is used to express that someone is missing or might be dead.

In a Christian perspective green colour symbolises life, an internal life that has been promised to those who believe in God. The Holy Bible in the book of Psalm 23:1-2 says that “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters”. Green colour as used in green pastures is a symbol of living the fulfilled life. Living without lack neither food nor water.

Green is primarily associated with plant life. As a result we can view it as a symbol of natural growth and life. Life is not always pretty, and neither is it green, but life is good, and so is the idea of growth and activity. In this way it is a deep force in our everyday lives. The meaning of the colour green is a clever suggestion which colours the underlying structure of our culture, our art, and our very lives.

2.4 Red colour

There are many meanings that are associated with the colour red. It is commonly known as a symbol of danger. Red is often used in roads to indicate stop, as with a stop sign, or danger, as with a warning light. At the same time red symbolizes love. The meaning attached to it varies according to different cultures. This means that one has to be careful when using the red colour as a symbol. It thus needs the in-depth knowledge of colour meanings for one to interpret it appropriately according to context.

In Tshivenda culture red colour also symbolises death and bad luck. If a person is dead brought about by a car accident, being shot by a gun or being stabbed, the closest people to the deceased dress in red, or they have a red cloth tied on the head. The red cloth serves as a symbol of danger or bad luck that happened to the deceased. In this instance, the coffin of the deceased is not allowed to enter in the family as it is customary before the funeral. The reason for this being that if the coffin is let into the house it will spread bad luck in the family.

2.5 Conclusion

Every colour carries images and symbols that are influenced by culture, history and circumstances. It varies with time, place and culture. In fact one colour may perform very different symbolic function in the same place. Using colour can be problematic if one does not design with the culture of your audience in mind. Colours symbolism can vary dramatically between cultures. Most colours have more positive associations with them than negative. So, although some colours do have negative connotations these negative elements are usually triggered by specific circumstances. It thus needs one to be careful when selecting the colour and the in-depth knowledge of the culture's colour interpretation is needed.

Chapter three

3. Symbolism through animals

Animal symbols are so universal as to be a part of the collective unconscious, belonging to the mythology, legends and religious scriptures of virtually every culture on earth. Some animal symbols contain a secret code and reveal their inner meanings only through written and oral traditions. Other symbols are related to the characteristics of animals that are readily accessible to any observer.

Our insight sense of the meaning of animal symbols can be greatly enhanced by looking at the meanings given to existing symbols in a cultural context. Understanding animal symbolism helps us to reveal the deeper meaning in many figurative expressions and proverbs as well as giving us an immediate understanding of their use in films, novels, poetry, art and even advertisements.

Humans share the need to use animal and other symbols and many are cross-cultural. Yet this is agreeing with specificity in regard to the symbols used by large groups. Neighboring groups, like Shona and Venda, typically do not have the same animal symbol, even if they share many other historical, religious and linguistic characteristics. For example the crocodile is a symbol of power in Shona (in Zimbabwe) and is a symbol of danger in Tshivenda culture. If one dreams of a crocodile, it symbolised that there is a certain danger to come. When large groups do share a symbol such as the lion, one ethno national group's lion has minor or major differences from another large group's lion, and members may defend and justify the use of a lion to specifically symbolize their exclusive group identity.

According to Loewenberg, (1995) large-group animal symbols which are used as childhood suitable reservoirs have intimate relationships within all children's, as well as adult's, internal worlds. Therefore, when a large group regresses, individuals may experience large-group animal symbols as "protosymbols" as if they are one's large-group identity. Thus, any attack on an ethnic, national, or religious group's animal symbol (as well as other symbols which originate as suitable reservoirs) is perceived by those belonging to that large group as personal attacks damaging their large-group identity.

Many national or ethnic groups' identities are represented by animal symbols. For example, in Tshivenda culture we have many groups of people that are classified according to their clans. The *vhakwevho* people find their identity on their clan that is “*nguluvhe*” (pigs). They call themselves “*nguluvhe khulu dza luonde dzi ilaho u lavhelesa quvha*” (Big pigs from Luonde that are forbidden from looking at the sun). This phenomenon goes back to the beginnings of human history where people have always linked their own valued or feared characteristics, and attempted to divide and order experience, through the symbolic and the use of animal and plants in their environment.

Biedermann, (1992:387) comments that “the symbolic significance of animals is sometimes obvious and primal, such as those associated with fertility, warfare, wisdom, or specific behaviours, while in other cases animals are used as symbols for complex and abstract ideas and beliefs. Some primitive people collectively believed, for example, that an omnipotent lion of the heavens swallowed the sun and thereby brought on darkness each day”.

In Tshivenda culture, people are advised that when one comes across certain animals in life, it may be an indication from the ancestors that they put in our path to give us messages from Spirits about what it is that we need to focus on in our personal healing at that moment in time. This is usually a warning in people's lives. For example, when one is travelling and a black cat cross the road before him or her it is a symbol that bad things will happen on his or her journey if not where he or she is going.

The animal form is one of the most fundamental and significant symbols in the art and decoration of every major culture on earth. From the days of our ancestors' prehistoric cave paintings to today's fine art prints, animal symbols have always graced the walls of man's interior environments. For example, *Maphungubwe* is a place of heritage in Venda that is commonly known by its great animal symbol of a Rhino made of gold. Their forms contain a wealth of meaning in both social and religious contexts. Various animal forms have multiple psychological meanings and tap into the power of the unconscious realm.

Understanding animal symbolism helps one to understand a particular people and their artistic expression and also connects individuals from any culture with the powerful forces of nature symbolised by various members of the animal kingdom.

3.1 Lion

The lion is considered the king of the jungle, and the symbolism associated with that cannot be overlooked. Like a good ruler, the lion is powerful and it is respected. It is understood that in Tshivenda culture lions are often associated with kings because they rule as the lions do in the jungle that's why there is an expression which says "*ndua ndi lone fivhanda fihulu*" (the lion is the strongest of all the animals). The kings are the ones that give authority to everything that has to be done in their land. The lion is a strong symbol used to symbolise strength in Tshivenda culture. If a person has more strength, he or she is commonly describes by the expression that says "*Munna uyu ndi ndau / Mufumakadzi uyu ndi ndau* (this man is a lion or this woman is a lion)

Kathleen (2009:6) comments that "the lion is a symbol of deathless courage and fearlessness that symbolises bravery, strength and royalty. The lion appears throughout mythologies and cultures as a symbol of royalty, power, courage, and sometimes vengeance. In Egyptian mythology, the goddesses Sekhmet and Menhit were both goddesses who had lion characteristics. In Greek mythology the Nemean lion was an obstacle the Hercules had to conquer as one of his twelve labours. The sphinx was the monstrous offspring of Orphus and Chimaera, a creature with the body of a lion and the head of a woman. No matter what form or culture the lion appears in he or she is always a force to be reckoned with". The courage of the lion as the endless one shows that there is always hope to achieve more because the lion is the king of the jungle.

Burns-Ncamashe (1967:317) comments that the use of lion as a symbol to enhance one's authority is also found in the poem “*Umnyaka omtsha*”, in which *Velile*, *Xolilizwe*, *Daliwonga*, *Jonguhlanga* and *Jongilizwe*, who are/were important chiefs (and kings) in different parts of *Xhosaland*, are referred to as *ezo ngonyama* (those lions). This reference is based on these figures' having authority over the Xhosa nation, as they are the supreme chiefs of the different subgroups of that nation.

The lions are also used as symbols in the Bible. The most familiar connection one can make with lions and the Bible is the title of Christ as the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah." It is the connection with royalty that the Bible makes that is the reason for Christ's association with the lion, but lions also appear in the Bible as symbols of strength, boldness, power, and might. This appears when the power of Jesus Christ is represented by the lion.

A lesser known biblical lion is the lion of Samson's riddle as presented in the Holy Bible in the Book of Judges 14:14: "So he said to them, Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet". The eater was a lion in whose dead carcass bees built a hive from which Samson, in his earlier life, had scooped up honey to eat.

In Tshivenda culture, lions in dreams follow much the same patterns other traditions follow. In dreams they may symbolise power, courage, royalty, might, or boldness. Dream lions may therefore indicate that one is feeling courageous or feeling an elevation of some sort in one's waking life. Alternatively, they could be compensatory symbols meaning that one is in need of more courage or more power in one's life. The dream lion may indicate that this power and courage is on its way. In Tshivenda culture people who can interpret best the dreams of lions are the traditional healers. Those kind of dreams are called *miḽoro ya muhali* (the dreams of the brave). This often happens when a person dreams fighting a lion. It symbolises that the person is a great leader. Another association with lions is pride, they travel in prides and their regal nature leads to pride in appearance and in nature. Again, this may indicate that one is taking more pride in one's waking life or in need of taking more pride in one's self.

Another consideration one might make involving lions is the lion's roar. A lion in a dream might symbolise that one is regaining one's voice, that one has something not only to say, but something important, that needs to be heard by others. This usually happens to the foreseer in the community, especially the traditional healers. The lion in the dream may be delivering a message to the dreamer that he or she should not ignore.

A lion in a dream is a sign that we should make the right choices. Courage comes from the heart and from one's deep sense of personal authority, which creates the power to act in a way that line up with one's spirit. One who acts truly from the heart is capable of leadership, achievement, and the kind of success that encourages the accomplishments of others. It is also about not being able to speak one's own truth, or to "roar" if you feel threatened in any way.

Mapfura a ndau (the fat of a lion) plays a significant role in Tshivenda culture. It has a major role in people's lives. The fat of a lion is used in most of Tshivenda rituals. When one is in need of good luck, the individual will most certainly go to the traditional healer. Respondent 2 who is a traditional healer commented: "the fat of a lion is extremely important in Tshivenda tradition". When a person is going to look for a job, the *maine* can perform some ritual for the person so that he or she will be considered for the job. Not every *maine* can perform this, it depend on the ancestral call that one has for the gods". To bring good luck to the person the *maine* will take the fat of the lion and mix it with some medicine known only to the *maine*. The person (client) kneels down on the mat and the *maine* will smear the fats mixed with the medicine on the eyebrow using a match stick. It is not allowed to use a hand or finger when smearing the medicine. In the meantime, the *maine* will utter the following words: " *Ri ni vulela dzinḡila, zwi ni tshenele hu ne na ya. Vha tshi ni vhona vha dzhenwe nga nyofho. A vhe inwi wa gundo misi yoḡhe*" (we are opening your ways. Let there be peace wherever you go. People must fear you and you always are the victor).

It is believed that such people can never lose a job or fail a job interview. When danger happens such people always survive. If thugs break into a building killing people, they cannot touch them because they are wearing the brave spirit of the lion. As much as people are scared of the lion, they will also be scared of the people who have been given good luck by the *maine*. When they are at work, the employer will never yell at them. They will always be respected and be feared. They are the ones that are considered first for promotion and given the best treatment.

Mapfura a ndau is also used on *uvhea mahosi*. It is believed that the chief must not just be in the position of leading the people without passing through the hands of the *maine*. If a chief just rules without being prepared by the *maine*, people will not respect him. The *maine* performs a ritual that prepares the chief to be a strong and brave leader that no one can undermine him. The ritual is done secretly so that people must not know what it is done and how is done. This is done in secret so that people do not know what is done; otherwise they may also use it against the chief.

Mapfura a ndau can also be used as a symbol of protection. It is believed that if one smears money with *mapfura a ndau* no one can steal it. The reason why people believe that *mapfura a ndau* can be used for protection is that the lion is one scary animal.

When *u vhea muḡi* ritual is performed, *mapfura a ndau* is used. This ritual is performed in Tshivenda culture to protect the house from evil, including witchcraft. There is a belief that before one can move into a new house the *maine* must first perform a ritual which is *u fara muḡi*. If this is not done, witches will have free entry into the house

U fara mudi is done in the following way:

The *maine* will take some soil from the homestead and mix with the fat of a lion, elephant, , baboon, giraffe and a buffalo. That is then mixed with the skeleton of different insects and animals.

Mapfura a ndau is also used to chase away *ƙokoloshi* (a man or woman transformed into baboon by the witches). *ƙokoloshi* can be used by witches in a number of ways. The job is to do evil.

For the *ƙokoloshi* to be stopped the *maine* performs the following ritual:

The *maine* takes some medicine and mixes it with *mapfura a ndau* and some other concoction known to the *maine*. After they are all well mixed, the *maine* will give them to the person who is receiving the treatment. He or She must do this in a daily until the *ƙokoloshi* stops visiting.

3.2 Dog

Dogs are good animals. They are generally seen in a positive light: loyal, faithful, honest, and willing to fight for the owner. Dogs play an important role in Tshivenda culture as far as symbolism is concerned. Dogs can be used to symbolise protection. It is common in Tshivenda culture that one uses a dog as a symbol of protection. One can say “*a thi tshuwi tshithu, mmbwa dzanga dzi hone*”. It literally means that “I am not scared of anything, my dogs are there,” meaning that “I am well protected”.

There is an expression in Tshivenda which says “*mmbwa nzwimi ya fara, u ƙi hudza hu vha ha mubikeli*” (If a dog fights victoriously, the pride is for the owner). This expression shows that a dog can be used as a symbol of pride

The dog can also be used to symbolise negative or bad things. This contradicts with the good image depicted earlier. It therefore means that one must be careful when using a dog as a symbol. The dog can also be symbol of uncontrolled lust due to its habit of copulating in public. In Tshivenda culture if a woman is an adulteress people will say “*u tou vha mmbwa yo fungulaho*” (She is a dog). In this context, a dog is used to symbolise bad behaviour.

A dog can also be used in Tshivenda culture to symbolise poverty or lack. A dog is known for depending on the owner; it owns nothing, everything is supplied by the owner. To this end people may say to someone, “*munna uyu ndi mmbwa, u tou balelwa na u ξ i rengela vhurukhu*” (This man is a dog; he cannot afford to buy himself a trouser). In this case a dog is used to symbolise poverty.

3.3 Baboon

In Tshivenda culture, baboons often play a significant and mysterious role in religion and elsewhere. In Tshivenda culture a baboon is used to symbolise unacceptable human behaviour. When a person is behaving in an indecent way, that individual will be associated with the baboon to show that he/she is not expected to behave in such a manner.

Still in Tshivenda culture the baboon has the positive connotation. A baboon can be used as a symbol of happiness. When people are happy, there is an idiom which is commonly used to show that there is no problem at all: “*mapfe ξ e o tsitsa vhana*”. It literally means baboons have put the baby down, but figuratively meaning that people are happy. When things are difficult and dangerous baboons normally keep their young as close as possible to protect them from anything that might happen but once they put them down it symbolises that there is peace reigning in the place.

Baboons can also be used to symbolise good luck in Tshivenda culture. When one is travelling and comes across a baboon making noise on the way it is a symbol of good luck; things will go well where one is going. But if the baboons remain silent it symbolises bad luck. In such a situation a person is advised to turn back to where he or she is coming from. If he or she continues with the journey, something bad will happen.

Baboons are used in many rituals in Tshivenda culture. The common one is in *u thusa \acute{r} wana*. This is a ritual performed for a child few days after birth. The ritual is performed to protect the child against sicknesses and fear. The performance of this ritual varies according to the

maine who is tasked to perform it. Respondent 2 who is *maine* commented: *u thusa n̄wana* is done in the following way:

The *maine* will take a dry skeleton of a baboon's head (*dethele*) and use a sharp object to scrap it to gather some powder which is then mixed with some medicine. The medicine is then smeared in the middle of the child's head (*ngoma*). This medicine protects the child from danger, fear, and sicknesses.

The baboon's waste (*makaka*) is used to heal or protect the child from *vhulwade ha tshiiivha* (epilepsy). It is done in the following way: the *Maine* will take the baboon's waste and burn it into a powder. The *maine* makes sure that the child inhales the smoke. After that the concoction will be mixed with some other medicine prepared by *maine*. When it is completely mixed the *maine* will again mix it with water and smear it on the face of the baby. The *maine* will take the baby and throw the baby on the roof, at a close range, and catch him or her as he she comes down. This is called *u fhakhisa*. By so doing the child will be protected from fear.

The bones of the baboon can be used to by witches to make *n̄okoloshi* (a man made transformed in to a baboon that can be used to bewitch people). Some of the bones can be used to make *fhangu* (divining bones or dice). Dried baboon skin can be used for protection in the fields. It is done to stop the baboons from destroying crops. The medicine is prepared by the *maine* who takes the dried skin of the baboon and mixes it with the blood of the baboon and some medicines. The *maine* then allow the leather to dry. When it is dry, the skin then burnt it in to ashes. The ashes will be spread all over the field, and the baboons will not enter the field.

The baboon is associated with witchcraft. It thus means that it can be used to symbolise the practice of witchcraft. Burns-Ncamashe (1961:110) points out that domesticating a baboon brings some suspicion of witchcraft among amaXhosa. That is the reason why the following is said about the people of Nkobonkobo:

Kuba bafuya kakubi xa bafuy' iimfene. (ndi u fuwa huvhi hune muthu a fuwa pfeṅe)
(For they breed badly when they breed baboons.)

This statement stresses the idea that among amaXhosa the baboon is not regarded as being a good choice for breeding. Anyone who breeds it is normally accused of witchcraft. The use of the baboon as a familiar is clearly depicted by Sinxo (1980:36, 40) in the instance where Velesazi sends Tsibamangcwaba (the baboon) to bewitch Nomsa, who rejects his constant pleas for a love relationship.

The use of the baboon as a symbol of witchcraft reveals Burns-Ncamashe's familiarity with the cultural practices and beliefs of his people. Although no one may have actually been seen riding a baboon, since this practice would be a visible phenomenon, its use as a symbol enables the reader to form a mental picture of the action. The reader's ability to form a mental picture underlines the fact that the employment of the symbol can be regarded as successful.

To black South Africans the baboon can bring up the memory of the past they have been through during the apartheid era where in black South Africans were referred to as baboons by the Afrikaners. This means that one must be careful when using baboons to symbolise something because it can mean different things to people depending on their interpretation.

3.4 Elephant

The elephant is one of the largest and most powerful animals in the forest. Its authority is regarded as almost on the same level as that of the lion, but the former is less cruel than the latter. The use of the elephant as a symbol to refer to a person is indicative of the authority.

Some people in Tshivenda culture find their identity through the elephant. When praising someone they may say '*nḁou, nḁou, dzula fhasi iwe nḁou ya mulenga ya nyatevhela nḁila ya pfeṅe ine i tshiya phanḁa ya gonya luwa*' (have a sit, you the son of the elephant). So for those people the elephant is a symbol of their identity which represents authority.

For example, there is a town in Venda that is named after a great king called *Thohoyandou*. The name is for the royals, the commoners cannot be associated with elephants.

3.5 Sheep or Lamb

The lamb is the common animal used as a symbol in many cultures and in religions perspective. The lamb is a symbol of gentleness and patience. The lamb symbolism is commonly used in Christianity, the Lamb of God that is Christ Jesus. The lamb is also symbolic of the followers of Christ, those who are taken care of by the Good Shepherd. Lambs are also classic symbols of pastoral life, peace and freedom from trouble.

Sheep are a symbol of meekness, holiness and devotion in Tshivenda culture. In early times, the symbolism of sheep had, mostly, negative connotations: stupidity, blind submission, helplessness. This is because if one sheep does something, the rest will also do it. This is where the expression “if one sheep cross the road, the rest will follow” comes from. With the advent of Christianity, the symbol of the sheep was elevated by association with Christ as the Sacred Lamb and the apostles as the sheep gathered around the Good Shepherd.

Sheep can also be used as a symbol of stupidity in Tshivenda culture. It is used to refer to a person who always agrees to things even such things are not good for him or her, doing so to avoid hurting people’s feeling while suppressing their own feelings. The reason why they are associated with the sheep is that a sheep keeps quiet even when it is being slaughtered. The expression used refers to such people is: *ni tou vha nngu, ni gunarwa line la tendelela zwothe zwothe* (you are a sheep, a stupid thing that agrees to everything).

A sheep also plays an important role in Tshivenda culture when the *uvhuisa* ritual is performed. *Uvhuisa* is a ritual performed when a person dies far away off, and did not receive a proper burial. The death of that nature is called *ufhalala* (to scatter away) and it is believed that if the spirit of the dead person is not brought back, misfortune would befall the family. To prevent the family from all the misfortune, the spirit of such a person must be brought back home through the process of *uvhuisa*.

When *u vhuisa* is performed, a black sheep is killed through immersing its head in a gourd full of medicinal water. This is called *u dzwingiswa*. Slaughtering is not allowed in this case. After the sheep is suffocated, its head is cut off from the body. The head is then placed in a wooden bowl by the *nanga*, who then attends to all medicinal rituals. The head of the sheep become a symbolic of the dead person and is then carried in the wooden bowl as if it is the dead man being carried. A grave would have been dug, and when the mourners reach the grave site, the *nanga*, performs some rituals. The wooden bowl is then lowered into the grave. As this is happening medicine man utters the following: “*ri a ni vhuisa, ni eḁele zwavhuḁi, ni singo tsha ita zwa u dina, ni songo tsha tota vhana*” (we brought you back, sleep well, stop bothering people, don’t pinch the children anymore).

3.6 Pig

Animals often stand in as symbols of us; often our emotions. Pigs have a number of connotations. Some people think of pigs as stupid animals, while others like the Venda people think of pigs as dirty animals. Some religions share this view and adherents to those religions disallow the eating of pork. Other people like in Western culture find the pig charming, intelligent and loving and keep varieties of small pigs as indoor pets.

Tshivenda culture is filled with references to a pig as the animal that is always dirty and that does not care about life. For this reason, people are sometimes negatively referred to as pigs, as are people who are overweight, greedy, or viewed as unattractive. This also goes to the extent that unclean people are referred to as pigs. In this situation a pig is used as a symbol of dirtiness. For example, if a child is dirty, one will say “*ni tou nga tshiguluzwana*” (you are like a piglet).

Pigs get part of their reputation from being dirty due to their careless eating habits and their tendency of rolling in mud. It turns to be the way they are described and also used to symbolise negative things. However, part of the reason the pig eats in the manner it does is

because of the manner in which it is fed so it turns to be used to symbolise a parent who can not feed the children in a proper way. Such kings of people are often told that “*ni tou vha nguluvhe, tshone tshigwanda matope*” (you are a pig that eats mud).

In Tshivenda culture pigs are often used to symbolise helpless people or situations because pigs are unable to defend themselves. There are situations in life which makes one feel weak, and powerless. In Tshivenda culture, such situations are symbolised by the pig in a pit : “*ndi tou nga nguluvhe yo welaho mulindini*” (I am like a pig that fell in the pit). A pig is known for not lifting its head to the sky so when it is in the pit, it cannot do anything to get out. It remains helpless.

The meaning that is attached to a pig differs from culture to culture. Kathleen (2009:10) outlines that “in Western culture, the pig is a symbol meaning honor and generosity. They also symbolise happiness and are notably intelligent and it is different with the meaning in Tshivenda culture. In Chinese astrology, those born under the sign of the pig love to be needed and feel best when everyone around them is smiling. They see only the best in others and may be exclusive in their friendships. They are nice to a fault and have impeccable manners and taste.

Regardless of all the negative connotations attached to the pig in Tshivenda culture, there are some instances the pig is important. The fat of the pig is very important in Tshivenda culture. It plays an important role in people’s lives. It is believed that the fats of the pig can be used to give a true vision when *masilamusi* (magic) is practiced. If one can apply it on the face he or she will not be robbed by those who use *masilamusi*.

Mapfura a nguluvhe can also be used to cure the painful ears of a child. It is a great medicine preferred by traditional healers. When a child is suffering from itching ears, the *maine* will pour a drop of *mapfura a nguluvhe* in the ear of a child and the child will be healed instantly. It can also used to heal chest pain when coughing. In this instance one warms the oil and takes a seep of it. After a few hours or a day the pain will be gone.

3.7 Rabbit

The rabbit is a symbol meaning generative power and fertility, obviously due to its amazing procreative abilities. In Tshivenda, the rabbit is highly valued as the animal of Venus, the goddess of love. In addition, the rabbit has traditionally been an exciting animal for chase hunting.

In Tshivenda culture the rabbit can be used to symbolise someone who can run fast. The white rabbit, as the guardian of animals, symbolises divinity, good fortune and prosperity. The rabbit can also be used to symbolise unfaithfulness, this comes as the results of how the rabbit is described in “*ngano dza Tshivenda*” (Tshivenda folk-tales) where the rabbit is characterised by robbing other animals through its wisdom and endless tricks that makes it be called *talingwane* (the wisdom guru). For this reason the rabbit can be used to symbolise unfaithfulness.

The rabbit is used to symbolise wisdom in Tshivenda culture. If a person is brilliant in something, person is called *muvhuda*, “*ni tou vha muvhuda, ene talingwane wa mashango*” (you are a rabbit, the wisdom guru). This is because the rabbit always finds a way to overcome challenges and finds the best out of the most in its life. More of the rabbit’s wisdom is found in Tshivenda folk-tales like *sankambe*.

3.8 Snail

The snail is one of the animals that are used in symbolic meanings. It is commonly used to symbolise protection of providence, deliberation and perseverance because of its cover. This is because it is soft at inside but it is protected by the hard shell that prevents it from any external harm. The common expression used in Tshivenda that shows the protection of a snail is that “*muthu ndi a q̄i kutela sa khumba*” (you must put yourself safe like a snail).

The snail can also symbolise one who has firm grip and stability. Snails have the liquid that glues them on to the ground that make them be firm and unshakable. Even when they move, they cannot be diverged from their way. For this reason the snail can be used to symbolise stability. Snails can also be viewed as slow moving and lazy. In this regard it can be used to symbolise someone who is slow in motion or when doing some activity.

The snail is also used in Tshivenda culture to symbolise slow action. When people are waiting for something to be done and is taking longer that expected, they would say: “*afha ri tou nga ro lindela khumba ine ya khou ǀdi tshimbila i tshi tala shango ǀofhe*” (it seems as we are waiting for a snail that is coming in its slow pace). A person who is slow is also symbolised by the use of snail. The common expression used is: “*ni tou vha ene nyamunonoka khumba ya mvulani ine ya tshimbila i tshi vhuela murahu* (you are a snail in rainy days).

The snail shell is an important assert used in Tshivenda culture, more especially by the traditional healers. They perceive it as a safest place where they can put their medicine. In it the medicine is safe. The shell can also be used to measure the medicine that has to be given to the patient. It can also be used for a patient to drink some medicine from when the calabash is not to be used.

The liquid that comes from the snail is an important medicine used in Tshivenda culture. If a person did something bad and people or police are looking for him or her, the *maine* can prepare some medicine for him or her so that he or she cannot be found. The medicine is called *masutu* (slippery). The *maine* will take the liquid from the snail and mix it with the powder that comes from the skin of the snake fish and blend it with some medicines. The client applies it on the face and people who are looking for him cannot recognize the individual.

3.9 Snake

The snake is a universal symbol with the most complex and converse connotation. Bella comments that “the meanings that are attached to it vary depending on one’s culture. Ancients believed that because the snake shed its skin, it symbolised immortality, and therefore became associated with the Roman God of healing and also with many Hindu gods. The ancient Egyptians, Romans and Greeks regarded it as a protective spirit. Christianity sees it as bringing about the fall of man, and therefore became to be known as crafty and malevolent, Satan and sin.” Its looks inspire fear while its lidless eyes denoted watchfulness and wisdom. Its shape makes it a powerful phallic fertility symbol. In dreams, when it appears coiled, it means dynamic potential.

Kathleen (2009) notes that “the snake is one of the oldest symbols, appearing repeatedly, in the Bible as well as in the iconography of Egypt and other ancient cultures”. This has appeared the Holy Bible in the book of Exodus 4: 2-3.

And the Lord said unto him, what is that in cast it
your hand? And he said, a rod. And he said, on the
ground, and he cast it on the ground and it become
a serpent (snake)and Moses fled from before it.

The snake is a symbol meaning danger. In Tshivenda culture the snake is associated with witchcraft. In many instances people who are said to be witches are also said to have snakes that they use as messenger to bewitch people. Most people cannot take it for granted when snakes appear in their dreams. They can often symbolise a fear of the unknown. They can point to a deep seated concern that something is not right, or a nagging feeling that something is waiting for them, something bad. In most instances wherein a person dreams about a snake, the elders will advice such person that “*u tea u ya u vhonisa*” (he or she must go and consult with traditional healers)

Snake can also be used as a symbol of wisdom. Walker (1980:87) states that while the unknown factor of snakes can engender fear, it may also give rise to feelings of intrigue. Some people and cultures see snakes as exotic and possessing hidden wisdom. This is partly due to their mysterious nature and partly due to one of snake's more prominent features: its

tongue. In Chinese astrology people born under the sign of snake are considered extremely wise, sensual, and diplomatic--they have an ease of tongue which makes them able to navigate sticky situations. If a snake appears in your dream it may actually be there using its tongue to impart wisdom that may be life altering.

In Tshivenda culture the snake has negative connotation; it is associated with evil. This is because it is culturally associated with jealousy. It is said that witches use it when they perform their rituals or when they want to bewitch someone. This evil association has been indoctrinated in people's mind in such a way that there is no good thing that can be associated with it. If a person is unfaithful, evil or has betrayed another they will say "muthu uyu u tou vha *n̄owa*" (this person is a snake). The impression given here will be that the person is evil and heartless. This also goes for a person who is jealous. The snake is also known for killing something that it can not eat so the jealousy people are regarded as "*n̄owa ine ya vhulaha tshithu i si le*" (a snake that kills something that it does not eat).

The fat of the python is so important in Tshivenda culture. It is used to heal a wound caused by fire. The fat from the python is applied on the wound. It removes the scars.

3.10 Cat

Cat is one of the animals that in animal symbolism. The meaning that is attached to a cat varies depending on cultures because different cultures perceive things in different ways. In Tshivenda culture a cat is associated with cleanliness. Every morning a cat cleans its face using its feet and saliva. Whenever it relives itself, it makes sure that no one sees it.

Cat is also associated with negative symbols, although in some countries like China, a black cat is a bringer of good luck. In Tshivenda culture a black cat is associated with bad luck and witchcraft. If a black cat crosses the road as one is in a journey, it symbolises that something bad will happen along the way. In Western cultures, because of this association the cat is

perceived as cruel, deceitful and malevolent. Female cats were considered promiscuous and signified lustful women; their nine lives were seen as supernatural. Buddhists consider the cat cursed. However, the Norse, the Romans and the Moslems all feel positively toward the cat.

According to Kathleen (2009:2) cats are symbols meaning spiritual power and freedom or love of liberty. Cats were sacred in ancient Egypt. The Egyptian goddess Bast was feline and her chariot was drawn by cats. In the Christian world, cats were maligned as associating with witches and the devil. Cats have also been used as negative symbols of women, especially predatory women or those who seek to attract men to sexual misconduct. Likewise, "tom-cats" have a similar reputation. To be "catty" is to be playful. A "cat-house" is a place of prostitution. In addition, the cat is highly fertile and often has large litters. These associations have dampened the cat's magical qualities in some circles, although cats remain a favorite pet and useful for keeping the rodent population in check around the world.

In Tshivenda culture cat is also used to symbolise bad luck. If a black cat can cross the path before one's path, it is a symbol of bad luck. It can mean that things will not go well on the way or where he or she is going. In this instance, it is advised that one must turn back and not continue with the journey. It is believed in Tshivenda culture that if a black cat is found in the homestead, it is a messenger from witches.

3.11 Conclusion

Each animal has a specific meaning to the people in different cultures and religions, and certain animals signify certain character qualities. This is why one has to be extra careful when using animals as a symbol because the meaning attached to them varies from culture to culture or from religion to religion even within the same culture.

Chapter four

4 Symbolism in rituals

Rappaport (1999:24) defines rituals as “the performance of more or less in variant sequence of formal acts and utterance not entirely encoded by the performers”. This definition does not cover all aspect that one can expect on ritual performance. As a result one can analyze the definition and conclude that ritual is a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value, which is prescribed mostly by the traditions of a community or family.

A ritual may be performed on specific occasions, or at the discretion of individuals or communities. It may be performed by a single individual, by a group, or by the entire community; in arbitrary places, or in places especially reserved for it; either in public, in private, or before specific people. A ritual may be restricted to a certain subset of the community, and may enable or underscore the passage between religious or social states.

The purposes of rituals are varied. They include compliance with religious obligations or ideals, satisfaction of spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners, strengthening of social bonds, social and moral education, demonstration of respect or submission, stating one's affiliation, obtaining social acceptance or approval for some event or, sometimes, just for the pleasure of the ritual itself.

Rituals are performed to address a person's problems, and can be done any time of year. They sometimes involve the slaughtering of an animal. Although some might think this slaughtering is the main focus of a ritual, it is important also to know that the ceremony is not complete if it is not accompanied by speeches directed to the spiritual world. The speeches form the bulk of all ritual sacrifices, in fact, and although the words uttered are addressed to all those present, they are actually intended for the ears of a clan's ancestors.

Before a ritual is performed, clan members call a meeting to assign duties, which extend from the start of the preparations to its last moment. This varies with cultures and the ritual being performed. Some rituals oblige the medicine man to perform it only with one person.

Rituals of various kinds are a feature of almost all known human societies, past or present. They include not only the various worship rites and sacraments of organized religions and cults, but also the rites of passage of certain societies, and purification rites, oaths of allegiance, dedication ceremonies, coronations and presidential inaugurations, marriages and funerals, strengthening businesses and graduations and more. Many activities that are performed for concrete purposes, such as jury trials and execution of criminals, are loaded with purely symbolic actions prescribed by regulations or tradition, and thus partly ritualistic in nature. Even common actions like hand shaking and saying hello are rituals.

Tolbert (1990a: 80-105) comments that “due to their symbolic nature, there are hardly any limits to the kind of actions that may be incorporated into a ritual. The rites of past and present societies have typically involved special gestures and words, recitation of fixed texts, performance of special music, songs or dances, processions, manipulation of certain objects, use of special dresses, consumption of special food, drink, or drugs, and much more. Religious rituals have also included animal sacrifice, human sacrifice, ritual suicide, and ritual murder. Ritual lamentation song performed with weeping in many societies was regarded as required to ritually carry the departed soul to a safe afterlife”.

Rituals can aid in creating a firm sense of group identity. Humans have used rituals to create social bonds and even to nourish interpersonal relationships. For example, nearly all fraternities and sororities have rituals incorporated into their structure, from elaborate and sometimes "secret" initiation rites, to the formalized structure of convening a meeting. Thus, numerous aspects of ritual and ritualistic proceedings are engrained into the workings of those societies.

4.1 U vhuisa (to bring back)

Uvhuisa is a ritual performed in Tshivenda for a person who died far away from home and did not receive a proper burial. The death of that nature is called *ufhalala* (to scatter away). The belief is that because such a person did not receive a proper burial, misfortune would befall the family. In the vent where the person died of a car accident and did not receive a proper burial, again the belief is that the spirit of such a person might cause accidents at the very same sport of his death. In order to resolve the issue of misfortune and accident and unnecessary deaths, the spirit of such a person must be brought back home through the process of *uvhuisa*.

Milubi (2007:4) explains that *Uvhuisa* is performed in the following way:

“A black sheep is killed through immersing its head in a gourd full of medicinal water. This is called *u dzwingiswa*. Slaughtering is not allowed in this case. After the sheep is suffocated, its head is cut off from the body. The head is then placed in a wooden bowl by the *řanga*, who then attends to all medicinal rituals. The head of the sheep become a symbolic of the dead person and is then carried in the wooden bowl as if it is the dead man being carried. A grave would have been dug, and when the mourners reach the grave site, the *nanga*, performs some rituals. The wooden bowl is then lowered into the grave. As this is happening medicine man utters the following: “*ri a ni vhuisa, ni eđele zwavhuđi, ni singo tsha ita zwa u dina, ni songo tsha tota vhana*” (we brought you back, sleep well, stop bothering people, don’t pinch the children anymore).

In this way, the spirit shall have been appeased. The appeasement of the spirit/ ancestral spirit occurs when an animal sacrifice has been made. Mbiti (1989:58) states that “sacrifice refers to case where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal, in part or whole, to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living dead”. He too indicates that sacrifice and offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African people.

4.2 U luvhedza

This is a common ritual performed in Tshivenda culture. *U luvhedza* is a ritual practice where a dead persons' spirit is appeased. This is done after burial. According to Milubi (2007:4) "if an elderly person has died, be it a male or female, the belief is that the person becomes an ancestor who would need to be communicated with now and then". For the ritual to have meaning; *rianga*, the medicine person, must be in the forefront as it is the case with *uvhuisa*.

In *u luvhedza* a goat is used. A she –goat will be used for a woman and a he-goat will be used for a man. The he-goat that is used for a male person must have started *u vhevheṭela* and the she-goat for a female person must have had kids more that twice. The reason for this is for those who are left in the family to be able to produce and for the woman to be able to bear children. The goat becomes symbolic of the dead. Before the ritual takes place, the goat must have urinated and defecated. These are mixed with the medicine.

A hole is dug within the home stead to represent a grave. The medicine man goes and picks some soil and mixes the soil with some medicine. The goat's meat will be cooked without adding salt or spices. The meat has to be eaten. The bones are collected and they must be without salt too. The bones of the goat become symbolic of the bones of the dead. Together with the soil from the grave and the medicine, they are buried in a symbolic grave. This becomes a symbolic for future ancestral communication.

4.3 U dzekisa mufu

When a bachelor dies, the Tshivenda ritual performance has to be done. Traditionally, any man who dies without having married and fathered children was regarded as being selfish. When such a person dies, a piece of wood is inserted between his buttocks. This becomes symbolic of the responsibilities that he has shunned.

The ritual is conducted according to the instructions from the medicine man. This varies according to the man behind the whole scene (*maine*). In some instances when a man died a bachelor the medicine man takes a branch of *muvhale* tree and cut it into two pieces and the medicine person performs the medicinal practice. The branch is then taken to the intersection of the path where people commonly pass now and then. The other piece of the branch is put at the gate where the deceased use to live. During the funeral, the medicine man will take the branch that was at the gate and put it in the coffin next to the deceased. By so doing the deceased will be married. The brunch of *muvhale* tree will therefore be a symbol of his wife.

Milubi (2007:3) notes that “another ritual may still be performed for the one who has died a bachelor. In this instance, a wooden hoe stick is placed in a round gourd. The medicine person opens a hole on the gourd and this is where hoe stick comes in. medicinal practice are performed by the medicine person. The stick and the gourd are then taken to the intersection of the path where people pass now and then. Whoever passes would realize that the person who had died was a bachelor. The stick becomes symbolic of his male hood; while the gourd with a hole becomes symbolic of female hood. One could say that the symbolic ritual performance may be meant to appease the spirit of one who died without having married”.

In this instance they are not marrying but removing curses that can be transmitted to the coming generation. It also serves as a symbol of warning to those who are still alive that one must marry.

4.4 U vhumbela (to mould)

U vhumbela is one of the most important rituals in Tshivenda culture. It is gender specific because it is performed for women, not just any woman but for a woman who lost a child either after birth or through miscarriage (*u sala fhedzi*).

Milubi (2007:3) comments that “the belief is that if the ritual is not performed, the woman may fail to conceive and may not bear a child anymore. When a dead child is buried, the medicine person would have to mould a child out of clay. The clay must come from an anthill where termites are still active. The termites and their being active suggest fertility and the possibility of the mother bearing children again.”

He further points out that “on the head of the molded clay child, a crown made of ‘*mupfure*’ with its seed and thorns are placed. On the ankles and joints, ring of ‘*tshitzanzhela*’ grass are placed. The *tshitanzhela* grass is hard and very resistant to drought. The blood of the mother is mixed with urine and medicine. The dead child is placed in a grave in an upright position. The molded clay child is also placed in an upright position to prevent *nowa ya mme* from falling asleep”.

The snake in this instance suggests the womb of the mother. The sleeping of the snake implies rendering the womb to be barren. The up positioning in the burial of the child will prevent the snake of the mother from sleeping. The mother has to scatter some seeds in the grave. After the burial, a hole is left where the mother would urinate into the grave now and then until she witnesses her first menstruation. Once she witnesses her first menstruation, the mother then stops urinating into the grave. The molded clay child becomes symbolic of a child to be born again in the future. The symbol suggests hope and a sense of continuation of recreation and the life after death.

4.5 U bvisa murunzi

This is a ritual that is performed after a death in the family. It is performed to prevent the fields from becoming barely and to prevent the bad luck in the family as well as in the community as the whole. It is performed by the family of the deceased. They perform it to allow the soil to produce food again for the community. It is believed that if this ritual is not performed people will harvest rather little because the soil will have been cursed.

U bvisa murunzi is performed in this way:

Milubi (2007:5) outlines the demonstration of *u bvisa murunzi*: “*maine* (the medicine man) will take the seed of all types of the thing they plant in the fields and mix them with *mushonga* and give them to the family members. They one by one sow the seeds in the mini grave prepared by *maine* during the *uluvhedza* ritual. The *maine* will utter the following words as they sow seeds. *Kheyo mbeu ri khou ni fha yone, ni songo ri sinyutshela. Vulani dzinḡila, masimuni zwi vhibve vhana vha wane zwiḡiwa.* (Here are the seeds we are giving you, don’t be angry at us, open the ways so that we can harvest at the fields so that children will have food)”.

Family members will take some of the seed to their families and sow them. They also give some to the children so that they will sow as well. By so doing, it is believed that the family will have fruitful life that will pass to the community at large. The seed in this ritual is serves as a symbol of close contact between the ancestors and the people who are still alive.

4.6 U ḡanzwa tshinyama

This is a ritual that is done for a people who have bad luck. Such kind of people are vulnerable to bad things in their lives. No matter how hard they try to run away from it, bad luck is always by their side. For that to stop, the *maine* must perform the ritual for them. It is said to be contagious that it can be passed to the children so it must be stopped.

U ḡanzwa tshinyama is done in the following way:

The *maine* takes a chicken, preferably a white one and slaughters it and lets the blood flow on the body of the person who is being cleaned. After realising that there is no longer blood coming from the chicken, the person will have to bath with the water prepared by the *maine* mixed with *mushonga* (medicine). After bathing, the water will be shed on the way where people pass through so that someone will take that bad luck. The blood of a chicken in this

ritual plays a symbolic role of washing away the bad luck as it happens in Christianity wherein Jesus Christ was crucified and his precious blood washed away the sins of the people.

It is believed that if *u tanzwa tshinyama* ritual is performed, one will enjoy the following:

- Protection from danger.
- Unlimited success.
- Victory
- Survival when in danger.
- Swift recover when injured.

4.7 U rula *ḡhoho* (stopping continuous headache)

U rula ḡhoho is a ritual that is performed under the supervision of the *maine* as it is in many rituals. This ritual is performed to stop the endless headache. Not every *maine* can perform this ritual. It depends on the ancestral call that one has. In this ritual only the *maine* and the client are present. No one is allowed to come and witness what will be happening unless the client is a child; in that case he or she will be accompanied by the mother.

Urula *ḡhoho* is performed in the following way:

The client is instructed to bring along a chicken, preferably white one. This ritual is performed in the bush. The *maine* and the client will go to the bush. In this ritual the chicken is not slaughtered. The client kneels down and the *maine* will tie the chicken and puts on the patient's head. After that the *maine* takes some blood from the client's body and mixes it with *mushonga* (medicine). The prepared medicine is therefore smeared on the chicken by the medicine man and then it is set free.

Ad the headache stops instantly. If the chicken is eaten by other animals in the bush, the headache will be gone for good, but if someone finds it and eats it, that person will be attacked by endless headache. To be cured, that person will also have to undergo the ritual. In this ritual a chicken is used as a symbol of disease leaving the person. This is symbolised by the chicken flying away from a sick person's head.

4.8 Thevhula

This is the greatest sacrificial ritual performed by Vhavenda people. It is led by the royal family. It is not performed by the sib of commoners. It is performed at the secret graves, where the ancestors lie buried the whole sib must assemble and a libation (*mpambo*) made of *mufhoho* is poured out over the stone serving as a symbol of the departed ancestral spirits. It is done for *u suma* (to inform) the ancestors about something. When they wish to eat fruits of the new season, they announce that a *tshikona* dance should be performed. When they do so, they say they are going to *kunguwedza*. This is an emphatic expression to indicate the grand scale of the proceeding.

Respondent 2 who is from the royal family that performs this ritual comments that “when preparation for the sacrifice to the ancestral spirits (*midzimu*) is made, it is because the divining bones have shown that they, namely *midzimu*, disconnected. The first step will be to inform all those of the royal family that they must bring *mufhoho*, all the living members of the sib as far as they can be traced. They all must come and each must contribute a small bowl full of *mufhoho*. The place where they assemble is the ancient home of the sib, near which there is the sacred grave, the place of sacrifice to the spirit of their ancestors who lie buried nearby. *Makhadzi* collects their gifts and keeps them in one vessel. These gifts from the sib members are called *lweṭolweṭo*”.

As it happens with many rituals performed in *Tshivenda*, the *maine* will have to give a way forward with his bones. Lestrède (1960: 154) outlines that “before any preparation for beer making is made, the *makhadzi* must consult the divining bones of the professional diviner. He takes the bones and throws them down. The *Maine* then explains what it means, who will

have to soak the *mufhoho* and fetch the necessary *mufhoho*. Those who do all the work of preparing the *mpambo*, beer for sacrifice are the young. They also soak the grain and draw the necessary water, having been designated for this duty by the divining bones. Not a word may be said about these preparations, because it is believed that it might cause the death of the chief. After this they ask the divination bones if they must soak the millet, if the bones indicate affection, they do so. If the indication is negative, they must wait. After a while, *makhadzi* will ask and the reply will be affirmative.

He continues commenting that the millet is then soaked and allowed to sprout in the sleeping hut of the chief himself, where nobody will enter. When these rituals have been duly done, *makhadzi* will go to the sacred place of burial, where the ancestral spirits are, and inform them, "We have soaked the grain". That's all she needs to do. The chief's daughters go naked to the river to draw water. They may not be seen by anyone, which is taboo, for they are afraid that it might cause the death of the chief. When they go to the river, they leave the kraal by a small secret gateway. Before crossing a path they hide behind bushes nearby and make sure that there is no one and then they cross the path.

There are strict rules that have to be followed when this ritual is performed. Not everyone from a royal sib can work either in preparation or in the ritual process itself. Respondent 2 commented that "all the preparations for *thevhula* are made by girls of royal blood. They soak the *mufhoho* and when it has sprouted, it means the day for pounding it has arrived. We must all leave the *musanda* and the young girls who prepare the corn are left alone. Early next morning they tell the royals to cook the porridge and get out of the kraal. Only the girls remain alone to pound the fermented *mufhoho*". The reason they chase the people away is that the girls must be free when doing all the work, as they will be naked when doing the work. Even the *ludede* (griddle) will be laid aside.

The work is done in the nude state in imitation of their departed ancestors, who now lie buried, stripped off all the clothing. They also stamp the fresh *mufhoho* and fresh maize to make beer. Then in the evening, after having finished their work of fetching water and pounding the fermented corn, they begin to cook the flour to make ordinary beer which will be drunk by the commoners.

Respondent 2 continues: “After a few days when the beer has fermented and is almost ready, they inform *makhadzi*, who then comes and performs her work of mixing the *mpambo*. She does this with water drawn early that same morning by the girls chosen by the divining bones. The mixing is done at the graveyard. *Makhadzi* pours some of this special drowned water for *mpambo* into the *thungu*, the quantity depending upon the number of sib-members who will have to take a sip of it, and mixes some of the pounded ferment with it. A quantity of water is left in the vessel in which it was brought, and to this she adds the remaining ferment, to be drunk by those of the royal family who are not themselves sib-members and therefore not entitled to partake of *mpambo*. Vessel, calabash, and *thungu* are left there with the beer. All this takes place at the graveyard which no stranger may approach”. The reason why the outsiders are not allowed to take part in the ritual is that it must strictly be performed by those who belong to the royal family. It is a taboo for the outsiders to see what is happening during the performing of *thevhula*. It is believed that an outsider witnesses such a ritual; it might lead to the death of the chief.

Makhadzi plays an important role in the performance of *thevhula* ritual. Most of things are done through her. She is the one who also communicates with the ancestors. On the same day of mixing *mpambo*, *makhadzi* will go and inform the chief that all is ready. The chief will then tell his headmen. The headmen will, in return, inform the common people to go to *musanda*.

The people assemble at *musanda* and the beer is brought in a great quantities. The order is given to people to go and carry *ngoma na nanga* (the drum and the horns) from *malugwane* (the lead dancer). Then the members of the royal sib, both male and female are told to get up. They all go out through the small gate leading to the graveyard. The horns remain *kharoni*, ready for use.

Lestrade (1960: 154) outlines that “during the day of *thevhula* all the royal sibs assemble at the graves including the commoners’ women who are married to the royal sib. At this point one appointed person will double check if there is no stranger among them and finally call *makhadzi* to come to the front. *Makhadzi* will come forward and lifts up the *thungu* while the girl designated by the dice takes up the vessel containing the *mvuvhelo*. A great solemnity

comes over the people. They will all be silent and serious. They leave the grave in a solemn procession. Then will *makhadzi* go in the front and others follow one by one after her. They pass through *kharoni* where all the people are assembled. The commoners don't say a word; they just stare at them as they pass. The royals also don't say a word but just follow *makhadzi*. Behind *makhadzi* is *tshifhe* who will be carrying *mvuvhelo*".

Lestrade (1960: 156) goes on to state that "the solemnity increase as they approach the place of sacrifice, and there is no one that speaks at the time. They go to the stone that symbolises the dead forefathers. They halt and *makhadzi* puts down the *thungu* while *tshifhe*, the chosen girl, also puts down her *mvuvhelo* and calabash on the ground. *Makhadzi* will sit down and all people will do likewise forming a round circle. *Makhadzi* will say: let's give them the crop of the New Year. Then *makhadzi* will hand over the *thungu* to the mother of *tshifhe* (a chosen girl) and she will crawl to the stone that represents the first ancestor and say: *I thevhula* (sacred, pour out) *nga dzina la kuduhulu kwaŋu*, *we a farwa nga thangu uri a vhe ene tshifhe* (in the name of your descendant who was designated by the dice to be *tshifhe*)".

When all this is happening other people will be silent watching the whole scenario happening. At this time everyone is obliged to have peace within his or her heart so that the ways will be opened for the *thevhula* to be successful. Lestrade (1960: 156) adds: "The mother of *tshifhe* will then crawl to the second stone and say: *nothe vhozwi nga dzina jenejo* (you all in the name of the domain of the dead, you and other ancestors) *ndi tevhula nga dzina la muduhulu waŋu* (in the same name of the child, do I sacrifice to you). She will proceed to the third stone and say the same thing. She will finally say "*ri ri shango livhe na mulalo, hu vhe na khombo, ripfume ngazwo*" (our prayer is "may the country resound with lamentation, may there be sorrow among the commoners, that we may grow rich thereby). When she has performed her office and has sacrificed to all the stones, her work is done. *Makhadzi* will then call *tshifhe* to come and perform her office too. She come and does what her mother did before her".

In this instance *tshifhe* must always behold what *makhadzi* is doing since she will be in charge as time goes on. After giving the crop of the New Year to the gods *makhadzi* will proceed with the performance. She (*makhadzi*) will therefore take *thungu* and drink one mouthful, the others do the same. This is called “*u la mare a vhadzimu*” (eating the saliva of ancestors). When she has done so, she utters a loud ululation of joy. She will then put down the *thungu* and *khotsimunene*, the brother of the last deceased chief, takes it and takes a sip in his turn and put it down again. Then it goes one after the other of the rest of royal blood. Also take a sip and put the *thungu* down. When this is over *khotsimunene* utter a loud yell of joy.

People at *khroni* will be waiting for the indication that they can start dancing *tshikona*. When the *mukosi* of *khotsimunene* is heard, the men at *khroni* get up and prepare to dance *tshikona*. *Malugwane* gets up and dances about excitedly. The royals will return in happy spirits from the place of sacrifice. The chief’s daughter takes up the calabash and the *thungu* and follows other people. The young boys join the woman and girls who beat the *murumba* drums and seat around them.

Makhadzi will therefore play her last part of this ritual. She will join those who are dancing *tshikona* and tell *malugwane* to stop the dance and command that: “*ri fhundula vhathu dzima. Zwashu ro fhedza. A re musiwana nga ite zwa mutani wawe -vho*” (we have giving the people to hoe again, our duty is done. Whosoever is a comm. oner, let him do what is meet in his own kraal). This means that the commoners are allowed to sacrifice to their ancestors. *Makhadzi* will then utter a loud *mukosi* of joy and *tshikona* will continue playing fluently. After that they break off and attend to the beer, which was brought in large quantity by the people. At this point it is believed that the gods are appeased.

4.9 Conclusion

Traditional ritual rites, whether they be in the form of festivals, propitiation of lineage ancestors, communal rituals or voluntary association rites act as symbols of unity which seem to draw a whole community together. The effect of these symbolic rites appear to be greater and deeper than any form of billboard, newspaper, television advertisement or person to person street and home product promotional announcements. A number of factors contribute to this, the major aspect being that the meanings behind rituals and their symbolic items are culturally defined.

Messages that are transmitted through indigenous ritual rites performance are understood by those who are familiar with the language of the rituals. Hence, gender messages that are revealed during the ritual processes may come to be lost or convey the wrong meanings to non-members of the cultural environment.

Chapter five

5 Symbolism through birds and numbers

Birds are often seen as symbols of fortune or as bad omen in many cultures. The meaning of bird symbolism varies from one culture to another. Birds can be seen as symbols of premonitions but they also link to the future in some ways. They can be symbols simply of ideas and proposals for the future. That may include an idea at work you have put forward. In a wider sense birds symbolise your own vision of the future. They can also simply link to the possibility of change and usually some specific changes in weather. For example: *Thambelamaḡi* (swallows) symbolises the coming of the rain in Tshivenda culture. If it has been raining and stops after a while and the swallows start flaying, it symbolises that the rain is still going to rain within a short period of time.

Birds of various types can gently remind us of many positive and negative things in life. Birds are a common dream symbol; sometimes they appear soaring high in the sky, sometimes they are seen trapped in a cage. Birds have several different dream meanings and specific birds also have their own specific function in dreams.

Angels and birds seem linked and the most likely reason for this linkage is the idea of communication and message delivery. This is more important in Tshivenda culture where the language of birds is considered as angelic message from the ancestors. For example: *tshivha ntutu* (dove from mountains) is a symbol of messenger from the ancestors reminding us about the pain of the children that have no parents.

Bird song and angel tongue both seem to have the same goal; the revelation of something important, something strange, something perhaps divine, to the mortal. With such an emphasis on bird's ability to communicate, it seems pretty obvious that a dream bird may represent communication of some form. The bird may be an indication, bringing news about something which may soon come into being in waking life. A *luzwio* bird for example in Tshivenda is an indication of the death that will happen in the family or to the relative of the family. It is a symbol of destruction, despair; a sign of bad news.

5.1 Eagle

The eagle is a highly important bird in many cultures and belief. It plays a major role in the human lives in a way that people cannot underestimate the meaning attached to it. Most obviously, the bird partakes of the ritual by having his nest represented at the fork of the lodge. In Arapaho mythology, this nest symbolizes the thunderbird, or eagle, who built his nest in a cottonwood tree. “Just as birds fly about overlooking the earth, so does the Father. He is in the form of a bird” (Dorsey.1903:114). Some tribes, notably the Crow and Shoshone, fasten an actual mounted golden eagle to the rafter over the entrance or near the nest.

According to Dorsey (1903:119) “eagles are another easily recognizable and understood symbol. In the United States the eagle has been selected as that nation's symbol of independence. Dream eagles typically represent the same pride, independence, strength, and bravery. This majestic bird may symbolize those same feelings within yourself as the eagle is rarely has a negative meaning. The only time the connotation with the eagle could be negative would be if the eagle was hurt in some way. In that capacity the eagle could serve as a symbol for a bruised ego or perhaps feelings of limitation or loss of freedom”.

The eagle is a symbol meaning a man of action, a lofty spirit, intelligent and judicious. The eagle's sharp vision gives him the ability to see hidden truths and spiritual principles. The eagle has powers of intuition, creativity and the balance of power with grace. With its eyes an eagle is able to see from a distance. It is therefore used to symbolise observance of a man, patient and good timing. In Tshivenda culture the eagle is used to refer to a person who can see hidden things. For example: if something like a key is lost and people are failing to find it, they will say *zwi ɬoɖa vha maɬo a goni* (it needs those with the eyes of an eagle). This is because the eagle can see things from the distance.

The eagle reminds us of courage because it flies fearlessly and teaches us to courageously face our fear of the unknown in order to fly as high as our heart's joy can take us. Finding out the true emotional aspects within self, using them to rediscover the real person within, and awaken a higher sense of passion, creativity, spirituality, strength, and healing. Eagles are passionate birds that can wait for a long time to get what they want and this teaches us to be patient in life.

Beside the good association of the eagle to people's lives, there are negative connotations that are related to the eagle. It is known as an unclean bird that is an abomination to eat. In Tshivenda culture the eagle is known for stealing and taking forcefully. This comes from the act of attacking chicks from the chicken for feeding themselves. For this reason an eagle can be used to symbolise a person who is a thief or a person who takes things forcefully from the owner. In Tshivenda culture those people are called *magoni a no la nga u zhongonedza* (the eagles that eat in a forceful way).

5.2 Peacock

The peacock is one of the most beautiful and admired birds in Tshivenda culture. It is used for many things; some of them are in the area of symbolism and rituals. It is the bird that has a symbolic meaning beauty and pride of carriage. The peacock is also used as a symbol of self-renewal and immortality. Ancient Venda peoples believed that the peacock's flesh did not decay after death. The peacock became a symbol of the after. The peacock was used when performing *u vhea khosi* ritual. The skin of a peacock was used to symbolise endless life of the chief that is being sat.

When *u vhea khosi* ritual is performed the following things are done: the *maine* will in charge of the whole process as it is with many rituals. He is the man who handles the entire thing secretly. When performing *u vhea khosi* ritual the *maine* will take the fat of the lion that serve as a symbol of braveness of the chief and mix it with the fat of the elephant and wrap this with the skin of the peacock. The *maine* will then place it in the place where no one will know so that no one tampers with it. It is believed that the medicine placed by the *maine* with the fat of the elephant and items used are the life of the chief. In this way it means that the life of the chief is in the *maine*'s hands.

The peacock also symbolise individual beauty and wholeness. This bird, honored around the world for the beauty of its feathers, has also an association with resurrection.. As such, it helps to enhance confidence and self-esteem. In dreams the peacock can represent feelings of pride over a job well done, or satisfaction with oneself. However, it is believed, that peacock can prophesy the death of the chief since it is used to lay the foundation of his chieftaincy.

5.3 A dove

The dove is probably the most easily recognizable bird symbol. It is used for many reasons in different cultures and religions. In some instance the role played by the dove has some connotations from one culture to other. This means that a dove can symbolise different things in different cultures. The symbol of the dove is one of peace as well as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Dreaming of a dove may symbolize feelings of peace or the end of a battle, be it mental, spiritual, physical or emotional. It may also symbolize deep spiritual awakening or may herald news from your higher self from a Christian perspective.

In Tshivenda culture a dove has a significant role in some rituals. It is used to join a man and a woman to be one thing sexually. A long time ago most men used to work far away for their families where in they can see their wives once or twice a year. So for a man not to cheat outside there is a ritual that is performed called *u paṭekanya munna na mufumakadzi*. This ritual makes a man not to have sexual affairs outside his marriage. It is used to sustain the marriage so that they (man and woman) will be together for ever.

U paṭekanya munna na mufumakadzi is done in the following way:

The *maine* will take a heart of a dove and perform some rotuals. After that he gives both man and a woman to eat. After eating, the man will always think of his woman, the same goes with the woman. She cannot think of any man if her husband is not around. In this way the family is preserved.

A dove is also used in *u fara munna* ritual. This ritual is closely related to *u paṭekanya munna na mufumakadzi*. The difference is that the woman usually does this without the knowledge of her husband. In this ritual a man is being sexually deactivated, so to speak. This is done so that the husband will not have sexual partners or affairs with other women.

Dove is also considered to be an angel of peace in Tshivenda culture. It brings peace to people's lives. When a person has bad luck, a dove is used to cure all the bad luck from such a person. The *maine* will take a bowl of water and put it in a place where doves are playing

around. It is done for a dove to get in the water and bath. That water is mixed with some medication and the person with bad luck will have to bath using the same water, which removes the bad luck. In this situation a dove can be used to symbolise healing.

For a person who is suffering from epilepsy, a dove plays a healing role. In this situation, the bird is killed and the blood mixed with medicine and water. The sick person will have to bath using that water. After that the maine will take a feather and the old nest of a bird, and burn them together into ashes. When they are burning, the sick person must inhales the smoke. It is called *u aravhela*.

In Christianity the dove is a universal symbol of peace and innocence. In the Bible it was a dove released from the Ark by Noah which returned with an olive branch to show that the Biblical flood was over. Ever since, the dove has symbolized deliverance and God's forgiveness. According to legend, the devil and witches can turn themselves into any bird shape except the dove.

The dove reminds us how important peace is. The peace symbolized by dove is that of the deepest kind. It quiets our worried and troubled thoughts, and allows us to find renewal in the silence of mind. In such moments of stillness we are able to appreciate simple blessings. It reminds us that no matter what is happening in our lives, there are always new possibilities open to us. It is a symbol meaning loving constancy and peace. In Christianity the dove is a clear symbol of the Holy Spirit. A dove can also be a symbol of the soul or the Church itself.

5.4 Owl

The owl is an important bird in many cultures including Tshivenḁa culture. It plays an important role as far as symbolism is concerned. It is a symbol meaning vigilance and acute wit. The owl has long been associated with the spiritual and the magical. In Tshivenda culture, the owl is noted for bad luck, witchcraft, and bad omen. It is perceived as being an important asset for the witches when they are practising their witchcraft.

Owls are common in popular culture. Tshivenda culture tends to attribute witches and wizards to owls or to associate them with it. The owl in Tshivenda cultures is associated with evil. It dances with witches, steals treasures, brings bad luck and is a symbol of the underworld. Owls are the symbol of darkness, the latter meaning evil and death. They are symbolically associated with clairvoyance, astral projection and magic, and are oftentimes the medicine of sorcerers and witches.

There are variations as far as the meaning of the owl is concerned. It varies with cultures and traditions. Johnny in answer.com comments that “In Indian culture, a white owl is considered a companion of the goddess of wealth, and therefore a harbinger of prosperity. The owl has been adapted as an emblem to reflect its implications of wisdom (Wise old owl) by a revered military institution in India known as the Defence Service Staff College. In colloquial use, however, it is commonly used to refer to stupidity. This is different with Tshivenda culture wherein it resembles bad luck and witch craft”.

He continues to note that “in Greek mythology, the owl, and specifically the Little Owl, was often associated with the Greek goddess Athena, a bird goddess who often assumed the form of an owl. Athena was also the goddess of wisdom, the Arts, and skills, and as a result, owls also became symbols of teaching and of institutions of learning, being included in the crest of arms of many universities. In the Western world, owls continue to be traditionally associated with wisdom”.

There has always been a magic surrounding the owl, regardless of the species. It is probably the most revered, feared, loved and worshipped bird in the history of the world. The owl is cloaked in superstition and folklore originating from stories spun through hundreds of years and each culture has its own interpretation and many times they conflict.

Boiled owl and owl eggs have been used for medications in Peru and, in English folklore, the owl egg was believed to cure alcoholism. In India owl broth was said to cure seizures and the meat used as an aphrodisiac. The Swahili of East Africa were not as sold on owls for medical purposes. The belief there is that the owl makes children ill.

In Tshivenda culture the eggs of the owl are used for protection. It is believed that if a person is going to court, he or she can be helped by the *maine* to be found not guilty. Not every *maine* though can perform this kind of ritual. The ritual is performed using the owl's egg.

Respondent 3 comments that "in days gone by the owl was not liked at all. People then believed, for instance, that the owl's hoot brought death. It was said that an owl predicted the death of many kings including king *Tshikosi* and king *Ratshilumela*. The owl is said to see what other birds cannot, which is the essence of true wisdom. It is also believed that the Owl also brings its messages in the night through dreams or meditation.

In certain cultures (Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and IsiZulu) the symbolic meaning of owl is associated with death, but one must understand that the owl is not a symbol of death per se. In many cultures, the symbolic meaning of owl deals with:

- Intelligence and power in Egyptians
- Death and mystery in Tshivenda
- Brilliance and wisdom in Romans
- Independence and protection in Indian and in Tshivenda in some instances.

5.5 Numbers

The interpretations of numbers vary according to culture and traditions as well as religions. This simply means that one number can be interpreted differently in different cultures. What follows is a brief description and interpretation of numerical symbols in Christianity. In Christianity one signifies unity; both the unity of God and the unity of the members of the church. In most African cultures, one symbolises the beginning. This interpretation differs from the Christian interpretation of the number. It thus requires one to know the way in which numbers are used in different cultures and religions.

5.5.1 One

One the most common numbers used in many cultures even though the meanings may vary. It primarily deals with strong will, positivity, and pure energy .The number One reflects new beginnings, and purity in Tshivenda culture. The symbolic meaning of number One is further clarified when one understands that it represents both kinds of action, physical and mental. This combined with Ones urgency for new beginnings, one begins to see One's recurring in our lives indicates a time to exert our natural forces, take action, and start a new venture. One encourages that action will be rewarded in kind.

It is also used to symbolise lack power in Tshivenda culture. This is mostly indicated by the expression “*munwe muthihi a u fusi mathuthu*” meaning that alone you cannot bring out more. Not surprisingly, the number One is generally treated as a symbol of unity. Therefore, in Tshivenda culture, it often symbolises togetherness that is in one accord bonded by the spirits of the ancestors. In Tshivenda culture, one is not merely considered being a number at all because number means plurality and one is singular. However, they considered it to be the source of all numbers because adding many 1s together can create any other (positive whole) number. For that reason one is more considered to symbolise unity than being a number. The symbolic meaning of one in Tshivenda culture that indicates unity is emphasised by the idiomatic expression that says “*maḽoni a so ngo kavhaho mutanda muthihi u fhufha aya liana*” which means: (if people are not in one accord, united, will always have different views and disagreement).

Number one is s important in Tshivenda culture to such an extent that one cannot underestimate its role. In Tshivenda culture, a person who is born first in the family is considered to be the one who is entitled to the riches of the parents. This sometimes differs with families because some consider the gender of the person and a male person is preferred.

In the royal families, it is the first born who is considered to be the chief after the father. The person must be male so that he maintains the continuity of the genealogy. And the individual must be a son of the *dzekiso* wife (a wife who was married for the chief either by his father or the family, not the one of his choice). This symbolises the power of number one and also symbolises originality.

One is also used to symbolise something that is incomplete. This is used in an offensive way in Tshivenda culture, more especially to women by their in-laws and friends in some instances. When a woman has one child and is unable to bear another one, she will always be teased. In most instances the expression that will be used to refer to such a person is : ”*řwana muthihi ndi wa gwitha, musadzia si tshirřoni tsha vhusiku*” (one child is for an owl, a person must bear many children). In this instance, *one* symbolises the incompleteness or incompetence.

5.5.2 Two

The symbolic meaning of number *two* is kindness, balance, tact, equalization, and duality. The number *two* reflects a quiet power of judgment, and the need for planning. *Two* allows one to choose. There is no obligation when things are two. One can be able to make a choice. The spiritual meaning of number *two* also deals with exchanges made with others. In Christianity *two* symbolises revival. *Two* urges us out of our indecision, calling us to unite with our minds, and ideals. *Two* asks us to exert our natural flow of judgment to do what is best for us.

5.5.3 Six

Six is an important number that has different symbolic meanings in different cultures and religions. In some instances, the meanings attached to number six are the same while in others they vary. *Six* represents creation in Christian perspective, because God created the earth in six days. *Six* may also represent imperfection, because it falls short of the perfect number seven. From the above expression, one can conclude that the meaning of number six can have

varied symbolism within one culture or religion. In the example given, the symbolic meanings of six represent both creation and imperfection in Christianity. This is according to biblical interpretation which is different from the interpretation in Tshivenda. In Tshivenda, the number six is a symbol of crossing to another side. It is called *rathi* which is derived from the word *ratha* or *u ratha*, meaning to cross. It is completely different from what the number represents in Christianity. It, therefore, requires one to be careful when using a number as a symbol because one number can mean different things in different cultures.

5.5.4 Eight

The symbolism associated with number eight deals largely with success. This is due to the fact that eight represents perfection and completeness. Such elements are seen in arenas where success is obtained in the issues of marriage negotiation and the payments of “*mamalo* (lobola). As mentioned on number seven, eight symbolises perfection and completeness. This is because when a person has to marry a woman, he must pay the sum of eight cows to the family he is marrying from. If not so, he can not have the woman so he must wait until all the payments are done that’s when they will say “*o mala a fhedza, zwothe zwo dzudzanyea*” (he is done paying lobola, every thing is perfect and settled.

5.5.5 Nine

Nine is one of the great numbers considered in people’s lives. Its meaning has a great role that cannot be underestimated. In Christianity, nine represents attainment, satisfaction, accomplishment, and success. The spiritual meaning of number nine is associated with intellectual power, inventiveness, influence over situations and things. This meaning is adopted from the fact that when a woman is pregnant, she is expected to give birth after nine months. That will be the accomplishment of the mission.

The symbolic meaning of nine in Tshivenda culture differs from the Christian perspective. In Tshivenda nine has the same meaning as with the number seven in some instances. It symbolises incompleteness, because the number that shows a complete circle is ten. A normal human being has ten fingers and when counting in Tshivenda, it ends in number.

The following is the example of number counting in Tshivenda:

Thiho – one

Mbili - two

Tharu - three

Nṱa - four

Ṱhanu - five

Rathi – six

Sumbe - seven

Malo - eight

Ṱahe - nine

Fumi – ten

Starting from here, numbers are added from ten to the last number that the counter may end. This is because number ten is the complete number. It is as follows:

Fumi na thihi- eleven

Fumi na mbili – twelve

It continues in that sequence taking the complete number which is ten and adds it with another number. When it comes to twenty is still counted in tenth wherein it will be *mahumi mavhili* (two tenth).

5.6 Conclusion

The role played by number and birds in people's lives are of great significance. It varies from one culture to another also in the same culture or religion. It thus needs one to have the in-depths knowledge of how numbers and birds are interpreted in different cultures to avoid conflicts and differences in our communication since we live in cosmopolitan countries wherein we interact with people from different cultures in our daily lives.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to investigate the meaning of the use of symbols in Tshivenda life and world view, identifying the aspects through which symbolism appears. Furthermore, to find out how symbolism is interpreted in Tshivenda culture.

6.2 Findings

The findings of the study are discussed below:

From this study it has been discovered that symbolism plays an important role in Tshivenda culture. The study has discovered that the funeral is a very important event in Tshivenda culture. When a person might die away from home, and does not receive a proper burial, the death of that nature is called *ufhalala* (to scatter away) and it is believed that if the spirit of the dead person is not brought back, misfortune would befall the family. To prevent the family from all the misfortune, the spirit of such a person must be brought back home through the process of *uvhuisa* where in the head of a sheep is used to symbolise the dead person.

The study has shown that colours have a vital role in Tshivenda culture as far as symbolism is concerned. It has also proved that colour symbolism can vary dramatically between cultures. So, although some colours do have negative connotations (such as black for a funeral or for evil) in Western culture, the same colour may have positive connotations in Tshivenda where black represents fertility and ancestors, which is far different from Western culture.

From this study it has been realized that animals are important in Tshivenda rituals and sacrifices. In Tshivenda culture people are advised that when one comes across certain animals in life, these can be an indication from the ancestors that they put in our path to give us messages from the spirit world about what it is that we need to focus on in our personal healing at that moment in time. This is usually a warning in people's lives. For example, when one is travelling and a black cat crosses the road before him or her, it symbolises that bad things will happen on his or her journey if not where he or she is going.

The study has discovered that marriage is an important aspect of family life in Tshivenda culture. If a man dies unmarried, he is considered being selfish so there is a special ritual performed for his dead body. This emphasizes that a man should be married and has children. In this instance, a wooden hoe stick is placed in a round gourd. *maine* opens a hole on the gourd and this is where hoe stick comes in. some rituals are then performed by the *maine*. The stick and the gourd are then taken to the intersection of the path where people pass now and then. Whoever passes would realize that the person who had died was a bachelor. The stick becomes symbolic of his male hood, while the gourd with a hole becomes symbolic of female hood. One could say that the symbolic ritual performance may be meant to appease the spirit of the one who died without having married.

One has come to realize that Tshivenda culture considers and respects most the roles played by the symbolism of birds and numbers. This study this has found out that birds are often seen as symbols of fortune as well as of bad omen in Tshivenda cultures. The meanings of birds have some connotations from one culture to the other. They (Birds) can be seen as symbols of premonitions but they also link to the future in number of ways. They can be symbols simply of ideas and proposals for the future. In a wider sense birds symbolise one's vision of the future.

It has been discovered in this study that numbers have different symbolic meanings in Tshivenda culture. There are numbers that indicate completeness such as eight and others indicate imperfection for example, seven. Numbers have different meanings in different cultures and religion.

6.3 Recommendations

The researcher would like to recommend that in terms of the findings of the research, the following aspects should be taken in to consideration:

Tshivenda tradition has rituals that are practised to appease the gods and those who practise the tradition should be given a legitimate right to practise the rituals so that they could have peace of mind and their gods to receive the honour they deserve.

The youth must learn more about the traditional way of doing things (indigenous knowledge) for the accomplishment of their traditional practices. Institutions of Higher Learning should cater for the study of indigenous knowledge so that this could be passed from one generation to another.

Since traditional healers are in the fore front of ritual performance, they must be given the right to have access to some animals that are used in ritual performance. In other words, the ban on the killing of some animals must be lifted to allow people to practice their culture fully.

Culture is an important aspect of life in every community. It is through the practice of culture that a community develops and grows. The practice of culture allows the community to know its past; and once the community knows its past, it is ready to act in certain way to preserve what is good and to plan for the future. In this way the community will live on, holding onto important cultural principles.

6.4 Conclusion

As has been seen from the discussion, things, concepts or numbers acquire different symbolism in different cultures or contexts. The meaning attached to these symbols is important to the people who use them. These symbols are part and parcel of their culture, enabling them to communicate effectively; attaching meaning to their interpretation of their words.

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