DIMENSIONS OF ORACLE-SPEECH IN THE NEAR EASTERN, MEDITERRANEAN, AND AFRICAN CONTEXTS: A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS AFRICAN ORALITY

By

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BLOEMFONTEIN

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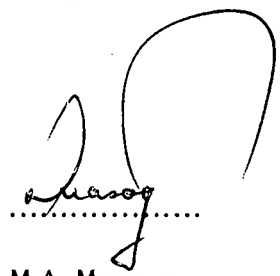
DECLA RATION

I declare that *'Dimensions Of Oracle-Speech In The Near Eastern, Mediterranean, And African Contexts: A Contribution Towards African Orality'* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



M.A. Masoga

31/10/2001

Date

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all Diviner-Healers in Africa,

the living and the living timeless!

Thokozani Mangaka!

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Summary

Divination is receiving ever more attention in the media. Communities, groups of people and individuals are asking questions, voice opinions, and make judgements on the function of this important branch of African life and philosophy. The thesis attempts to address this issue. Relating African divination to the rich and universal tradition of divination and oracle, it argues that this important part of African life be brought to the forefront for purposes of research and scholarship. This generally marginalised part of African life and culture, should be accorded its rightful place in academia. To this end, the researcher gives an account of his own life history as it was informed by divination and divination oracles. He further provides data on African divination oracles drawn from sample interviews with diviners. In this context, the data is comparatively interpreted in terms of existing oral theories and scholarship on Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean divination and oracle. The thrust of the thesis is that it aims to both provide some insight into divination as practiced by African people and to bring this previously marginalized discourse and its practices into the centre of debate and scholarship.

Opsomming

Waarsêery ontvang meer en meer aandag in die media. Gemeenskappe, groepe mense en individue vra vrae, lug opinies en gee uitsprake oor die funksie van hierdie belangrike vertakking van die Afrika-lewe en –filosofie. Die tesis poog om hierdie saak aan te spreek. Deur die Afrika-waarsêerskuns met die ryk en universele tradisie van waarsêery en orakelkuns te verbind, word die argument gevoer dat hierdie belangrike deel van Afrika-lewe na die voorgrond vir die doel van navorsing en intellektuele gesprek gebring word. Hierdie algemeen gemarginaliseerde deel van Afrika-lewe en –kultuur behoort sy regmatige plek in die akademie in te neem. In hierdie verband gee die navorser rekenskap van sy eie lewensgeskiedenis soos dit deur waarsêery en orakelkuns gevorm is. Hy verskaf verder data oor die Afrika-waarsêerkuns en orakels uit geselekteerde onderhoude met waarsêers. In hierdie konteks gesien word die data vergelykend geïnterpreteer met die heersende stand van wetenskaplike mondelinge teorië oor die Antiek Naby-Oosterse en Meditterreense waarsêery en orakels. Die doel van die tesis is om beide insig in waarsêery, soos dit deur die Afrika-mense uitgeleef word, te verskaf, sowel as om die voorheen gemarginaliseerde diskoers rakende hierdie praktyk die middelpunt van intellektuele bespreking te maak.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and the nature of the Problem

Recently (July 1999), the South African Broadcasting Corporation - Television 2 - introduced an interesting drama programme entitled: *Ke bona boloi?* (Is it really witchcraft?). The content of this SABC production centred on the concept and practice of divination. As a point of reference, Makhura, a well-to-do businessman in the community, in terms of the characterisation of the drama, is honourable and patron to most of his clientéle. His opponent is depicted as a liar, gossiper, and sly. The latter, then, falsely accuses Makhura of fraud and of robbing community members. He also plans to kill Makhura in the name of *boloi*-accusation. He manages to launch this plan by conniving with village youth, rumouring that Edward's (a silent and short-lived character) suspicious suicide death, was as a result of *vholoi* (witchcraft).

Having managed to spread these serious allegations, the whole village is completely convinced that it was necessary to invite the *ngaka* (diviner-healer) to *hlola* or *go hlola* (to divine). Makhura was responsible for both organising the divination event as well as paying the diviner-healer. Central to this whole programme are the oracle-formulae articulated by the diviner-healer in revealing the actions and identity of the 'real witch' during *umhlahlo* (Ngubane 1977:38) session - a public consultation with a diviner.

As Ngubane (1977:38) points out,

> "*Um hlahlo* is a consultation with a diviner in cases of open accusations. Both the accu ser and the accused agree upon the particular diviner who is to be consulted. She must be one who lives a good distance away and is therefore not known to either. Her methods of divination must be such that the consultants give no clue; they sit silently throughout the process of divination. Besides the accuser and the accused there must be neutral observers who represent the chief. These are chosen by the chief himself, and their duty is to report back to him and also to ensure that the protagonists do not fight"

The general aim of this SABC 2 production was to address the killings that are associated with witch-believing systems in South Africa, in particular the Northern province. The general belief has been that wrong and innocent people were targeted and then became victims of witch-believing killings.

Another interesting discourse derives from the Bafana Bafana (the National South African Football Team) competition in Burkina Faso in 1998. At some point during the proceedings, the temporary coach of the team at the time had to fly from Burkina Faso to consult a diviner-healer. This shows the importance African people ascribe to divination and the central role oracles play in their lives. Contrary to the SABC production - in which divination was negatively depicted - in this case, it was correctly reported on in the media, even though not without sarcasm in some instances. The story indicated to the South African 'literate' public that things in Burkina Faso were in

bad shape, and, to set matters right, that Jomo Sono had to seek divinatory intervention.

Another reference pointing to the importance divination has for African people, comes from the SABC 1 story titled: *Hlala kwabafileyo* (Stay forever with the dead). In the story, Mhlongo, a dominant character, vanishes mysteriously on his daughter's wedding day. The family then looked for him, with the assistance of friends and the police. The search for him also included the mortuaries. In one of these, the family mistook a man who looked like him, to be Mhlongo. The wrong Mhlongo was then buried. In reality, however, Mhlongo was hospitalised and his stepson, Vusimuzi, did not recognize him when looking for him there, because he was under the influence of alcohol. Prior to the burial of the wrong Mhlongo, however, Mrs Mhlongo consulted with a diviner, uBabaMkhonto. BabaMkhonto, in his divination and oracle, flatly pointed out that "*yena uzotholakala*" (he will be found).

When Mhlongo was identified albeit wrongly at the mortuary, Mrs Mhlongo rejected the oracle-message. It was only after the truth came out - that Mhlongo was still alive - that Mrs Mhlongo admitted that the oracle-message had been correct. This admission was voiced to BabaMkonto who was on his deathbed at the time. In this regard, the divination oracle was correct, "*manje usetholakele*" (he has been found).

These three incidents provide some insight into the importance of divination for people. In general, this is not acknowledged in our current modern and so-called

enlightened society. This disjunction has provided the general rationale for this thesis and has also determined its particular structure.

Divination as both concept and practice, in the opinion of the researcher, is not accorded its rightful place in society. As in the first SABC production referred to above, it is negatively seen - that it is a practice, which is closely related to the sinister killing of innocent people. Despite the existence of evidence that divination constitutes a central element of the history of human culture, that much research has been done on it, and that it is generally acknowledged as one of the most central elements of human spirituality, it is either negatively evaluated or ignored in the African context. Symptomatic of this state of affairs is that producers, authors or journalists who do report on it, do not consult with stakeholders (including diviners themselves). Since the media both mirror and pose serious questions to society, this general state of affairs is untenable. As part of the general populace, but also as very significant leaders in communities, diviners need to receive the recognition they deserve. At the least, when writing or reporting on divination, the diviners themselves need to be consulted. Their 'voices' and 'voicings' cannot be silenced any longer. For any meaningful conversation on this issue, they are the role players who must be accorded their rightful place in society.

Film productions are a mirror of reflection to any society, just as folktales function as a reflection of any given community. They attempt to pose serious questions and offer answers to society. Furthermore they 'jump' societal boundaries to open new avenues for the interaction of communities. Stakeholders, like diviners, from varied African

cultural backgrounds should have been consulted, engaged, and conversed with during the making of the films. In this way their 'voice' and many other 'voicings' would have been a meaningful contribution and conversation in the process of the productions in question.

Divination is central to African life. Divination oracles define and determine human destiny, at least in most African communities. This is the case in spite of the fact that 'globalization' - often used as synonym for 'modernization' - has become a buzzword in Africa. For many, if not most Africans, modern life does not exclude participation in divinatory practices. For example, imagine a young well-qualified engineer driving from Sandton with his new BMW 5 Series and a top of the range laptop computer on the seat next to him, to see his grandmother and ask her to bless his new property. He drives to Giyani kaMalamulele, dusty and remote. On his arrival, a diviner of the clan, who immediately sprinkles substances on his car, meets him. The diviner then immediately gets a goat slaughtered for this special occasion. *Vakokwani* (grandmothers) of the entire clan sing praises to the young man. For some, this image may be strange. For African people, it is a daily occurrence. It is central to their lives, philosophies and cultures. Modern life does not exclude this particular part of African spirituality. The ancestors are not outdated, nor out of touch with current developments and the challenges and demands of modern living. They are a living part of life - they know about laptops and BMW's.

Obviously the above three accounts provide and raise critical questions for this particular research study. The following questions are crucial:

1. What is the nature and significance of the divination oracle? The question calls for serious engagement on the concept and practice of divination oracles.
2. How could divination oracle be studied scientifically and from within (personal discourse aspect)? – This question challenges the present students on divination to begin to wrestle with the subject of divination from both reductional and internal-investigation premises.
3. What are the oracle features and formal characteristics of divination oracles?
4. How do African divination oracles relate to the existing features in the Near Eastern –Mediterranean contexts?
5. What challenges do African divination oracles pose to the investigator?

1.2 Aims of the Study

The research for this thesis proposes that oracle-speech in the context of divination (*go hlahloba, ukuhlahloba, ho hlola*) plays a central religious role in African culture, life and practice. In particular, it provides data to support this view. In general, it provides definitions, perspectives and historical information on the shape and functional dimensions of divination with regard to its seminal role in many oral and residual oral communities (Ong 1982).

It is undergirded by the following key objectives:

Firstly, to provide a brief account of the researcher's own life history as it was informed by divination and divination oracles. Having been exposed to a vast number of events and circumstances that influenced my life, I finally ended up qualifying and being initiated as a diviner-healer.

Secondly, to provide data on divination and the oracle drawn from sample interviews with a number of practising diviners. The researcher worked cross-culturally with about fifty diviners of varied training in the fields of divination and healing. Geographical areas which were covered in the field research include among others: Sekhukhune (Makgane and Jane Furse), Motetema, Ga-Mmasealama, Bela-Bela (Warmbad), Majaneng (Hammanskraal), Soshanguve (North of Pretoria), New Castle, Mnambithi (Ladysmith), Phuthaditjhaba, and Intabazwe (Harrismith). For the sake of focus, only samples of the gathered data are presented here.

Thirdly, to interpret the data comparatively in terms of oral theories. A number of oral theories are looked at critically, with the primary focus on the work of Walter Ong (1982).

Fourthly, to interpret the data comparatively in terms of existing scholarship on ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean divination and oracle.

Finally, to interpret the data comparatively in terms of the oral structure of prophecy.

The research focus, then, is on the religious phenomenon of divination and oracle. It seeks to identify, in a comparative manner, the similarities and dissimilarities between Near Eastern and Mediterranean, and African oracle formulae. In contrast to literate culture, the oracle is a seminal part of oral culture.

As Albert Bates Lord (1960:15) rightly asserts:

> "... for the majority of people, as a matter of fact, words are still heard rather than seen, and even those who have learned to visualise words as containing particular letters in a particular sequence continue to operate much of the time with the heard, and hence the spoken word".

1.3 Definition of operational terms

1.3.1 Divination

To define the concept 'divination' is a cumbersome act for the concept, or idea, itself is complex. As Devisch (1985:50) maintains,

> "People look to divination to uncover the hidden, to gain insight into occurrences which go counter to the even tenor of life and to the normal sense of events, so as to enable remedial measures to be taken or to restore peace."

Devisch's assertion makes sense in the context and relevance of what this research attempts to do. The researcher views the concept of divination as a linking 'zone' between what is and what ought to be - in this regard the process of divination allows the *what is context* to engage the *what ought to be context.* In this way divination occupies the 'middle' place and attempts to offer open avenues of responses and

'voices' for the two contexts to be able to engage each other. The divine (supernatural) context converses with the natural context. Decisions are arrived at after a series of serious engagements. It is expected that both contexts should at least come to a kind of agreement – in terms of the 'space' and 'time' of which the divinatory process and conceptualisation offers an ongoing conversation. On the whole the researcher views divination to be a process and not a static dimension.

1.3.2 Oracle

An oracle is viewed within the context of divination. It simply means a 'divine response'. The researcher views an oracle in a complex manner. The entire process of divination constitutes an oracular-context – note the wise speeches, oracular declarations, views of audience, symbolic bodily expressions of the diviner-healer, the place in which the oracle is declared – all constitute an oracular context. In this regard the researcher challenges reasoning that sees an oracle only pertaining to words said during the divinatory process.

1.3.3 Culture

Ani (1994) asserts that culture as a phenomenological concept through which people retain their self-identity, build their views and symbolic expressions on a shared historical experience, and thereby create a sense of collective cultural identity. It follows that culture is embedded in the life of the society with its variety of aspects such as material culture, painting, drama, philosophy etc. On the whole culture helps people to affirm their comprehensive well-being in the world around them. Again

culture is contained in what people are capable of doing and retaining as a source of building confidence in themselves and in relation to others (Ngungi wa Thiongo 1986)

1.3.4 Healing

Grundmann (2001:26) is right to assume that

> "healing is a pan-religious phenomenon; it exists in all the religions we know of, be they of a primal kind or be they highly sophisticated. Healing thus cannot be monopolised by Christian groups or the Church".

Again Bates (2001:73) makes a strong distinction between curing and healing, i.e; "curing disease" and "healing illness". For Bates (2001:73),

> " Curing disease then is an organic process of remedying disease. However, healing illness is a human process that has to do with the perception as well as the understanding of wellness within the society or culture she is part of".

Taking cue from both views (Grundmann and Bates) the researcher defines healing as the restoration of human life and thoughts. This particular line of reasoning takes into account the disparaged human relationships both within the natural and supernatural contexts.

1.3.5 Orality

To define the concept 'orality' forces one to enter a terrain of fierce struggles (Jensen 1980 and Naude 1996). There is tension that pervades debates on orality. The basic contention within the debate is caused by the lack of a clear-cut division between oral and written literature – with the nagging assumption that "most illiterate societies have some degree of literacy" (Jensen 1980:22). However, one gains a sense

of relief to note that within this heated debate by scholars in the field of orality, Africa is considered an exception. Jensen (1980:15) notes that,

> "From what I have read, it seems that the best chance of finding a single parallel today would be in Africa: the collection of oral poetry from all parts of Africa is currently taking place on a large scale, and it is possible that a detailed and profound comparison between early Greek poetry and that of some definite African society will be possible in the not too distant future"

One would then support Naude's views (1996:20-21) in this debate and accept his views as plausible definition that,

> "Instead of the older model of a finalised a-social product, one should perhaps look upon a text as an emergent process with all its connotations of co-text, meta-text, con-text, pre-text, sub-text, inter-text and after-text ... This notion of a text-as-process opens the possibilities about "oral text" whilst doing justice to the dynamics involved in the creation and transmission of oral or verbal art forms."

1.3.6 Prophecy

Sawyer's definition (1993:1) of prophecy as "first and foremost 'proclaimers'" suffices for the focus of this research study. However, the definition does not at all confine itself to the proclamation role only, but instead broadens it to accommodate the distinct supernatural prowess dimension (Sawyer 1993:1 and Sheppard 1987:8-14). This supernatural power should not be equated with divination as Ndiokwere presupposes (1981:175).

1.4 Motivation for the Study

As stated above, the study seeks to bring divination into the centre of scholarly debate and research. It does so because it is a central part of African life, culture and philosophy. For this reason, the study does not focus on the topic in a disinterested manner. Since divination is an existential part of life for many - if not most - Africans the topic is engaged experientially.

Further, since there is both a rich universal tradition related to divination and also an ever developing scholarship on this phenomenon, the study seeks to articulate both divination and oracle. In the process, African traditions are associated with this tradition. It is accomplished by focusing on theories but also the formulaic structure of oracle. This focus seeks to provide possibilities for the advancing of a typology, or at least to provide a basis in terms of which African oracle speech can be compared with the ancient roots of this phenomenon.

Ultimately, the study attempts to analyse, define and open up further possibilities of conversation amongst existing scholars on orality and oral community speakers and performers. This focus is derived at by situating oracle-formulae in the context of development, namely: scholarly, political and cultural. Despite a growing body of research on oral culture and the oral nature of African communities, the presupposition of the study is that 'development' will only be effective, if African spirituality is taken seriously and accommodated in developmental processes.

The study therefore proposes that this voice from the underside of history be accommodated and that it be heard as a potent and dynamic oral voice. Verily, it is time for text-oriented scholarship to begin to wrestle with the reality and integrity of oral communities. The recorded speeches could be of importance to other researchers by stimulating further research work to rediscover and reclaim the indigenous knowledge systems included in a tradition now threatened by globalisation and modernisation processes. This is again in line with the current "worrying voices" about the African Renaissance, which encapsulate the African thought of life. In some way it helps to bring one in close contact with realities of African cultural reclamation and revitalisation. Another path is a serious engagement with the African bios-cosmos and bios-philosophy. The alleged distorted and displaced African-bios needs to be revisited and 'found' once more, especially now that the 'buzzword' is Renaissance (Biko 1978, Chinweizu 1987 and Frere 1981).

1.5 Scope of Research

The thesis consists of ten chapters. The first chapter provides the general rationale and perspectives on the research design.

The second chapter is a narrative of the life of the researcher as it pertains to divination. The chapter strives to bring to the fore, by means of a personal account, the experiential elements of this previously marginalized discourse and its practices.

Life-historical accounts are one way among many, through which previously marginalised discourses can be brought to the centre of debate and scholarship.

The third chapter provides data from an interview with Mrs Annah Mokgethi, an African healer of Qwa Qwa, Phuthaditjhaba. It gives some insight into perceptions and views of a typical diviner-healer as they concern the 'call' to divination, as well as practices related to the divination institution itself.

The fourth chapter looks at healing and prophecy. It provides general trajectories in this respect and offers further clarity of the divination context.

The fifth chapter deals with African divination oracles. The researcher selected the oracles-speeches from the data gathered for the research. The data of oracles are drawn from sample interviews with diviners.

The sixth chapter deals with theories of orality, in particular the psychodynamics of orality as theorised by Ong (1982).

Chapter seven looks at theories of divination. This is particularly helpful in terms of the theorisation exercise for discerning divination in the African context.

Chapter eight looks at the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean divination oracles and prophecy. The chapter paves the way for a possible comparison of the theories and the fieldwork data collected.

Chapter nine looks at the oral structure of prophecy. As in the case of chapter seven, it offers a comparative footing to interpret the data in terms of the oral structure of prophecy.

The final chapter (chapter ten) concludes the study by looking at the similarities and differences found in each of the theoretical and taxonomic studies accessed in this research endeavour.

Chapter Two

2. When I became a *Ngaka* (African Healer): A personal account

This chapter deals with the researcher's personal journey through the world of divination. The narrative discourse in this regard attempts to bring previously marginalised discourse and practice of divination into the centre of debate and scholarship. This forms part of one of the key research objectives in rectifying the current imbalances concerning African culture in general. Further, the discourse offers this displaced discourse the opportunity to occupy its rightful place and be able to 'converse' with existing centralised discourses. The story also allows for openness and transparency. It is intended to be *ipssisima vitae* with regard to the esoteric world of divination.

2.1 This is my Story...

In my first Northern Province fieldwork on divination I remained an observing outsider, only asking questions. Most questions were more clarity seeking questions than aimed at being engaged in the realities of divination itself. Since I had been introduced to divination and healing from early stages of my life, however, this changed. Very soon, the data awakened the realities divination had had for me personally at various stages of my own life. This is my story.

My mother comes from Ga-Ramotse, a village to the north of Pretoria, located within the Hammanskraal area. Unfortunately (or maybe because it was destined to be) my father did not marry my mother. I have never seen or met him. However, I know that he comes from the Makobe family. To know this, has always been enough for me, and has always given me my own special identity. When I was seven years old, my mother was married into the Masoga family. I still have a vivid recollection of the actual day of the wedding and the activities all engaged.

We (mother and I) were covered with *dikobo* (African blankets) and danced in circles. Among others, well wishers sang songs like the following:

Dikuku di monate

Lenyalo le boima

Rena re ya tsamaya o tla sala o dibona ngwetsi. ...

(Wedding cakes are tasty

But marriage is a tough zone

We are going and you shall see to finish.)

Since my mother was being married with me already born, the ritual demanded that the *magadi* (betrothal gift) include me. This fact means that I am not ignored but taken cognisance of and fully recognised in the new relationship. The Masoga family had to establish links with my mother as well as with me. As such, it was not a transaction, but an establishment of links and relations. It was at this point in my life

that ancestry featured prominently in my life. The *magadi* negotiators from both families emphasised the importance of these new ties. Sacrifices confirmed the new status of both my mother and I.

In these activities and festivities, animal sacrifice plays a central role. It is a ritual of 're-ordering' and it impacts strongly on our 'symbolic social universe' - giving primacy of place to ancestral spirits. Becoming a Masoga did not change my inner identity - *Makobe Makobe*. The fact that my father left my mother in the cold did not change the fact that I am *Makobe Makobe*. My ancestral spirits guard and support me. This had been so throughout my life. At some points in my life, there were indications too, that I am a child of the ancestral realm – *Ke ngwana wa badimo.*

For my schooling, I proceeded from the primary school at Leboneng to Madisong Middle School where I completed my standard eight. I then moved to Hans Kekana High School and there completed my matriculation - the only high school in my village, Majaneng.

Trouble began when I had to embark on my post-matriculation programmes. I was offered a bursary by the then Bophuthatswana Department of Education, but turned it down. The basic reason was that I wanted to become a minister of religion, or to be precise, a Reverend within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. My parish pastor at the time, Rev A Malapane, an old man full of wisdom and good counselling, was primarily responsible for my 'early entrance' into the training for the ministry in the Lutheran church.

My application for training was successful and I was informed that the screening committee of ELCSA had decided to send a few of the new candidates to the University of Natal's School of Theology, at Pietermaritzburg. It was at this stage that my grandmother, Mrs Moshala Paulina Masoga advised me to consult with a woman in the vicinity. The woman in question was a well-known 'prophet'. I immediately consulted with her with the purpose of 'smoothing' my way into and through the University.

During the consultation, Mrs Modise, the prophetically gifted woman, put a seashell containing clear water on a table. She prayed to all the ancestral spirits and concluded with the trinitarian reference – *Modimo Tate, Le Morwa le Moya o Mokgethwa.* After this, she said to me that I had serious problems in my life.

"Your ancestors, both patrilineal and matrilineal, want you to become a diviner-healer. This they wish for seriously, my son. They appreciate that you intend to become a minister of religion. But still, they want you to become a diviner-healer."

"Please ask them to release me for a while to complete my studies. Thereafter, I will surely follow in their footsteps," I pleaded.

Her reply was: "Sure, that can be considered. We will have to plead with them to allow you to pursue your studies first."

Subsequent to this was a ritual of pleading. A sheep was slaughtered and I was cleansed (ritual cleansing) with its blood, and some un-describable substances were mixed in the water of my cleansing bath. After the ritual, a black string was tied around my waist.

"Now you can proceed with your studies. Remember that ancestral spirits cannot be fooled, my son. A promise is a promise. Now go and complete your studies," she concluded.

My stay at the University did not meet with problems at all. I was surely under the support of my ancestral spirits. I was able to complete my studies to master's level.

From the University of Natal, I moved to Pretoria and worked as junior lecturer in the Department of Classics at the University of South Africa. Trouble started to simmer. First, I divorced my wife. Reasons for this event, I can hardly spell out. Only the ancestors can give an adequate account of it. Second, I was involved in a number of motorcar accidents. Reasons for this are unknown too. Some of the people I was accompanying in their cars died. I felt that I was saved for a reason. I consulted with a number of diviner-healers who mentioned the same thing: *Badimo ba lwa le wena* (The ancestors are at war with you). I then decided to become a *ngaka.*

For about four months I frequented *Tate* Mavulindlela's *sangoma* lodge. I was there almost every day and evening, sometimes staying overnight. Life at the *sangoma* lodge showed me many aspects and layers of African divination and healing practices.

I was restored back to my full human form. I experienced patterns and dreams of *sangoma*hood. *Tate* Mavulindlela, now my 'father' (the rank used in this trade) was chosen by my ancestral spirits to initiate me. I greet her as: *Tate Mavulindlela, monna wa ga Nqeshe, o tswalwang ke koko Mashayi-Hlombe, monna wa ga Nkomo Mokhari, o tswalwang ke koko Magwetja Nkwe ya Thaba, monna wa ga Phoshoko* - the ancestral greetings. This I have to do whenever I meet her at the *sangoma* lodge.

I was then introduced to basic esoteric knowledge and the skills of handling oracular tablets. With regard to the digging for and gathering of herbs as well as with the administering of medicines, I was supervised. I had to induce ancestral trances daily. I was also informed that my grandfather, *Makobe Makobe* - old and tired - spoke and still speaks through my mouth, asking for a stick to walk with. He sometimes, I am informed, conveys messages about daily happenings and how they should be handled. Trance production is considered to be the decisive sign of one's calling.

After three months of training, I was sent to the Northern province due for initiation. The place was the sangoma lodge of *Koko Magwetja Nkwe ya Thaba, monna wa Phoshoko. Koko Magwetja Nkwe ya Thaba* gave birth to my 'father' *Mavulindlela monna wa Nqeshe.* It was the right time to be initiated into *sangoma*hood. It happened before a large audience of lodge members, invited guests and neighbours. I spent the first day and evening with no food, only wearing and covering my body with a red cloth. The whole night was characterised by drum rhythms and singing. Ululations filled the night. I was informed that the ululations welcomed two new *sangomas – badimo ba retwa e bile ba lebogwa ka mekgolokwane.*

The morning of the initiation dawned. This day I will never forget as long as I live. I was to be initiated together with an elderly woman from a Shangaan background. We both knelt and sniffed our *motsoko* (snuff) without uttering a word to one another.

The great moment came. My ancestral goat passed by. It was taken right up to the ancestral site – *'egandlelweni'* – the place where ancestral spirits reside.

Khalel' nkani, khalel' nkani, nkani ya bobaba bayibuz' nkani (I am crying for the healing horn, let my ancestral spirits bring the healing horn to me) - was the song sung at this moment. With drums beating in the background, the song was sung repeatedly. *Tate Mavulindlela* came forth to fetch me. I crawled on hands and knees over rocky and rough ground to *'egandlelweni'*. Finally, I reached my destination. I drank the blood from the cut throat of a dying goat and drank water from a big bowl. I had to take out the water substances with blood faster. Having taken that out brought a sense of relief to all: *ngaliphuza ngaliphalaza*. Finally, I was initiated.

2.2 Reflections

Before one can attempt to do a reflectional discourse on the above narrative account the theoretical observations need to be clarified at this stage. The first one has to do with the tension that exists within the phenomenological debate or field. Eliade's perspective on *epoche'* - i.e. meaning that 'an observer can enter into the religious experience of believing communities and achieve understanding initially through the

technique of *epoche* and then by employing emphatic interpolation while still maintaining *epoche* concerning the reality of the community's object of faith - was heavily contested by a number of scholars (Segal 1983:101, Pals 1986:28 and Strenski 1993:41). This entire debate centers around reductionism in the scientific research on religion (Cox 1996:155). James Cox's views on methodological conversion make sense to the researcher. He (Cox) maintains that

> "We can understand those who are different from ourselves without confessionally endorsing their world views. Yet, we do affirm methodologically what they affirm thereby experiencing what they experience" (1996:166).

This explanation or perspective clarifies confessional conversion as opposed to methodological conversation. As Cox (1996;168) maintains,

> "Confessional conversion surreptitiously moves the study of religion away from science into theology".

In this case methodological conversion allows one to suspend the rules of autonomous rationality and abide by the rules of religious faith while at the same time playing the rules of scientific rationality (Cox 1996:168).

Cox uses the term diatopical hermeneutics as opposed to interpolational approach to the study of religion. Bringing Cox's views home one is able to note the following:

The researcher was introduced or plunged into the esoteric knowledge of divination together with his academic cultural baggage. This was a diatopical situation the researcher had to deal with. The conversion *metanoia* helped the researcher to sharpen his methodological analysis. It was not a mere confessional process, but dealt

with his inner methodological realities. The researcher changed and adapted his thinking in the process of the diatopical hermeneutics. Firstly, both the researcher and his adherence to his faith were critically analysed by employing theories and disciplines to which he had been introduced (Cox 1996:167). Secondly, the researcher tried to apply the said analysis to the tradition he found and had emerged from (Cox 1996:167). Thirdly, the researcher attempted to internalise his own tradition in the process of critical appraisal. This process engaged a serious, open, critical and honest conversation which ultimately led to a methodological conversation (Cox 1996:167). Fourthly, the whole conversation and conversion led to "new meaning" and understanding. The process that the researcher went through exposed and pointed to major landmarks for his life experience. He kept on reflecting and re-casting on this backdrop as it shaped and reconstituted his thinking and life. The effects of this engagement will not be easily removed from the researcher, but instead will continue to engage other life experiences encountered in due course. Surely, in terms of methodological stance the researcher changed and reshaped his own perspective. The researcher is found once more, was lost before.

Further on the theoretical assumptions. The above narrative discourse introduces or rather opens a door for the reader into the narrator's world. Genette (1972) distinguishes between *histoire, recit* and narration to account for the analytical categories used in narrative theory. She translates these concepts as story, text and narration. A story in this regard comprises the logical chronological fictional events that provide the narrative with the 'raw material' in terms of which the narrative is told. Text deals with the narrative text encountered during the narration process. Lastly,

narration category within the narrative theory accounts for the process of the narrative with implications that someone has written the narrative and has intended it to be read as a message by a reader or readers. As Rimmon-Kenan (1983:3) rightly notes,

> "within the text, communication involves fictional narrator transmitting a narrative fictional narratee. Of the three aspects of narrative fiction, the text is the only one directly available to the reader. It is through the text that he or she acquires knowledge of the story (its object) and of the narration (the process of its production). On the other hand, however, the narrative text is itself defined by these two aspects: unless it told a story it would not be a narrative, and without being narrated or written it would not be a text".

For purposes of this research both the story and text fit. The above story indicates the nature of events and characters involved. The function of events indicates progression through 'steps taken' with the result of 'objective reached' or 'missed' or the 'steps not taken'. In this case both analeptic and proleptic events in the story are taken into consideration. As far as the characterisation goes, the researcher is the character himself. He is, in terms of Rimmon-Kenan's (1983:40ff) definition of character, a round character. Apparently this distinction originated in the 1930's and since it has been taken over by many narratologists. A round character is more complex and develops in the course of the action (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:40).

The textual narration of the above personal narrative discourse stands in relation to both story and narration. Three categories should be noted in this regard: Time,

characterisation and focalisation (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:43). In this case time and characterisation stand in relation to the story and focalisation to the narration.

Time category concerns the textual arrangement of the event component of the story in the text (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:43). Definitely, the researcher's narration does not accurately correspond to the logical chronological succession of events in the story. The discourse of the researcher is patterned in terms of order, duration, and frequency (Genette 1972:33ff). The order patterns specify analeptic (flashbacks) and proleptic (foreshadowing) relations between the story and text-time. Duration specifies the difference in time between events that took place in the story and at various textual levels. Lastly, frequency specifies the number of times the events in the story are recounted in the text. In this regard 'initiation' as an event noted in the text is repeated several times. Characterisation on the other hand has already been discussed above. Lastly, focalisation offers the reader or hearer an 'angle of vision' (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:3) through which the story is filtered in the text, and it is verbally formulated by the narrator (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:43). Uspensky (1973) identifies three areas in this regard, i.e.; the perceptional facet, the psychological facet, and the ideological facet.

First, time and space determine the perceptional facet (sight and hearing). The researcher is also a focaliser both externally and internally – located in the action and interaction of the entire focalisation. He (researcher) not only provides a bird's eye view but participates in the action and is further unlimited to the present characterisation.

Second, the psychological facet of perception has both cognitive and emotive components. The cognitive component (knowledge, conjecture, belief, and memory) indicate that the narrator (cf. researcher) understands overtly the represented world in the text. The emotive component comprises the emotions of the internal focalisation (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:80f). Lastly, the ideological facet of focalisation comprises the 'norms of the text' which consist of 'a general system of viewing the world conceptually' (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:81). In the above personal narration (narrative text), the narrator-focaliser's norms or ideology provide the 'single dominant perspective' which "is usually taken as authoritative, and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this 'higher' position" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:81). In the above mentioned narrative discourse ideology is positively presented and evaluated by the narrator-focaliser. The narrator-focaliser is,in this case, inside the storyworld (diegesis) and not objective and authoritative external focaliser.

Clearly the above brief account of the researcher's own experiences gives insight into some of the practices that are central to his own life history. They can be much expanded and that will be done in future research. Even so, my mother's wedding, how I was taken up in the Masoga family, my studies, that I had a calling and how I finally became a *ngaka*, form ingredients central to my life. If I would deny this, I would become alienated not only from my most revered meaning system but also my people and ancestors. When I started my research, I intended to do it as a scholar looking at divination from the outside and objectively. Very soon, however, and given my own calling before I went to university to study, I realised that this was impossible. This explains why I took the course of action I did: to become *ngaka*.

My entrance into divination offered me esoteric knowledge that remains outside the experience of the observer-researcher who remains on outsider. Crossing over into this special territory or 'specialised space' gives this esoteric knowledge personal, social and bodily legitimacy.

This experiential knowledge is more profound and comprehensive, more personal and idiosyncratic than what I would have gleaned from mere observation.

The knowledge I gained is practical and effective. I have mastered the language of divination and healing. The knowledge and language of divination heals. Healing, with its complexities, attempts to realign the natural and supernatural realms. They cannot be separated. The diviner-healer is the embodiment of the ancestry in the world of the living, regardless of his or her technical skills. This is encompassed in the spiritual manifestations that diviners experience daily.

I have also realised that much of the current scholarship on African Religion uses the operation table of intellectual vivisection to de-construct, deny, assault, appropriate, or destroy the living. There are exceptions to this practice (Setiloane 2000:11). As Setiloane (2000:11) rightly observes:

> "For many of us living in modern urbanized Africa, it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine how life might have been on this continent before the advent of Western people and their civilization. We have become so conditioned (and

brain washed) that, even with the best education, we often look back at it with shame as 'shame', 'brutal' and everything that is bad".

Much of the published work in this field has produced systematic academic commentaries (Mbiti 1969). The problem, however, is that such approaches are often reductionistic. As van Binsbergen (1991:341) rightly notes:

"We still know far too little about the anthropological activity as boundary crossing, and how this reacts with the participant's own boundary management. Dealing with other people's existential questions, existential questions of our own cannot be avoided; nor can these all be suffocated under increasingly convoluted and elegant discourse, no matter how many levels of structure, transformation, binary and ternary logic they may contain".

In crossing over and making contact again with my own ancestral roots, I merged with the data. I am enriched in the process and am human being again. To provide more insight into divination, however, the following chapter provides information on an interview that I had with Mrs Annah Mokgethi.

Chapter Three

3. Divinatory Conversation with Mrs Annah Mokgethi

This chapter offers the reader a glimpse into the esoteric world of divination as seen and explained by a practitioner herself (Mme Annah Mokgethi, *Ngaka ya setso sa Afrika*). Questions formulated for this 'conversation' intended to bring to the fore some of the elements of divination. As it will become clear from the interview, Mme Annah Mokgethi did not delve into the specialised intricacies of divination, but only gave general views on the subject.

3.1 Sesotho version of the Interview

Date: 11 October 2000

Interviewee: Mrs Annah Mokhethi

Designation: African Traditional Healer (Ngaka ya Setso sa Afrika)

Venue: Phuthaditjhaba, Qwa Qwa

Potso: *Ako mpollelle ka tshebetso ena ya setso.*

Karabo: *Phodiso ya setso ke hore re oka motho ya tshwerweng ke mafu, eka ba hloho, mangwele, mahlo, ditsebe kapa lefu le leng le le leng le ka phekolehang.*

Potso: *Ka setso o bolela hore ho na le meriana ya mafu ohle?*

Karabo: *Re na le yona.*

Potso: *Le sebedisa meriana ya lona jwang, a na e hlwekile hore e ka sebediswa ke bakudi?*

Karabo: *Ho tswa hore motho ya o sebedisang ke mang. E tlamehile hore e hlweke. Re e pheha ka pitsa tse hlwekileng, Re a e sefa, re ntano e kenya ka dibotlolong tse hlwekileng.*

Potso: *Pitso ya hore o be ngaka ebe e tswa kae?*

Karabo: *Ho tswa hore neho ena o e fuwa ke mang. Baholoholo ba hao ba o tlela ka toro, ba o bontshe setlamatlama, le lebitso la sona. Le ho batho ho jwalo feela, ba tla o bolelela hore o ye sebakeng se feng moo o tla kopana le motho eo o mo bontshitsweng torong, ka nako tse ding otla fumana motho eo a bile a o emetse.*

Potso: *Ho etsahalang ka motho ya hanang seo a se bolellwang torong tsa hae ke bona baholoholo ba hae?*

Karabo: *O tla kula, a re o ya dingakeng tsa sekgowa, ase fumane pheko ho hang; ka nako tse ding a be a hlokahale. Pheko ke yona feela ya hore a dumele mme a pholohe .*

Potso: Ha re kgutlele thupelong ya bona bongaka bona. Taba ya kgomo e hlajwang e kena kae moo?

Karabo: Kgomo ena ha e hlajwe feela, o tla e bontshwa pele, mohatla wa yona o be jwang, mmala, manaka, jwalo-jwalo. E be e ya ho batlwa; hoba ba e fumane ba ke ke ba o bontsha yona, o tla tlameha hore o e batle ka ditaola, kapa ka hloho hobane e patilwe kae kae, le sebaka seo otla tlameha hore o se laole.O tla laola ho fihlela o ba o e fumana

Potso: Na ho etsahala hore o se e fumane? Teng ebe ho etsahalang ?

Karabo: Ee ho etsahala, feela e tla be e hlabuwe.

Potso: Bohlokwa ba bongaka boo ba setho ke bofe matsatsing a ka jeno?

Karabo: Bo sa le boholo, hobane makgowa ha a kgone ho ka phekola mafu ana kaofela; re na le botsebi re le ngaka tsa setso.

Potso: Hlahlobo ya motho e tsama-tsamaya jwang hape o bona jwang hore motho o tlisitswe ke bothata bofe ho wena ?

Karabo: Ho na le batho ba tlang ho rona bosiu ditorong , re kgona ho bona hore e tla ba mang, ya tshwerweng ke eng, ebe ha a fihla taba tse ding di tla hlahela, mme

ha a fihla mona ke se ke tseba hore ke tla mo neha eng hore a hlaphohelwe lefung le mo tlisitseng mona ho nna.

Potso: *Ho na le batho ba tlang dingakeng ba tla hlahloba o kgona jwang ho sebetsa le bona?*

Karabo: *Ke kgona ho ba thusa, mohlomong ho na le ho sa lokang ka lapeng kapa ho na le ho sa lokang pakeng tsa mosadi le monna wa hae, ke ba sheba feela ebe ke o jwetsa hore o etse eng.*

3.2 English Version of the Interview

Question: Tell me about African healing systems as practised by you and others.

Answer: This healing as practised by myself and others has the potency of curing all curable illnesses and diseases including headaches, eyes, knees, ears, or any other illness which are regarded as incurable by conventional healers.

Question: According to this practice, do you have a cure for almost all kinds of known diseases?

Answer: Yes, we have remedies for almost all known illnesses.

Question: How do you make sure that your medicines are hygienic for use and consumption by patients?

Answer: It always depends on the person who is using them. Ideally, hygiene is our priority. We cook these plants, then remove the unwanted material that may be present using specified equipment for that purpose. They are then bottled in clean containers.

Question: How does one become a healer; how did it happen that you are now a healer?

Answer: It is a calling. One is called by his or her ancestors to became a healer. Your ancestors may come to you in the form of a dream; they may show you a certain kind of context with particular herbs you did not know of before; they tell you the name of herbs, their properties and how it must be used as a herb to cure illnesses. They also tell you the person to contact for initiation as well as the place where you would find such a person. Sometimes, you will find that person waiting for you.

Question: What can happen if you refuse your calling to be a healer?

Answer: You will probably get sick and may even die. If you think that your illness can be cured by western medicine, you would lie to yourself, because there is nothing this medicine can do to help you.

Question: Let us go back to the issue of initiation. Why is a cow slaughtered?

Answer: The cow is not just slaughtered. The ancestors first show you how it should look like, its tail, head, horns on so on. Then you go out to buy it, but not you yourself. When it arrives you are also not allowed to see it. You just have to throw bones and they will tell you what it looks like, and where it is hidden. You will have to guess until you find its whereabouts.

Question: It happens that you sometimes do not find its whereabouts?

Answer: Yes it sometimes happens, but it is still going to be slaughtered anyway.

Question: Do you see the importance of this healing system nowadays?

Answer: Yes, there is still a lot of importance for this kind of healing. Western medicine can cure all the illnesses and our medicines are able to complement where they are failing, or unable to cure.

Question: How does this healing system work? How do you diagnose the illness or detect what brings a person to you?

Answer: When someone is coming to consult me, knowledge about him/ her , the nature of the problem, as well as the kind of sickness, are brought to me

beforehand through dreams. When the person arrives, I have a full understanding of what brings him here, and what I should give as a remedy.

3.3 Reflections

From the above conversation with Mme Mokgethi, three perspectives are important.

First, views aired consist of the following: that the diviner healers believe that they have remedies for almost all known illnesses; that they can cure all curable illnesses and diseases; that they follow a hygienic process in the preparation of their medicines; that the calling to become healer and diviner is central to this position; that the divination of the cow which is slaughtered at the time of initiation is a central component of the initiation process and that it is a very important system within African understanding of health and well-being. There is also evidence of the fact that diviner-healers see their practices as complementing modern medicine.

The second perspective comes from the fact that dreams form a central component to all divination. The dream is the medium through which the ancestors communicate. It is also in dreams that the diviner has visions of people who may come to him or her. The dream is also the medium through which the diviner comes to know what people's ailments are and what medicines to prescribe. This is supported by a number of diviner-healers I have conversed with during the fieldwork research. Statements like '*badimo ba reng?*" (what do ancestors say?) and *'lena le be le nyaka gore re botse badimo eng?'* (what do you want us to tell the ancestors?) were common in the

responses of the diviner-healers I conversed with. The two questions are posed to both 'spaces'. The former refers to ancestral 'space' while the latter is posed in the context of empirical 'space'. In the mediation of the spaces, the diviner plays a prominent role. He or she has to establish the link that exists between deceased kinsmen and the people living in the empirical world. Ancestry, as rightly pointed out, is responsible for this particular 'gift' of healing, and continues to remain central to healing and divination. It has to be noted that ancestors determine the entire system of divination. Mrs Melita Lekota (Research Informant: Diviner-healer from Soshanguve, Pretoria) points out that,

> *"Badimo ga ba tshwanela gore ba gapeletšwe. Ba tlogele gore ba iphetolele. O seke wa ba bolelela"*
>
> "Ancestors should not be forced into something they do not approve of. Let them speak for themselves – Do not speak on their behalf"

In this case dreams and divination bones are *ancilla* to the ancestral context. Dreams and divination bones work inter-changeably. There are instances when one dreams and the actual content of the dream is confirmed or deciphered during the divination process. Or put differently, the suppliant or diviner-healer could dream of the actual divination process. This shows how important it is for one to see all symbols and activities as part of the same pattern. All work to support the entire system. There are no hierarchies in terms of this operation and philosophy. Dreams are not de-valued in

the context of divination. But instead considered a part in the entire divination process.

To make this explanation understandable, the researcher encountered problems on his way from his initiation ceremony. He felt acute pain in his abdomen. The pain was so serious that he had to stop driving for a while. He (the researcher) rang his *gobela* who immediately threw bones to divine. She (*gobela*) pointed out that ancestors were not satisfied because the researcher did not fulfil his promise of paying the R10 (symbolically standing for a cow) during the river-initiation. Ancestors were so angry that they even intended killing him. This shows how a mere abdominal pain connects with the macro-structural patterns.

Last, the third perspective deals with the slaughtering of the goat and its significance. In his book, *Homo Necans,* Burkert outlines his approach – an eclectic blend of functionalism, structuralism, and socio-biology (cf. Burkert 1983:xix; 1987:150; Alderick 1980:3). He defines ritual as "Forms of non-verbal communication" and 'patterns' which are accompanied by motives (Burkert 1987:150). For him, human society is shaped by the past. Burkert further shows that killing and spilling of blood is the/a central ritual of religion. This practice, as he maintains, affirms, paradoxically, the necessity of violence for the foundation of human culture. Burkert's views are not without flaws (Lambert 1993:305,308). Therefore, one should be careful about the idea of bones collected,and hunting theories of sexual aggression. However, one accepts the relationship between ritual sacrifice and the renewal of life. In addition,

one can accept the functions of community forming and relationship building or the restoring of sacrificial ritual.

Girard, a distinguished French literary critic whose views on violence, aggression and sacrifice are shaped by literary texts, uses Freud's model of the conscious and unconscious. For him (Girard), ritual is an act which is a substitution of a prior event, while, on the other hand, myth is the verbalised concealment of the original event. Therefore, ritual becomes part of the social institution and it is repetitive because it claims to be mimetic re-enactment of a prior event (Girard 1987:99,100). The details of Girard's thesis may be challenged, rightly, especially the reduction of everything to binary opposition and the positing of hypothetical original situations. But, the idea of projected guilt is helpful and could be combined with some Bukert's views, especially on the community building aspect and the death-life exchange.

The two ritual theoretical frames above (Burkert and Girard) help one to understand the pillar role of sacrificial rituals as indicated by Mme Annah Mokgethi. Indeed, without this shedding of blood, there can be no life. The shedding of blood creates and affirms social interaction (Burkert 1983:24). The goat, as mentioned by Mme Mokgethi, helps suppliants to interact effectively with the living timeless (Mbiti 1969:83).

The three perspectives referred to above undergird the main rationale behind the conversation with Mme Mokgethi. Mme Mokgethi's account indicates vividly the importance of the African 'social symbolic universe' (Geertz) and how it governs folk in

the empirical world. The connection of the two 'spaces' is to allow them to operate as 'one' and they are forcefully inter-dependant. There is no line of division between them. The conversation with Mme Mokhethi helps to demonstrate how people in the empirical 'space' view divination oracles. Symbolic objects like divination oracles are seen as the 'mouthpiece' for both these 'spaces'.

The next chapter deals with some general trends in African healing, divination, and prophecy.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. African healing, divination, and prophecy

Every human community "recognizes a need for the special knowledge gained through divination" (Peek 1991:1). Africa still prides itself on its divinatory practices. Unfortunately, divination was and still remains marginalised. Even so, Peek (1991:1) says that some of its intuitive findings and assertions are surprisingly 'scientific'.

Further, another unfortunate part of views on divination is that most of the African indigenous healers cannot express themselves through the medium of literature (Peek 1991:200). In most African oral cultures, the diviner does not, and cannot 'read', but looks and listens, sees and hears (Peek 1991:200). With that in mind, the role of the diviner is to decode, or to be precise, to interpret the esoteric codes for the client in the divination process. It is for this reason that some social anthropologists have not represented them well. However, the esoteric knowledge of African indigenous healing systems, has survived the tests of time.

The previous chapter looked at the conversation with Mme Annah Mokgethi on divination and the calling to divination and healing. This chapter looks at trends in African healing, divination and prophecy. This is done by primarily focusing on African herbalists, African diviner-healers, and the call, and training of African Diviners. In the process, the researcher has decided to retain indigenous terminology. One of the reasons is that the concept 'traditional', for example, may give rise to views that it is

not relevant or outdated. The term traditional, is commonly known to have roots in Latin 'tradere', literally to 'pass on something from somewhere'. Currently, scholarly views on whether it should be used or not, are divided.

Those who are against its use are adamant that the term has derogative underpinnings and should therefore not be used at all. Those who prefer the use of this concept refer to its Latin root meaning as it denotes a sense of progression or passing on through time.

4.1 African Herbalists

The common trend among African herbalists is to divide indigenous healing into two categories - herbalists and diviners.

Dingaka Tšhupša, inyanga – 'Herbalists' – treat diseases. They simply do not diagnose or venture into any divination strategies. This skill of treating diseases can be learnt. Very often it is inherited. To this category may be added the growing number of homeopaths and naturopaths whose activities require some investigation. *Bapedi* communities have a specific terminology for this category of healers – *ke ngaka e tšhupša* (he or she is a healer who does not use divining bones - *ditaola or dikgagara*). This typology of healing involves a serious concern for herbs (*mere or dihlare*). The healer has to have good skills in knowing the correct prescription for a particular disease or illness. In most case, the healer studies or becomes an understudy of a particular skilled herbalist healer who later imparts the skill to him or her. Part of the

training involves going into the field and bushes to dig for herbs (*go epa mehlare goba mere*). The entire procedure and protocol in digging and stamping the dried herbs is explained painstakinly to the learner or disciple. Some procedures cannot be easily understood but demands complete commitment on the part of both tutor and disciple.

Respondent Ruth Motlatsi from Thaba Moopo points out that:

"Seo o swanetšego go se tseba ke gore gona le mehlare e mengwe eo o ka se kego wa e rema felafela ... gona le ka fao melao e beilwego gore e rengwe ka gona. Mohlala, nka go botša ka mohlare o o thušago bonna, ge motho wa senna a na le bothata bo bo bjalo. Ngaka e swanetše gore e sale gosasa e tsoge e tšee kepu le mokotlana wa yona e lebe thabeng. E tlare mola e le kgauswi le wona mohlare, e tla apola dikobo e šale e ponoka... e ponoka ke a go botša. Ke moka e tla thoma ka go o rema. Ga e swanela go bolela go ba go lealea kua le kua. Sa yona ke gore mahlo a yona a tsepelele gona mo mošomong yoo e godirago. Ke moka ge a feditše o tla tlatša mokotlana wa yona. E boele gae. Ga e swanela go lebelela morago mo a tšwago. Ga e a swanela go boledišana le mang kapa mang go fihla gae. Melawana e ka moka e direlwa gore sehlare se goba pheko ye e tle šome e phedše batho".

"One has to note the fact that there are herbs that cannot be cut as one wishes. ... there are rules pertaining to the cutting procedure. An example is the specific herb that helps impotent men. The healer has to cut it at dawn. When he or she

is about to reach the said tree he or she has to take off their clothes and then proceed with the cutting process. He or she is not allowed to talk or look around but instead to fix or rather use the tree as his focal point and attention. When the process is complete he or she will return home but is not allowed to look back or talk to any person he or she meets on the way until he or she finally reaches home. All these little rules are meant to be observed so that the potency, efficiency and effectiveness of the herb is guaranteed".

From the above interview with MmaMotlatsi one is able to notice a few important elements.

The herbalist has to be skilled in order to observe all rules pertaining to herbalism.

Rules pertaining to herbalism separate the healer from the everyday patterns of life, for an example,

"When he or she is about to reach the said tree, he or she has to take off his or her clothes and then proceed with the cutting process .... he or she will return home but is not allowed to look back or talk to any person he or she meets on the way until he or she finally reaches home".

The rules are extra-ordinary because they need to ensure the extra-ordinarly nature of the cure or healing which is to be effected. Rules are there to be observed and demonstrate the level of commitment of the herbalist.

4.2 African Diviner-Healers

The second category to be taken note of, is that of 'diviners' – *Ngaka tsa marapo/ ditaola/ dikgagara/ Izangoma/ amagqirha.* Healers within this category are able to diagnose and prescribe medicines. However, their medicines and diagnostic skills and art are even used in the social, economical and magical spheres of life. This research work is confined entirely to this category of African healers because of its specific interest to divination-oracles.

4.2.1 The call, and training of African Diviners

It is within this category that calling is emphasised. Calling refers to the actual entry into divination and its intricacies. The general trend has it that one does not decide to become a healer but is 'forced' into it. Respondent Ntate Mopedi, the African healer from the Northern province, at the place called Makgane, notes:

"Nna ke be ke sa rate goba ngaka, ke bile ka bitšwa. Bongaka bjo ke bo filwe ke bo koko le bo rakgolo. E be e le bošego ge ke be ke na le pono. Ke bile ka bona makgolo khukhu yo nna ke bego ke sa motsebe. Yena oile a itsibša gore ke mang le gore ke wa moloko o fe. Oile a nhlalošetša le gore oile a hwa lehu la mohuta mang. Seo ke ilego ka se bontšhwa ke yena, ke mokotlana wa ditaola le gore ke tla o hwetša kae. Go tsogeng ga ka ke ile ka napa ka ba botša ka mogae. Ba bagolo ba ile ba kgonthšiša lebaka le. Se ke go bontšha gore bongakeng ga wo ikgethele, fela o wa bofiwa"

"I did not want to become a healer, but was called into it. The gift came from both my ancestors and ancestresses. It was in the night that I saw my great-grandmother whóm I did not know. She explained herself to me and accounted for her own death. She showed me a bag full of divining bones, and even informed me about their actual whereabouts. In the morning I informed my family about my dream. They (the older ones) confirmed her actual existence and the fact of her healing trade when she was still alive. This shows very clearly that one does not merely decide to become a healer, but is rather called".

van Binsbergen (1991) did extensive fieldwork in Francistown and surrounding areas in Botswana during April-May 1988, November 1988-October 1989, August-September 1990 and June-July 1991. In the article entitled: *Becoming a sangoma: Religious anthropological field-work in Francistown, Botswana* a comprehensive narrative of his initiation into what he calls *sangoma*hood is provided. He (van Binsbergen 1991:333) succinctly points out that

"There is no doubt that 'becoming a sangoma' offers me as a researcher a vast range of information, both of esoteric and of social and bodily patterns which may not be as accessible to the participant observer who remains an outsider".

van Binsbergen (1991:316) mentions a number of steps that were followed before he qualified as a sangoma. Part of the process included

(a) "we were introduced to a more complex and less mechanical aetiology", (b) "we were impressed when in dramatic divination sessions the specific ancestors were identified who were held responsible for our suffering: my paternal

grandfather, who had died in my father's infancy, and a few weeks later at a different sangoma lodge",

(c) "we both could hardly talk, think or dream of anything else any more except sangomahood",

(d) was introduced to esoteric knowledge as regards "handling the oracular tablets",

(e) "the drinking of blood from the cut throat of a dying goat; its gall was smeared onto my feet and its inflated gall bladder tied to a string for me to wear as a pendant",

2 was "initiated as a twaza, before a massive audience of lodge members, invitees and neighbours", and

3 "with all the trappings: my own sangoma uniform as dictated in detail by my ancestral spirit under trance; sacred cloths, as well as bead necklaces and bracelets which I was to wear night and day for the rest of my life;

(h) elaborate and cumbersome taboos and prescriptions relating to food, bodily care, sexuality and ritual for the duration of my period as a *twaza*".

The above-mentioned sketched procedure, though summarised, overtly introduces one to the meaning and functions of African divination. van Binsbergen had the opportunity to experience this *partem rite de passage* (cf. Turner 1969) of African divination and healing.

Calling into divination varies from one healer to another. In the case of *ntate* Maamushi, he experienced visions and dreams. *Badimo* visited him in his sleep and made their wishes known to him. In turn, these dreams and visions exerted a profound attraction.

Respondent *Tate Mavulindlela* from the Eastern Free State, Phuthaditjhaba, Qwa Qwa (her ancestral name is *Mavulindlela* the man of *Nqhese*, born by grandmother *Mashayihlombe*, the man of *Nkomo Mokhari*...) points out that,

> "I was very sick. I went from one hospital to another. Western doctors could not account for the cause of my disease. One doctor at Manapo Hospital hinted at asthma as the cause of my disease. This problem was not only located physically but was socially as well. My marriage was in a shambles. My husband left me. There was no verifiable cause for his departure from home. He returned home and chased me away. I was deeply hurt by his actions. Fortunately, my maiden family was supportive. They took me to consult with a traditional healer. He was very forthright. This is what he said to me: You do not have a problem. It is ancestors who are behind all these problems. They want you to be initiated into healing/divination. I guarantee you that after you have gone through the initiation your affairs will be restored to normality. I then decided to undergo the initiation

process and I am now back to my normal stage. Ancestrology is a very serious affair and should be treated as such."

Tate Mavulindlela had to be subjected to some form of physical and emotional pressure to indicate that ancestors wanted her to do something. Becoming sick or falling sick necessitates that an established or qualified diviner be consulted. Van Binsbergen (1991:318) concedes that,

"it turns out that the social and psycho-somatic complaints of patients in both types of therapy are very similar. However, the sangoma cult idiom seeks to establish, in the consciousness of the clients, a coherent image of a viable and meaningful social order anchored in the village, adorcism."

The diviner may come to a solid conclusion that such an illness, as in the case of *Tate Mavulindlela*, is not amenable to simple treatment by any healer. Findings and conclusions in this regard may be that the patient is at an early stage of the novitiate (*uyathwasa*). Literally, the term *go thwasa / uku-thwasa*, "means coming into view."

Some scholars, in this very same context translate it as 'blossoming' (Setiloane 2000, Berglund 1975 and Mbiti 1969). In particular Setiloane (2000:27)outrightly mentions that,

"*Go thwasa*, properly understood, means 'to blossom', 'to come to blossom', like a flower, 'to come into being', like a new year or month, or 'appear into view', like the sun or moon."

In this case, it simply means that 'to become the novice' is at an early stage of entry into divination. Only the most experienced, established and renowned diviner is capable of '*ukuthwasisa*' (helping with the initiation) the novice. It is at this stage that the novice often begins to grow delicate and eccentric, dreaming frequently, often about wild ferocious animals and serpents. He or she is instructed to take note of dreams and visions and convey them to his or her *gobela* 'the established diviner' involved in the training. Novices are of a highly neurotic temperament and often are in a trance while at other times they become violent. They often become particular about food. They are again often fond of snuff, *lefola* or *motsoko* and easily get shaken by convulsions. They shed tears and weep extravagantly. They may get up in the middle of the night and sing.

Those around them or in their company are expected to respond by clapping hands and beating a cowhide drum rhythmically. Usually the spirit in possession begins singing her or his favoured/ preferred song and is then joined by those who sit around. At one of the *Ndomb'*, which are rightly translated by van Binsbergen to be 'cult lodges' (1991:316) in Pretoria, Soshanguve, I observed the following:

The novice sitting on the floor began to shiver and had uncontrollable hiccups. She began to move her feet uncontrollably. Immediately those sitting around her, spoke patiently:

'*Botse botse, le seke la tla ka bogale, tlang ka lethabo, e kaba mokgekolo goba mokgalabe, re a le amogela ....*"

'Wonderful, wonderful, do not come with trouble, come with happiness, whether an old woman or man, we welcome you".

The *ithwasana* then moved out of the ancestral room and moved towards the place of the *gobela*. She was going to *hlehla*, literally meaning 'to greet accordingly'. She started to sing her preferred song: *Awee Shai makarakaragana, awee shai makarankara, rena bagologolo shai makarankara, re a le lotšha, ke nna Phalafala, shai makarankara* .... She started by greeting the *gobela* and then moved.

So far one is able to see the importance of a call to this vocation. The candidate is supposed to be in a suitable physical and spiritual condition to receive a revelation or direction from a guardian spirit. The guardian spirit reveals the vocation as well as supposed trainer. The directives of the guardian spirit are binding and must be obeyed. At this stage one has to note that one healer has the ability to commune with more than one guardian spirit.

Another good example of this is the account of Mrs Melita Lekota, healer from Soshanguve, whose ancestrological names are *Magwetja Nkwe ya thaba*, the man of *Phoshoko*, born by grandmother *Mahlasela*, the man of *Mtetwa Nyambose*, born of grandmother *Le dada phulamanzi*, the man of *Ndwandwe Nxumalo*, born of grandmother *Mkhwekazi*, the man of *Ndabezitha Majola, Majola* the progenitor of the initiation medicine (drug). Mrs Lekota indicated to me that she has more than twenty guardian spirits. She is particularly impressed by the presence of one guardian spirit that can foretell tomorrow's happenings. This particular guardian spirit is able to

inform her if her interlocutors are telling lies or not. Lastly, she is able to discover hidden articles because of the help of this particular guardian spirit.

When one has finally accepted the call, he or she is admitted into a place called *Ndomba* or *ka ndombeng* or *ngoako wa Badimo* (an initiation lodge) (cf. van Binsbergen 1991:316). This is a place where guardian spirits reside and take charge. There is a special ritual that is performed when an initiate (novice) is received into it. He or she stands at the entrance of the yard and is covered with a veil depending on the requirements of his or her specific guardian spirits. The preliminary ritual is performed. It is the ritual called *go phasa* (cf. isiZulu - *ukuphahla*; Sesotho - *ho hlabela badimo*) (to communicate with the ancestors and ancestresses). It is at this stage that the *badimo* of the novice are evoked and welcomed into the house of the trainer or senior's adept (van Binsbergen 1991:316) *badimo* in order for them to '*thwasa* – to blossom' (Setiloane 1998, 2000 and Mbiti 1969). It should be noted that the whole process revolves around the ancestors and ancestresses. Every communication has to do entirely with them. It is the *badimo* who are about to *thwasa* and not the novice. The use of the term novice refers to the *badimo* because they have not as yet *thwasa*. They are still regarded as being young. Having admitted them, the human novices, into an *indomba* they now are ready to be taught and trained to become skilled healers.

Training of the novice (both the possessed and the guardian spirit) involves both physical and mental aspects. The physical aspect of training entails rules pertaining to diet0, fasting, cleanliness, etc. The mental training on the other hand covers

thorough knowledge of the novice's family history, history of the controlling guardian spirit, religious developments within the family, as well as ritual rites and taboos. Acquiring a knowledge of healing herbs is vital in this aspect of training. This type of training is regarded as basic for *ithwasana*. After the experienced trainer has established that the *ithwasana* is ready for higher training he or she (*ithwasana*) is then introduced to the most complex esoteric philosophies about life as regards healing. Training basically deals with the intellectual, intuitve and spiritual aspects. The intellectual capacity provides knowledge about the profession, dealing with the mysteries and powers contained in the profession.

In developing this aspect the candidate has to be able to demonstrate knowledge of bone-casting or oracular tablets (van Binsbergen 1991 and 1995, Whyte 1991) (*ditaola/amathambo/tinhlolo*), psychological treatment of patients, concentration and mastery of trances : *go tlelwa ke badimo le go tseba go gwerana le badimo ge ba tlile ka melaetša e bohlokwa eo e nyakago gore e fitišetšwe go bao ba phelago ka keno.* The intuitive capacity on the other hand deals with the power of knowing or understanding something without reasoning or being taught. This capacity lies in one's ability to connect closely with one's guardian spirits *go ntšha badimo gore batle ba tsebe go dira mošomo wa bona.*

Lastly, the spiritual aspect deals with powers utilised in the control of the human soul, nature, prophecy and the reading of the human mind and thus finding hidden articles and secrets. One has to note that all aspects indicated are mutually inclusive and aid

one another to foster a comprehensive healing skill and art. All have to be maintained and viewed as of equal importance.

Another important dimension in the training is the secluded life that has to be led by the neophyte. Part of this seclusion is the strict observance of chastity.

In some cases the neophyte has to avoid all common footpaths and is constantly given medicines to purge. The dress code varies from one neophyte to another depending on the demands of their respective guardian spirits (van Binsbergen 1991:317). Commonly, they dress in white. As van Binsbergen (1991:317) precisely notes, "my own sangoma uniform as dictated in detail by my ancestral spirit under trance". In his case the ancestral spirit dictated the actual clothing for him. In most cases ancestral spirits prefer the clothing they previously used when they were still alive. One respondent, *Mahamba-nomoya* (she preferred to use her ancestral name) pointed out to me that,

> *"Go ile gwa ba le nako eo ke ilego ka se apare dikobo tša badimo ba ka. Ba ile ba nkgama. Se se bontšha bogolo ba seo badimo ba lego sona".*
>
> "It happened that one day I did not put on my ancestral clothing. I was forcefully pressed on my throat. This is what the ancestors are all about."

The role of fear is central in this case. The researcher discovered that fear operates on two levels. First, is the general fear of the ancestors. Second and relevant for this research work is the 'complex-fear'. The first view of fear is general in a sense that neophytes have to obey their ancestors. This is general and applies to almost everyone

who is within the African social symbolic universe (reality). The second view is complex and tricky. It involves a serious and clear relationship which one (neophyte and/or experienced diviner-healer) has with his or her ancestors. The neophyte or diviner-healer is always careful and in fear of the 'wrath' of ancestry. The ancestors, in this case, are not supposed to be angered or provoked but should be 'cushioned' until they become stronger to work. Expressions like '*ke šoma ke badimo*' (I work through my ancestors) are common within this latter view of fear.

The preceding descriptions enable one to get an idea of the specialised terminology used by some in the field of African divination communities. The main rationale behind this chapter was to provide the reader with a broader perspective on some African divination communities. The following chapter looks at the typologies of African divination oracles and provides further commentaries on these oracles.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. African Divination Oracles

This chapter looks at African divination oracles and provides a footnoted commentary. The chapter aims to aid the reader to get acquainted or attuned with the esoteric knowledge, *lingua* and world of *divinatio*. The oracles were selected from the sample interviews that were conducted with a number of diviners. For the purposes of this research, the researcher selected two oracles that are different in terms of their unique generic forms. The selection was done by carefully sifting the samples of about 50 divination oracles that were previously collected, translated and analysed. Two categories can be distinguished: The first category of oracles was basically poetry form. The oral performers (cf. diviner-healers) did not only 'tell' a story in their divination poetry, but transmitted their 'epics' by word of mouth and changed their word patterns in the process reciting the 'epics'. The second category is a divination oracle nuance consisting of formulary patterns combining with *siyavuma* interjections.

The research targeted fourty African diviners and healers spread throughout the country. It concentrated on the Northern province. I employed both snowball and Delphic techniques to acquire the data. Places covered included the following: Makgane (Northern Province, Ga-Sekhukhune), Motetema (next to Groblersdal), Moganyaka (on the route to Marble Hall), Majaneng (fifty kilometers from Pretoria), Suurman (neighbouring village to Majaneng), Stinkwater (on the east of Soshanguve),

and Soshanguve township which is about forty kilometers from Pretoria. It was in Soshanguve that I was introduced to the cultic lodge of Ndabezitha Majola. It was within this lodge that I was initiated as a diviner (refer to Appendix A). The Ndomba of Ndabezitha Majola has links with Swaziland and Maputo (where Ndabezitha originally came from.

The diviner named *ngaka Maamushi* at Makgane in Sekhukhune pronounced the first oracle to the researcher himself. The second oracle was pronounced to *Ntate* Masobela, a young man from Rockville, Hammanskraal. Mr Masobela accompanied the researcher on some days of the fieldwork research. He gave consent that the oracle be recorded for the purposes of this research.

Please refer to the pictures attached as appendix C for visuals of the variety of interviews that took place during the fieldwork research. The researcher selected a few pictures for the purposes of this research, from the many pictures that were taken during the interviews, with a wide range of diviners, in a number of places, in the country. Attached here as well (appendix A), is the schematic representation of planes of classification (cf. Turner 1969) indicating places and symbols in the context of divination (cf *Ngaka* Maamushi's divination place).

Most of the divination infrastructures were common and similar in many ways. Turner (1969:15) accommodates every unit of space and time, by convention, for something other than itself in this regard. The schematic representation indicates the importance of viewing 'space' and 'time' conjunctively. As Mircea Eliade (1959:20) postulates,

"for religious man, space is not homogeneous, he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others".

One entered each divinatory space, related to the two oracles question here, in a different way. In this regard Turner's concept of *rite de passage*, borrowed from Arnold van Gennep (1909), is helpful. Arnold van Gennep connected this concept to the idea of 'liminal space' (Turner 1969:94). According to van Gennep (cf. Turner 1969:94) concepts of *rite de passage*

"accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. Three phases are notable in this regard, namely; separation, liminality and reincorporation" .

Separation refers to the "symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure" (Turner 1969:94). Liminality on the other hand indicates that the "intervening 'liminal' period ... the characteristics of the ritual subject ... are ambiguous" (Turner 1969:94). Reincorporation means that the "individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more" (Turner 1969:95). Taking a cue from Turner's views the researcher's fieldwork had a triad of levels of experience, viz. separation, liminality and reincorporation. The researcher crossed boundaries and entered into the divinatory context (cf. photos 4,7 and 8)

The researcher was betwixt and between positions assigned and arrayed by the divination laws, customs, conventions and ceremonies. It was a state and experience of ambiguity and was characterised by indeterminate attributes as expressed by a rich variety of symbols, expressions and activities. Despite the ambiguity of characterising

this 'space' (Eliade 1959:20-24), the researcher ventured through it to discover and be discovered. Both the researcher and Mr Masobela allowed their 'spiritual space' to be interfered with and dictated upon by diviners. *Se ke seo bongaka e lego sona bagešo* ... (This is what divination is all about).

African indigenous healing systems has become one of the hotly debated terrains[1] in scholarship. Various perceptions are advanced from different paradigms. The general propensity in this regard underrates, or rather put aptly, down-writes, the positiveness of this fact[2].

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[1] van Binsbergen (1991) relates a story of his initiation into divination. He read a paper at the University of Cape Town in 1990 and was challenged by Prof Harriet Ngubane, a prolific author on anthropology and established in the field. The attack was based on her extensive rural research. She questioned the (unintended) suggestion that one could opt to be a sangoma. In her opinion one has to be chosen by the ancestors. Also Nokuzola Mndende in one of her articles entitled: *Initiation of "White Sangomas" within Xhosa Tradition*, (in: *Imibengo Yomthonyama* (April 2000), pp. 4-6), asserts strongly that 'no white person can become a sangoma'. Mndende strongly maintains that, "I want to be honest in this regard; the initiation of whites by Xhosa diviners is a false practice, from both sides ... I have never heard a white person *enqula* (invoking his/her ancestors) even in his/her language. I have never heard them telling us that they woke up with a song revealed to them, instead you sometimes hear them singing Xhosa songs. Does that mean that they are called by Xhosa ancestors or are their ancestors Xhosa? Strange!"

[2] Ferdinand (1999:84) argues that the nature of the African spiritual world is essentially ambivalent and dangerous. He further maintains that "the response to spirit attack exhibits a similar uniformity; on the one hand it may be repelled by exorcist

5.1 An interview with *Ngaka* Maamushi from Makgane, Ga-Sekhukhune, Northern Province[3]

Having entered the yard of *ngaka*[4] Maamushi I was led into the healing shrine *(ka ngwakwaneng wa kalafo*[5]). Ngaka Maamushi welcomed me and instructed that I take off my shoes. He then brought his bag full of divining bones and further instructed that I sit on the grass-made-mat, with my legs straight, facing the east. He explained this as a position helping me to 'look into myself' (*go ihlola*) and not to 'complain' (*go tlša pelaelo*). He then asked that I breathe into the bag which contained the divining bones[6] in order to bring life to the bones and let them live and tell their story about my

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techniques; on the other; concessions may be made to satisfy the spirit and give advantages to the victim."

[3] This is were most of the data was collected (cf. Photos 10,11,13,14,15,16,17,18 and 19).

[4] Sesotho for diviner-healer.

[5] Refer to Appendix A (Ngaka Maamushi's Cultic Lodge), which indicates planes of classification. It indicates a construction from the observational and exegetical data of a model of the semantic structure of this symbolism.

[6] *Ditaola* from Sepedi (or rather commonly known as Sesotho sa Leboa) is derived from the verb root '*laola*' which translates as 'to divine' or put scientifically, 'to seek or establish meaning'. As Peek (1991:2) rightly asserts,

life (*go di huetše gore di tlise bophelo gape*). Having breathed into the bag, I took it and threw the ingredients on the floor (*gore di tle di bolele gore ke lla kae eng*) and he began with his divination (*go thoma go laola*) process:

> "A divination is often the primary institutional means of articulating the epistemology of people ... is central to the expression and enactment of his or her cultural truths as they are reviewed in the context of contemporary realities."

In this case, the use of *ditaola* and going through the '*laola*' process in itself offer and guide the enquirer into the entire context of esoteric knowledge, symbolic power, and performative beauty. *Ditaola* are composed of various bones taken from different wild animals (cf. Appendix C, Photos 8 & 9). Like elephant, lion amongst others. The size is usually less than 10cm and made from wood, bone or ivory (van Binsbergen 1995:115). The use of the symbolic world and its images encodes the life of the living. This places a human being in close connection with nature. Nature is where human beings emerged and continue to live. For family typology divination bones (cf. *monna, mošimane, ngwanenyana, ngwana, mosadi* etc) refer to appendix B taken from the Ndabezitha Majola's cultic lodge. It should be noted that bone throwing differ from one cultic lodge to another. In the case of the Ndabezitha Majola's cultic lodge only diviner-healers are supposed to throw bones during the divination process. This is based on the perspective of cleansing versus *miasma (pollution)*. This cultic lodge (Ndabezitha Majola) emphasizes the importance of cleansing. Common expressions in this regard include among others: *sefifi* (literally from darkness – *lefifi*, *isiceto* or *monyama*). All these terminologies refer to *miasmic* propensities. According to Mrs Melita Lekota (chief diviner in the cultic lodge based in Soshanguve, Pretoria; "*Badimo ga ba rate go tshwara senyama*" – "Ancestors to not like miasma".

5.1.1 The Oracle

1. *Yaa!!*[7]

2. *Ke nna mogolo ke kakatlela dithaba*[8]

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[7] It acts as a 'constraint' to offer the narrator the 'space' and 'time' of fixing his discourse. One has to note that the narrator, in this case *ngaka* Maamushi, needs this 'space' and 'time' to stitch together prefabricated discourse.

[8] It is important for the diviner-healer to praise himself or herself. The opening of this praise-form-divination explains and establishes his potency in divining – 'I am the greatest to take charge of the mountains' as *Ngaka* Maamushi indicated in the oracle. Mountains are associated with ancestral spirits and at times seen as a 'haven' for ancestral activities. For instance, as Maamushi pointed out, most of Bapedi go up the mountain to perform rituals to invoke ancestors/tresses and plead with them to intervene in stopping drought by bringing rain. A good example is the famous mountain of *Modimo O 'lle*, literally 'The deity has eaten/devoured', which is situated along the N1 road to Pietersburg. It is next to Nylstroom, in the Northern province. The common belief system regarding this mountain is that: *Go tloga kgale-kgale go be go sa swanela gore batho ba ye kgauswi le thaba ya Modimo O 'lle. Ge motho a be a ka fihla go yona, ka kgonthe o be a sa boe. Tumelo ke gore badimo le Modimo ba dula gona mo thabeng. Ga se tshwanelo ya gore ba tshwenywe ntle le ge e le bona ba re tshwenyago* (Respondent: Mmameke Masoga, passed away in 1986, interviewed in 1985, June, 26). Translation: "Long long ago the living were not allowed to come close to the mountain. If a person happened to come close to the mountain he or she would not return or be seen alive. The belief system was that God and the ancestral spirits resided there and were not supposed to be disturbed at all. In this case, it was proper to be bothered by the ancestral spirits than to bother them". In addition, as mentioned in chapter six (orality theories), *ke nna mogolo ke kakatlela dithaba*, has both mnemonic and formulary patterns. It contains epithets and other formulary

3. *Ke bitša thaba tsa gešo*[9]

4. *Ke sepitsi se rwele katse*[10]

5. *Ke mošimane ga ke na mogolo – mogola*[11]

6. *Ke mogolo ke kakatlela dithaba*[12]

7. *Byale ga di je dire go mpherefere*[13]

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expressions that provide it with an interesting oral discourse structure. *Ngaka* Maamushi employs the noetic role of heroic 'heavy' figures that are 'bizarre' (cf. Appendix C - Photos 1,2 and 3).

[9] This refers to Ngaka Maamushi's ancestral cultic origin. As indicated in (8) mountains were and still are associated with sacredness.

[10] A very strong combination of various meanings in one statement. A symbolic and metaphorical use of concepts – note 'cat' and 'horse' (*sepitsi se rwele katse* – the horse carries a cat). The bravery of the horse is strongly emphasized. This links with the preceding line in which the performer recites about his cultic origin. *Sepitsi se rwele katse* refers to the 'family of cats' (*legoro labo katse*) e.g. lion, leopard etc. This is again a 'bizarre' expression. It helps *ngaka* Maamushi in a noetic manner to structure his oral divination oracle.

[11] To indicate and validate his potency, *Ngaka* Maamushi points out to his energetic constitution. He is like a 'young lad who is able to spring, run, and is overall alert'. One should note Sherzer's observation (cf. Ong 1982:64) that

> "Sometimes formulaic elements are managed in an effort to establish verbatimsameness, sometimes they work to implement a certain adaptability or variation".

[12] This appears like a formula in the oracle – see line 6.

8. *Ke mabyala a ditšukudu*[14]

9. *Eeh ... re a tsoga ...*[15]

10. *Re tsoga ka lena, gomme re re ...*[16]

11. *Hleng dibitša mabele ga di je?*[17]

12. *Thakadu*[18] *lota*[19] *motho, motho o lotwa ke beng*[20]

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[13] This is a typology of a bone fall – (*Di wele mpherefere'*). H A Mahlase (1996:64) in his comprehensive publication entitled: *Mokubega*, argues that this tablet or bone fall indicates '*go rerwa molato/monyanya/magadi*', which translates as 'it discusses/ communicates or converses a problem/crisis, feast or betrothal related matter. *Ga di je* ... 'they do not eat' in this case has a deeper meaning: 'they are not peaceful or at peace'.

[14] It is not clear whether Maamushi indicates his tribal totem (Setiloane 2000:17).

[15] This is a typical formula which introduces a totally different swing of fate. It literally translates, 'We are awake ...' which means 'we are fine' with a sarcastic underpinning.

[16] We are well because of the support of the ancestral spirits '*lena*' – '*we*' – collectively.

[17] The line emphasises line 7 '*Di wele mpherefere* ...' and negates line 9 *'Eeh re a tsoga ...'*.

[18] *Thakadu* translates '*Orycteropus afer*'. The animal is important for diviners. The bone is used to indicate a diviner it belongs to, it is an animals that digs swiftly. The diviner in this case is said to go deep into the hermeneutics of life philosophies. In this case, *Ngaka* Maamushi invokes his ancestral spirits to come with a divining power to assist in the divination process.

[19] Protect the inquirer or the client.

13. Motse bare o lotwa ke beng[21]

14. Ke mabyana[22] *ke mahlatlamane*[23]

15. Re tšea maoto a tšukudu[24]

16. Re aketša balata[25] ...

17. Palabadi ya mmabošego[26]

18. Eeh... re a lekwa mofase[27]

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[20] *Ke beng* in this case refers to the ancestral spirits of the client to take charge, '*lota*'.

[21] This line strengthens the previous line. *Lota* and *ke beng* is repeated to emphasise the importance of the ancestral spirits.

[22] *Ngaka* Maamushi continues to praise the divining tablets. In this case, they are referred to as 'small stones' which are admirable '*mabyana*'.

[23] The 'admirable small stones' are 'collected' and put in one place to give meaning to life, *'mahlahlamane'.*

[24] Literally, 'we take the feet of a hippopotamus'. The diviner indicates further the importance of 'animal bones' to master human fate and success.

[25] *Balata* are slaves or servants. It is not clear whether the diviner uses sarcasm in this case. Slaves and servants are said to be lied to.

[26] The night star *'mmabošego'* is mentioned. This indicates another aspect of the divination process. The star is said to move through the night. The diviner evokes the ancestral spirits to respond to all questions and doubts of the inquirer. It is believed that when night falls, it opens space and time for personal and collective reflections, (*'palabadi'),* on life and its upheavals.

19. Maraga[28] *dibetlele makokoma – bare go letše ba go lala ba kwile*[29]

20. Eeh ... ga e le sehlako sa mmamomosepedi wa nošî[30] *...*

21. Dire[31] *mola tlase*[32] *go pitlagana*[33] *Noko*[34]

22. O sale lesogana la go kgahlwakgahlwa[35]*.*

23. Mola basadi e le dintsheba diya nokeng di boye dintsheba[36]

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[27] Literally, 'we hear you on the ground' – it refers to the ancestral spirits who are said to be on the ground (*'ba mo fase'*).

[28] Sepedi for dung.

[29] *Ba re go letše ba go lala ba kwile.* This refers to the ancestral spirits who are said to be awake and understand the affairs of the living.

[30] The diviner indicates to the client that his affairs are not fine. *Sehlako* (traditional shoe) in this case refers to his well being, indicating that he is not well at all.

[31]To be understood as : "they say" or "the divine tablets say that...."

[32] *Mola tlase* ... literally, means "down there" – referring to the life of the client or inquirer.

[33] *Go pitlagano* means "there is trouble or crisis."

[34] It is the totemism of the inquirer – he venerates *Noko.*

[35] "You are still a young man who is still looking for this and that girl to marry."

[36] Women are said to be unpredictable. In this case the inquirer is not decisive on whom to take as a wife.

24. Bare ntshebele motho o sebelwa ke wabo[37]

25. Wa dikwaa?[38]

26. O re ... eng![39] ...

27. O monna a sa nyaka[40] ...

28. Seo e lego segwana sa meetse[41] *seo o tlogo se bona*[42] ...

29. *Wa tia ka sona wa tla wa etša ba bangwe*[43]

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[37] Literally – let your ancestral spirits help you in this case.

[38] Do you hear what they are saying? – The inquirer is asked to confirm if he really understood what the divine tablets were saying.

[39] It is important for the inquirer to agree or disagree.

[40] You are still a man looking for a woman to marry. In this case the diviner reiterates the oracle line 21.

[41] *Segwana sa metsi* literally translates 'The traditional container for water'. The metaphorical use of the term refers to a bride. Bapedi use the expression in a dowry context to ask and converse about the wedding preparations.

[42] The diviner assures the inquirer that he will surely get a suitable woman to marry. It is clear that the source of crisis (*'mpherefere')* in the life of the inquirer was to get married to a suitable woman approved by the ancestral spirits.

[43] *Wa tia ka sona ... wa etša ba bangwe* .... Marriage is held in high esteem. It is the institution that is supported by and that supports the ancestral spirits. An unmarried person is never considered whole until he or she enters into this important institution. Indeed, ancestral spirits cannot be harboured outside a family. It is referred to as *'lenaka la motheo'* ('the horn of foundation'). The belief is that when one gets married

5.1.2 Translation

1. Indeed/Yes
2. I am big/great, I hold the mountains
3. I call upon my home/local mountains
4. I belong to the place were lions and leopards stay
5. I am a lad and do not have *mogola-mogola*
6. I am big/great, and I hold the mountains
7. Now they take a different turn/swing
8. These are mabyala a *tšhukudu*
9. Yes, we are alive
10. We live by you, he says...
11. Why are they calling for mealies and they do not eat?
12. *Thakadu* take protection of a person, a person is protected by his or her's
13. They say a home is protected by its own person
14. It is *mabyana* and *mahlatlamane*

(from a masculine perspective) the father or the authoritative male person designated in the family is supposed to hand over this '*lenaka la motheo*' to the marrying male person. The horn should be kept in a secluded place and can only be taken out in times of trial and tribulation and be used according to the prescribed rules and regulations governing the ritual itself. It is a protective 'horn'. For instance, when a baby is born and the diviner-healer is not around, the head of the family *(hlogo ya lapa)* is supposed to take out the 'horn' and perform the ritual that fits. The use of this 'horn' is considered to be the grand finale in ensuring the survival of the baby (*ngwana*).

15. We take the ... of a *tšhukudu*
16. We lie to the servants
17. Troubles of *mmabošego* (literally, queen of the night)
18. Yes ... we hear you, those on the ground
19. *Dung dibetlele makokoma* – they say it is those who are asleep who have heard
20. The shoe of the man who walk alone
21. They reveal trouble or crisis down there - *Noko*
22. You are still a young man who is still interested in women with the purpose of getting married
23. Women are gossipers all the time
24. Be told or informed by your ancestral spirits
25. Do you hear?
26. You should say yes...
27. You are a man still looking for a suitable woman to marry...
28. You will definitely get a suitable woman to marry
29. You will have a firm family and be like other people who have strong families.

(This was then followed by the interpretation and implication of the oracle)

5.2 Interview with Ngaka Nkosi of Majaneng

Ngaka Nkosi is married to Mr Nkosi who is also a diviner-healer (cf. Appendix C – Photos 20 and 21) I was not able to secure an appointment for both of them but could only have a discussion with Mrs Nkosi. She has a strong background in Sepedi divination and healing practices. The couple lives in the rural village of Majaneng,

under Kgosi Kekana of the Matebele-a-Moletlane. The oracle was uttered for Mr Masobela, the young man who accompanied me. Mrs Nkosi indicated to me that she had no problem in demonstrating how the bones are interpreted but asked one of us to be willing to go through the divining process. Mr Masobela could not wait to jump for the opportunity of being divined by Mrs Nkosi. He further pointed out that he had no problem for the recordings being used in this study. Mrs Nkosi further asked that R30, 00 be put beneath the mat (*legogo*) as this was necessary for the ancestral spirits to understand the seriousness of the business of divining. The oracle-divination by Mrs Nkosi differs considerably from that of *Ngaka* Maamushi because of its mixed formulae. As we will observe, the Nguni expression '*siyavuma*' permeates the oracle. This is a typical oracle that is encountered when one visits many diviner-healers. The *siyavuma* interjection is well contained. When asked why this expression was used with the Sepedi oracular, Mrs Nkosi indicated that the expression is more convenient than the Sepedi expression: *Eng re a dumela* or *Thobela re kwana le tsona*. A typical Isizulu oracle would be rhythmically contained and guided by this expression: For instance, the diviner-healer would say something like this: *Vumani bo!* and the respondents around would respond affirmatively: *Siyavuma!*

5.2.1 The Oracle

1. A re yeng le ditaola[44] *– siyavuma*

[44] This is an interesting formula – It functions as both the opening phrase and it also paces the divination process. The diviner uses this formulation to call for the attention of the audience present and at the same time authorises the divining bones to

2. *Ka mokgwa wo dibolelago ka gona*[45] – *siyavuma*

3. *Ge ke eya ke tsamaya le taola tša gago*[46] - *siy.*

---

function. It means "Let us begin and go along with the divination process". The audience is supposed to respond affirmatively: *siyavuma*, ('We agree'). It is important for both the diviner-healer and the audience present to find a common space of agreement. This affirms the divination process. This again shows the inter-cultural nature of African divination and healing. *Siyavuma* is in this case expressed in a Sepedi context. Divination in an African context is both dynamic and inter-cultural, and it further employs varied devices and patterns. Some of these devices and patterns are borrowed from other African cultural orientations.

[45] As bones speak. In line 1 (one) the diviner-healer was able to exhort her audience to go along in the divination process. In this case she builds on the formulary pattern and emphasises the fact that the divining bones have the capacity to 'speak' the 'truth'. The divining bones are said to be powerful as they reveal the mysteries of life, for life, against life, and on life. Life's binary oppositions are detected and analysed through the process of divining bones. The diviner-healer uses the expression *'ka mokgwa wo di bolelago ka gona'* ('as they speak'). It seeks to keep both the speaker and audience on track.

[46] "As I go along with your bones" or, the divination process. The diviner-healer introduces an interesting discourse. She introduces her ability and authority of divination. In this case, she sets apart her role as the diviner and places the audience as people who are in the process of being divined. One should note the expression 'I'. The 'I' in this case indicates the special expertise endowed on the diviner to divine. It is at this particular time that one distinguishes the skill and art of the diviner. This is necessary for the sake of the authority the diviner-healer has to command. The reason behind this is the fact that the diviner and her authority should be valued highly. It is essential to ensure that the entire process continues without any interruption. The audience should definitely trust the diviner. In the process the entire procedure of divination will ultimately be a trustworthy exercise. It is noteworthy to see

4. Eeh ditaola tša gago di wele makgolela papa[47] *– siy.*

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line 1-3 as being formed by divination formulae. Being at the beginning, the three lines are not only formulae, but also function as the introductory process to divination. I was able to notice the difference in voicing these formulae throughout the divination process. This formulary pattern is used repeatedly throughout the divination oracle, but varies in terms of word emphasis.

[47] This means that the client or enquirer might have been ill for some time already - a chronic disease of some kind. From the onset, the diviner-healer indicates the type of bone fall for this particular divination. *Makgolela* bone fall is different from the *mpherefere* bone fall we observed in the case of the first oracle we have looked at. The latter is more serious. The diviner-healer would actually advise the inquirer to become more serious as circumstances would demand a speedy intervention. The other bone falls are as follows: 1. *Mogolori* has to do with dreams that are directly linked to the ancestral realm (*go lora badimo*). 2. *Moraro wa mogolo* has to do with family or house fights or conflicts. 3. *Morarwana* explains something that could be seen or experienced in the immediate future. 4. *Masupša* explains the silent fight in which the inquirer identifies a silent and subtle opponent. 5. *Legwana* explains problems of a female (young lady) person. 6. *Mabyana* refers to the clan uncles. 7. *Sehlako* explains to the inquirer that he or she should stand firm and fight a hard battle for life. 8. *Legwame* explains the ripe mealies or an old man. 9. *Hlapadiba* explains to the inquirer to move on and seek divine or healing advice further on. In this case the diviner does not want to engage himself or herself with the divination or healing process since he or she might not be fit for it in terms of the competition, or rather that the ancestral realm does not at all approve of him or her to take on the challenge. 10. *Merekwe* explains a fight between a husband and wife. 11. *Thwagadima* explains a mental disease. 12. *Morupi* explains the disease of a child caused by the mother's womb. 13. *Selomi* explains a young man who is a weakling. Refer to Appendix C indicating some divining bones from the *Ndabezitha Majola* divination lodge (*impande ka Ndabezitha Majola*).

5. Ge ke eya ke bolela le taola tša gago[48] *– siy.*

6. Molomo ka bašemanyana[49] *– siy.*

7. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[50] *– siy.*

8. Ge ke eya ke bolela le ditaola tša gago[51] *– siy.*

9. Papa waka gona le melomo ya bašemanyana mo morago ga gago papa waka[52]*– siy.*

10. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[53] *– siy.*

---

[48] Formulary patterns and expressions.

[49] *Molomo* (mouth) is used in this case as generic term. Young boys are talking about the client. Clearly, the content of what these alleged 'boys' are talking about is not good news at all for the client.

[50] The formulary pattern. Repetition keeps the speaker and audience on track. Both their minds (speaker and audience) are "forced into a slowed-down pattern that affords it the opportunity to interfere with and re-organize its more normal, redundant processes" (Ong 1982:40). The aim is to encourage fluency, fullsomeness and volubility (Ong 1982:40-41).

[51] Repetitive formulary pattern. Refer to lines 3,5 and 8. It heightens expectancy or suspense just before the main cause of the problem is disclosed or announced (cf. line 10).

[52] The diviner-healer reiterates the fact that the client has opponents who continue to speak ill about him. This emphasis is in the middle of the formulae, note lines 7 and 8 and thereafter lines 10 and 11. In this case, the discourse changes from or makes minor variations to line 6. The singular form *'molomo'* becomes the plural, *'melomo'* to bring about greater clarity on the divination oracle.

[53] Repetitive formulary pattern and expression.

11. Ge ke eya bolela le ditaola tša gago[54] *– siy.*

12. Ke nnete gona le sebakwa[55] *– siy.*

13. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[56] *– siy.*

14. Ge ke eya ke bolela le ditaola tša gago[57] *–siy.*

15. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[58] *– siy.*

16. Gona le mohlakola[59] *– siy.*

17. Gona le motho wa senna[60] *– siy.*

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[54] Formulary pattern and expression. As indicated in 52 the function of the formulae in lines 7,8,10 and 11 enclose the importance of message (oracle) in line 9. Surely, the client would hear the rhythmic patterns and thus, the message would come home powerfully. Oracles are supposed to be heard and the message thereof carried further.

[55] The diviner-healer reiterates the fact that there are problems facing the client. Even in this case, the formulary arrangement encloses this oracular message. The formulary patterns in this oracle function to carry the message of the oracles powerfully and comprehensively.

[56] Formulary pattern.

[57] Formulary pattern.

[58] Formulary pattern.

[59] The diviner-healer reiterates the bone fall – *Mohlakola.* Refer to appendix C examples of divining bones.

[60] The oracle changes from the collective form of young male opponents and focuses only on one specific male opponent.

18. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[61] *– siy.*

19. Ge ke eya ke kitima le ditaola tša gago[62] *– siy.*

20. Mohlakola wa gore gona le ngwanenyana wo ailego a tšewa ke mošemanyana[63] *– siy.*

21. Ngwanenyana wo o bego o dula le yena o go tšwile matsogong[64] *– siy.*

22. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[65] *– siy.*

23. Ge ke eya ke bolela le ditaola tša gago[66] *– siy.*

24. O go tšwile matsogong wa thoma go dula ka pelo e ntsho[67] *– siy.*

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[61] This formulary pattern emphasises and supports the oracle, line 17.

[62] The diviner-healer introduces a new formula – 'as I run along with bones'. This is interesting to note. The diviner-healer uses her skill in articulating words and formulating new expressions in the process of the divination.

[63] *Mohlakola* is further emphasised in the context of fight or conflict as regards a woman. There is a tension brewing between the client and the male opponent, instigated by a young woman who was once involved with the client in a love relationship. This is indeed a love triangle.

[64] The young woman is said to have left the client for another man, presumably the young male opponent already referred to in the oracle above.

[65] Formulary pattern.

[66] Formulary pattern.

[67] The above preceding 22 and 23 prepare the reiteration of this line (24). The reiteration maintains the fact that the client lost his former lover.

25. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[68] *– siy.*

26. Mo yena a nyakago gore lerato la lena le ka boya gape[69] *– siy.*

27. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[70] *– siy.*

28. O a itshola mo pelong ya gagwe[71] *– siy.*

29. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[72] *– siy.*

30. Ge ke kitima le ditaola tša gago[73] *– siy.*

31. O hlokomele ngwanaka[74] *– siy.*

32. Mo ditaoleng tša gago[75] *– siy.*

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[68] Formulary pattern strengthening line 24.

[69] The formulary pattern changes from three and two lines to one to indicate a shift. The oracle indicates that the young woman is sad that she separated with the client and that she wants to reconcile with him if permitted to do so.

[70] Formulary pattern.

[71] The girlfriend in question is sorry about the decision she took by leaving the client.

[72] Formulary pattern.

[73] Formulary pattern. Note line 19.

[74] The client is seriously warned to take care of his affairs. Even in this case, the *'mohlakola'* bone fall (*lewa la mohlakola*) is emphasised.

[75] For the first time, the diviner-healer introduces an emphatic expression, literally 'in or according to your bones'. This expression strengthens the oracle and its underpinnings for the client's life and affairs. It should be noted that artistic and skillful

33. Gona le motho yoo a go šetšego morago[76] *– siy.*

34. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[77] *– siy.*

35. Mo ba ratago go tima lebone, ba re o hlalefile kudu[78] *– siy.*

36. Phuthi ya bo malope[79] *a re ke sepela ka go ikgoga – siy.*

37. Ke bolela gore le mmele wa gago o re ke lapile la go hwa[80] *– siy.*

38. Ga o sale mošemane wa go tsoga wa maloba le maobane[81] *– siy.*

---

communication is pertinent in maintaining the conversation between the client and the diviner. Correct, or to be precise, appropriate wording and articulation should be maintained to carry out the message of the oracle.

[76] The diviner healer uses a concealed manner of speech ('there is a person who is after you'). This line presupposes the male opponent already introduced earlier on in the course of the oracular discourse.

[77] Line 34 immediately reinforces line 33 about the unidentified figure who has 'malicious' intentions concerning the client.

[78] Lines 35 to 41 discuss the content of the malicious intentions of the client's opponents. It is interesting that the diviner switches from singular to plural forms. The opponents want to kill the client.

[79] *Phuthi ya malope* – literally 'the small antelope' (cf. some form of euphemism). The diviner uses an encoded form of language. It refers to the fact that the sexual organs of the client are no longer potent enough (*'a re ke sepela ka go ikgoga'*).

[80] A more vivid commentary is provided immediately by the diviner – the sexual performance of the client is no longer as good as it used to be.

[81] Further commentary is provided. The client is no longer active as he used to be.

39. Ga o sale mošemane wa go tsoga wola wa maloba le maobane[82] *– siy.*

40. Ke ra gore, ge o hlakane le banenyana goba motho wa sesadi o a lapa[83] *– siy.*

41. Ga o sale wa maloba le maobane[84] *– siy.*

42. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[85] *– siy.*

43. Selo se se dira gore ge o hlakane le motho wa sesadi o fellwa ke maatla[86] *– siy.*

44. Bothata bo mading[87] *– siy.*

45. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona[88] *– siy.*

46. Ge ke bolela le ditaola tša gago[89] *– siy.*

47. Mosadi le yena pelo ya gagwe ke e ntsho[90] *– siy.*

---

[82] The commentary provided in line 38 is reiterated. It looks as if the diviner considers this 'department' of life to be central in the affairs of the client.

[83] The most vivid explanation is provided – 'It means that when you meet with female people in bed you are a failure in bed'.

[84] You are no longer active as you used to be.

[85] This is immediately followed by a formulary pattern and expression.

[86] The diviner is about to mention the cause of the problem.

[87] The problem is in the blood circulation and content thereof.

[88] Formulary pattern.

[89] Formulary pattern.

48. O rata go boela go wena papa[91] *– siy.*

49. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola dibolelago ka gona[92] *– siy.*

50. O tiiše mmele wa gago papa[93] *– siy.*

51. Lehono go timile ngwanaka[94] *– siy.*

52. Ge ke bolela le ditaola tša gago[95] *– siy.*

53. O hlokomele o se tlo wela kotsing[96] *– siy.*

54. Sebakwa ke gore bare o hlalefile kudu o ka tlo tsoša lapa la geno[97] *– siy.*

55. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola dibolelago ka gona[98] *– siy.*

---

[90] The diviner goes back to the girlfriend's sub-discourse. She, it is alleged, is sad about the separation.

[91] The girlfriend wants to be reconciled with the client.

[92] Formulary pattern which both closes and introduces the counselling sub-discourse.

[93] The client is advised to fortify (*tiiša*) his body (*mmele*).

[94] The main reason for the physical fortification is based on the fact that the client has no support and cannot withstand challenges facing him.

[95] Formulary pattern in the counselling sub-discourse.

[96] The client is advised to be extra careful and not fall into traps that might destroy his life.

[97] Another reason for this subtle conflict is because of the jealousy.

[98] Formulary pattern.

56. Ge re ya re bolela le ditaola tša gona[99] *– siy.*

57. Le ka ga geno di gata mohlakola dire pheko e timile[100] *– siy.*

58. Ge ke bolela le ditaola tša gago[101] *– siy.*

59. Dire o tiye le lapa la geno le tle le loke[102] *– siy.*

60. Ka mokgwa wo ditaola dibolelago ka gona[103] *– siy.*

61. Ge ke kitima le ditaola tša gago[104] *– siy.*

5.2.2 Translation

1. Let us go along with the bones – we agree (siyavuma)!

2. According to your bones

3. As I do along with your bones

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[99] Formulary pattern.

[100] The oracle makes references to the client's family. It is mentioned that there is 'mohlakola'.

[101] Formulary pattern.

[102] Reiteration of the fact that the client has to fortify and strengthen himself to withstand upcoming life threatening challenges.

[103] Formulary pattern.

[104] The oracle closes with a formulary pattern and expression (*'Ge ke kitima le ditaola tša gago'*). In this regard the formulary pattern and expression becomes a closing

4. Yes! It is a difficult or critical bone fall

5. As I go along with your bones

6. Mouth by boys

7. According to your bones

8. As I go along with your bones

9. There are mouths of boys – after you

10. According to your bones

11. As I speak about your bones

12. Indeed, there is a conflict

13. According to your bones

14. As I speak about your bones

15. According to your bones

16. It is a critical bone fall

17. There is a male opponent

18. According to your bones

19. As I go along with your bones

20. A crisis-fall (divination fall): that you once had a girlfriend who was forcefully taken from you by a certain boy

21. Your girl friend left you

22. According to your bones

23. As I speak about your bones

24. She slipped through fingers - she feels bad about that

---

formula. The audience (cf. the client) emphasized the closure by both a sigh and the *siyavuma* interjection to indicate the measure of the oracular message.

25. According to your bones

26. She wants to come back to you

27. According to your bones

28. She is sorry internally

29. According to your bones

30. As I run along with your bones

31. Be careful my son

32. In the context of your bones

33. There is a person who is after you

34. According to your bones

35. They would switch off the light of life in you by claiming that you think yourself better intellectually

36. Your sexual organs are tired

37. I mean your body is tired

38. You are no longer that active person in bed

39. You are no longer that active person in bed

40. I mean when you are in the act with a woman in bed

41. Indeed you are no longer the same

42. According to your bones

43. As bones speak

42. As I speak about your bones

43. You feel weak when you meet a female person

44. It is in your blood

45. According to your bones

46. As I speak about your bones

47. Your girl friend is not happy

48. She wants a second chance with you

49. According to your bones

50. Strengthen your body

51. Today there is absolute darkness

52. As I speak about your bones

53. Be careful of falling into danger

54. The reason is that they think that you are wise and could save your family from misery

55. As bones speak

56. As we speak about your bones

57. There is also some trouble in your family

58. As I speak about your bones

59. Be strong and fortify your family

60. According to your bones

61. As I run through your bones

Chapter Six

6. Theories of Orality

The preceding chapters dealt with the data on African divination oracles. This chapter attempts to treat the oral characteristics in terms of some of the scholarly theories. The researcher, to a larger extent, makes references to the work of Walter Ong in the field of orality versus literacy. The researcher is very much aware of the controversy that exists in this specific field (cf. Jensen 1980). He (the researcher) uses Ong's perspective to provide some basics on orality for the research work. The chapter basically outlines some key features of orality which underline the main thrust of the research work.

Ruth Finnegan (1970:2) rightly observed that "Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion". In this study the researcher wishes to show that oracle-speech in the context of divination (*ho hlola*, or *go hlola, tinhlolo* and *ukuhlola*) is both dependent on a performer and the performer's formulations . The latter provide situational definitions and shape the functional dimensions for many oral communities. Later on, this perspective will be verified as it relates to ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean contexts.

Oral theory emerged from classical philology. This was the accomplishment of Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the 1930's (cf. *The Singer of Tales* by Albert Lord in

1960). This feat meant a methodological shift from philology to other disciplines or fields of study such as folklore studies, social anthropology, oral history and biblical studies. In 1985, *Oral Formulaic Theory and Research* (John Miles Foley's bibliography) and the journal entitled: Oral Tradition (dealing explicitly with matters related to Oral Theory) were published. Following this, important scholarly literature further developed on the basis of the seminal work of particularly Walter Ong (*The Presence of the Word* (1967), *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the evolution of consciousness and Culture* (1977), *Orality and Literacy* (1982)) and Ruth Finnegan (*Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), *Literacy and Non-literacy* (1970), and *Oral Poetry: Its nature: significance and social context* (1977)). Later, there was an attempt to view the early Christian creeds and controversies about the Trinity from an oral-literacy perspective by scholars such as Thomas Farrel (*Early Christian creeds and controversies in the light of the oral-literacy hypothesis* (1987).

As Finnegan (1970:2) argues,

> "Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion - there is no other way in which it can be realised as literary product".

Finnegan (1970:2) further adds that these 'art forms' are also actualised in and through their performance in the broader context of oral culture. Oral literature, some scholars argue, involves the following: full actualisation, symbolic associations of words and phrases, the actual enactment, emotional situation and expression and the total effectiveness of the performance (Finnegan 1970:3). It is characterised by devices such as expressiveness of tone (it provides the structural element in literary

expression), gesture, facial expression, dignity, humour, and receptivity to the reactions of the audience, etc. (Finnegan 1970:3 and Foley 1974:6). Similarly, Ong (1982:6, 1967:1-9) maintains that

> "Human beings communicate in countless ways, making use of their senses, touch, taste, smell, and especially sight, as well as hearing".

In this case the recorder of oral words has to take into account these vital and essential aspects of the actual performance. This is significant, because as Foley (1974:417) concludes in his doctoral work: "To perform is to ritualise".

6.1 Oral techniques – theories to be considered

This research works within the confinements of orality as opposed to "literacy". The argument affirms the important role oracle plays in the foundation and development of oral communities - hence, the focus on divination. For a better understanding of this phenomenon, the researcher has concentrated on the theories of (or rather) oral techniques as discussed by Walter Ong.

Words, in their true sense, are not solely made up of letters but of their functional units or phonemes. This fact challenges the current view of language as merely founded on written rather than phonetic nuances. Language largely is and will continue to be an oral phenomenon (Ong 1982:6).

Ong challenges the views (Finnegan 1970) which reduce oral art forms to literature. This is his opinion (1982:12):

> "Writing, moreover ... is a particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity that tends to assimilate other things to itself even without the aid of etymologies".

He reasons that oral art forms are texts, with the exception that they were not written down but handed down orally. These written traditions or oral expressions have continued to exit and still exist without any writing activity at all. Even so, one has to note the phenomenon of neo-orality as it is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices (cf. The SABC, TV 2 production – *Tholoana tsa Sethepu*). The obvious difference between the act of writing and oral art forms is that "writing tyrannically locks them (words) into a visual field forever" (Ong 1982:12). Therefore, Ong (1982:12) rightly concludes that,

> "it appears quite impossible to use the term 'literature' to include oral tradition and performance without subtly but immediately reducing these somehow to variants of writing".

Current scholarship is seriously challenged, to borrow from Ong's metaphor, to desist from putting the cart before the horses. The cart comes only after the horse and not the other way around.

The other area that needs earnest clarity is the current use of the term 'preliterate'. Ong (1982:13) cautions on the use of the term, because of the biases associated with it. Therefore, for this thesis, a more acceptable term is that of the 'epos', originally from Greek '*epos*', and which literally means: 'to say' or 'word'. This is also present in the Latin equivalent, '*vox*, voice'. The term has come to mean '*epic*', and therefore, making for identifying 'oral literature' rather as '*oral epics*' (Ong 1982:14). Placing

emphasis on oral performance, the research will refer to these oral art forms as 'oral voicings'.

Orality as a subject of study is not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced back diachronically in the history of orality to the Old Testament tradition - it had oral speech tendencies (cf. *Qoheleth* – i.e. with its 'assembly speaker'). It (tradition) was definitely neither chirographically nor typographically perceived. Rather, it was oral.

Further, as far as the Homeric corpus is concerned, scholars (Parry 1971, Foley 1977 and Lord 1960) became aware of a distinction between the Iliad and Odyssey. Studies concluded that both texts differed from each other regarding the ancient Greek poetry (Ong 1982:19). The centrality of the 'power of memory' (mnemonics) in orality was the conclusion that Milman Parry drew.

Parry focused on the Odyssey and treated the text from the perspective of ancient Greek hexametrical verse or poetry. His view was that "Homer stitched together prefabricated parts" (Ong 1982:22). According to Ong (1982:23), in support of Parry:

> "Written narrative and other written discourses use themes, too, of necessity, but the themes are definitely more varied and less obtrusive".

Furthermore, Ong (1982:14) maintains,

> "formula and formulary and formulaic ... referring quite generically to more or less exactly repeated set phrases or set expressions in verse or prose ... do have a function in oral culture more crucial and persuasive than any they may have in

a writing or print or electronic culture" (Finnegan 1970 and 1977, Opland, Mbiti 1970).

It should be noted that the formulaic style referred to by Ong does not only mark poetry alone, but it marks, more or less, all thought and expression in primary oral voicings and culture (Ong 1982:26).

Marshall McLuhan (1967) introduced an interesting focus on what he called 'gnomic sayings'. His methodical focus was basically eclectic. He focused on oracular pronouncements and concluded that they (oracular pronouncements) were deeply perceptive. It is the intention of this research study to look at the oracles from the perspective of oral voicings and culture. For this reason, it is fitting to move to a section that deals with theories or dynamics of orality. This is what this chapter mainly focuses on.

6.2 Theories or dynamics of Orality

6.2.1 Sounding words and their dynamism

The Hebrew word *dabar* gives some idea with regard to the dynamism with which the uttered word is considered in oral culture. It is literally translated as "word", but carries the force of both 'word' and 'event' (Ong 1982:32). In most cases, words that are said are not easily erased from the mind, hence the Sepedi expression: *Lentšu ga le bowe go bowa monwana.* This simply means that in the context of the agony between two people - and oral and literate cultures for example - the said words are more memorable than the actual actions that were used. The mnemonic patterns are always around the 'said word' because of the power that words carry in any context of

communication (Malinowski 1923:451, Ong 1982:32). The oral utterance carries much power because of its dynamism. A closer example found within an oral cultural setting is the naming of children at birth. For example, Mmatebogo (Mother of thanksgiving) is a word that is given to children to mark an important event that occurred within the family or village. Oral cultural people have names that they give to signify power over what they name (Ong 1982:33).

6.2.2 Mnemonic and formula patterns

Oral art forms make use of mnemonics and formulas to sustain thought and expression. What is known, what a person living in an oral culture is able to recall, stems from oral communication events.

The common technique used in such memorising and memory derives from the mnemonic patterns shaped for ready oral recurrence in expression. This type of device is characterised by heavy rhythmic, balanced patterns, repetitions or antithesis, alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings, in proverbs, or other structured formats and determined by other mnemonic forms (Ong 1982:34). Mnemonic patterns determine the structure of syntax in this regard. The benefit of making use of formulary expressions helps one to implement rhythmic discourse and also act as mnemonic aid (Ong 1982:35), because they form the substance or fibre of the thought itself in the context of an oral discourse.

6.2.3 Thought and expression in oral discourse

Thought and expression in oral discourse is sustained in two ways, additively and aggregatively (Ong 1982:37). The additive nature of thought and expression refers to the use of conjunctions in the discourse, e.g. 'and'. The common Sepedi conjunctive strategy in an oral telling set-up is expressed by **'ya ba'** (and then) throughout the discourse. Note the following excerpts from a typical Sepedi folktale told to the *digotlane* (children) *ka mafure mo mollong* (at the back of the main home around the fire). It has to be kept in mind that the telling of tales had a specific aim. Children were reared in this way to become prominent and useful members of the community. The tale is usually told by *mohlami le mmolela dinonwane* (the composer and teller of folktales).

"Bana baka theeletšang le se robale ge ke le botša nonwane ye e latelago ...
Tau le mmutla ba be ba kwana kudu ka matla ... **ya ba** mmutla o re go tau...
'a re age mošašana gore ge pula e ena re se tlo nelwa' ...**ya ba** tau o kwana le taba ya mogweragwe mmutla... **ya ba** ba thoma go nyaka dikota tša go rulela ..."

"Children listen and do not sleep when I tell you the following tale ... A lion and a hare were real good friends ... and then a hare said to the lion ... 'let us built a house to protect ourselves from heavy rains' ... and then the lion agreed to the plan of the hare' ... and then they started looking for strong sticks for the roofing of the intended or envisaged house..."

It is evident that the 'and then' (ya ba) expression appears three times in the above oral discourse. Oral art speakers make use of this technique to sustain and provide for progress in the oral narrative. Its flow is partly facilitated by this technique and the audience is kept in touch and has a flowing feel of the discourse content. The additive technique 'ya ba' is submerged in a compound discourse and determines the flow and progress of the narrative itself. It should be mentioned at this stage that the audience 'additively' participate in the discourse by saying: *nkelenketla* (it is hard to translate). This device ensures the full participation of the audience and it keeps them listening with interest. *Nkelenketla* is said immediately after every brief pause by the *mmolela dinonwane*. Further, the *mmolela dinonwane* is offered an opportunity to formulate his or her narrative in the process of telling it to the audience. This is a pragmatic way in dealing with communication in an oral context. This is also evident from the section above dealing with African divination oracles, especially the *siyavuma* (we concur) device.

Second is the aggregative technique. Memory is sustained by the use of epithets and other formulary baggage (Ong 1982:39). The use of attributes in this case keeps the aggregate intact (Ong 1982:39). Note the following oral poetry taken from the novel by U N Shai-Ragoboya (36), entitled: *O Se-Ke*. Nta-malomela-kobong (p.36), where the character sings praises to himself:

Nkwe se ile go hlabiwa.

Ke se leŝwega la ga Mokwape,

Ke ila mabala go senywa

Ke serurubele sa ga Mpe;

Serurubele sehloka letlalo,

Sehloka šapo le tiya

Leopard do not disapprove to be slaughtered.

It is the coward of Mokwape'

I am against scars of laughter

I am the butterfly of Mpe;

The butterfly that does not have a skin,

The one that does not have strong bone

The character (Nta-malomela-kobong) in this regard uses epithets or attributes in his oral praise poetry. Logically, it is easier to remember one's oral praise poem when the content contains expressions that are easily remembered. Note that the word 'coward' (leswega) is juxtaposed with Mokwape in the second line of the oral praise poem.

6.2.4 Redundant propensity

As in the case of the 'additive' tendency in oral discourse, the discourse uses redundancy to keep the thought and expression continuing (Ong 1982:39). Words are repeated by the interlocutor to keep both the discourse and audience on track (Ong 1982:40). In this case, the mind framework is facilitated to slow down a bit within this pattern and affords it the opportunity to interfere with and reorganise its more normal,

redundant processes. This is definitely fitting before a large audience for obvious acoustical effects (Ong 1982:40). The repetition of words before a large audience offers an opportunity for one to catch up with both the substance and momentum of the oral discourse in a fluent, fullsome and volubious manner. Referring back to the oral praise poetry by Nta-malomela-kobong in Shai-Ragoboya's novel, the praise singer repeats: *Ke nna* (I am) (line 3 and 4). The repetition in this regard is powerful and offers the audience a flow in the tune of the praise song itself.

6.2.5 Conservative?

The question mark after the word conservative is put rhetorically. Surely, the redundance and additive character of oral discourse do not imply that there is an absence of originality. Oral narrators do introduce new elements in the process of their narration. Making use of old stories in the discourse is compounded with new ideas, themes, expressions and thoughts in the process of the discourse (Ong 1982:42).

Mrs Stella Makatu fascinated me. She is a praise singer in one of the congregations (Majaneng) I once served in the Northern province. Mrs Makatu is known for her praises for the new confirmants in the Church (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa). I was able to listen to her praises to the confirmants over a period of four years. What fascinated one was the fact that she maintained the same structure and to a larger extent the wording but kept on changing some words and reorganising some based on the contexts. These minor variants through time made me realise the

creativity and originality of the praise singer. The creativity that comes into play with apparent identical repetitions, yet, with its minor deviations or changes in pattern or word distribution. The audience was competent enough to register these variations. It should be noted that performance is in some way negotiation of meaning. The performer would surely perform from the context of her S*itz im Leben.* She is part and parcel of their life and philosophy. She further shares meaning in their world-view. The variation in performance is understood and accepted by the audience since both audience are performers on a different level. In this case performance should not only be confined to a 'conspicious' performer but instead broadened to include audience as performers. For an example spectators at the FNB stadium are involved in the game. Gerd Bauman's views (1992:98) of ritual as implication 'Others' is instructive. Bauman looks at public rituals as being directed to an outsider by making statements about the definition or redefinition of outsider and insider. When public rituals are performed, the messages are transmitted to both the inner and outer groups (Bauman 1992:98). This is because of the fact that even outsiders participate in the performed rituals visibly or invisibly. Therefore, the presence of 'Others' during a public performance, to use Bauman's theory, suffices to alter the intensions and meaning of a public performance. Both the performers share in the negotiation of meaning and redefine the performance contextually.

The following is the praise song she sang in a 1995 confirmation service at Majaneng:

Walawalala! Walawala!

Tshikwane thiba ntlo di maroba

Bana ba nwela ke pula

Walawalala!

Ba re: kgoši Kekana

Kekana wa Mmakola
Majaneng–a-Mmakola

Walawalala! Walawala!
Tshikwane repair homes

Children are drenched

Walawalala!

They say: king Kekana

Kekana of Mmakola

Majaneng of Mmakola

The above praise poem and structure was used for the four-year period I spent at Majaneng. The praise singer added new elements (minor variants) to determine the uniqueness of every occasion.

6.2.6 Oral discourses are closer to the human lifeworld

The conceptualisation and verbalisation processes in the 'oral voicings' centre around and are determined by the human lifeworld (Ong 1982:42). They are 'oral voicings', if listened to closely, and within their given space, are about human life, for life, against life, in life and on life. They converse within the context of the human lifeworld itself and the knowledge thereof.

6.2.7 A terrain of 'fierce struggle'

Orality situates knowledge within a context of 'fierce struggle'. The Sepedi genre *dithai* (riddles) is a good reference in this regard. Note for instance:

Thai ... sankgatha ka se gata:	*metsi*
Thai ... pota ka mo ke pote ka mola, re tla kopana pele:	*lepanta*
Thai ... ntlwana ya go hloka mojako:	lee
	Etc.

Thai ... I touch it and it touches me	water
Thai ... go this way and I will go that way we meet	belt
Thai ... a small house with no door	an egg

The narrator in the above genre of oral discourse engages his or her audience in both verbal and intellectual combat. He or she calls out, by making use of the *thai*

expression (cf. calling for silence and attention as he or she is about to begin the game). The audience has to reciprocate. Ong (1982:45) rightly mentions that the violence or struggle of verbal and intellectual combat in oral art forms is also connected to the structure of orality. In this case, the audience and narrator achieve closeness and communal identification among themselves and the reality and environment around them. The knower comes to terms with the known. As in the case of proverbs, riddles have a multidimensional aspect; i.e., interactional, literal and philosophical meanings. They help in the context of smoothing tension, stinging an opponent and inflaming a constructive conflict. Riddles are by and large contextual (Penfield 1997:166).

6.2.8 In search of 'harmony'

Ong (1982:47) notes that oral societies live very much in the present that keeps itself in equilibrium. The meaning of each word is controlled by direct semantic ratification or real life situations in which the word is used here and now. Efforts in the oral discourse do not conform to 'definitions' but remain contextual. They are all about the 'now' and 'present' situation. The meaning of words encapsulate gestures, vocal inflections, facial expression etc. (Ong 1982:47). The present in its contextual form facilitates word meanings though one has to note that past meanings having shaped the present meaning in many and varied ways (Ong 1982:47).

6.2.9 The power of memory in oral voicings

Oral discourse makes use of standard formulas connected to standard themes (Ong 1982:60). These formulas and themes vary at times depending on how they were stitched together. Their characterisation is both contextual and original. The oral memorisation technique is kept intact by means of a brief 'postponement' technique to allow the narrator to fix a verbatim oral narrative. Music that is sometimes in the form of 'drum beating' acts (*meropa*) as a constraint to allow the fixing of a verbatim oral narrative (Ong 1982:63).

Some of the Sepedi divination oracles are accompanied by instruments like *ditšhela* (dried corns in containers and stick handles beat rhythmically in the process of divination). This allows the diviner or the about-to-become-a-diviner to voice formulas and narrate themes. In this case, the interaction with the living audience can "actively interfere with verbal stability and audience expectations can help fix themes and formulas" (Ong 1982:67). Sherzer (quoted by Ong 1982:64) suggests that "we think of a continuum between the 'fixed' and the 'flexible' use of formulaic elements". Taking the cue from Sherzer, Ong (1982:64) maintains that:

> "Sometimes, formulaic elements are managed in an effort to establish verbatim sameness, sometimes they work to implement a certain adaptability or variation".

In ritual context, oral discourse is presented repeatedly not as verbatim, but with a content, style, and formulaic structure which remain constant from performance to performance. What has to be noted is the fact that narrators narrate what the

audience calls for or will tolerate. In this case, oral performance to a certain extent is subjected to direct social pressures (Ong 1982:67).

The following are relevant examples taken from Shai-Ragoboya's novel: O Se-Ke, page 81. Rampulane (the character) arrives at a place called Makopyane. On his arrival, he meets a woman (flat character in the context of the novel) named Malema-isago sitting flat on the floor singing the following song:

"Mahodu bo Lešoka,

O we, we-e-e-e-,

Ba utswa le dipitsi,

O we, we-e-e-e;

Baetša bo letsoka,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

Mphehle le dipitsi,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

Malobiša Mpulane,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

Thabeng ya Letupi,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

Mpšatlakgane le makgowa,

O we, we-e-e-e-."

"Thugs the Lešoka,

O we, we-e-e-e-,

Stealing also the horses,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

Just like the letsoka,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

Malobiša Mpulane,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

At the mountain of Letupi,

O we, we-e-e-e-;

Mpšatlakgane and the whites,

O we, we-e-e-e-."

The above oral discourse indicates the repetitive use of *'O we, we-e-e-e-'*. The performer uses the device repeatedly to maintain verbal stability. It makes sense for the narrator to sing it alone since the author introduces her alone in the opening of the discourse. If it was in the presence of an audience, she was to be accompanied throughout the discourse by the repeated singing and beating of drums and *ditshela* to make the entire oral discourse comprehensive and meaningful. This device, again, is present in the *siyavuma* interjection as well as in the verbo-motor device of merely nodding while the narrator speaks out the divination oracle to the audience.

6.3. Key Considerations

Thus far the chapter dealt with some key oral features from a theoretical perspective. Most of the references are discussed by Walter Ong. Drawing from the two types of African divination oracles looked at in the preceding chapter there are some features and patterns that need to be highlighted.

6.3.1. The first oracle in perspective

As already indicated this typology of genre depicts a typical oral poetry genre. *Ngaka* Maamushi (cf. the oral performer in this case) employs some of his clan praises during the divinatory process. He succeeds to involve his own *Sitz im Leben* during the performance. The opening of his performance is powerful articulated. He begins by the expression *Yaa!*. This expression in turn demands a powerful *interlocutation* by the audience present during the performance. One has to note the Sepedi proverb – *Lentšu ga le bowe go bowa monwana* (said words are more memorable than actual actions). Firstly, the opening has to be organised in a manner that powerfully introduces both the performer (cf. diviner-healer) and the divinatory process. '*Yaa*' is translated as an exclamation of shock or masement. Further the expression '*Yaa*' could also be a form of 'postponement' to allow the performer (cf. Ngaka Maamushi) to organize his oral divination dicourse (Ong 1982:60). Secondly, the bizarre and aggregative are noticeable in this case. The mind operates in a complex way. This was observed in *Ngaka* Maamushi's use of the expression: *Ke mogolo ke kakatlela dithaba* (I am great, I hold the mountains). This could also relate to the aggregative technique. *Ngaka* Maamushi uses the expression comprised of epithets to carry out his clan praises comprehensively. Indeed, it is easier to remember one's oral praise poem

when the content of the speech articulated contains expressions that are easily remembered. Thirdly, the use of animal symbolism in the discourse featured well. Note *Thakadu and Tšhukudu.* As pointed earlier the conceptualisation and verbalisation processes in the discourse centre around and are determined by the human lifeworld (Ong 1982:42). Discourses are about human life, for life, against life, in life and on life. They further converse within the context of the human lifeworld itself and the knowledge thereof. Fourthly, the use of common proverbial expressions. This is another important oral device that assists the performer in terms of noetic and mnemonic techniques. *Ngaka* Maamushi, in lines 23 and 24, recites in the following manner:

23 – Mola basadi e le dintsheba di ya nokeng di boye dintsheba

24 – Ba re motho o sebelwa ke wa gabo

On the whole the discourse runs through interesting rhythms of poetics and noetics. The 'ntshebele' (secretly inform me) is encapsulated in the following Sepedi proverb:

Hlokwa la tsela ntshebele motho o sebelwa ke wa gabo (the route-informer informs because one is rightly informed by his or her own people).

Ngaka Maamushi employs and refines this proverb to fit his oracle discourse. As pointed elsewhere in this chapter, oral narrators do introduce new elements in the process of their narration. Making use of old stories in the discourse is compounded with new ideas, themes, expressions and thoughts in the process of the discourse

(Ong 1982:42). Furthermore, the creativity of *Ngaka* Maamushi indicates how closely he is connected to his life world. This gain brings the African metaphysics, epistemology and ethics to life. The prominent features in this proverbial expressions is their concern to give practical advice on how to view and handle problems of life (Penfield 1997: 168). At the heart of all this lies an African sapiential character. The inner nature and reality of the Sepedi context is engaged and at the same time questioned to offer answers and probabilities about life's fate.

6.3.2. The second oracle in perspective

The second type of the oracle consists of various formulas. The footnote commentary indicated repetition and redundant expressions. The performer (cf. *Ngaka* Nkosi) was able to make use of these mnemonic and formula patterns to sustain thought and expression within the oracle discourse. Note the following examples:

Ka mokgwa wo di bolelago ka gona – lines: 2,7,10,13,15,18,25,27,29,34,42,45,49,55 and 60.

Ge ke eya ke sepela le taola tša gago – line: 3

Ge ke eya ke kitima le ditaola tša gago – lines: 19,30 and 61

Ge ke bolela le ditaola tša gago –lines: 5,8,11,14,23 and 56

The above oracle formulary patterns were able to both structure and contain the entire oracle discourse. They were able to provide a mind framework and afforded the performer the opportunity to interfere with and reorganise her discourse. Definitely, fluency and volubiosness was possible within such as the oral discourse.

Thus far one is able to conclude without any hesitation that the two discourses analysed fit well within the oral technique. Further the diviner-healers have been within the scope of oral performance. They make use of oral techniques in the context of their divinatory process. They are contextually located and are shaped, and also shape the context within which they exist. Finally, the two oracles differ in terms of form and structure. The one has a poetic form while the other uses a formulary patterned format.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. Divination Theories

Against the background of the data provided above as well as the brief theoretical overview of theoretical and conceptual perspectives on orality, the question now arises as to how this relates to theories of divination. This chapter seeks to position these theories with regard to the data and these theoretical perspectives on orality.

Divination is considered to be both a cultural and social practice (Devisch 1985:50, Ngubane 1977:30 and Peek 1991:1). The institution of divination assumes a central position in facilitating a better understanding of the cultures of people, in particular African people. Most African communities continue to trust this institution as a way and means of arriving at a decision, and as a basic source of important knowledge (Peek 1991:2). Peek (1991:2) defines divination as a

> "standardised process deriving from learned discipline based on an extensive body of knowledge. This knowledge may or may not be literally expressed during the interpretation of the oracular message. The diviner may utilise a fixed corpus".

It has to be noted that the processes of divination vary, but

> "follow set routines by which otherwise inaccessible information is obtained. Some type of device usually is employed, forming a simple sliding object to the myriad symbolic items shaken in diviners' baskets" (Peek 1991:2).

In some cases, the diviner's body becomes the model of communication and network through spirit possession (Peek 1991:2). The process of divination is, as Peek (1991:2) rightly notes, "instances of arbitrary, idiosyncratic behavior by diviners".

The institution offers communities the voice and space to articulate their epistemologies (Peek 1991:2). The articulation of the epistemology of a community based within the context of divination offers dynamic and determining systems of knowledge aimed at the (re-)ordering of social action within a specific community (Peek 1991:2). There is no aspect of life that is not touched or affected by this institution. This shows the centrality and criticality of the institution.

Against the background of the data, the elements central to the theorising of orality and this brief introduction, the question now arises as to the most compatible theory for the study of divination and oracle.

7.1 Positivist functionalist assumptions

The theory of positivism emerged in the late nineteenth century. It was characterised by several prominent themes that included among others, evolutionism and secularism (Peek 1991:5). The period under question had far-reaching effects on anthropological studies and research about communities outside Europe, more

precisely, African communities. The positivist science of Anthropology became prominent, as it was based on the premise that "only verifiable observations" could be accepted as "truths". As such, it automatically denied ideas of religious or aesthetic causality any viability (Peek 1991:5, Evans-Prichard 1966:155-161, Ray 1976:2-7).

This theoretical perspective could hardly promote a sensitivity and a centrality to the study of religions outside Europe (Peek 1991:5). For instance, Taylor (1958: 119-133) in his earlier publications lists countless divinatory methods that, in his opinion, only happened by chance, rendering them not acceptable in the positivist paradigm.

Surely, Taylor used his supposedly presuppositionless European 'instruments' to measure what was chance and what was not. Peek (1991:5) cites other anthropologists within the very same period of study like Frazer, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown, who failed to attempt any comprehensive study of divination.

Later, other scholars began to do research on divination but reflected upon it from the point of view of ambivalence (Peek 1991:5). Henri Junod, cited by Peek (1991:5), having done research on the Thonga concludes:

> "I am convinced that, however high the degree of astuteness engendered by the divinatory bones may be, they have been extremely detrimental to the intellectual and moral welfare of the Natives".

Within evolutionist thinking, the story is much grimmer - because here, cultures engaging divination were regarded as cultures at a much lesser stage of 'development'

than the European. As a paradigm, this focus had its own excesses - not least that of the racist discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Distinct from these extremes, Durkheim and Mauss (1967:77), as early as 1903, affirmatively considered divination as a core for research undertaking:

> "There is nothing more natural, moreover, than the relation thus expressed between divination and the classification of things. Every divinatory rite, however simple it may be, rests on a pre-existing sympathy between things, and on a traditionally admitted kinship between a certain sign and a certain future event. Further, a divinatory rite is generally not isolated; it is part of an organised whole. The science of the diviners, therefore, does not form isolated groups of things, but binds these groups to each other. At the basis of a system of divination there is thus, at least implicitly, a system of classification".

This view, offered by the French enthnologists, was a good one since as at that time, they attempted to break with the positivist paradigm. The influence of Evans-Prichard in this regard cannot be left unnoticed. His influential work entitled: *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1973) was his first and serious reflection on divination. In this publication, Evans-Prichard concludes,

> "Zande religion is not only internally consistent and rational but "Zande Man" constantly makes self-interested utilitarian use of his oracles in order to respond to witchcraft" (Peek 1991:8).

Even so, one has to note that Evans-Prichard failed to

> "appreciate that other peoples may not conform to the rigid European dichotomization of science and religion and may utilize different modes of thought, often in alternating fashion" (Peek 1991:8).

While one notes the serious contribution made by this school of thought (cf. Evans-Prichard 1966) it can be showed , within their own way of thinking, that some of their presuppositions are appeased entirely unreasonable. As Robin Horton, a British anthropologist of Nigeria, rightly observed, there is

> "a controversial claim among anthropologists, who were and are loath to accept the neo-Frazerian view that religions of pre-literate societies are an inferior form of science" (Gellner 1999:29).

One has to start from the terms of the people themselves in order to avoid traps such as 'superstition' (Gellner 1999:38).

7.2 The Structural functionalist approach

The structural and functional approaches were developed from Freudian analysis (Devisch 1985:54). Similar to how the unconscious structures determine the ego - and therefore consciousness - it was held that divination and its symbols derive from the collective unconscious.

Victor Turner used multidimensional symbols to analyse the divinatory context (1985:55). In his article entitled: *Syntax of symbolism in a Ndembu Ritual* (1971),

Turner uses three dimensions which are significant for his analysis of the Ndembu ritual. These are the exegetic dimensions which deal with the

> "whole corpus of explanations of a particular symbol's meaning offered by indigenous informants, the operational dimension which equates meaning with its use, and lastly the positional dimension which considers meaning as derived form its relationship to other symbols in a specific cluster or *gestalt* of symbols "(Turner 1971:125-129).

Turner fuses the sensory and ideational poles within the condensed symbols (1985:55). For Turner, a divinatory process moves from the context of the fearsome to the provision of emotional reassurance.

Alan Lomax and Joan Halifax (1971:235) on the other hand, view folksongs for example, to be diagnostic, having both the cultural complexities and representing a set of cultural norms, which differentiate and sharply characterise cultures. These folksongs are, according to them, yielding normative information readily based on their redundancy propensities.

Devisch (1985:55) strongly disputes these views and maintains that such arguments

> "could only be validated by anthropological methods, particularly by the study of the symbolic practices in the divinatory process".

Further, for Devisch (1985:55), Turner's anxiety - reassurance argument is heavily biased and depends on positivistic premises, rooted

> "in a Western pragmatic and positivistic philosophy and comfort ideology which presupposes that mastery over a desacralized ... environment is a compelling goal for all societies".

Devisch (1985:56) concludes that,

> "Traditional divination cannot be said to be scientific any more than any other symbolic practice, nor can it be said to be contrary to a rational outlook: it is qualitatively different".

Clearly, for Devisch, it becomes difficult to accept approaches which do not base their modalities on an internal investigation and which are not formulated according to the co-ordinates and psychodynamics of the person in his or her ethnic and cultural Sitz im Leben.

7.3 External Cognitive Approaches

The external cognitive approaches consider the expressive and explanatory function of divination. The entire divinatory process is seen as a conceptual system, a system of thought and furthermore a modality of knowing (Devisch 1985:62).

These approaches share "an organistic view of society with structural-functionalists", since both

> "presume that order, structure, regularity, safety, and especially its mental complements such as intelligibility are basic needs or aims of the individual and the group" (Devisch 1985:62).

The prime focus of these approaches on divination is "as a form of acquiring knowledge for establishing, controlling and predicting order". The cognitive approach offers the "epistemological complement of the structural-functionalist interpretation of divination" (Devisch 1985:62). Peek (1991:193) looks closely at African divination systems from the point of view of non-normal modes of cognition and defines divination systems as temporarily shifting and facilitating "decision making into a liminal realm by emphatically participating in opposing cognitive modes".

For Peek (1991:194),

> "divination utilizes a non-normal mode of cognition which is synthesised by the diviner and clients with everyday knowledge in order to allow the clients to make plans of action".

In this case, Peek (1991:198) maintains, divination creates a situation of dilectism to accomplish the required synthesis to solve the problem brought to the attention of the diviner. The diviner is said to use the divination apparata which at times incorporate elements of creatures with special sensory abilities or are somehow extraordinarily endowed. The non-normal mode of cognition referred to by Peek (1991:199) is established and maintained during the divination process. The primary senses used in the divination process, "are vision and hearing, and their enhancement is manifest throughout the divination process"(Peek 1991:199).

In this regard, argues Devisch (198562), the phenomena of divination is taken at face value. It is only the literal meaning of the consultor's and the meaning of the context of oracles and divinatory oral tradition that are taken seriously (Devisch 1985:62). The

approach is inspired by the positivistic and pragmatic theory of knowledge. In this case, "order" (the deterministic order of things) becomes the central issue.

Objective knowledge and its philosophical principles govern this approach (Devisch 1985:62). The divinatory oracle is

> "regarded as a non-rational way of investigating a moral domain or occult matters and of reinforcing the related beliefs" (Devisch 1985:63).

For Devisch (1985:67),

> "These external approaches to divination as a system of thought not only evaluate according to positivistic scientific premises, but also appeal to presuppositions proper to Western literate culture, implying its notions of matter, causality, time, human nature, person or self, other, relationship".

The approach views divination as

> "a superstitious, backward, inferior way of knowing which will evolve towards a profane way of knowing, following processes, similar to those in Western history, of individualization, disenchantment, secularisation, rationalization ... as necessary concomitants of urbanization and mechanization".

However, one has to note that not all cognitive studies are "defective for not all of them evaluate divination through a self-corroborative belief system" (Devisch 1985:67, Horton 1967 and Park 1967).

7.4 Internal, semiotic (symbolic patterning) and semantic approaches to divination

The semiotic and semantic approaches do not consider symbols as sheer representations or as

> "instruments of social reality, nor as a pre-scientific form of knowledge, but as a reality in its own right" (Devisch 1985:68).

The focus in these approaches basically concentrate on the symbolic activity within the divination oracle as fundamental communication and exchange,

> "concentrated on the semiotic presentation in the oracle of social cultural ideas and principles, through the articulation of divinatory vehicles according to some inexorable cultural logic" (1985:68).

The other focus or line of thought in this regard is the performative production "of a meaningful reality in trance and oracle" (1985:68). Even in this regard, the reality dealt with is treated and reflected upon in its own right. In this case, the semiotic patterning of communication is carefully and closely monitored and interpreted in the context of divination. The diviner is said to establish a divinatory theme following the standardised procedure and thereafter responds to the needs and affairs of the client(s). The said theme is skilfully patterned to run through a divination "repertoire or by bringing together the code elements or the divinatory vehicles in significant configurations". For Victor Turner (1975:219) these divinatory vehicles are referred to as 'divinatory symbolic mnemonics' (Devisch 1985:68).

These symbols store memories or refer to broad dimensions of a specific culture (Devisch 1985:68). Ultimately, the diviner within the oracular discourse provides a message relating to the affairs and needs of the consulting clients and thereby draws

> "self-corroborative conclusions about events which are initially uncertain and wished for or feared by the consultors" (Turner 1975:220 and Retel-Laurentin 1969).

The temporal underpinning has both a past and present reality for the client(s). The oracular message is poly-vocal and touches firmly on the existential reality of the client(s) (Devisch 1985:68). Interestingly, clients are involved in the dramaturgical divination context and help the diviner in a collaborative manner to revise the hermeneutics of the divination message and finally offer an alternative message. This would surely be a shared and an all-agreed message (Devisch 1985:80).

The semantic and internal approach on the other hand involves basic underpinnings as regards social-cultural reality (Devisch 1985:70). This view of social-cultural reality and the practice of semantic anthropology, Devisch (1985:70) argues, are interrelated. In this case, the anthropological semantic focuses on the socio-cultural reality, to use Devisch's (1985:71) expression. It is a

> "form of happening, a 'living theatre' in the process of being generated" and articulated. To be precise, the focus is on the 'works' themselves and how meaning stems from them by 'themselves'.

Devisch proposes three overlapping steps in this regard. First,

"one concentrates by observation on the way in which a particular activity, such as divinatory séance or the transition to divinership, is structured into a whole" (1985:71).

Second, the practice, for example a ritual practice, gets

"its form by combining significant elements selected from different semantic structures and classifications. All the different acts, objects and other phenomena are compared with analogous phenomena in oral tradition, in other rituals or in daily life" (1985:71).

Lastly, the third step consists

"in trying to find out how a meaningful reality is brought about, i.e. in focusing on its dynamic, its quasi-intentionality" (1985:72).

David Parkin (1991), in dealing with the simultaneity and sequencing in the oracular speech of Kenyan diviners, argues that

"diviners of all kinds use the idea of moving from a boundless to a bounded realm of existence in their diagnoses".

For him (Parkin), such archetypal usage seems unaffected by difference of rank and status among most diviners. For Parkin, the diviner converts one metaphor into another during the divination process. The usage of metaphors in this regard is inconsistent, at least according to Parkin (1991:177). For Parkin, there is a serious linkage or network between home and the outside world. The linkage activity is done simultaneously in the process of divination between the diviner and the consultor. Further, for Parkin (1991:179), the linkage, which is preceded by a sharp shift, is from conceptual simultaneity to sequencing. The diviner in this case operates within and

with the process of "semantic disentanglement and clarification" which runs in a parallel manner with the idiom of movement from a "wilderness to a set place and time" (Parkin 1991:183). The entire activity, argues Parkin, does not render the patient or consultor passive and "only figuratively carried along the paths from wilderness to settlement", but he or she,

> "is also a point of reference and guidance along the way. That is to say, by his nods, cues, and statements of agreement, the patient helps the diviner, encouraging him to proceed from one possibility to another. So, while we may think of the patient as being led to a cure by the diviner, the patient also guides the diviner in this attempt to reach satisfactory diagnoses, converting an unmanageably large number of interpretations into a more limited number" (Parkin 1991:183).

There is a mutual dependency in the divinatory process. The roles reciprocate and share meaning interchangeably in this process. To use Parkin's expression, they may be seen as mirror of each other (1991:184). In this regard, the diviner and patient allow each other into their spiritual worlds and thereby share meaning from these worlds in order to reach a locus of settlement. Hence, it provides movement from the wilderness to the point of settlement (Peek 1991:202). This affirms, maintains Parkin, the fact that divination offers opportunities for dramatic and semantic creativity. Its solves the practical problem of a mental nature as well as physical distress - presumably of both the diviner and the patient (Peek 1991:185). In this process, Parkin notes two parallel patterns which are revealed in the divinatory process: Language and the narrative theme.

For Parkin (1991:185), the language used in the divinatory process starts from a jumbled context and the jumbled language used. The jumbled language is said to be inconsistent and mixed with metaphors, false syllogism,

> "some reversals, and an apparent lack of path control straying from one concept to another and back again inconsequentiality".

This is then rectified or clarified in the process of the divination. The narrative theme on the other hand

> "starts with the idea of aimless wandering in an unspecified way and we may assume a empty area, which is alien and remote" (Parkin 1991:185).

It is within the divinatory process that the theme runs by means of motifs from a point of criss-cross confusion and aimless wandering and leads to a purposeful direction (1991:185). The logic governing this analysis, Parkin points out in structuralist fashion, lies in the contrast between deep structure and surface semantic. For Parkin (1991:186), the initial speech of diviners operate more freely at the level closer to the order-less of deep-structure semantics and that a shift from deep-structure to surface (sentence) semantics analytically parallels the shift in the diviner's speech style and narrative theme.

The deep-structure is considered by Parkin (1991:186) as a most creative, artistic, poetic and schizophrenic thought while surface semantics offer a place for classification and taxonomy (bricolage). Parkin (1991:187) concludes that the diviner-client relation

"create a range of possible interpretations of cause and effect and then [allows for the client to] choose from within that range ... to articulate new ideas in the society which have not yet come to general currency".

This means that both the diviner and client are inspired to disentangle a puzzle.

On the whole, the patterning of signification in these approaches is internally transformative and is further objectified in the performative drama itself. Participants guide and determine the transformational process by themselves (Parkin 1985:76). The performative drama is fundamentally characterised and fermented by interaction, rhetoric, emotional manifestations, play, song, colours, even smell and smoke, organisation of space, temporal co-ordinates, and the multi-referential semiotics of the divinatory vehicles (Parkin 1985:76). The divinatory séance itself consists of

"a dialectical alternation of phases so as to give form to the elementary paradoxes of multiplicity versus unity, disorder versus order"

with the prime intention of re-establishing qualitative differentiations and to bring awareness to the participants to choose or to render order at other levels (Parkin 1985:76).

7.5 The praxeological approach

The praxeological approach attempts to integrate all the positive elements identified and appreciated by scholars above. This means that it focuses on the acceptable aspects of the above-indicated approaches. It is characterised by a poly-ethnic contextual divinatory outlook, meaning that divination is a cross-cultural phenomenon.

It is however mostly ignored by so-called positivistic or scientific scholars in their own cultures and even their own behaviours.

The context of divination has both a social and cultural side to it. The integrative nature of this approach selects from the above-indicated or discussed approaches in terms to typology and aspect (Devisch 1985:77). For Devisch (1985:77), the approach is subject-centred, the

> "subject being the diviner, or the supportive congregation and decision-making group constituting itself in the course of the divinatory process, or the institution of divination".

It is in this case that the de-psychologization process of comprehension and communication takes place (Devisch 1985:77). The praxis of divinatory process becomes the premise of the analysis. As Devisch (1985:77) rightly points out,

> "The oracle or the diviner brings out what is problematic by giving it metaphoric form, through rhetoric or dramatic bridging of physiological, sensitive, cognitive, social, historical and cosmological domains. In this giving of a form, a meaning is constituted which by inventive manipulation shows itself relevant to the actual situation so as to achieve individual and collective goals or functions simultaneously".

This approach is the one most suitable to the aims of this thesis. It not only appreciates divination as a cross-cultural phenomenon but also allows for the more particular study of African divinatory processes in comparison to prophecy in Near Eastern and Mediterranean contexts. It brings about insights, mastery of cognitive

intricacies, subtleties and the social conditions of divination based within a particular group. Since it is both an integrated approach and appreciates the insider perspective, it allows for the appreciation of the relevance of divination for people. It has the potential of becoming a comprehensive and inclusive theory for the study of culture in general. As such, not only the theory of praxeology but also divination itself, may prove to provide analytic perspectives on both cultural and social practices (Devisch 1985:50).

7.6. Summary

Having browsed through a number of divinatory approaches one is able to make the following observations:

First, research study pushes for a comprehensive approach. Comprehensivity in this case refers to the oracles already analysed. The researcher notes that oracles themselves require an understanding of both a non-verbal and verbal a view. All of this form what the researcher call 'African divination process'. To focus on certain word expressions only (i.e linguistics alone) would not just be self-perilous, but it would also defy the entire purpose of understanding the African divination (w)holistically. An example of this is the sight of an diviner-healer. The sight itself provides or rather epitomises the divinatory process itself. Hence, this research study is more in line with the praxeological approach because of its comprehensitivity and internally-based.

Chapter Eight

8. Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean divination and oracles

8.1 The phenomenon in question

Max Weber in his article entitled: *The Prophet* (1987), wrestles with the concept 'prophecy' from a sociological perspective. Interestingly, for Weber, the concept comes to mean a

> "purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment" (Weber 1987:99).

Weber's theory on the prophetic perspective draws, or rather juxtaposes the 'preacher' of older revelation and a founder of a completely 'new religion'. For him (Weber) it is important to seriously consider the personal call in order to distinguish the prophet from the priest (Weber 1987:99). The variation, argues Weber, lies in the fact that the priest lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the "prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma" (Weber 1987:99). Weber's thoughts opened a whole new debate on prophecy in and around Israel. This scholarly intervention provides the appropriate background against which the topic of this chapter is to be addressed, namely the more universal encyclopaedic understanding of divination and oracle.

8.2 Mesopotamian perspectives on prophecy and divination

Ivan Starr's (1983) publication, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica: The Rituals of the Diviner*, is seminal with regard to understanding prophecy and divination in Mesopotamia. In principle, Starr focuses on Mesopotamian divination. He draws on various sources, amongst others, sources on ancient Roman divination, but also more recent ones such as the disciplina Etruscan, which came late in the Roman period (Starr 1983:2). In the process, he refers to writers such as Pliny, Seneca, Varro and Cicero (*De Divinatione*).

He then takes a quick glance at Graeco-Roman divination, citing sources dating back to Homer, Aeschylus, Lucan, Livy and Plutarch. For Starr (1983:2),

"Classical divination may also have derived certain principles of prognostication from Mesopotamia". He (Starr 1983:3) then asserts that

> "the accounts scattered in classical literature reveal a picture similar to that found in the Mesopotamian sources concerning the diversity of divinatory practices in vogue and the common belief in their efficacy".

Looking closely at divination in Mesopotamian context, Starr emphasises the centrality divination played. Divination was central (Farber 1991;1895) in this ancient culture in that it even functioned within the political set-up of the time (Starr 1983:3). For the Mesopotamian

> "divination did not represent a superstition, but a major intellectual endeavor, embodying in it ... no less than a philosophy of history, one which is grounded

on the belief that history repeats itself. History in this regard was seen as a succession of meaningful happenings with ominous significance" (Starr 1983:3).

The ordinary was not considered ordinary, but valued because it conveyed a divine message. As Farber (1995:1895) rightly observes,

> "Mesopotamian religious beliefs are not easy to understand for people of our times, steeped in Western culture and imbued with what we call "enlightenment". We are used to thinking in categories of opposites".

It was necessary, in that context, for a human being to attempt to understand its language and be able to interpret it (Starr 1983:3 and Borghouts 1995:1782). He points out,

> "ominous significance of reality did not lie in the normally functioning universe, but in the deviations from it: in the abnormalities on the excreta of a sacrificial animal; in freak birth amongst humans and animals" (Starr 1983:3).

Further, Starr (1983:4) points out that extistipicy constituted a major branch of divination within the Mesopotamian context. Existipicy, according to Starr

> "refers to the practice in its broadest sense, ... the examination of the entire entrails, the excreta, and embraces, in conventional usage, also the more limited hepatoscopy".

Existipicy was constituted by a

> "variety of divine messages received by various other means, such as dreams, visions, prophecies, or even by means of the observation of celestial

phenomenon, [and] were often considered inconclusive until confirmed by means of more reliable means, such as existipicy" (1983:4).

For Farber (1995:1904)

> "extispicy involved at least the cost of one animal per query, private citizens are likely to have resorted to this technique only under extraordinary circumstances"

Further, in Mesopotamia there were different functionaries as regards divination and healing (von Soden 1985:184 and Farber 1995:1906). The prophets were called *mahhum* (ecstatic prophet) and *apilum* (the answerer). Both delivered prophecies ranging from ecstatic experiences, visions, dreams etc (von Soden 1985:185). On the other hand there were the priesthood category which narrowly connected to divination. The *baru* –priest studied the liver of a sacrificial goat or sheep, oil on water, position of celestial bodies/ constalations. The *asipu* and *masmassu*-priest delivered oracles in the usual context of divination. The afflicted persons or patients came to these priest and they (priests) would in turn examine them and thereafter deliver incantations of healing (cf. von Soden – *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*; 'Divination', 185-192). The diviner-healer in Babylon or Assyria is not a 'prophet' in the technical sense of the word, but diviner-healers were a professional group of people usually attached to specific cult centers (van Soden – *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*; 'Divination', 185-192).

8.3 The Semitic World in Perspective

The Semitic world outside Israel had a serious impact on its prophetic dimensions (Lindblom 1973:29). There is literary work that supports and gives evidence of the existence of the ecstatic prophets in different parts of the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean contexts (Lindblom 1973:29, von Soden 1985:184, Oppenheim 1977:206-221)). One typical example is the story of Wen-Amon's journey to Phoenicia around 1100 B.C. The actual journey closely related to the famous Golenischeff papyrus contains information concerning the existence of prophetic phenomenon in ancient Phoenicia (Lindblom 1973:29, von Soden 1985:185-191). The story introduces Wen-Amon, an official at the temple of the deity named Amon, sent by the Egyptian King, at the time, to the place called Byblos, to procure "timber for the ceremonial barge of Amon-Re" (Lindblom 1973:30).

The journey was not a successful one since he was not well received by the prince of Byblos. The story relates that, while the prince was offering to his deities, subsequent to Wen-Amon's brief visitation, the "god seized one of his youths and made him possessed" (Lindblom 1973:30, von Soden 1985:184). Another good example is the story of the Dagan deity. It is overtly mentioned.

> "A prophet transported by Dagan in an ecstasy utters an oracle ordering that sacrifices must be offered ... the king's dead father" (Lindblom 1973:20).

Other regions which could be referred to in this case include the Hittites in Ugarit, in Hamath, etc. In such regions,

> "the ecstatic communication of oracles may well have been practised as well as the observation of omens, incubation, and sacrificial and other methods of divination" (Lindblom 1973:31).

David Aune (1989:23), looking at the Graeco-Roman prophecy, rightly points to the importance of prophecy and divination in the daily routine of most Romans and Greeks in antiquity. Prophecy and divination were held in high esteem - i.e. as the science that determined the "will of the gods on almost every conceivable issue" (Aune 1989:23).

Divination was regarded as the "art or science of interpreting symbolic messages from the gods" (Aune 1989:23, Oppenheim 1977:206). It was central to determine fate and the future. Oracles were used as potent messages from the deities communicating in human language to respond to questions, doubts and fears as it impacted on and determined the lives and well-being of kings, nations and individuals. Oracles were dynamic means of communication.

Apart from oracles there was a serious use of a number of divination practices which included the following: the casting of lots *(kleromancy)*, the flight and behavior of birds (*orthimancy*), the condition and behavior of sacrificial animals, or their vital organs, before and after the sacrifice (*hepatoscopy, hieromancy, pyromancy*), the various

omens or sounds (*cledonomancy*), dreams (*oneiromancy*) (Aune 1989:23, Oppenheim 1977:209).

A frequent term used by ancient Greeks for the practitioner of divination was *mantis,* to be translated as 'diviner', 'soothsayer', or 'seer' and 'prophet'(Aune 1989:23, von Soden 1985:186). The *mantis* had to be skilled and be able to use the acquired art to interpret the complex symbolism of the encoded "divine messages" (Aune 1989:23). It should be noted at this stage that Ancient Greeks and Romans distinguished between "technical divination" and "natural divination". Technical divination depended on the

> "knowledge, training, and skill of the mantis in observing and correctly interpreting signs, sacrifices, dreams, omens, prodigies, and the like"

while natural divination is

> "the direct inspiration of the mantis through trance, ecstasy, or vision" (Aune 1989:24).

Aune (1989:24) strongly argues that oracular divination should be placed somewhat in the latter category of divination based on its intuitive character and essence. He further points out that oracular divination used a number of methods for establishing oracular responses from the deities based on various issues about which the suppliant or inquirer wished to receive divine advice or admonition (Aune 1989:24). Three major types of oracular technique can be noted: (i) the lot oracle, (ii) the dream or incubation oracle (which basically involved healing), and (iii) the inspired oracle.

So far, one is able to note that the phenomena of prophecy are not unique to particular races, people, countries, or religions (Lindblom 1973:32, von Soden 1985:191). The phenomena may, be expected to, vary from context to context. However, the process of assimilation and influence could, Lindblom suggests, be in terms of behaviour, forms, words, and the external manifestations thereof (Lindblom 1973:32). This is backed up by the emphasis on the supernormal world, as we shall see in the next section in terms of ancient Israelite prophecy - i.e.

> "by which they have been subjected to influences from that world, not vouchsafed to other men" (Lindblom 1973:33).

8.4 Ancient Graeco-Roman perspectives

A miracle, from a modern perspective, is usually perceived to be a breach in the regularity of the functioning of the world (cf. Devisch 1985, Victor Turner 1969 and Mary Douglas 1966). Yet, it is more than a breach planned to over-rule something known or unknown – or even the scientific principle. A miraculous healing is scientifically unaccountable, yet, it is not merely random, but has a purposeful focus. It is often attributed to the work of some supernatural force (Setiloane 1998:65, Kudadjie and Osei 1998:35, Mbiti 1969:41). The general propensity is in the use of the term rather than coincidence with something that does not violate the laws of nature.

The Graeco-Roman perspectives on prophetic activity have serious points of relevance for healing. A good example is Asklepios, the healing deity among the Greeks. His cult

lasted for roughly a thousand years. The earliest reference to Asklepios is actually in Homer. In Loeb Homeric text, Aesklepios is referred to as a hero and further described as a peerless healer (Loeb II.518). His sons are Machaon and Podaleirios who led a contingent from Tricca to the Trojan war. Later, they too became physicians, like their father. In this account, there is no reference to his birth or to any divine ancestor in the family. Only later sources do throw some light on the background of this well-known physician of the ancient Graeco-Roman world.

There are several accounts of his birth recorded in different sources, but one of the earliest is that given by Pindar in his Third Pythian Ode. According to this account, Asklepios was the son of Apollo and Koronis, the daughter of Phlegyas (from other sources we know that Phlegyas was king of Tricca in Northern Greece). Koronis, while pregnant with Apollo's child, married Ischys. Apollo, all-knowing, was aware of this and sent his sister, Artemis to destroy Koronis with her golden arrows. As she was being cremated, Apollo rescued his son from his mother's dead body and took him to the centaur, Chiron, to be nursed and educated. Even so, Pindar does not make mention of it in this particular poem, or rather he does not provide vivid information about this account. This is rather unfortunate.

The account informs us on the fact that Apollo was the god of plague, but also of healing. Chiron (the centaur), instructed and comprehensively trained by Apollo, was also skilled in healing, music, hunting and prophecy. The centaur served as the tutor of other Greek heroes like Jason and Achilles. The centaur taught him to heal human sicknesses, wounds or diseases. The implications of this are that the methods utilised

varied from incantations and potions to surgery. The clients or patients, as the account points out, were delivered or brought to Chiron by Apollo himself. Finally, some of the interesting accounts point to the glory that was bestowed on him. He was able to raise a man from the dead and was struck down by Zeus. From this early account it appears that Asklepios was at first thought of as a hero and later as a mortal.

In another tradition, Asklepios is made the daughter of Arsinoe, daughter of a Messenian king (Hesiodic Catalogues 50), although in other respects the story was similar. A later version of the story retains Coronis as the mother, but makes Epidauros the birthplace of Asklepios. This version is the one related by the Epidaurians (Pausanias 11.26.3 - 5). This story provides an explanation for why the dog was a sacred animal associated with Asklepios and also why no goats were allowed to be sacrificed at Epidauros.

From originally being a man who practised as a physician, Asklepios was probably, after his death, honoured as a hero. Eventually, he came to be worshipped as a god of healing. There were sanctuaries to Asklepios in those cities that claimed to be his birthplace - at Tricca (archaeologists have not unearthed this shrine as yet, but there are some literary references to it (Loeb Classical Library, vol. II, by W. H. S. Jones, 9.5.17, 437), in Messenia and, of course, at Epidauros. A few other cities also laid claim to be the birthplace of this popular god in whose honour sanctuaries were subsequently erected in many parts of the world. Two of the other most important shrines to Asklepios were at Cos and Pergamum.

It should be noted that ancient Greek gods and goddesses fall into three categories. Olympian or sky deities, chthonian or earth deities and heroes. Heroes came as the result of unions between gods and mortals, and the worship of a hero often focused on his tomb where various sacrifices and rites took place. Some heroes were only of local importance while others were more widely revered. After his deification, Asklepios was probably more closely associated with the chthonian deities. The snake, a chthonic animal, is perhaps an indication of this. The snake had a long association with fertility and healing gods and with the spirits of the underworld (they come up from the ground). The snake was also a symbol of eternal rebirth (it sheds its skin). Earlier, it was mentioned that Asklepios had two sons. He also had five daughters, one of whom, Hygieia, was especially prominent in his cult. Others were Panakeia, Aceso, Iaso and Aglaea.

Asklepios was not only a healing god, but also the patron god of physicians. This implies that one must not separate too rigidly the different approaches to healing in the ancient world. Many doctors may well have encouraged their patients to visit one of Asklepios' sanctuaries. The question remains: What happened at these sanctuaries?

The sanctuary near Epidauros is one of those about which there is enough information. Originally, there was a cult of Apollo at this site. A sanctuary and an altar dating back to the seventh century B.C. have been excavated and under this site archaeologists have found a Mycenaean altar. From the sixth century, dedications

were made to Asklepios as well as to his father Apollo, but by the fourth century Asklepios was the dominant presence at the sanctuary.

Some inscriptions have been discovered that give details of the construction of some of the buildings. The temple was built in about 370 B.C. and took 4 years 8 ½ months to construct. Its architect was a man by the name of Theodotes and the sculptural work on the temple was done under the supervision of Timotheos. Inside the temple was a gold and ivory statue of Asklepios, seated on a throne and holding a staff in one hand (a staff was usually carried by Greek men walking out of doors). His other hand was over the head of a serpent and a dog lay at his feet.

On the side of the temple was a great altar and nearby a round building or *tholos,* known as the *thymele.* Its function is unknown (Luck 1985:3-60). Other suggestions include that it enshrined a sacred spring or that it contained a pit for the sacred snakes (it has some concentric underground passages) or that it was a place where the priest-doctors made their special offerings (Ferguson 1989:89).

The *abaton* where the patients slept in the hope of being cured by the god, was a long building (70 meters) to the north of the temple. It contained benches, on which the suppliants slept and dreamed, and it was here that the tablets that recorded successful cures were on display to encourage those who came for healing. The sanctuary became known as Asklepieion. Boundary stones marked out the sanctuary and no one was allowed to die or give birth within this area because *miasma* (pollution) was believed to result from giving birth or from death.

The entrance to the Asklepieion was via the *propylon* which like many of the buildings at the site had ramps which would have given easier access to the disabled than would have been the case if the buildings had the normal steps. The Sacred Road from Epidauros (7 km. away) led up to this grand entrance. Other buildings on the site include a stoa where the suppliants could rest and consult the priests; there were baths, fountains, a hostel, a banqueting hall and also temples to other divinities. Perhaps, the most famous structure is the theatre where dramatic and musical performances took place in honour of Asklepios. The remains of a stadium have also been found. These buildings date to various periods. They were not all constructed at the same time.

Asklepios was worshipped both publicly and privately. There were regular sacrifices and offerings made by the priests on behalf of the local community but there were also festivals which were on a much larger scale. Every fourth year an especially special lavish festival was celebrated at Epidauros. It was called the Asklepieia, involving the purification of the participants, sacrifices and athletic and musical competitions in honour of the god. However, it is the more private side of the god's cult that most concerns this study.

Individuals who came on matters to do with their physical well being, first performed a cleansing rite, then, after offering a sacrifice, had a ritual bath which resulted in their purification. This was important because they were about to enter a very holy building in what was already a holy sanctuary. They then entered the temple where they spent

the night and sometimes part of the day. This ritual sleep in a sanctuary is known as incubation. The aim was to get the god to appear to them in a dream; he either healed them or gave them instructions which, when carried out by the suppliant, resulted in healing.

Underlying the process of incubation was obviously a belief that dreams opened the way to contact those powers greater than human. A dream resulted in contact with the god or gods. It was in fact a meeting with the god or gods, as the suppliants strongly believed. This was another reason why the suppliants purified themselves.

Aristophanes has a humorous description of a visit to the Athenian sanctuary of Asklepios, but much of what he mentions was also applicable to what happened at Epidauros.

Here follows a summary of his description: Wealth bathes in the sea to purify himself, enters the sacred precinct and offers cakes and incense at the altar and then goes to lie down along with the other patients. The lights were put out and they waited for the god to appear. When he did (attended by Iaso and Panacaea) he looked carefully at all the patients (who had a variety of diseases) and then a boy placed a pestle, a mortar and a medicine chest at the god's side. He made up a mixture of garlic, fig juice, sea onions and vinegar and used them on an unpopular politician's eyes to make his complaint worse. Wealth, however, regained his sight when Asklepios wiped his eyelids with a clean cloth; Panacaea covered his face with a red cloth and Asklepios then summoned the sacred snakes that licked Wealth's eyes, in this way curing him.

All the other patients congratulated Wealth and were awake until daybreak. Nothing is said about whether they were cured. Asklepios in the two instances, describes the use of a variety of treatments - one involving medicine, another the sacred snakes. The cures from Epidauros reveal something similar.

8.4.1 The inscription from Epidauros

Before actually looking at the contents of the inscription I would like to make a few preliminary comments. First of all, the miracles took place in a sanctuary that was supported by the authorities at Epidauros and by the authorities of other Greek states (many Greek cities contributed towards funds for various buildings). It was a recognised part of the religious apparatus of the state and the cult obviously played a very important role in the lives of many individuals.

However, the shrines were open to both rich and poor. Greek society was a society that saw the gods at work in almost every sphere of life, and it was therefore natural to look for the gods to intervene in this realm as well. Illness is a crisis situation and people often turn to their god or gods in a time of crisis. Some of the cures may sound incredible. These inscriptions existed to encourage suppliants, presumably by the priests who must have felt that they would be incredible to many to the sanctuary.

This particular group of inscriptions dates from about 300 B.C. The fourth century was a period in which many collections of miracle stories associated with various deities appeared. They are partisan documents, but one must be careful not to dismiss all

their claims as fraudulent. The cult of Aesklepios lasted for a very long time. Some people saw dream visions and woke up cured.

On the other hand comparison with a shrine like Lourdes, indicates that not many healings are required to keep people coming. By 980 A.D the Medical Bureau at Lourdes had recorded over 5000 cures of which the Catholic Church had acknowledged as miracles only 64. In 1858, Bernadette had experienced the apparitions at Lourdes. 143 years had elapsed by 2001. At Lourdes medical doctors and scientists are called on to corroborate healings. Obviously, this would not have happened at Epidauros, but if there had been no apparently genuine healings, the cult of Asklepios would not have lasted for as long as it did.

There have been various attempts to explain the cures. Some, while accepting the reality of the miracles, have argued that they were deeds of the Devil. Other scholars argue that the priests made use of medical techniques along with the incubations (the inscription does not hint at this happening at Epidauros at this stage). Another theory is that the break in routine and perhaps a change in climate and diet may have produced healing. Others accuse the priests at the shrine of being charlatans and of deceiving the people. Others have pointed to the power of the mind over the body and that healing occurred through hypnosis or autosuggestion or, they refer to the power of religious experience. Even so, the people came, expecting to have dreams in which the god appeared to them and this is just what happened: they were familiar with the kind of work done by the doctors of the time and dreamed that Asklepios

used similar, albeit sometimes more spectacular, medical techniques or, they dreamed that healing was brought about in some other way.

Most of these suggestions try to explain away the possibility of miracles and this of course has always been a heated topic of debate. The attitude of the Protestant Churches is less uniform. In some quarters, the miracles of Jesus are an embarrassment to be explained away and the question of whether miracles still occur is not a real option. Various objections to miracles have been raised over the centuries, but the discussion of miracles by David Hume in the eighteenth century is one of the classic ones.

I am not going to debate the question of the reality of the healings at Epidauros. It is interesting that the inscription testifies to contemporary sceptics, showing that there was not universal acceptance of the validity of the cures. Forty-three miracles occur in the source material. In eleven cases the suppliants are women. In the others, they are men or boys. They came with a whole range of problems, some of them not even to do with healing (a broken goblet and a missing child). The problems were things like prolonged pregnancy (2 cases) and infertility (4 cases), paralysis (4 cases) and lameness (4 cases), blindness, aphasia, facial marks (2 cases), stones (2 cases), war wounds (4 cases), malignant sores, baldness, parasites (leeches, lice, tapeworm and 2 other cases of worms), a growth on the neck, an abdominal abscess, dropsy, headaches, consumption and gout.

The stories reveal a common format: the complaint is always listed and usually they include the name of the suppliant. The place from which the suppliant comes is often mentioned (Pellene, Athens, Thessaly, Epidauros (2), Torone, Lampsakos, Halieis(3), Mytilene, Hermione, Sparta,Thasos, Troizen(2), Pherai, Aigina, Thebes, Heraclea, Epeiros, Knidos, Argos Cirrha, Ceos, Caphyiae, Messene, Cios).

In six instances both the name and place are missing, in five instances the place name has been lost (I am assuming that Echedorus comes from Thessaly) and in one other case the place name is there but the person's name is missing. Other gaps are the result of damage to the inscription. The place names show that suppliants came from many parts of the Greek world, testifying to the popularity of the shrine.

The stories themselves can perhaps also be classified by the various means used to effect healing:

1. The god simply converses or gives advice or instructions - 2, 8,15, 34
2. The god performs some action, not of a medical or strictly medical nature - 3, 6, 7,18, 28, 29, 31, 35, 37, 38.
3. The god performs some medical procedure - either surgery (12,13, 21 – healing by proxy, 23, 25 - where the surgery takes place after Sostrata had left Epidauros, 27, 30,32) or the use of medicine (9,19, 40, 41 - also massage) or both (4).
4. Idiosyncratic cures -14, 16, 43

5. Cures involving the snakes or dog - 17, 20, 26, 33 (like 25, a delayed cure), 39, 42.

6. In some instances we are given only a few details - 1, 5,10,11, 22, 36.

Most healings occur by night, but in some, the god appeared during the day (25). Asklepios seems to have been willing to appear on most nights - there were no special nights set aside for his epiphanies. He appeared in various guises but was not a frightening figure. In accounts of Christian miracles it is often stated that witnesses were amazed or afraid (cf. Mark 5:20).

Cure 3 tells of a man who scoffed at the inscriptions recording cures, but was converted when his paralysed fingers were cured. Like this anonymous man, Ambrosia (4) came as a suppliant and yet laughed at the cures as incredible - despite her scepticism, she was healed. Reference is made to her ignorance. Some of those in the Temple laughed at a blind man's silliness who came for healing though he had no eyeball left in one of his eyes (9). The slave with the broken goblet also had to endure the scoffing of a passer-by (10). Cephisias was another who laughed at the cures only to be punished by Asklepios and forced to beg him for healing (36).

Some supplicants seem to have lacked faith to do what the god commanded in the vision - they are described as lacking in courage and as being cowards (35, 36). Asklepios first reacts with anger to the man from Epidauros (35), but later laughs at him. Like Cleimenes, he later dares to do what the god required and was healed.

Other cures record the faith of the suppliants - Cleo (1) describes Asklepios as "admirable".

In numbers 1, 4-8, 15, 22 and 26, offerings are mentioned, sometimes with no indication of what the offering was to be. In some instances the offerings must have been fairly costly - an inscribed stone (1), a silver pig (4). Money is mentioned on one occasion (when Echedorus embezzled Pandarus' offering - 7). Echedorus himself promised a painted image (7). Other offerings were a headband containing the marks from which Pandarus had been cured (6) - although as we learn, this was to be followed up with cash offering to Athena. Another offering that was a testimony was a large stone that a previously paralysed man was instructed to carry to the *Abaton* (15). Asklepios laughed when a young boy offers 10 dice (8). The goblet that was mended was dedicated to the god (10).

There are therefore indications that rich and poor came to the sanctuary - Andromache (31) was perhaps the wife of the Spartan king, Arybbas. Thersandros drove a wagon (33) and Hagestratos won the *pankretion* at the Nemean Games - an indication of his status and wealth. A servant or slave features in cure 10.

Mention has already been made of how Cephisias was punished for his insolence. He laughed at the cures of Asklepios (36). Other reasons for punishment include failing to hand over a thank-offering (7) or to bring a thank-offering (22). A peeping Tom called Aeschines who tried to see into the *Abaton* was punished by being made blind but was also healed (11). These can perhaps be grouped as punishment miracles.

8.4.2 Disease, disability and healing: Hippocratic writings

This corpus contains about 60 treatises on a wide range of subjects and is written in a variety of styles. Most date from between 430 - 330 B.C., although some are later. Reference to the "Sacred Disease" probably dates to the late fifth or early fourth century (Lloyd 1986:15).

The collection of Hippocratic writings was compiled by scholars from the Museum and Library in Alexandria in about 200 B.C. - some texts were written by doctors, others by teachers. Although the collection became linked to the name of the most famous doctor in antiquity (known to us mainly through references in Plato, Aristotle and Meno), it is not possible to assign any of these texts with certainty to Hippokrates himself. He came from the island of Cos where he was born in c. 460 B.C. He was associated with the Asklepion and was famous as a doctor, charging a fee for teaching other doctors. He was credited by Celsus with the establishment of rational medicine - we are not sure of the truth of this but he was certainly an exponent of rational medicine whose views were until fairly recently accepted as authoritative in Western medicine.

The Greeks created rational medicine but before the advent of rational medicine they, like societies in most of the rest of the world, relied on folk medicine to treat injuries and diseases. They continued to use folk medicine and to resort to magic even after rational medicine appeared on the scene. Folk medicine is based on the knowledge of

herbs and plant remedies. Many of our modern drugs have resulted from folk remedies. For sure, drug companies often start with plants used in folk remedies and try to isolate the active ingredients. It would be possible to test all plants, but this would be very time consuming and it is much more economical in terms of time and money to start with something which may well be effective. Various communities are at the moment trying to reach an agreement with drug companies who are benefiting from their traditional knowledge (Sowetan article featuring Credo Mutwa and recently, views on the HIV/Aids debate). They hope to be recompensed so that the community as a whole can derive some advantage from their heritage. Midwives, gymnastic trainers, herbalists, drug-sellers and practitioners of magic existed alongside practitioners of rational medicine, as did those working in the various healing sanctuaries.

At the outset (in the sixth-century) there was no clear-cut distinction between Greek philosophy and science, of which medicine was one branch. Early philosophers set out to examine the causes of things. Thales of Miletus suggested that there was the basic substance from which everything was made. Empedocles of Acragas (c. 493 - 433) was a philosopher who argued that earth, water, air and fire were elements of life and that two opposing forces, Love and Strife, worked on these elements to produce everything else. These four elements were sometimes analysed in terms of dry, wet, cold, and hot and linked up with the four seasons. Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 500 - 428) believed that the original substance was comprised of pairs of opposites (wet/dry, cold/hot, dark/light etc.).

These philosophers tried to explain natural phenomena in natural, not supernatural, terms. They worked out options related to the fact that natural phenomena were not random, but that laws governing cause and effect operated in the world. For instance, the cosmologists tried to explain earthquakes in natural terms and not as the work of the god, Poseidon. The philosophers put forward various theories and they engaged in rational criticism and debate about each other's theories. These were based not on scientific experiment but mainly on argument and reflection.

Most medical writers were influenced by the nature philosophers and like the author of *The Sacred Disease* later also looked for natural explanations of disease.

In the fifth century B.C .E , medicine separated itself from philosophy as a discipline in its own right. The concerns were different from those of the philosophers in that their goals were not speculation but practical. The doctors wished to cure the sick and injured. They laid a great deal of emphasis on prognosis and the ability to describe the course of an illness and its likely outcome.

This was a means to establishing one's credibility, although the doctor was often powerless to alter the course of the disease. It was important for the doctor to take into account a whole range of factors, for instance, age, sex, habits, climate, environment, physical symptoms. Some of the medical writings include fairly detailed case histories of patients. Epidemics I & III are examples of such works which would help other doctors in their prognosis. Acute diseases had critical days that would help in diagnosis. The case histories show that the doctors used to examine their patients

carefully noting all sorts of details about the patient, his lifestyle, environment and symptoms, but it is clear that there was often little treatment that they could offer them.

In other texts, one reads of some of the methods of treatment used by doctors. These include surgery, cautery, bloodletting, purgative drugs and control of regimen (diet and exercise). This last form of treatment was particularly important. For example, the wrong diet and exercise could cause disease, while the right regimen could maintain or restore health.

These texts (e.g. Epidemics 1.i) also show the interest that Greek doctors had in climate, seasons and weather as factors causing or influencing the course of a disease. Data on air, water, and places were in fact written down to help doctors establish what kinds of diseases were likely to occur under various conditions (cf. chapters 1-3). The importance of air to the body was clear from observation. Some medical writers argued that too much or too little air or the wrong kind of air could result in disease.

There were many other theories about the causes of disease, but most doctors accepted a version of the humoral theory as an important explanation of disease, although there was debate about the particular details. Disease resulted from an imbalance in the humours or fluids of the body that could be caused by a number of factors. This theory had its origins in the work of Empedocles and Alcmaeon of Croton (late sixth-century) who argued that for a person to be healthy, it was important that there be a balance of opposing forces in the body. The four most commonly

accepted constituent humours in the human body were blood, phlegm (from nose), black bile (excreted or vomited blood from an internal haemorrhage) and yellow bile. Yellow bile was associated with diseases that occurred in summer; black bile was earthy and linked with autumn diseases; phlegm was watery and was seen in the diseases of winter. Blood was linked with air and spring. Blood was hot and wet; phlegm was cold and wet; black bile was dry and cold and yellow bile was dry and hot.

These humours determined one's constitution, health and particular character traits (phlegmatic, sanguine, melancholic, and choleric). When these humours were out of balance, problems arose and the doctor would resort to bloodletting, purging, emetics and various dietary measures. Certain foods were considered to be appropriate to certain conditions (cf. The Sacred Disease 2). Plants and herbal remedies were also seen as having humours, elements and qualities and those believed to be opposite to the disease were prescribed to restore balance.

The statements made about the humours were obviously dogmatic statements which the authors had no means of verifying. Some writers were therefore critical of this approach and advocated an empiricist position whereby scientific theories could be tested. This ideal was, however, unattainable and when the authors of these treatises put forward their own ideas about the origins of disease and about the constituents of the body, they were also unverifiable (*On Ancient Medicine* 1 & 14; *The Nature of Man*).

There were no legally recognised qualifications for doctors, who probably learned their skills by apprenticing themselves to practising doctors. These were often, no doubt, their fathers. By the late sixth-century B.C.E there were a number of city-states which had a reputation for producing competent doctors namely Croton, Cyrene, Cos and Cnidus. Doctors often travelled from place to place having to establish a reputation and build up a new practice in each of the centres where they settled. Occasionally, one hears of a city employing a doctor for a period of time, but it is not clear what this entailed.

Lloyd (1970:52) suggests that it meant that the doctor had merely to reside and practise in the city for the length of his contract.

Some doctors became very wealthy, although Precept 6 warns the doctor against greed and suggests that the patient's financial status should be taken into account; on some occasions the doctor should be prepared to forego his fee.

8.4.3 The sacred disease

The author (cf. The Loeb Classical Library, translation by Chadwick and Mann 1986, The Loeb Classical Library 1916, vol 11, 2-321, translation by Arthur Hort) of this treatise seeks to debunk the idea that this disease is "any more divine or sacred than any other disease". He argues that the sacred disease has specific characteristics and a definite cause.

On a personal level, the author doubts their integrity. In the opinion of the author the first people to describe epilepsy as a sacred disease were witch doctors *(magoi),* purifiers (*katharta*), quacks *(agurta,*) and charlatans (*alazones*). The author argues that their motives were to screen their own failure to give suitable treatment and their own ignorance. They are trying to make a living and so are prepared to deceive those who are ill. They wish to create the impression that they have knowledge when they do not. They also treat the condition in such a way as to avoid any risk of being blamed in the event of the patient's death.

He questions their piety on the basis of the other things that such people claimed to be able to do, like drawing down the moon, causing eclipses of the sun etc. The writer argues that if they did perform these magic acts, this would prove their impiety and the fact that they did not believe the gods to exist or to have power. The reason he gives is that such acts would be hateful to the gods. If they genuinely did do any of those amazing acts, the author would not call it divine but human because human will had overcome divine power. However, what they profess is not true. They are trying to make a living and invent stories about this disease and others, making a different god responsible for each disease. It is clear that such practitioners do not use the state-approved religious structures like the temples in their attempts to treat epilepsy, and the author disapproves of this.

He also seems to question their whole way of thinking, and that their treatment is eclectic and illogical if they really believe that a god causes this disease. They resort to

conventional medical diets, magic and superstition in a mixture of muddled thinking suggesting a range of possible yet conflicting causes - diet, impurity, magic.

If eating goat's meat can cause and exacerbate the disease, as they suggest, then one need not look to the gods as a cause. Likewise, if purifications *(perikathairon)* or magic (*mageuon*) can cure the disease, they must presumably also be able to bring on the disease. By talking of gods and demons these men are merely seeking to deceive.

The author acknowledges the unique character of the disease and the ignorance and astonishment that people display when confronted by it, but he questions why this particular disease is singled out when there are other equally likely candidates (including madness, delirium and fevers).

Their theology is suspect, the author acknowledges. They treat the sufferers by purification with blood and similar things,

> "as if the sufferers were ritually unclean, the victims of divine vengeance or of human magic or had done something sacrilegious".

The author's response to this is a statement of faith. He points out that,

> "Personally I believe that human bodies cannot be polluted by a god.

Even if the sufferers had done something sacrilegious, their methods were wrong. They should use the well-established temple- based rites of sacrifice, prayer and supplication to cleanse them and not resort to magic. The author obviously has a strong antipathy towards magicians and exponents of similar practices. Even if their

magic were to work, it would be because "the divine power had been overcome and forced into subjection by the human will".

The author proceeds to give his own explanation for the disease, arguing that it has the same nature as other diseases and a similar cause. His affinities are with the scientists and philosophers of the time who were trying to find a basic principle to explain nature's principles. The explanations he suggests are rational. One explanation is heredity, because the seed comes from all parts of the body, including diseased seed from diseased parts and because certain constitutions are prone to it (phlegmatic) while others are not (bilious). If a god were responsible, all types would be prone to the disease.

The brain is the part of the body that is responsible for epilepsy. Problems occur in uterus when the brain is not cleansed properly and the fetus develops a phlegmatic constitution (8). Some people are purged of this phlegm later when they are children and they do not suffer from epilepsy, others who are not purged in the womb or later are attacked by this phlegm - the phlegm might make its way to the heart or chest, causing asthma, or it might affect the stomach, resulting in diarrhoea. If the discharge reaches the blood vessels the patient suffers an epileptic fit.

Each of the symptoms is explained in terms of this theory - air is unable to flow through the blood vessels because they are blocked by phlegm. The severity of the attack depends on how much cold phlegm is discharged into the warm blood (10).

Other relevant factors include the weather especially the wind and time of year (11, 13 -14, 16) and age (it is not fatal for adults - 12); if children's heads are warmed and then suddenly cooled, they may experience an attack (13); shock may also induce an attack (13). Chronic epilepsy is very hard to cure as it results in changes in the brain. This, the author points out, is confirmed by the study of animal brains, especially the brains of goats (14).

However, it is obvious that in other instances statements are made about the structure of the body that could easily be refuted by dissection. One should closely note his account of respiration (7) and his description of the veins (6). At this stage, it was exceptional to think in terms of a post-mortem and it would have been considered to be a desecration of the body. It is not surprising that scientists seldom used these means. Another investigative tool is analogy, the effect of the wind on other things is used to explain the effect of the wind on the human body and the consequences that this has for epileptics. However, early Greek medicine was not fully scientific. While there might be empirical research, there was also a heavy reliance on "armchair" research - sitting and reflecting on various subjects.

A number of contemporary medical theories are reflected in this treatise. The impact of climate (paragraphs 7 and 10); it is "seen as the source of consciousness in thought, perception and sensation" (Jackson 1988 :22), the humorous theory and of course the idea of balance (too much phlegm/ bile and too much of what is moist/ dry -17).

This is very clearly stated in chapter 21. It is not that the writer excludes the divine dimension at all. The factors that do cause disease like the cold and the sun and the winds are divine and so all diseases could be described as divine; no single disease is more so than another.

At the same time all diseases are human with their own character and nature. There is definitely a rational explanation for every disease. It can be understood and treated, although some diseases pose more of a challenge than others. Regimen is what would be required, not magic spells and purifications. The right knowledge can result in a cure. As Lloyd points out, the author rejects the idea of not only epilepsy, being the result of divine intervention but also every other disease. What is divine does not appear to contradict what is natural. The author also explains the conduct of epileptics who sense an impending attack. They try to go home or to a lonely spot, not out of fear of a demon but out of embarrassment. In this area, too, he is concerned to give a rational explanation.

8.5 Occurrence in Israel

The Old Testament writings and their scholars frequently used the term 'nebiism' in denoting the concept and practice of prophecy in antiquity. Lindblom cautions that since prophecy later, in the course of time, is also referred to as 'nebiism', it "is unfitting to use the term 'nebiism' for a special form of prophecy" (Lindblom 1973:47). There, the appropriate designation, Lindblom argues, would be the use of 'ecstasy'. This, he maintains, "is often said [to be] the distinctive feature of the older prophecy"

(Lindblom 1973:47). In this regard, the frequency and character of ecstasy becomes a determinant.

The first reference to it in Israel is in 1 Sam. 10:5ff. This presents what Lindblom(1973:48) calls 'the orgiastic type'. The discourse indicates Saul who was on his way to Gibeah and that he met a band of prophets of whom "it is said that they were in prophetic ecstasy" (Lindblom 1973:48, Ndiokwere 1981:20). Saul, as the discourse indicates, coming across them, fell into ecstasy (verse 10).

Another example of ecstasy, a collective one for that matter, is offered by 1 Kings 22, indicating four hundred prophets whom, on "the eve of the attack against Ramoth-Gilead, were assembled before the kings of Israel and Judah". It is said that "they raged in ecstasy before the kings" (verse 10). Generally, it is maintained that

> "biblical prophets have been understood as unique figures whose sudden appearance in ancient Israel had a profound impact on the development of Judaism and Christianity" (Wilson 1987:14).

On the surface, the view of prophecy is the gift of foretelling. This can be traced as far back as the ancient Greek word 'pro-phemi' literally meaning 'to speak before/ in advance'.

Another observation is that prophecy has 'public propensities', and that is how we came to know about it. It was not meant to be a private skill or trait but had a serious underpinning for the community. Lindblom (1973:1) holds a strong view that

prophets uttered their oracles in a poetic form. Does this assertion reduce prophets to mere poets with their poetic performances? Wilson strongly suggests that prophets as

> "specialists form a highly diverse group that includes various types of mediums, diviners, priests, and shamans, but like biblical prophets they all see themselves as intermediaries between the human and divine worlds" (Wilson 1987:15).

Another observation that should be made is that a prophet had a divine duty coupled with accountability. One does not make himself or herself a prophet but is called for a specific duty (Lindblom 1973:1 and Wilson 1987:15). This connects with the prophet's public responsibility. The prophet has a public responsibility with a public voice. Wilson (1987:14) acutely supports this as he indicates that

> "scholars have portrayed the prophets variously as creators of a highly intellectual form of ethical monotheism, as ecstatics scarcely in control of their own actions, as religious officials with regular duties in the Israelite cult, as shrewd political advisers, as isolated mystics, and as guardians of Israel's religious traditions".

In this case, Wilson proposes the use of extrabiblical evidence to

> "supplement the narrative about prophetic activity and the words of the prophets that have been preserved in the Bible" (1987:14).

The believe is that he or she is always accompanied by the divine power to inform him or her as to what should be said (Lindblom 1973:2). Prophets differed from religious teachers who methodically instructed pupils (Lindblom 1973:2, Ndiokwere 1981:7). Prophets are believed to be under the guidance of the *anima* (spirit).

8.6 Primitive Prophecy

The first group to be traced are the shamans among the Arctic and Ural-Altaic people. Investigators managed to accurately trace the origins of shamans. Shamans are said to be mediators between the spiritual and the living worlds. A special communication is maintained to be in both worlds. This implies a movement between two worlds. The ability to travel between these two worlds empowers shamans to be able to cure sicknesses and reveal mysteries from the divine world to the living, perform extra-ordinary functions and decipher oracular messages (Lindblom 1973:7, Ndiokwere 1981:3). Ecstatic experiences are fundamental in revealing and communicating oracular messages. They communicate with anima and are given sensational authority over the living. They have their special dressing code and their preferred *locus operandi* is darkness (Lindblom 1973:7).

The other prophetic genre that resembles Shamans is *kahins* and dervishes found in the Arabic context. A *kahin* is a 'seer' or 'soothsayer' whose duty is to proclaim oracles and perform divinations (Lindblom 1973:8). Oracles, in this case, are performed while being in a state of ecstasy. This state of mind (cf. ecstasy) was recognised as a divine form of reality, hence, utterances were considered to be divine in their origin (Lindblom 1973:8).

The inspiration was assigned to *jinn*, the indeterminate impersonal spirit. Their message was presented in artistic forms characterised by phrases formulated in a kind

of rhymed prose. They were consulted on spheres of life affecting communities (Lindblom 1973:8). Rulers had their special *kahins* as advisors to sort out matters of political and social concern. They also played key roles in expediting missions against hostile tribes. Some of the *kahins* were consulted from distances afar to reveal issues pertaining to theft, interpret dreams and other related matters. Due to their sacredness, they had to perform sacrifices to the gods and acted as sacrificial priests (1973:8).

On the other hand, the dervishes' tasks included, among others, a thorough religious training. At the end of a religious exercise they are regarded as ecstatic. To evoke a sense of ecstatic-ness, the dervish used detailed methods and ceremonies which include the Moslem creed, prayers and the reading of the Qur'an. The methodical movement of the body forms an integral part of the ritual.

The important characteristic of this organisation is the pivotal role played by spiritual guide called *shaik* or *mukaddam* (Lindblom 1973:8). A *shaik* was guide or leader in the *takiyyah* (convent where dervishes gather either for meals or other communal activities). The prime task of this *shaik* is to conduct and direct religious exercises and to maintain discipline which leads to ecstatic raptures (1973:9). The role of this *shaik* is not only confined within the convent but extends to the public or life outside the convent. The outsiders or non-dervish communities have the latitude to consult and ask for advice from *shaik* or *mukaddam*.

Next are the primitive prophets known as the *alios musil.* They are well-known orientalists and explorers from Czechoslovakia, better known as the rwala bedouin (wanderers). Among these bedouins exist a class of male and female seers known as ahl as sirr (owners of secrets). These bedouins claim to have special protection from the supernatural power and it enables them to cure diseases, disclose hidden mysteries, interpret dreams and foretell the future and its implications (1973:10). Rwala bedouins believe in spirits, '*jinn*', and the spiritual world. Their special gift is assigned to the celestial spirit called *malak* who is regarded as the messenger of Allah. As Allah's mouthpiece, *malak* is named *munabi* who appears in the shape of a rider seated on a white mare proclaiming to the seer what to proclaim in Allah's name (Lindblom 1973:11).

8.7 Mohammed

Mohammed claimed his title from his organisation. It is believed that the angel *jinn* sent by Allah accompanied him on his way to the kahins. It is not confirmed whether Mohammed experienced ecstaticism since he was known as the proclaimer of inspired messages. In this regard, the title prophet is used accordingly. His call was preceded by meditations at Mount Hira where he had ecstatic visions. The heavenly messenger that came to Mohammed imparted to him a communiqué that implied a mission to be a prophet and Allah's prophet (Lindblom 1973:12). His call accorded him the consciousness of having been chosen to be the messenger of Allah. His preaching of an imminent judgement and repentance made him one of the greatest prophet (Lindblom 1973:13).

8.8 St. Bridget of Sweden

The Swedish preacher of the 14th century known as Birgetta is, among the Swedish people, regarded as greater than Finish preachers. She was of noble birth and lived in permanent contact with learned persons.

Bishops, noblemen and other key leaders in the community had to listen to her words which were very uncompromising (Lindblom 1973:19). Birgitta was born in 1303 and died in Rome in 1373. Her revelations amounted to 700 in number, written in both Latin and Swedish languages. These revelations constitute the first and most prominent source of study of her personal piety and her prophetic activities.

In her revelations, one is also informed of her communiqué with Jesus Christ. She presents herself as a bride and Jesus Christ as the bridegroom. The following expression is contained in the writings, "Your heart will be in my heart and will be inflamed with my love" (Lindblom 1973:19). In Birgetta's prophetic career, obedience is encouraged. She calls upon every inspiration and then receives revelation. She had a gift of supernatural nature and remarkable ability to see through human beings' secrets (Lindblom 1973:24).

So far, it becomes evident that prophetic phenomena are not only confined to a particular community but can be traced in a number of communities. The characteristics of these prophetic patterns vary from one community to another. As

observed, some claim to have the inspiration of a supernatural power while others are coupled with religious (professional) training. Key and common to all is the accountability and representative role of prophets. They command respect based on their divine connection and continual communiqué.

8.9 Ecstasy and other extra-ordinary phenomena

Ecstatic prophecy has foundations also within the Old Testament tradition. The oldest traditions are preserved in, for example, Samuel and Kings. Scholars commonly make use of the term *nebi'im* to denote the earliest stage and form of prophecy in Israel. The ecstatic prophets appeared for the first time in Israel at the selection of Saul as king (Lindblom 1973:47).

Further, the problem is coupled with cross-fertilisation process in terms of Israel's contact with other communities surrounding it. The first reference made about prophecy in Israel is in 1 Samuel 10:5ff that presents an orgiastic tapestry of prophecy. In the text, Saul is introduced in the discourse travelling to Gibeah and meets a band of prophets in ecstasy (mitnabbe im) (Lindblom 1973: 48). Having come across this band of prophets, Saul himself experiences ecstasy (Samuel 10:10). This is well captured in Samuel 26:22-24 - i.e. he stripped off his clothes and fell flat on the ground.

Ecstasy in this regard involves a behavior which is unconventional and can be located outside the parameters or boundaries of societal activities (1 Kings 28:46). The

supernatural power or element is fundamental in this case, hence expressions like, "the hand of Yahweh came upon Elijah" (Lindblom 1973:48, Ndiokwere 1981:20).

There were instances of passive (lethargic) trances that had less or completely no ecstatic significance at all. A typical example is found in 1 Kings 24:11-13 (Lindblom 1973:49).

Another significant prophetic action is the sign or token (*mopet, oth*). In some cases the angel or '*mal'ak*' appeared as an intermediary between the prophet and the supernatural power (1 Kings 13:18): "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of God". Unfortunately, the Old Testament traditions do not contain a detailed description of the concept of vision as it relates to prophecy (Lindblom 1973:56, Hayes 1971:140). To evoke the ecstatic experience and determine its intensity, one had to use extra external means depending on the cultural and religious background of a particular prophet. Music was a fundamental extra external means to evoke ecstasy among the early prophets. This is observed in the Saul discourse on Mount Gibeah mentioned earlier in the course of the chapter (Lindblom 1973:59).

It would be useful in this case to make mention of dancing as another extra external means of evoking ecstatic experiences (Lindblom 1973:59, Ndiokwere 1981:4). The ecstatic and gifted prophet was known as the 'man of God' (*'iš 'elohim*). The rationale behind it is that the *'iš 'elohim* has divine or special qualities which have been bestowed on him by a supernatural power. The Hebrew expression *'iš 'elohim*

corresponds with the Mesopotamian term '*amel – ili*'. In this case, the prophet/ '*iš 'elohim* has special traits and integrity in community (Lindblom 1973:60, Ndiokwere 1981:4) and brings *salom* (peace) or *berakah* (blessings) with him - he is expected to have the ability of seeing through people.

They were also sacrosanct as men of God, implying that it was not allowed for them to be offended (Kings 20:35ff). They lived under strict divine rules, characterised by regulations to be observed obediently (Lindblom 1973:62, Westermann 1991:99). Their lives were governed by a divine call - a special prophetic call. The earlier generation of prophets was in a form of guilds or associations of prophets. They had to dwell in common houses and have meals together. Members were called '*benê hannebi' im*' (literally = sons of the prophets). The aim of such guilds was in the interests of mutual support (Lindblom 1973:69). Their prime duty was to deliver and decipher oracles. A special relationship with the supernatural power was their common characteristic (Lindblom 1973:71, Hayes 1971: 148, Ndiokwere 1981:30).

Their prophetic role was not only confined to religious activities but extended to areas such as politics, social transformation, moral life of the community(ies) and international relations issues of concern and dispute.

8.10 Classical prophets and primitive prophecy

Classical prophecy refers to canonical prophets in Israel from the 8th century up to the last period of the inspirational prophecy. The first in this category is the prophet

Amos, the sheep-breeder from Tekoa and the last is Malachi. This category of prophecy had a common mission, i.e. to deconstruct and then reconstruct Israel (Lindblom 1973:105, Ndiokwere 1981:18).

8.11 Revelations

Classical prophets are said to have received revelations from God (Yahweh). Their visionary skill is characterised as *religiosi homines*. The term 'revelation' in this regard is used to denote a message shown or seen in a 'visionary' manner (Lindblom 1973:108, Ndiokwere 1981:20). The message conveyed, carries the command and the respect of God. The common formula, "Thus says the Lord/ Yahweh" attests to this whole idea of God speaking through his messengers (Lindblom 1973:108, Gunkel 1968:23, Westermann 1991:100). Their (prophets) acceptance in community had to be ratified through the sod (council) and consisted of other prophets. Surely, the council was meant to standardise and control the institution. 'True' prophets were able to appear differently from the bogus ones in terms of their practice (Lindblom 1973:108, Hayes 1971:148).

The relation between Yahweh as the formulator of the prophetic message and the prophet (the spokesperson) is clearly illustrated by the relation between Moses and Aaron. Moses was commanded by God to speak to Aaron and it is said that God would put his words in his mouth.

God, on the other hand, duly informed Aaron that he shall speak for Moses to the people and shall serve as his mouth-piece. In this case, the *kol Yahweh* (the voice of Yahweh) is articulated through the mouth of another agent (prophet).

Prophets were often persecuted, since they often proclaimed a message of doom and judgement. Amos and Jeremiah are classical examples as regards the persecution experiences.

Further, the dramatic character of a vision is also observed in the inaugural vision of Isaiah. Isaiah the prophet experienced it whilst he was in one of the temple courts in Jerusalem. Yahweh appeared as a kingly God of the heavens, sitting on his heavenly throne.

Another dramatic vision is present in John's vision about the downfall of Babylon in the New Testament.

8.12 Prophetic Oracles and sermons

Kings in the Old Testament tradition had to receive oracles from oracle-givers (prophets). It is mentioned that when king Zedekiah sent two of his trusted men to prophet Jeremiah to require and inquire about an oracle, he (king Zedekiah) wanted to know if God would come to their rescue/ help. The response came loud and clear, "I myself fight against you". The response came through the uttering or report of the prophet Zedekiah (Lindblom 1973:149, Ndiokwere 1981:7).

Some revelations where proclaimed by prophets in a public forum in a form of a sermon or speech. In this case, the prophet appeared in a place where many people assembled and delivered the revelations (Jeremiah 11:6). Public fora included places like city gates, royal palaces or courts etc. The aim of public speeches was partly to address the societal problems. This brings to the fore the point made earlier, that prophets had a societal context situating them among others. Haggai made a public speech exhorting his interlocutors to act responsibly in the community (Lindblom 1973:153, Ndiokwere 1981:3).

8.13 Ecstatic visions and auditions

The classical prophets, like their predecessors, were endowed with the gift of receiving revelation from the divine world. These revelations were conveyed in the form of perceptions. Thoughts and ideas are then expressed in words. The prophetic revelations have a unique common factor in that they are apprehended in a state of inspiration that may vary in degrees. To other prophets, revelations are experienced in a static form. In yet others, they are passively experienced in (lethargic) form (Lindblom 1973:122, Hayes 1971:154).

The contents of these revelations differ widely. These revelations are found in sermons, admonitory address, announcement of doom and punishment, lyric poems and short articles, etc. Two of the prophets' revelations are of a great psychological

interest: the vision (= perceived through visual perception) and auditions (= revelation through auditory perception).

By 'vision' we mean the revelation received through a visual perception and 'auditions' are those perceived through auditory perceptions in both revelations. There is no external object that causes any revelation but these arise within the soul of a prophet (Lindblom 1973:122). The prophet claims that what he sees is from his "inward eye" or what he hears, by his "inward ears". It is not the external world but the invisible, divine world that informs the prophet. And, it is an exclusive experience and not open to everybody. It is only those who possess or have contact with the super natural who can have this experience (Lindblom 1973:123).

There are general characterisations of ecstatic visions. In them, there is something irrational and ineffable; something which transcends the normal and everyday experience. What the visionary sees may be described vividly and in detail. There is a looseness and lack of structural connection. Time and space seem not to matter and the scenes change rapidly as in dreams (Hayes 1971: 158, Lindblom 1973:124). Among the ecstatic visions, another two groups of visions are distinguished: "pictoral" visions and "dramatical" visions. The pictoral visions include the objects or figure that appear in a vision. Dramatical vision is characterised by persons or figures who appear in a vision undertaking or doing something as in a play.

A typical example of a pictoral vision is found in the inaugural vision of Ezekiel whereby many objects and figures are vividly and vaguely described. This vision made it impossible for a visionary to explain the vision.

Significant for the prophets is that they used comparison more generally than direct statements in their statements or pronouncements deriving from their visions. To render it in human words, in their missionary and pronouncing experience, the prophets rationalised, they interpreted circumstances and gave allegorical explanations to some features of their visions in order for the listener to have impressions of Yahweh's omnipotence, omnipresence or all-seeing eye (Lindblom 1973:125, Clements 1996:1). Much of the pictoral visions are found in the book of Amos, for example, in the scene where the locusts consumes the grass of the land, where Yahweh stands upon the wall, etc. In the ancient visions, dialogues between the visionary and God is observed.

The dramatic character of a vision is also observed in the inaugural vision of Isaiah. The prophet experienced this vision whilst in one of the temple courts in Jerusalem. Yahweh appeared as a kingly God of the Heavens, sitting on his heavenly throne.

Another dramatic vision is present in the vision of the downfall of Babylon. The visionary in this vision hears the noise - the noise like a whirlwind that sweeps through the Negeb from the Syrian Desert beyond which Babylon is situated. He sees with his inward eyes the work of plunder and devastation and hears the cries of people in distress. "Now I will bring all the groaning to the end". This vision is straightforward

and it makes it easier for the prophet to interpret the vision for the people (Lindblom 1973:129).

From the preceding items of information, one is able to argue for a very close connection between prophecy and healing. Prophecy has an important function in healing. What one foretells connects with the circumstances that one experiences, and wishes or does not wish to experience. The ancient Greek reality, in terms of healing, employed a strong prophetic format. Patients slept for days in the temple in order to be informed about their fate in life. The Delphic oracular context (Fonterose 1978:196), by and large connects both prophetic and healing propensities. Surely one can argue that oracles employ both prophetic and healing functionaries. The next chapter attempts to look closely at prophetic oracles. That exercise would assist one in the comparative section that follows thereafter.

CHAPTER NINE

9. The Oral Structure of Prophecy

9.1 General Remarks

Gunkel (1987) in his article titled: The prophets as writers and poets, explores the prophetic genre in writing. He asserts that this nuance of writing causes difficulties for contemporary decipherment (1987:22). Obviously, as Gunkel (1987:22) admits, prophets, who are referred to as authors, "made use of certain genres that had developed before they came along". The phenomenon of prophetic oracle has both a background and a firm foundation in the characteristics of the intellectual life of the ancient cultural contexts (1987:22). Prophets were like poets or should be rather called poets of their own times. They used their own 'style' to convey their messages - ingrained and relevant in both their particular 'long tradition' but also contemporary circumstances (1987:22). As Gunkel points out

> "they were more bound to the style than to the thought. Even when they were able to think and utter something new, they were still bound to the traditional forms of expressing it" (1987:23).

The following is a typical prophetic context with surrounding audience, as depicted by Gunkel (1987:23):

> "...the individual came to the fore. Powerful personalities arose, grasped by the storms of the age, trembling with passion, who, touched by the divinity in secret

hours, attained the sublime courage to proclaim thoughts that they, they completely alone, perceived within themselves".

Gunkel (1987:23) also cautions that:

"Anyone investigating an author without knowing the genre he uses is building a house without the roof".

This is a serious warning for any person in pursuit of prophetic genres and their style. Thus far, it should be evident that prophets were not necessarily the original writers but speakers, or to be precise, performers in their own right. A typical example is the expression:

Hear!

This is a definite prophetic utterance presupposing an audience around, a particular *Sitz im Leben* (the context of the life of Israel in which they were first spoken). In this case, one has to imagine a prophet standing in the forecourt of the temple, or in front of a crowd of villagers in the Northern Kingdom (cf. prophet Amos from Tekoa moving to the North) with an audience surrounding, curious and amazed about his appearance and/ or about what he says. Others marvel at this "strange figure" (Gunkel 1987:24).

9.2 Prophets and their oral communication patterns

How did prophets speak? Typical of ecstatic activities, some shouted wild threats against the people or kings; others uttered oracles in strange stammerings - gibberish for many - yet others beat their breasts, clap their hands, wobble like drunk people, or

stood naked or with a yoke around their neck. Another may madly swing a sword in the hand (Gunkel 1987:25).

Commonly, the opening of the prophet's speech had the opening formula: So Yahweh spoke to me. A small critique by Gunkel on the Israelite literature is its very little evidence of organisation, or none at all (Gunkel 1987:27). This shows that the type of conventional argument of raised by Gunkel. He is definitely looking at the matter from the point of view of a scholar raised in written material and applies its rules. Written sources have rules that apply and the same could be said about oral literature. The un-orderly part of the oral voice forms its organisational patterns.

Gunkel advises that the analyst of prophetic oracles should pay close attention to certain beginnings and endings. The common beginnings or openings include words such as:

"Thus says Yahweh" and "Hear!", while typical examples of endings include: "so says Yahweh", "thus spoke the mouth of Yahweh", "I Yahweh have spoken it" and "And they shall know that I am Yahweh" (Gunkel 1987:29). Further, as Gunkel states (1987:29),

> "the oldest units of prophetic style are the briefest; they are the puzzling words and collections of words that echo the odd cries of the ancient nebiim. The prophets of a higher sort adopted such a way of speaking in order to give their thoughts a sharp and impressive expression. Such words are then publicly displayed by these men on something like a sign or are given as names to their children" (Hosea 1; Isa. 7:3; 8:3).

9.3 Various Prophetic Oracles

9.3.1 Brief statements with more clarity, made up of two, three, or a few more lines

9.3.1.1 Isaiah 1: 2-3

2. Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord has spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

3. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, my people do not consider me.

9.3.1.2 Amos 1:2

And he said, "The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top Carmel shall whither.

9.3.1.3 Jeremiah 2:1-3

Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says the Lord; I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

Israel was holiness to you the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, says the Lord.

The above stated oracles were taken randomly by the researcher to indicate some of the short oracles that were uttered by prophets in ancient Israel. Surely, they had a particular intention for the audience they were directed to. They are short because the message was intended to be brief and to the point and, finally, have an impact on the interlocutors. In this case, the listener needed to hear the brief statement and that was adequate for the message to strike home.

All three selected oracles have impressive openings. The intention of the prophet was to have his point heard and remembered. It was important for him to make it brief but still acutely so. The shortness of the structure of the oracle is per se part and parcel of the oral technique. Short utterances are used to convey the message effectively.

9.3.2 Long statements / utterances

The second oracle technique can be called long statements. As Gunkel notes (1987:30), they are

> "more or less loosely piled up one after another. The prophet turns from one thing to another, according to whatever his eye lights upon, and he stops when he thinks he has exhausted the subject".

One can easily deduce an oral set-up with the paraphernalia of orality. It is located within the deeper context of the story-telling technique. The piling up of loose statements allude to an oral context.

It is a context of less restrictions and conventionalities. The performer has the liberty to deliver the utterance, as he feels free and how his intuitive moods demand. It surely

piles up and builds up a momentum and finally reaches the climax. Such a piece-meal style naturally opens the door for subsequent additions. In this case the story never comes to an end but instead continues endlessly with the unfolding of new plots, characters, themes, sub-themes, and contexts emerging and enriching the discourse in the process of telling the oracle.

The longitudinal process is due to the fact that smaller units collate into larger units to form a long and impressive discourse. It is important for the reader to critically note the *Gattung* of each and every unit and be able to locate its precise nuance. It will be interesting for one to critically assess the specific digressions or rhymes that do occur in the process of this discourse. This will show the skill and art of the story-teller (in this case the prophet and his oracular devices).

A notable example is Isaiah 13. This discourse deals with the city of Babylon. The narrator skilfully introduces a discourse that comes from the time of the exile,

> "one that is composed of many more or less strongly differentiated fragments. Yet, when taken as whole" (Gunkel 1987:30),

it forms a larger unit.

The discourse itself has the following structure: the introduction has a summons, the middle has the battle, while the end concludes with the destruction.

The manner, in which the narrator starts, introduces the reader to the context of total confusion and darkness. This is later clarified in the conclusion of the very same

darkness. Surely, this is a oral telling skill and art; and should be located within the *Sitz im Leben* of the narrator and his interlocutors.

9.3.3 Lyric poetry with refrains

Lyric poems and refrains are present in Amos 1:3-2:16 and the seven woes of Isaiah 5:8-23. The refrain, 'I will not turn away the punishment, because they have ...", runs through the entire discourse like a motif. It keeps the momentum of the text and sets the metrical pace of the poem. For Gunkel (1987:30):

> "The most artistic are those prophetic units in which fragments of different genres are brought together in the form of a "liturgy".

Thus Gunkel (1987:31) concludes that, in the hermeneutical process of the prophetic books, one should use the criterion of 'context' only with serious caution.

9.3.4 Prose

The prose oracle is described as a rational reflection – prophetic speech which was originally in the form of poetry (Gunkel 1987:31). Indeed, there should be a difference between Greek feeling and style as compared to that of the Israelites. The latter did not treat speech and poetry as mutually exclusive. They saw it as part and parcel of the same package. Usually, the prophetic oracle (the prose Gattung) is in verse form – sowing a poetic form and nature (Gunkel 1987:31). Two sub-genres can be distinguished in the metric form of poetic prophecy:

9.3.4.1 The strict style

The basic characteristic of this sub-genre is that the same verse dominates the entire poem and that it belongs to poetry which was sung (Gunkel 1987:31). The following texts give a portrayal of what this sub-theme is all about: Isa. 1:10-17, Jer. 2:1-3 and Isa. 2:2-4.

9.3.4.2 The freer style

The basic characteristic of this sub-genre is that the expressed content in different verses is according to the ebb and flow of the sentiment. This largely could be located within the spoken poetry category. Examples are Isa. 1:2-3; 29:1-7.

Gunkel (1987:32), using aesthetic standards, concludes,

> "many of the prophetic speeches are beyond comparison and they are among the most powerful passages of the Old Testament, which is so rich in powerful words. Hardly anywhere in the entire world is there religious poetry that is comparable in force and power to these prophetic writings".

The key question remains: What could be the metrical organisation of these prophetic poems? Are they in the iambic or metrical form? This is another field of research to be taken up later. It demands that the critical reader of these prophetic oracles wrestle with questions of metric nuances since they indicate the emphasis in verbal utterance.

9.3.5 Vision and audition oracles

Visions are classified into two variables: First, the brief and simple, and second, the longer and detailed. A typical example of brief and simple visions are the visionary experiences of Amos (8:1) who sees a fruit basket and Jeremiah (1:11) and the discourse of the branch of an almond tree (Gunkel 1987:33).

The longer and more detailed visions come from both Zechariah and Ezekiel (Gunkel 1987:33). As Gunkel (1987:33) rightly notices,

> "... faraway things the prophet cannot see by his own powers: before the eyes of the 'lookout' appears the Persian army, approaching two by two, as it traverses the pass".

In this case the prophet's eyes travel into the invisible world (Isaiah 6:1-7). It should be noted that the prophetic vision is confined within his own *Sitz im Leben*. Note Ezekiel who "sees the miraculous throne borne by the cherubim on which God travels".

The *Sitz im Leben* does go beyond the Isrealite context to account for outside influences. In this case, some of the mythological elements of the surrounding communities are indicated. This shows the influence of the Near Eastern and Mediterranean contexts on Israel. This further raises an interesting research study on the extend of influences of the outside contexts of Israelite prophecy. Indeed, Israelite prophecy was not independent of influences outside its parameters.

The style of visions varied considerably. There were narrative discourses where the prophet described or rather reported at length on what he saw. This would surely be in a prose format. Gunkel notes the following characteristics of vision presentations:

9.3.6 Coded form

In this case, the divine reality is covertly conveyed with less description. A typical example is the Ezekiel discourse where the prophet makes use of comparisons (1:26).

9.3.7 Visions connected with verbal revelations

In this case, the message of the prophetic oracle supersedes the visionary experience itself (Isaiah 6:1-8).

In this regard Gunkel (1987:35) concludes,

> "prophets put all emphasis on the thoughts that they contained [and] not on the miraculous way in which they came" (1987:35).

9.4 Classification forms of prophetic oracles

Gunkel notes the following classification forms of prophetic oracles:

Promises and threats

Descriptions of sins

Disputes

Songs of all sorts

Religious forms and parodies of profane poems

Lament and songs of joy

Short poetical passages and entire liturgies

Parables

Allegories

He further cautions that most of the above-mentioned genres should not be seen as only originating within the Israelite context, but that Israel have adopted foreign genres in the course of their development (Gunkel 1987:38).

9.5 Style and syntax

The Old Testament prophets favour particular sentence constructions. Firstly, the Hebrew narrative is used in some of the constructions: "and then" or "then" (Gunkel 1987:48).

Secondly, the use of the perfect tense expresses acts completed in the past (Gunkel 1987:48). In this case, the prophet does not see the expected event in the 'front' as ordinary people do, but 'behind' in their eyes as it has already occurred (Gunkel 1987:48).

Thirdly, they couch their address in the second person: It is linked to the vocation of the prophet (1987:49).

Fourthly, they favour imperatives at the beginning of speeches. This in turn becomes a powerful introduction (Joel 4:9, Zeph 2:1).

Lastly, they often make use of questions. Questions in this case play a major role in relating visions (Zeph 1:9) and at times they also begin or interrupt the prophetic word (Micah 4:9).

9.6 Claus Westermann's theories on forms of prophetic speech

In addition to Gunkel's research, that of Claus Westermann is important for this study.

Westermann's work reflects an approach to the basic forms of prophecy in Israel. His work attempts to do a critical survey of the works of several scholars who came before him (1991:13-81). Some of these scholars include the work of Gunkel referred to above.

Westermann notes three major kinds of prophetic speech, namely, accounts, prophetic speeches and utterances. The accounts are referred to as accounts uttered by prophets. The prophetic speeches on the other hand are said to be words of "God which are delivered by a messenger of God" (1991:90). Lastly, the utterances are directed from prophets to God.

Westermann cites the book of prophet Amos as one of the books that contain three components referred to earlier (Amos 7:1-17).

The book of Ezekiel is said to be a mixture of priestly and prophetic speech forms (1991:92). In connection with prophetic speech, Westermann deals with three basic questions: who speaks? To whom does the prophet speak? And, what takes place in this speaking?

According to Westermann (1991:96), the function of prophetic speech is that

> "... the person to whom the speech was addressed was considered by those who collected and passed down the prophetic speeches to be an important criterion for determining the types of speeches".

The tempus of the institution of prophecy in Israel is placed within the context of the loss of statehood that faced Israel at the time. The function at the time was to guide the nation in ways "willed, initiated, and directed by God [and which] were not disputed" (1991:99).

Westermann then identifies five theological phases of prophecy in Israel:
1) the patriarchal stories were God spoke directly to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; 2) the primeval history of Adam and Eve; 3) the Mosaic tradition of Moses and Aaron; 4) the Joseph period which introduced the concept of dreams; and, lastly, the time of the judges where judges became messengers of God (*mal yak yhwh*). The definition of prophecy, according to Westermann, should be defined as

> "a transitional stage in which the speech of the messenger is the form designated for the indirect revelation of God".

9.6.1 Westermann's Prophetic Genres

9.6.1.1 The Messenger formula

According to Westermann (1991:100), the messenger formula, "Thus says the Lord", emerged in the pre-writing epoch. This genre contains oral repetitive formulary patterns. He identifies the following structure that contains the messenger formula:

Instruction of the messenger

Messenger formula

Messenger speech

Westermann refers to the Genesis Patriarchal story (Genesis 32:3-5) as an example in this case.

Instruction of the messenger – "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau"

Messenger formula – "Thus says your servant Jacob"

Messenger speech – "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; and I have oxen, asses, flocks, menservants, and maidservants."

The duty of a prophet was to "bridge this distance with each of their speeches", hence the common expression 'Go and say' (Kohler 1923). In particular, Widengren (cf. Westermann 1991:104) comments that

> "It is thus presupposed that the letter is only the literary fixation of an oral message which is brought to the addressee by a messenger. The formula shows that there is a close connection between the oral message and the written letter".

One can refer to the example contained in II Kings 18:28,

> Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria!
>
> Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand'.

According to Westermann (1991:104),

> "That is important for the use of the message style in prophecy insofar as it is the oral transmission alone which is possible here. Hearing belongs to the character of the reception of the message as well as to the repetition of the speech".

9.6.2 The proclamation formula

This genre (proclamation formula) introduces

> "royal decrees, ordinances, and commands in as much as these convey irrevocable authoritative words of the king".

This genre differs from the message formula indicated earlier on because it (the message formula)

> "... introduces the message consisting of a perfect and an imperative part, which still offers a decision to the addressee" (Westermann 1991:111).

9.6.3 The Prophetic judgement-speech on individuals

This genre contains the following structure:

Summons to hear

Accusation

Introduction to the announcement by the message formula (with 'therefore')

Announcement of judgement (in personal address)

1 Kings 21: 18-19 offers an impressive example of this type of genre. One could add the popularly known Nathan story in this regard:

Accusation

Development of the Accusation

The announcement of Judgement

It becomes clear that the Israelite prophetic speech, regardless of its intention and context, is usually ratified by the messenger formula to authenticate it. Prophets at the time had to rely on the messenger formula in order to impress their message on their interlocutors. This has to be seen as an authenticating device used by prophets to gain respect, and, further, to have the necessary attention they deserved.

As we have seen in the case of the African divination oracles, the use of the '*siyavuma*' was used to authenticate the message of the diviner. The client is not at all compelled to call out the expression '*siyavuma*' but is free to utter it during the divination process. This is regardless of the fact that the client is accused for his or her acts as he or she came through the divination process.

CHAPTER TEN

10. Reflections

10.1 Concluding Reflections

Thus far, a number of areas concerning divination and oracle have been explored. At times, each is disjuncted and based on its unique perspective. It has to be understood by the reader that the researcher attempted to provide a broad overview of divination and to do so from a number of perspectives. The first perspective presented a personal reflection on divination in the context of African divination. That was followed by an interview with Mrs Annah Mokgethi who is a trained and 'called' diviner in the field of divination - healing. Her perspective opened up new dimensions on divination and its related practices. She provided insights into the perceptions of a practising diviner-healer with regard to her own understanding of her calling and training - from the inside, so to speak.

The third perspective dealt with African healing and the proper side of 'prophecy'. This connected very well with the two first perspectives. Though the researcher admits that the section was not comprehensive, it is informative. The main rationale for the third perspective was to provide a broader overview of the field of divination. The researcher concedes that much work has been done in the field (Setiloane, Ngubane, Mbiti, Berglund, Van Binsbergen). The third perspective used local voices to back up its framework.

The fourth perspective dealt with some of the African divination oracles. This perspective dealt with the main thrust of the thesis, namely the dimensions of oracle-speech. This perspective relates directly to other perspectives that represent the oral dimensions of oracles. It was necessary for the researcher to provide an overview of the orality arguments to help the reader to see the 'placement' of African divination oracles in the context of orality. African diviner-healers are performers. Again, African life and philosophy have an artistic form and nature. Life, for an African person, reveals itself in contrast more in art forms than in 'literature' forms.

The researcher was taught orally to memorise his ancestral greetings: *imithokosizo,* for both *aBanguni* ancestry and *aBandawu* ancestry. Intellectual and educated I may be. Even so, I was taken aback by the force of the oral world - its noetics and mnemonics. I had to listen and master rhythms of *aBandawu,*

Ndizo dzekamedza Gogo mukoruta

Nzimo rakwakwa Nwauri

Mutambo wa kwakwa Chimurenga

Ndo phundzuka musapa

Ndo garagasega

Ndola ndosura

(I great my grandmother

My (ndawu name) is Mwauri

Mwauri Chumurenga

I come from the seas

I come with gladness

I am fine with ancestral medicine)

One has to note that the ancestral is also trained to recite these oracles – "*Badimo ba a rutwa*" in order to grow and begin to divine effectively.

The perspectives provided in the thesis dealt with theories of divination. It is important to note that some work has been attempted in this broad field of research. It became clear that the researcher noted that each theory has its own strength and defaults. Hence, the researcher appealed strongly for a combination of approaches in order to come up with a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

Devisch's praxeological approach approximates what the researcher regards as a comprehensive approach. This means, among other things, that investigation into divination and the oracle need to be done from within African culture. The researcher needs to start from within and begin to wrestle with internal intricacies. Van Binsbergen (1991) in his article – *On becoming a Sangoma*, argues for a non-reductionistic approach to African divination. Recent theological trends (Bediako 1995) with the exception of Setiloane (2000) are challenged to seriously consider taking up this perspective.

The sections that analysed the Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern perception of divination and prophecy introduced a number of practices of Ancient Greek, Mesopotamian and Ancient Israelite prohecy and healing. It has to be noted that the attempt was to briefly flesh out this phenomenon in the light of African divination and healing.

The ninth chapter directly connects with the eight preceding perspectives and highlighted some oral divination oracles - especially as it derives from the work of Gunkel and Westermann.

Against the background of the research, there are number of issues which need to be highlighted.

10.1.1 Ecstasy

The concept of ecstasy is common throughout the perspectives. An African diviner-healer depends much on ecstasy. It is an experience that is considered important throughout the world of divination. The concept, as we have seen in the context of the Ancient Israelites, is considered of central importance. The qualities of diviner (African context) and that of a prophet rely on the ecstatic experience. It is a linking point of the natural and the spiritual worlds. Oracles are easily formulated and delivered through the means of the ecstatic experience. Pythia at Delphi is said to be have been the god's medium through her possession experiences. This is how she is depicted:

Spumea tum primum rabies vaesana per ora effluit et gemitus

Et anhelo clara meatu murmura, tum maetus vastis ululates in

Antris extremaeque sonant dominta jam virgine voces.

(BC 5.190-193)

Translated:

Then mad frenzy flows through her foaming lips, groans and load panting cries, and then, when the maiden was at last subdued, a dismal wail and final words sounded in the vast caves

Ecstasy is prominent in every divination context.

10.1.2 The connection between the supernatural world and the natural world

The connection between the supernatural world and natural world is what divination is all about. Oracles, whether from either context, helps to link or rather closes the gap that exists between these two contexts. Prophets and diviner-healers form a linking point between the two worlds. Daily life has to be seen and interpreted from the supernatural perspective. The example of a young man who bought a new BMW 5 series already demonstrated this point. The young man wanted the participation of the supernatural world in the context of his daily life.

10.1.3 Supernatural world determining the natural world

The macro-level structure influences the natural world. The Delphic oracles were meant to provide answers to daily activities. Rules and leading people in the community at the time contacted Pythia about their daily life. The same applies to Israelite prophecy. Kings and other rulers were given answers, hence the messenger formula: "Thus says the Lord." In this case of African divination, divine-healers too, provide answers about life and its intricacies: *Ditaola tša gago dire* or *Badimo ba re ngwanaka*. This symbolic social universe that introduces the sacred canopy on life, about life, on life and in life cannot be avoided.

Regardless of globalised thinking and activity, most people in Africa, regardless of their status level in the community, regard divinatory life to be central to their lives. A number of examples in the introduction pointed to the importance of this fact. Life philosophy hinges on the supernatural dimension. The stability and close connection between these two dimensions offers relief: *Badimo ba go roballe*. In the case of a clash between these dimensions, then, the individual person perceived that the context of community would have no life and peace at all. Globalisation and its challenges will and cannot wipe out this perception at all.

10.1.4 The importance of symbolism

The number of perspectives looked at indicated how symbolism works. The ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern contexts contain a number of symbols. Prophets in

the Old Testament used symbols to express and communicate with people in the empirical world. Amos is a good example. He used 'ordinary' symbols that contained complex meanings for his interlocutors. The African divination perspective on symbols, as we have seen, uses divination tablets, which are interpreted to discover meaning for the empirical world.

10.1.5 The importance of dreams

Dreams are not common experiences. Very few people are able to remember what they dreamt about the previous night. Others are able to recall bits and pieces of their dreams. The diviner-healers are supposed to recall every moment of their dreams. The same applies to prophets. Sometimes, this experience is accompanied by visions. There is still some work to be done in this regard. Does a dream equate a vision? If not, what is the difference between these two concepts?

The Aesclepios and Epidauros stories contain a number of instances where patients had to sleep in the temple in order to receive their healing through the means of dreams. As was indicated, the healer, who connected with the god Apollo, would come in a dream, and the next morning the patient is said to have been completely healed through this dreaming experience.

10.1.6 The concept of 'Space' and 'Time'

Space and time are crucial in divination. Where and how a particular act is performed is crucial. This became clear from Turner's views on 'classification'. This also applies to the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern context. The function of temples featured prominently in this regard. Patients had to wait in certain sections of the temple in order for their healing to be effected. The African divination context indicated the importance of *Sangoma* lodges that are referred to elsewhere in the research as '*ndomba*' - a special name for a divination lodge. This is also clearly indicated by the photos appended for the purpose of this research. 'Space' and 'Time' are crucial for divination and the divination process.

10.1.7 Divination oracles and orality

The orality section indicated a number of oral art forms and characteristics of oral culture - the psychodynamics of orality. The most important features introduced in this research were memorisation and oral formulary patterns. The researcher argues strongly that both diviner-healers and prophets are oral performers. They use a number of devices to transmit their oral epics. This became clearer in the case of ancient Israelite prophecy - with reference to the works of Gunkel and Westermann. The messenger formula features predominantly throughout the number of examples cited in this research.

The messenger formula helps the prophet and oral performer to introduce his prophetic utterances and further to authenticate his message. This should be seen in the context of communication between the empirical and spiritual worlds. The device resonates with the *siyavuma* interjection in one of the oracles looked at earlier on in the research. Prophets and diviner-healers are ordinary and are ordinarily located. They had to utilise devices which are commonly based and at the same time demanded attention or interlocutions from their audience.

It was important for them to be locally based and again different. The two dimensions had to be kept in tact. Locally, in a sense that they were communicating with the audiences, the latter in most cases knew who they were. They were different in the sense that what they were transmitting was not well received, hence some of them ended up being beaten or verbally insulted (Jeremiah). Keeping the two worlds together was not that easy, but it had to be done for the sake of the role the oral performers had to play in performing their divination.

In the case of African divination oracles, a number of formulary patterns were described. It should be noted that in this case, the use of divination tablets complement the divination process. The diviner-healer has to use both devices in order to carry out divination procedures. It was noticed that in the context of the second sample of African divination oracles, the diviner-healer used a number of formulary patterns in the opening, in the middle and at the end of the divination oracle.

The diviner-healer employed these devices. She was interjected throughout the divination process by the '*siyavuma*' oral interjection. The interjections helped her to recover and articulate further her divination oracles.

Clearly, the Old Testament prophets did not operate in a world much different from that of Africans. Orality has an important place in our current situation. The new branch of 'Prophets' and diviner-healers still continue with their divination processes. This introduces a linked world, a world of oral art forms which has operated for some time, the real world of experience and the world of the ancestors. This is central to the way that African people understand the universe. It is with the existence of oral art forms and how they help to reorganise life and thought patterns that we manage to live our lives. It is part and parcel of the meaning system in which we live, and on closer inspection, may prove to be not very different from other so-called modern (or Western) meaning systems. Modern life is not a basis determining whether divination is part of it or not.

10.2 Specific Reflections

Thus far the research managed to brood through a number of theories in the light of the divination data collected and analysed. A number of key issues emerged in the process of this analysis. For a fact the research study opened up an interesting academic 'conversation' in the fields of African Religious Studies, Oral Studies and Social Anthropology. The basic task of undertaking this research as stated in the introduction of this research work was merely to include the *'divinatio vox'* in the

centre of scholarship among *voces* that are marginalinased. The researcher used this particular discourse to begin a process of conversation with 'established' centres of learning to begin to understand other *voces*. The following specific observation deserve to be mentioned:

10.2.1 The science of dreams

Dreams are very central in the African divination process. Ancestrology centres predominantly around dreams. The personal narrative discourse indicated specifics on how the researcher experienced dreams and their effects on his personal life. Diviner-healers who divined or intervened through the means of divination revealed intricacies about his life patterns. The process was strictly channelled by dream patterns. In this case dreams formed a cardinal point of departure for the divination process. The researcher was able to find "his feet" in his life orientation having clearly understood what dreams and dreaming experience implied for his life destiny. Dreams, in this regard, offer a channel through which effective communication takes place.

10.2.2 Animal slaughtering (sacrificial ritual)

Sacrificial rituals form another important component through which ancestry is maintained and further communicated. The chapter on the personal discourse of the researcher introduced various theories around sacrificial ritual. Blood, as it was stated above, is important in any divinatory context. It consists of the symbolic and

metaphorical meanings offering the suppliants and the ancestry a common route of communication.

10.2.3 The training of ancestors

This arises when one takes note of the fact that the initiation of a diviner-healer into divination is definitely directed to the ancestors and not the diviner-healer (*Go thwasa badimo* – it is ancestors that are initiated). The logic behind this practice is that ancestors are re-activated from one diviner-healer to another – note the diachronic dimension of this view. The cycle keeps on repeating itself. What becomes central is the fact that ancestors are initiated and further trained to be good diviner-healers. This makes sense given the fact that common expressions like: *motho a sotlwa ke badimo* (a person is troubled by ancestors) (cf. the situation of both the researcher and Mrs Annah Mokgethi).

10.2.4 The distinction between African Herbalists and Diviner-Healers

The researcher noted the difference between African herbalists as opposed to African diviner-healers. The distinction was marked in terms of the functionary roles existing within the two categories. African herbalists are said not to diagnose or venture into any divination strategy, while on the other hand diviner-healers are able to diagnose or divine, and to prescribe further specific treatment. This distinction is interesting in comparison with the Near Eastern and Mediterranean realities.

10.2.5 Calling and training of African Diviner-Healers

Calling and training into African divination was discussed extensively in chapters 2,3 and 5. Dreams formed an important part and an effective vehicle of communication between both the natural and supernatural contexts. Added to dreams was the mentioning of 'strange' sickenesses and calamities which befall a prospective diviner-healer before the process of divination could assume.

10.2.6 Significant Others in the process of divination training

Prospective initiands are usually directed to 'senior' diviner-healers to become their mentors in the process of their initiation into divination. Dreams at times help one to identify potential mentors. Rules and regulations are put in place for both their mentors and themselves during this process. Interestingly, the gender characterisation sounds strange – the mentor is either *ntate* (father) or *koko* (granny) while the initiand acquires status of a child (*ngwana*). The gender typification of *ngwana* is not specified. It is merely used generically, and passionately so – note *ke ngwanaka* (it is my child). Gender and Feminist studies in this regard would surely find this interesting. This typification balances both the feminine (*koko*) and the masculine (*tate*) designations. A father begets a child while a child looks up to his or her granny who has begotten his or her father into the divinatory world. This is intriguing – the granny-father-child relationship. One could thus look into the en-gendered aspect of African divination realities.

10.2.7 The concept of fear in divination

One should reiterate the fact that fear (*phobos*) occupies a prominent place in the divination context. The researcher, earlier on, pointed out two pronged philosophies undergirding fear in the context of divination. The first perspective locates fear within a general context. In this case it is fear that almost any adherent of the African philosophy and life experiences. The second typified fear is more complex. It is the divinatory-context-fear-type. It concerns the initiand and his or her ancestors. This kind of fear is coupled with 'respect'. This latter fear type raises questions of 'significant others'. One cannot claim to master his or her fate and destiny within this context, but instead – fear of ancestry arrests everything and manages human fate and destiny. Life operations and philosophies are governed within this dimension of fear-respect in the context of divination. Formulations and questions in this regard are posed in terms of the laguage category used in this context. This ties and introduces one to African Ethics and Morality.

10.2.8 African Divination Oracles

The two typified oracles dealt with in this research bring one to socio-linguistics and African orality. It further enabled one to see through the 'window glass' some kind of the divinatory language full of rich symbols and symbolic interaction. Language is a vehicle of any symbolic action. The same should apply to the divinatory context.

10.2.9 Postponement during the narration

Ngaka Maamushi in line 1 (cf. the opening of his oral narration or performance) begins his narration by the expression: *Yaa!* The opening acts as a 'constraint' to offer the narrator the 'space' and 'time' of fixing his discourse (Ong 1982:60). The narrator needed this 'space' and 'time' to stitch together prefabricated discourse (Ong 1982:22).

10.2.10 Noetic role of heroic 'heavy' figures – *bizarre –ism*

The performer (*Ngaka* Maamushi) in the oracle employs noetic role of heroic 'heavy' figures that are 'bizarre'. Note the expression – *Ke nna mogolo ke kakatlela dithaba.* This is an oral memory technique to effect the structure of communication. The evanescence of this expression by *Ngaka* Maamushi relates once more to 'space' and 'time' by identifying and locating himself within the oral praise divination oracle.

10.2.11 Formulary patterns and expressions

The evidence of formulary patterns and expressions shapes the form of the second oracle.

Let's recapitulate the following common expressions:

Ge ke eya ke bolela le taola tša gago

Ka mokgwa wo ditaola di bolelago ka gona

Ge ke eya ke kitima le ditaola tša gago

This shows the importance of studying African divination from a plethora of ways. Again one has to note the importance of divination as a 'linking zone' between the supernatural and natural realities. Oracles function to bridge this gap – the natural *versus* the supernatural!

10.2.12 Divination, Prophecy and Healing – African and Near Eastern, Mediterranean Contexts

The researcher introduced the Near Eastern, Mediterranean material in the research for comparative purposes. It should be noted at this stage that the researcher sees a big difference between prophecy and divination. Both concepts are different phenomena, but yet close to each other. First prophecy connects to divination in the sense that both traits require some special calling. The Semitic material introduced God (*YHWH*) as the 'Caller' who calls prophets to deliver special messages. The African diviner performs the role of a messenger but he or she goes beyond the 'messenger' role in that he or she operates and manipulates the supernatural reality. This is a special training and calling that the African diviner is invested in him or her. However, it should be noted that both the Babylonian and Assyrian conception of healing and divination did not entirely encapsulate the idea of prophecy – but instead diviner-healers were a professional group of people usually attached to specific cult centres.

The question remains to be stated: Did the Semitic views on prophecy have any inclination towards divination and healing? Clearly not! Prophecy was all about the deliverance of the message (cf. messenger formula). Again, what is the difference between a diviner-healer and a prophet? The question is a difficult one, especially for South Africa that faces a number of *aMapostola* (prophets with Zionist inclination) and *dingaka* (diviner-healers). For Kiernan (1992:231-241) there exists a vast difference between the two institutions. Kiernan (1992:231) differs with Sundkler. For Sundkler (1977:242) there is no difference at all between these two institutions. One can at least note that prophecy within the Semitic context was contextual and precisely specific-context-focus. Various prophets emerged at different time spans within different situations. This applies also to African divination whith diviner-healers who are specific context focussed.

What about healing? The ancient Greek material engaged in this research study revealed interesting affinities with African divination and healing. The closest affinity in this case is the concept of 'space' and 'time'. The ancient Greek material, in particular the Aesklepian healing mentioned the importance of temples and the sleeping patients in the temples waiting for the God to reveal himself with a healing mechanism for them. Space (temples) indicate the sacredness of healing and divination. This also applies to the African divination reality, note the *ndomba* (cultic lodges). Further there is a link between the natural and supernatural realities in both cases. Clients or patients have a close link with the supernatural powers. In ths case case of the Asklepian healing, patients are advised to remain and sleep in the temple with the aim of dreaming and having visions and direct contact with the deity-healer. This interests

one to see how directly patients communicate with the powers above. Indeed, *motho ke Modimo* (a person is divine) (Setiloane 1998:66). This points to the fact that humanity in a natural sense comprises of both realities – divine and human realities. One does not need to wait for a particular time and place to discover his or her own divine nature. This can be surely experienced in this reality, here and now. What about the prophetic oracles in this regard? As Westermann maintained, the genre of prophetic speech contains oral repetitive formulary patterns. This structure resonates with the second type of African divination oracle that was looked at in this research study. Again the prophetic speech is contextualized for a specific context and time. This connects with the African divination oracles uttered or announced for specific context and audience.

10.3. Then what?

One might wonder about the sense in carrying out this research study. It is a fact that the intricacies around divination invoke a comprehensive research activity. Firstly, healing and divination are part and parcel of African reality. African indigenous reality will always continue to pose questions about 'unsual happenings' around people. This is despite the fact that modernisation and globalisation encroach. Culture will always undergird every reasoning that encounters humanity. The study attempted to help the reader to come to terms with how humanity interrogates reality. An unquestioned reality is a dead reality. Divination in this case forms an aspect among many that questions and engages reality. Secondly, language and culture are closely linked. Language should be viewed as a vehicle of culture. It (language) is embedded within

culture. And further more language imbibes culture. Divination language is culture-context-based activity. It is within this context of divination-cum-culture that one has to understand its intricacies based within its rightful cultural context. The misappropriation in the study of African Anthropology came as a result of studying African realities *non*-comprehensively – with the exception of some new insightful approaches (Braun 2000:31 and McCutcheon 2000). The interrogation and engagement of a specific context would surely bear much fruit. Not only will researchers understand the language, but also how that language was conceptualised within its specific context. Thirdly, the diviner-healers are performers. This is another challenge for African folklorists. Fourthly, the seriousness of divination in the raging Aids/HIV debate remains to be highlighted. This is so instructive in the challenge of African oriented techniques versus Western oriented techniques. African oriented techniques emphasises healing and not curing. This is one way of looking for African local solutions in the context of the Aids/HIV debate. This observation does not imply that Africa lacks in terms of *Materia Medica*. Instead the researcher strongly argues that every medical system has its own drugs and other *pharmacopoea*, hence the necessity to study *Materia Medica*. These *Materia Medica* would be invaluable documentation of the cultural and traditional treatments among African communites and in different geographical locations of the country. Another argument is that the protection of African herbs and drugs from powerful European pharmacutical companies is necessary, and a prerogative. In this whole debate of Aids/HIV specific cultural language become pertinent. Finally, the methodology of studying religions in Africa has to be re-investigated. The re-casting of these methods has to look at

possibilities of exploring the methodological conversion approach amongst other methods.

The study has attempted, though in a limited way, to point out the importance of divination. It has done so by broadly following a praxeological approach. It remains for African life and philosophy to develop it further and place it within the 'central pan'.

The institution of divination has now become a commercialised area and some funding institutions like the National Research Foundation have allocated millions of rands for the development of research in this area of study. Researchers in this field have to acknowledge the importance of 'internal investigation' theories in order to further this research.

Diviner-healers are important for the African Renaissance Movement and research. It is not enough to argue for the reclamation of this wealth of knowledge and practices without a serious look at the institution of African divination. It remains to be seen whether the South African Government will promulgate a bill in parliament in order to promote this branch of African life and philosophy. This wealth of knowledge has to be researched from a number of perspectives in order to aim for a comprehensive understanding. Diviner-healers should be at the forefront of this research initiative. It is important to see this research on African divination occupying a central position in higher institutions of learning. A reductionistic approach, as already stated, will not help to investigate and research comprehensively this area of study.

Universities in Africa and elsewhere have to take up this research priority and regard it in a serious light. The researcher admits that he only looked at the literature and formal aspects of this phenomenon. There are still other branches like medicines and botany that still need to be looked at comprehensively. Even in this case, an internal investigation is recommended. It does not help a researcher to look at certain plants without understanding the language used when applying it. African Medicine and divination takes language to be central. Plants are named certain names and command certain symbols for the African social symbolic system.

On another level, there should be a programme at tertiary institutions that deals specifically with African medicine and divination. This would surely close a gap between the 'outsider' and the 'insider' perspective. Collaboration is necessary. This collaboration has to take into account power relations. The current tendency is to regard diviner-healers as mere objects to be placed on the 'bandwagon'. Who is driving the bandwagon and who decides about its destination? The future of Africa and the understanding of African culture has its own destiny, and that will be minus opportunistic approaches and ideologies.

In conclusion, the study should not be viewed as exhaustive but an entry point into this exciting area of research, which has for some time been overshadowed and belittled. It is time that this field is explored appropriately, also taking into account the intellectual property and patency rights of the people that the current scholarship are engaged with.

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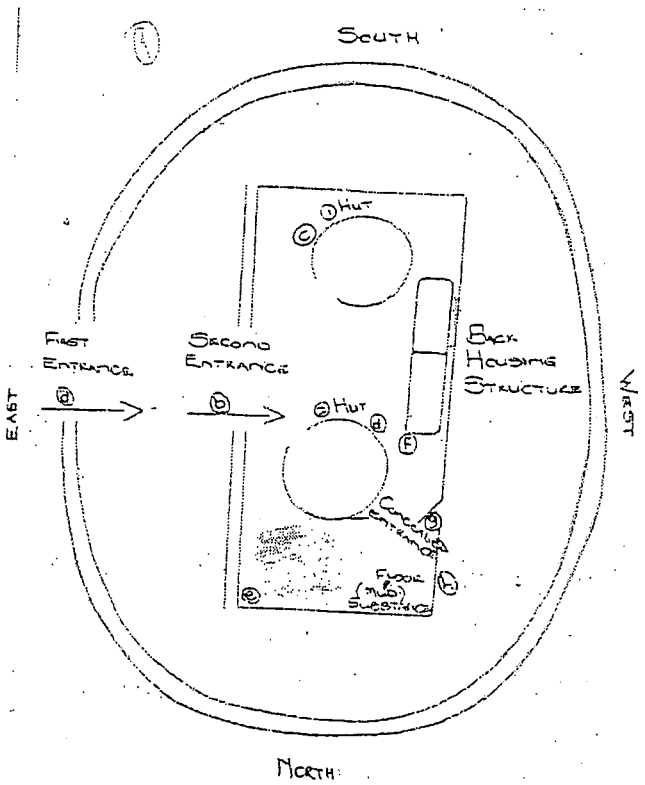
RESEARCH APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Ngaka Maamushi's divine-healing shrine

Figure 1



(a) First entrance from the East. It is actually the main entry point inot healing and divination

(b) The second entrance, assuming that the suppliant or inquirer has now been welcomed. Usually, at this point the enwuirer or suppliant has shouted "*Thobela, re a le tamiša*" before entering "*kgoro*". The *re a le tamiša* does not only refer to the "living dwellers of the cultic lodge" but also implies, covertly so, the existence and awareness of the *badimo*.

(c) The first hut contained the paraphernalia that are used by *Ngaka* Maamuši. The "medicinal line" within this first hut is well recorded and numbered. Every bottle had its own name. It is at this point that the person entering should take off shoes to indicate / convey submission. This bodily submission is necessary and may be coupled with prostration, kneeling and clapping. Only the diviner has the right or permission to enter in to the second hut.

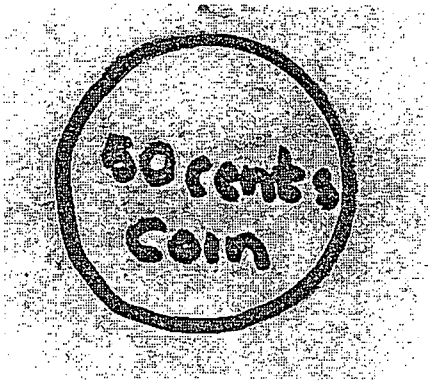
(d) The second hut is used for divination and healing. It is within this hut that a grass mat is put on the floor unrolled and business of casting tablets is done. This is not only the divination-healing hut, but a counselling hut. Many marriages and seriously troubled relations are saved in this hut. No secret is supposed to go out of this hut.

(e) Floor (an open space) – with mud substance is open and can be used for divination depending on the weather condition. Noting the hot weather conditions in the northern part of the country, *Ngaka* Maamushi used this open place for consultation and advice to his "interlocutors".

(f) Back housing structure – used by members of *Ngaka* Maamushi's family for daily routine house activities.

APPENDIX B

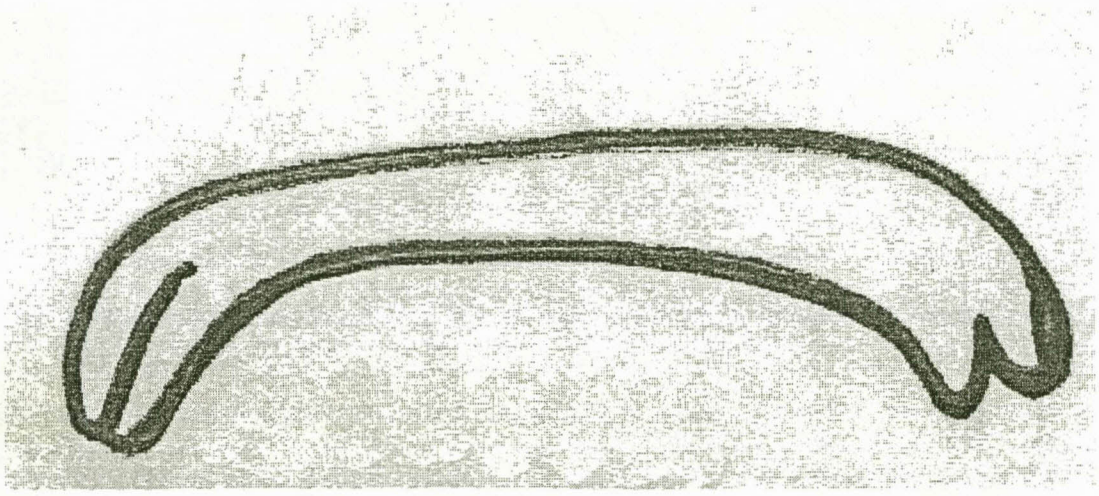
Figure 2



Tšhelete/Lehumo/Mahlogonolo – indicating luck and success of the client.

ABANDAWU

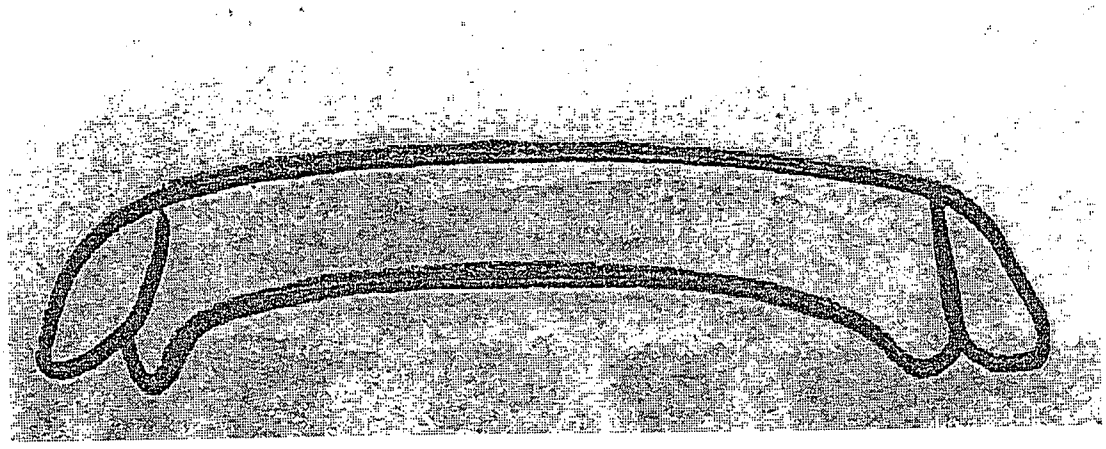
Figure 3



Abandawu – the ancestors – the "water ancestry"

Abanguni

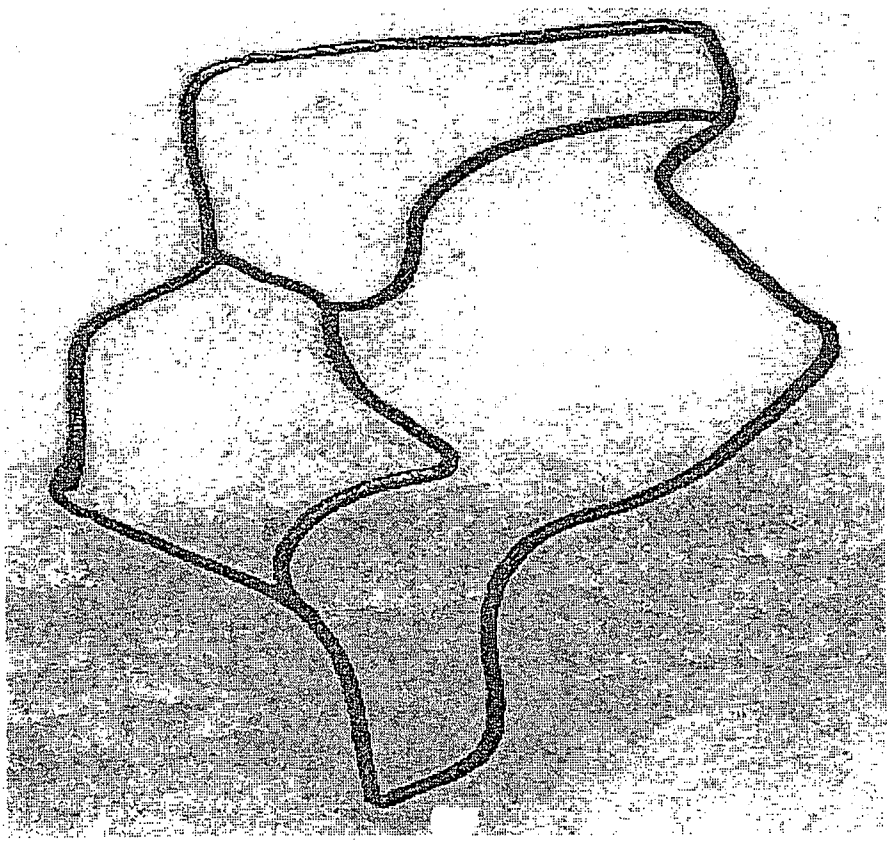
Figure 4



Abanguni – the ancestors – a different class.
"Land ancestry"

Badimo

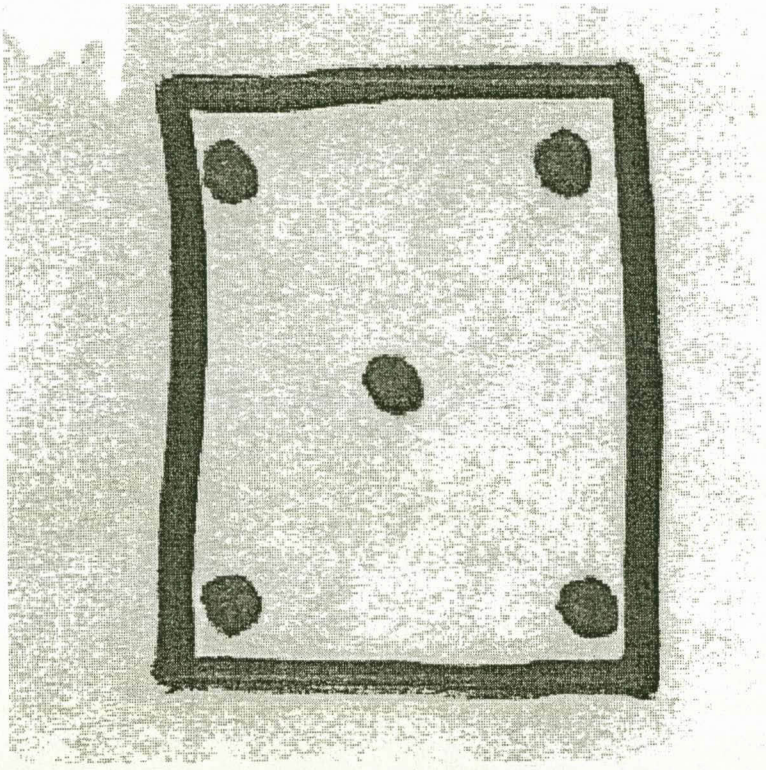
Figure 5



Badimo – a tablet for ancestry.

Ga go byalo

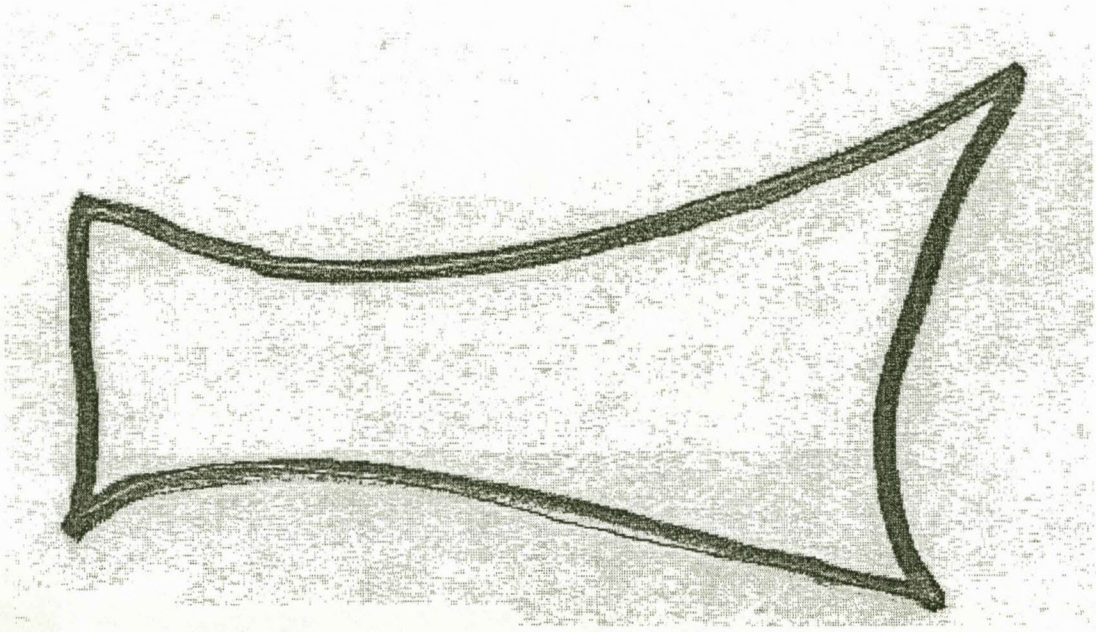
Figure 6



Ga go byalo – it usually negates (it is not like that)

Hamba ku fuma

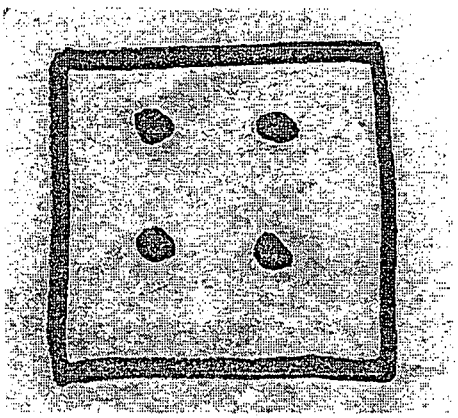
Figure 7



Hamba ku fuma – a wealthy/rich man

Koloi

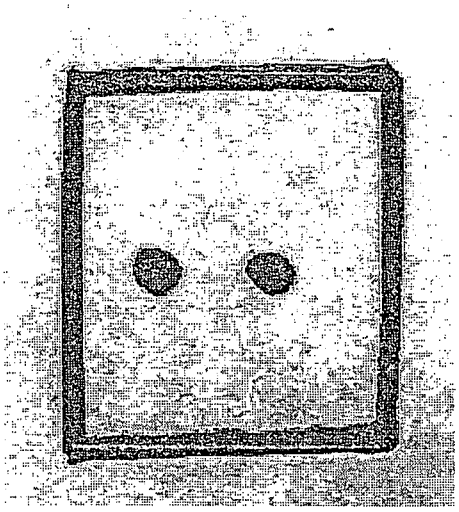
Figure 8



Koloi goba senamelwa – number four indicates a car – either the client will get a car or that his/her will be in danger.

Mahlo a mabedi

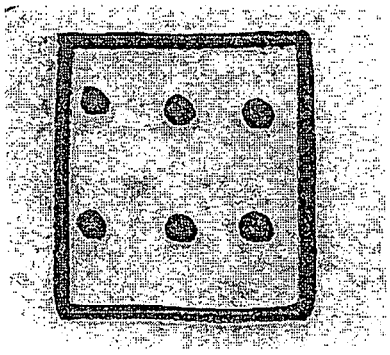
Figure 9



Mahlo a mabedi (two eyes) – the client is warned about something that might come his/her way

Mahlogonolo

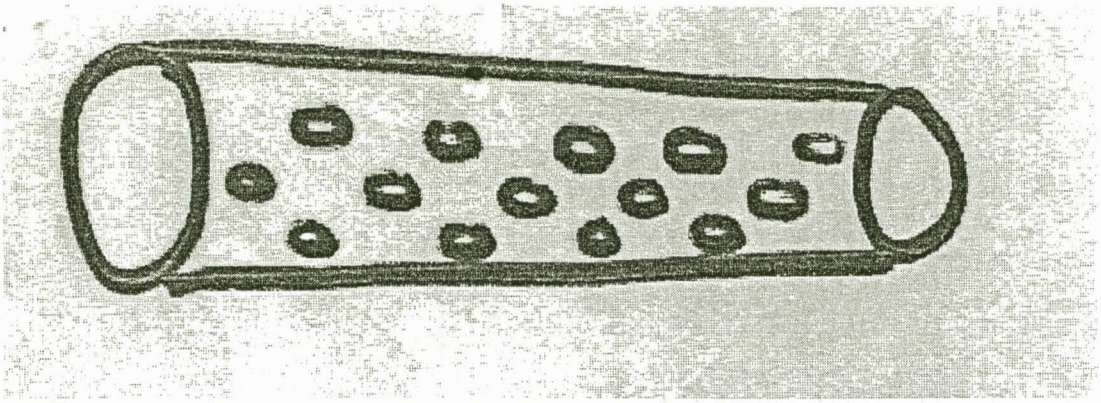
Figure 10



Mahlogonolo, go a phadima – all is well – there will be success

Masebo

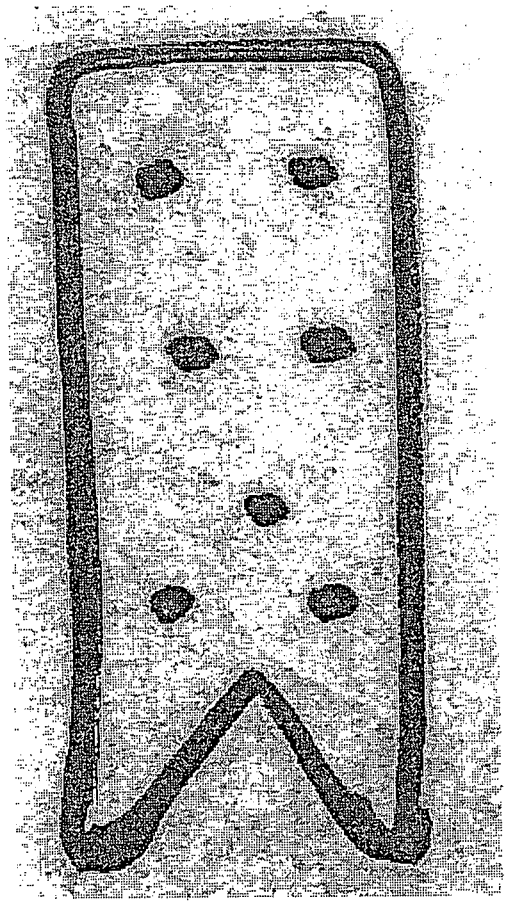
Figure 11



Masêbo – indicating that the male person or male client is well/stable

Masêbo

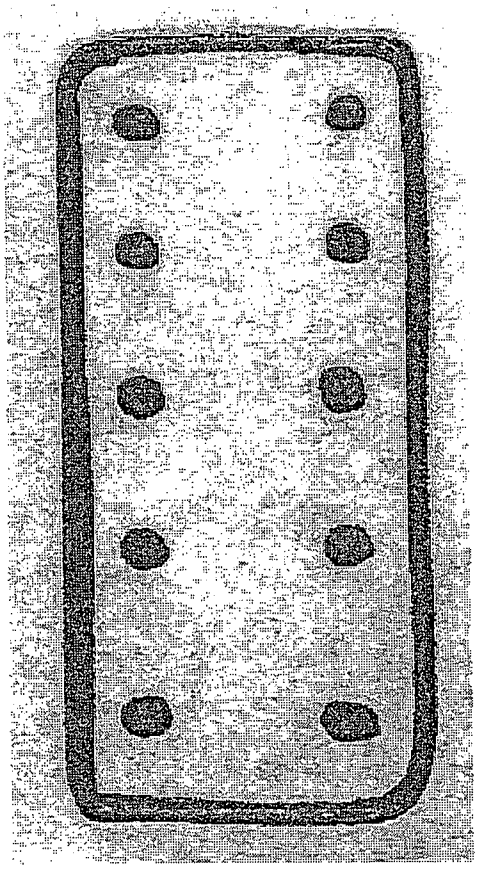
Figure 12



Masêbo – indicating the condition of a female client

Monna

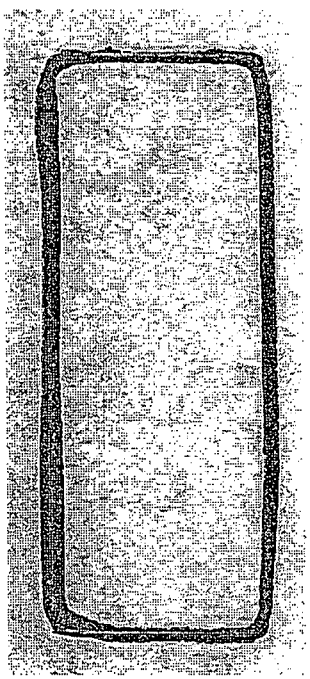
Figure 13



Monna – a male person who is well and happy

Monna

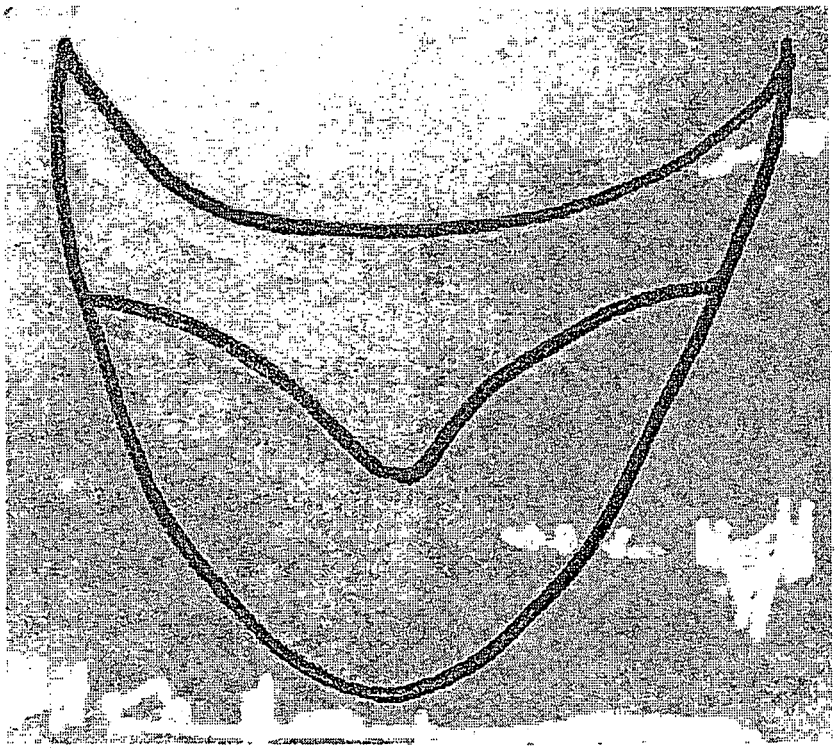
Figure 14



Monna – a male person who is in trouble

Mosadi

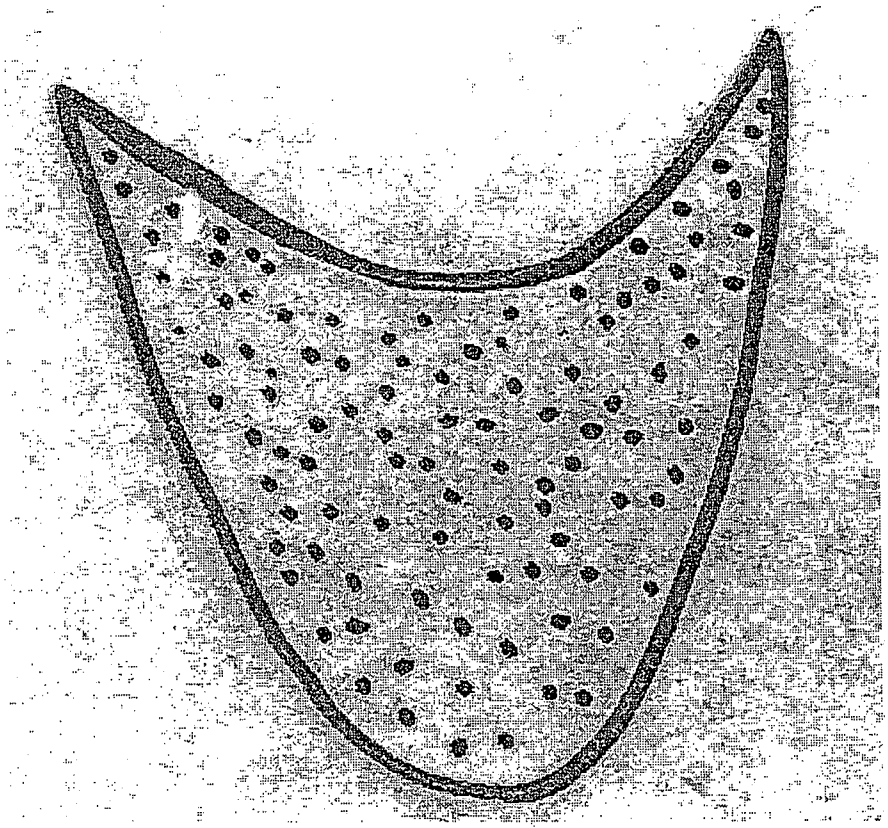
Figure 15



Mosadi – a female person who is happy or in love.

Mosadi

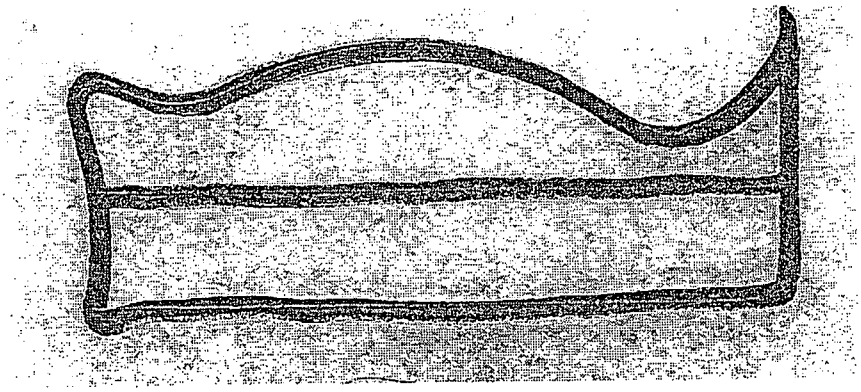
Figure 16



Mosadi – a female person who is in trouble.

Mošemanyana

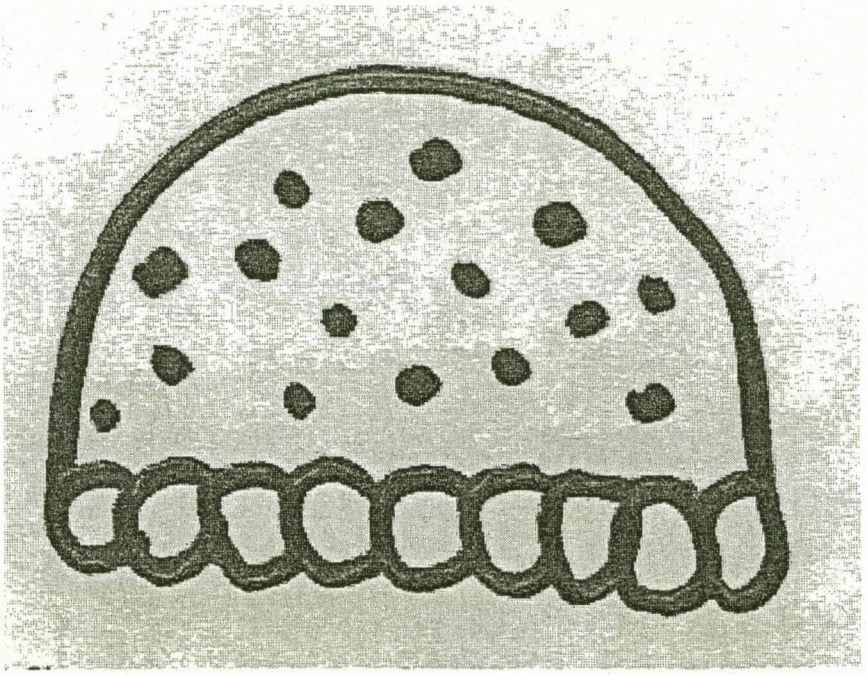
Figure 17



Mošemanyana – a boy – unmarried – from puberty until to the time of marriage

Ndomba

Figure 18

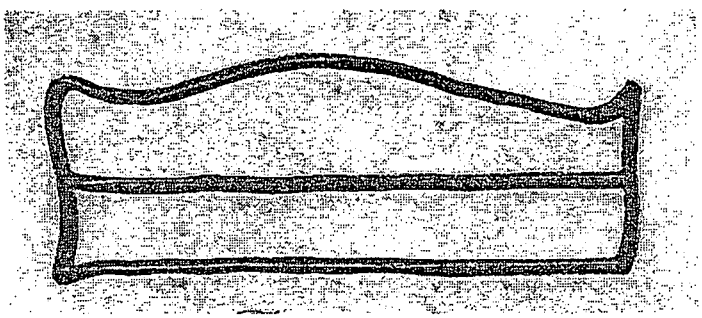


Ndomba or a huge house – (Sangoma lodge)

At times it indicates – pregnancy or that the client will die – "o tsholwa ke lewatle" – "the sea vomits him or her".

Ngwanenyana

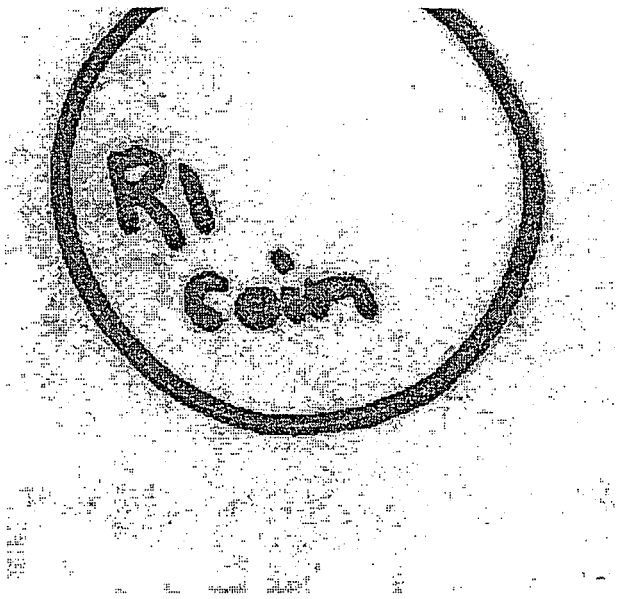
Figure 19



Ngwanenyana – a girl – from puberty until she is about to get married. She is definitely not having a child.

Tšhelete

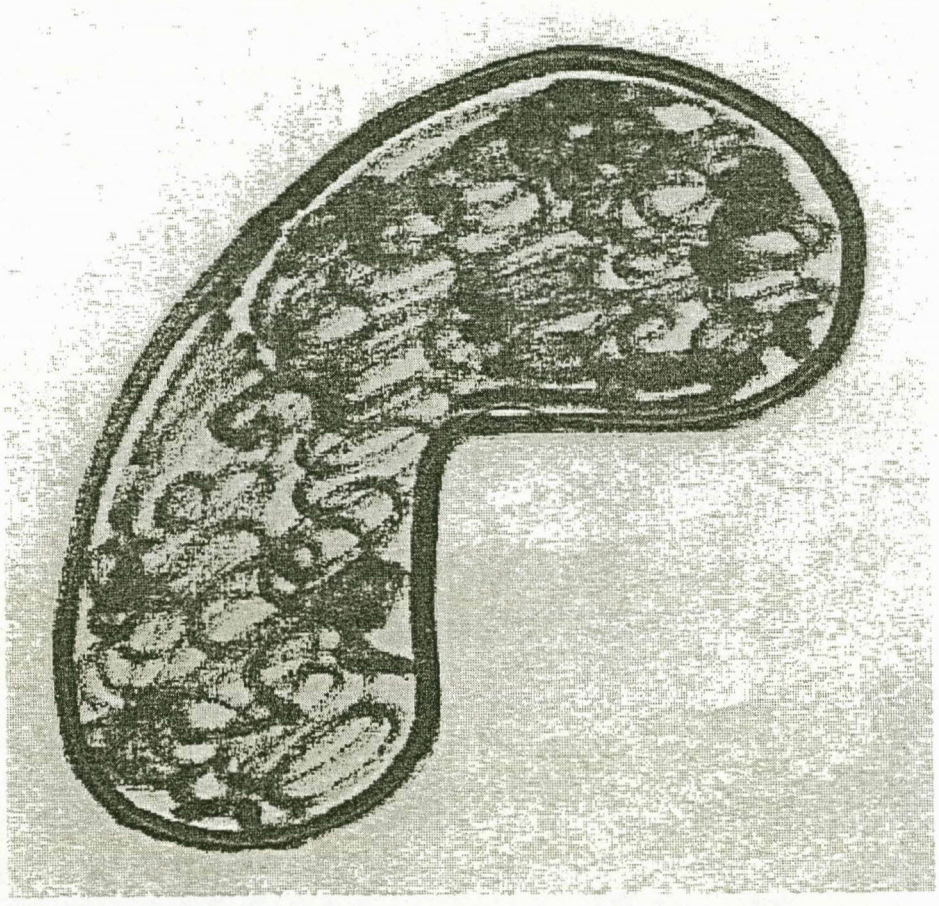
Figure 20



Tšhelete/Lehumo/Mahlogonolo – indicating luck and success of the client.

Sehlare

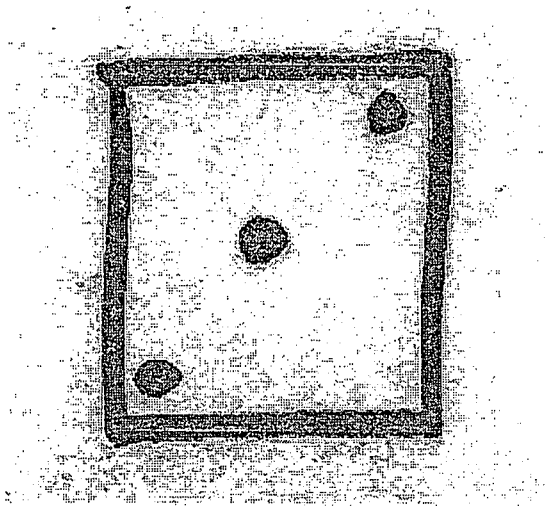
Figure 21



Sehlare - Medicine

Tsela

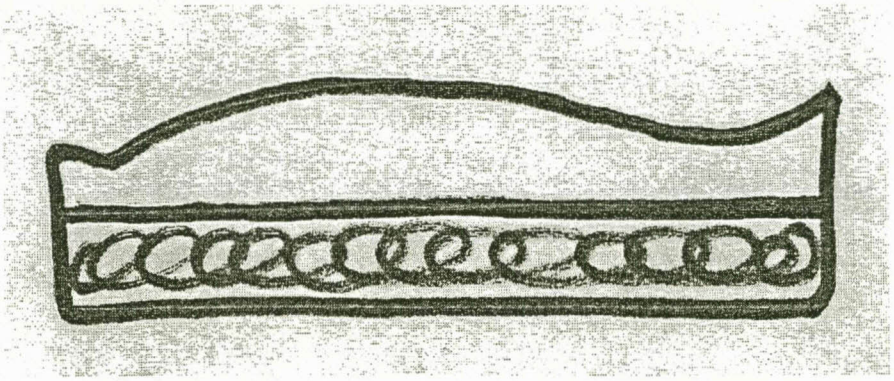
Figure 22



Tsela – Number 3 – the road is clear or that someone is about to leave.

Tsômbe

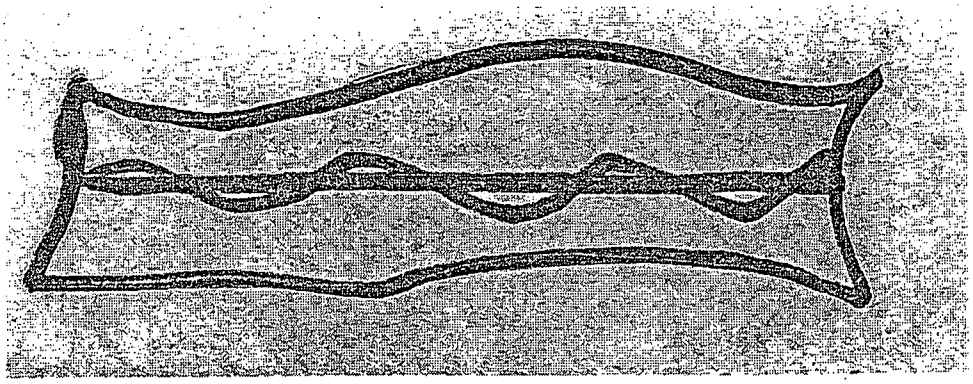
Figure 23



Tsômbe – indicates a male person. Usually a married male person.

Mohlologadi

Figure 24



Mohlologadi – a widow

APPENDIX C

Photo 1

Photo 1

Ngaka Maamushi from Makgane (Jane Furse) – depicted divining bones on the floor – with a snuff in his hands. He wears an animal hat that is part of the divination parapherphenalia

Photo 2

Photo 2

Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Maamushi with his legs crossed while sitting on the floor during the divination process.

Photo 3

Photo 3

Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Maamushi reciting his divination oracles.

Photo 4

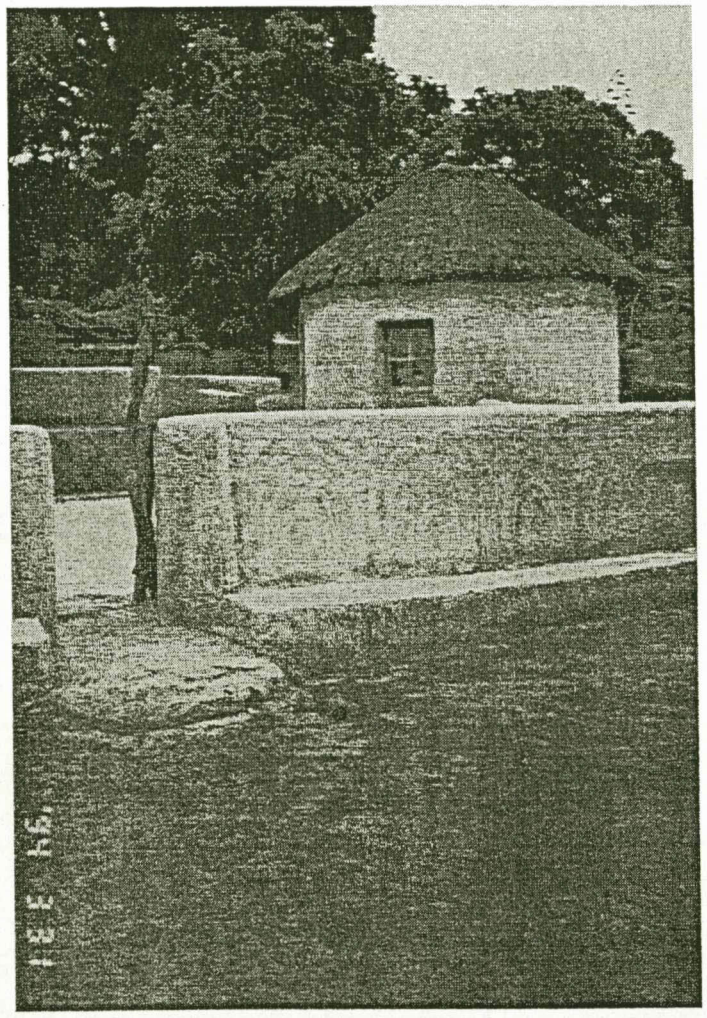


Photo 4

Photo: M A Masoga
The entrance through to Ngaka Maamushi's divination healing place. The hut on the right is used to keep medicine.

Photo 5

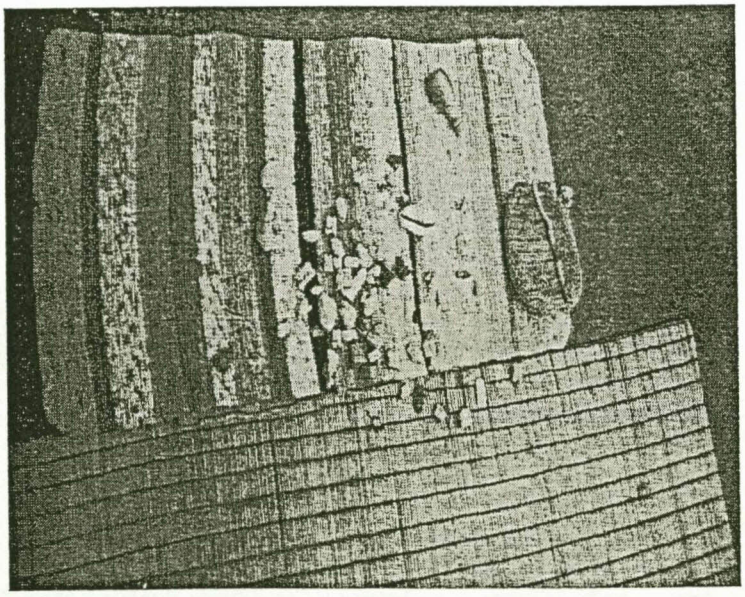


Photo 5

Photo: M A Masoga
Divining bones of Ngaka Maamushi on the floor.

Photo 6

Photo 6

Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Maamushi and the recorder (Rev E N Kolobe) sitting on the floor is a standard practice throughout most divination processes.

Photo 7

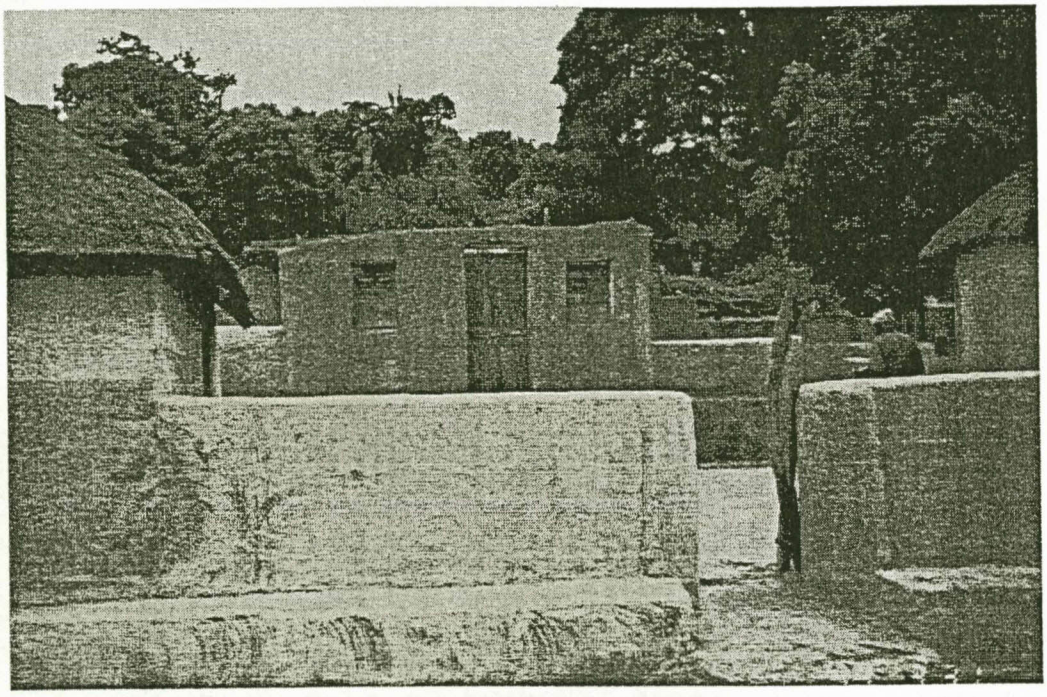


Photo 7
Photo: M A Masoga
The entrance through Ngaka Maamushi's divination – Healing place. From the pichive one can see one entrance through the entire place.

Photo 8

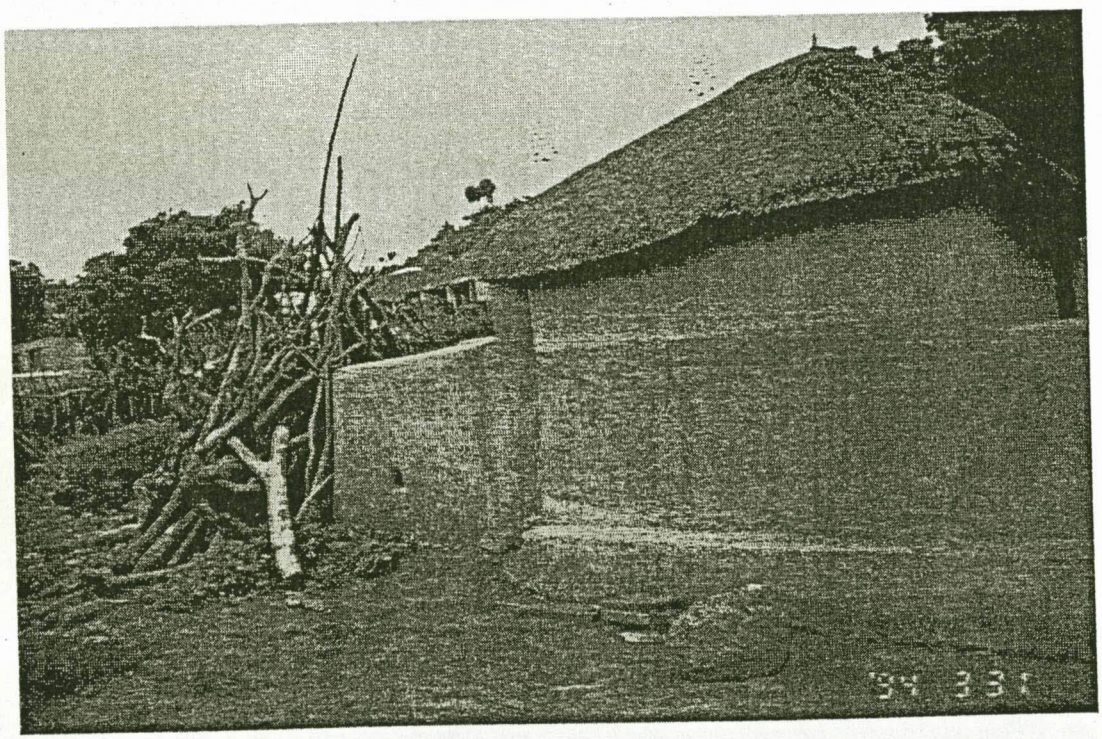


Photo 8
Photo: M A Masoga
The location of Ngaka Maamushi's divination – healing place. Muddy walls surround houses which are roofed by indigenous grass.

Photo 9

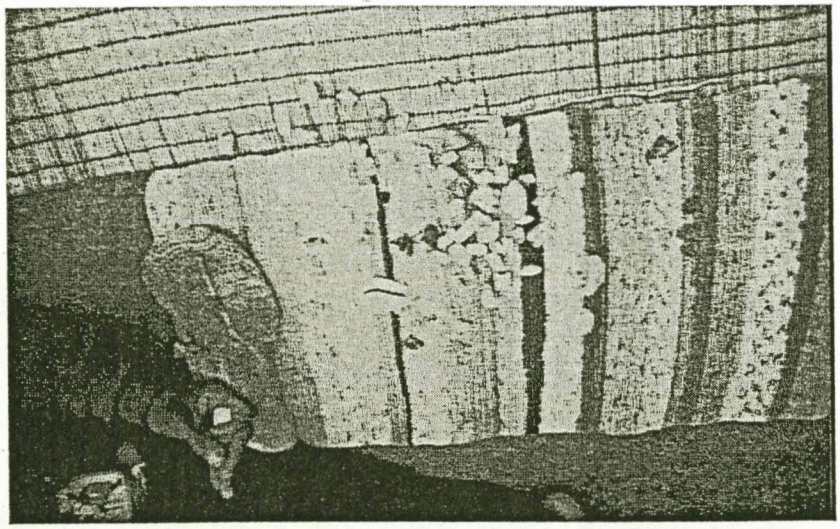


Photo 9
Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Maamushi – depicting the sepedi divination bones.

Photo 10

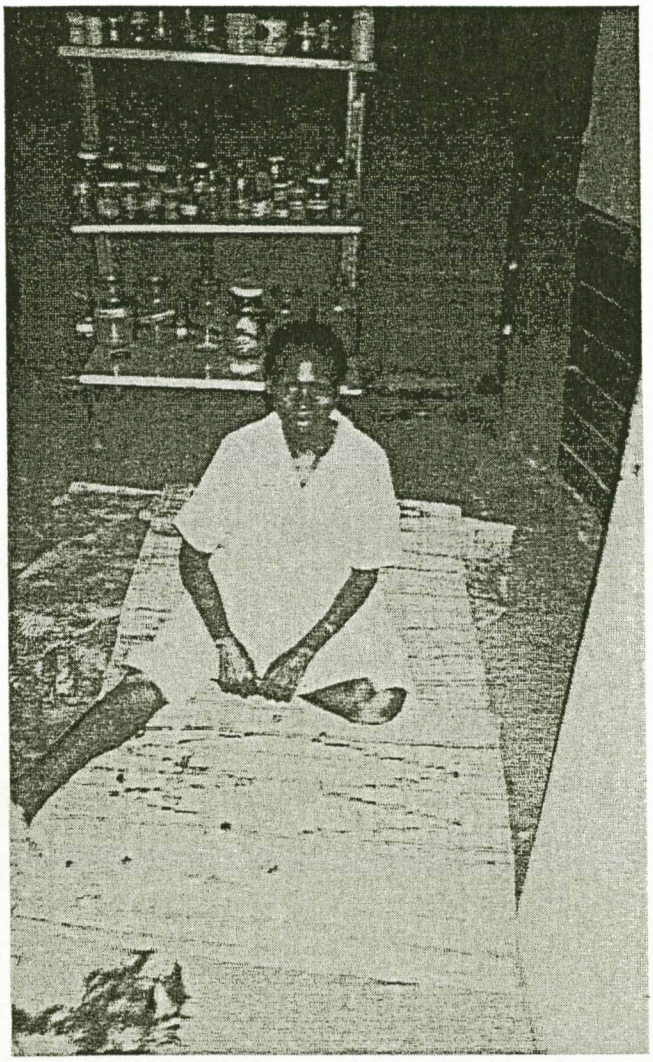


Photo 10
Photo: M A Masoga
An experienced diviner – healer about to start with her divination process.

Photo 11

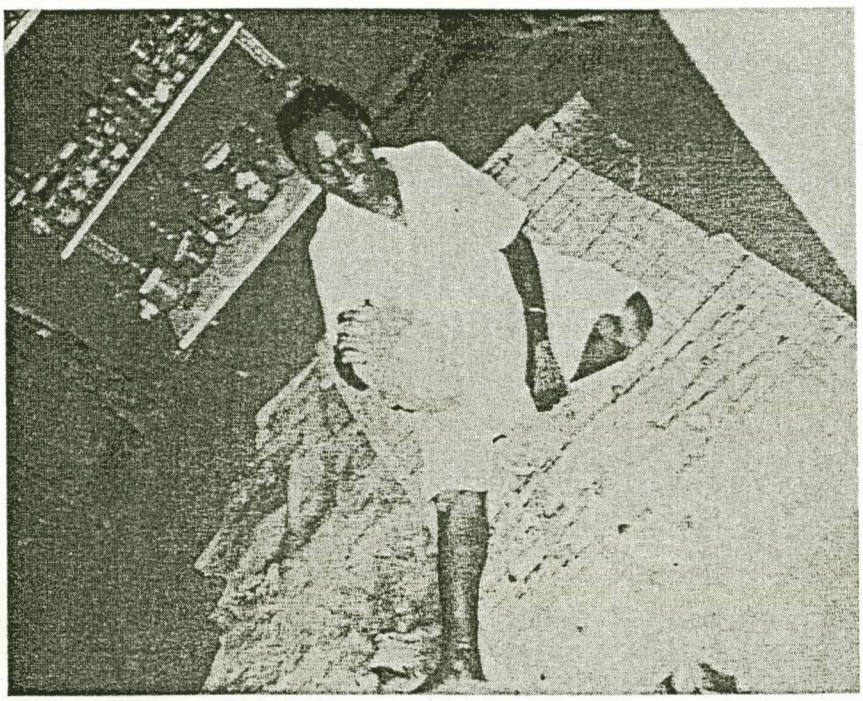


Photo 11
Photo: M A Masoga
An experienced diviner – healer throwing bones on the floor from the bag which keeps the bones.

Photo 12

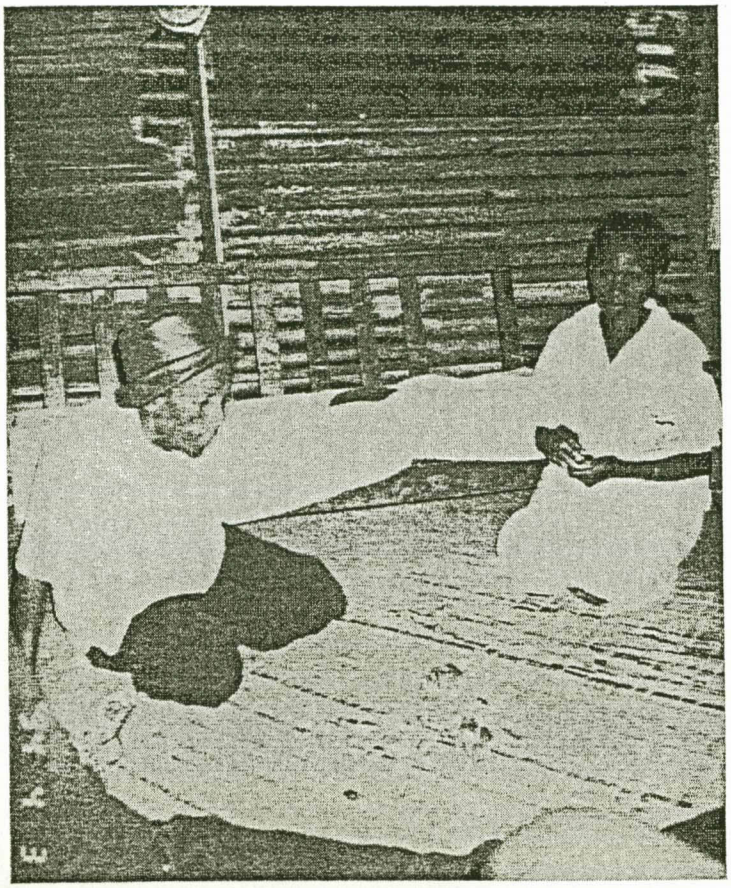


Photo 12
Photo: M A Masoga
A divination process at Suurman.

Photo 13

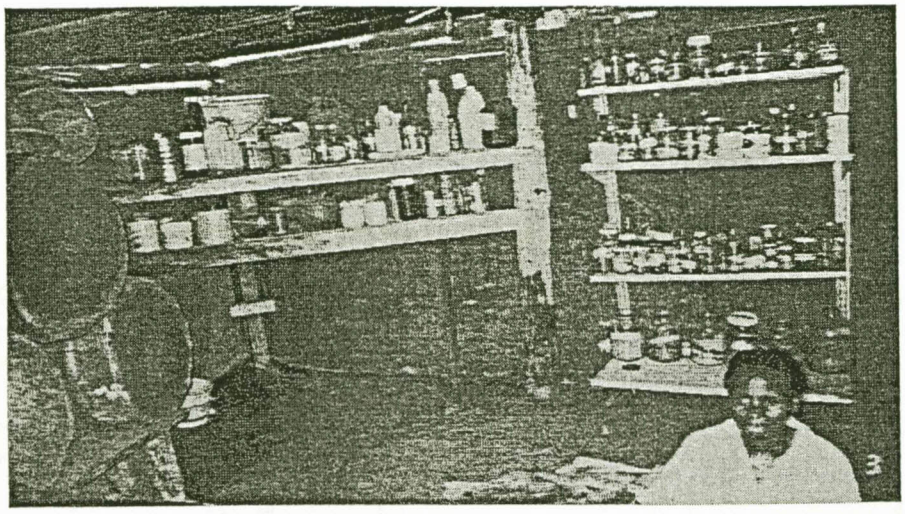


Photo 13
Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Maluleke showing her 'Medicine sanctuary' Medicines are carefully marked and arranged. On the left are drums(meropa) for dancing badins.

Photo 14

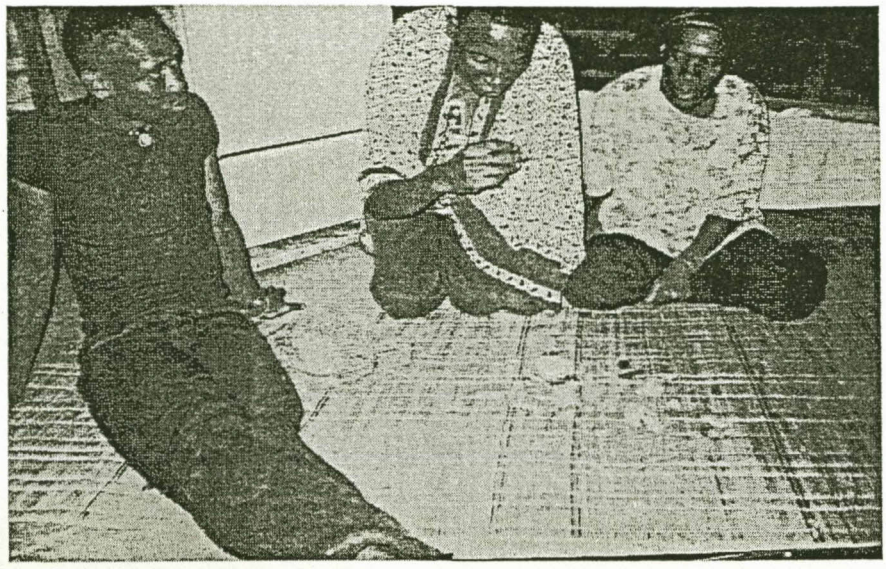


Photo 14
Photo: M A Masoga
Mr Masobela during the divination process.

Photo 15

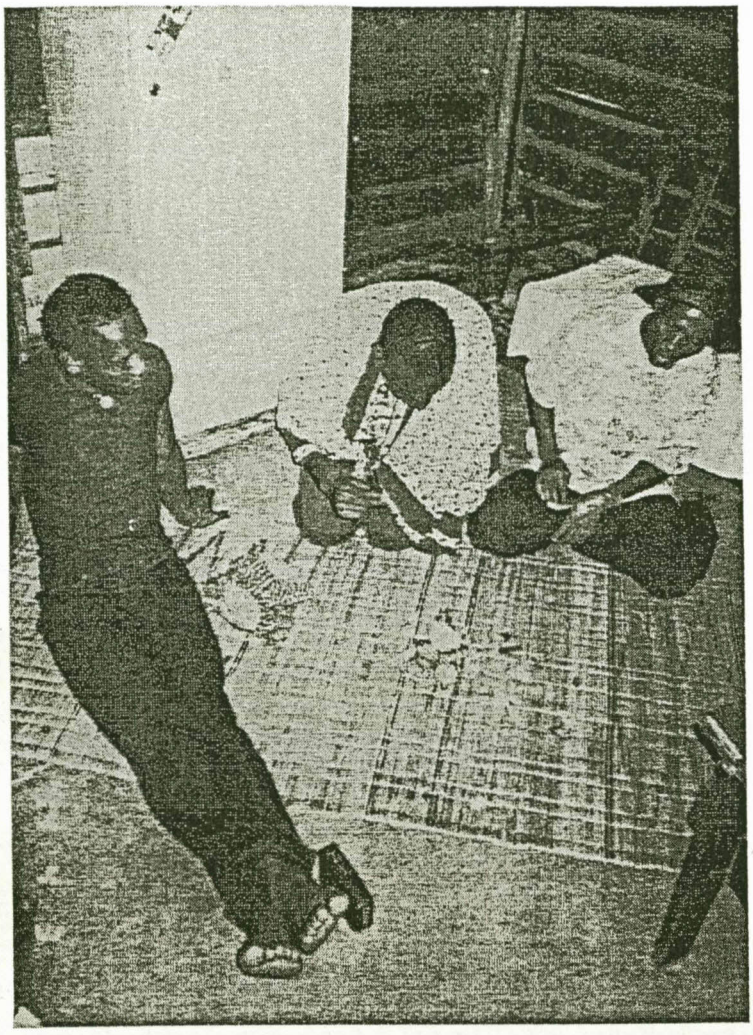


Photo 15
.Photo: M A Masoga
Mr Masobela during the divination session (Suurman Village). He was divined by two diviner – healers – Ngaka Maluleleke & Ngaka Ngubeni. Ngaka Maluleleke has an 'njeti' cloth is associated with the 'water ancestry'.

Photo 16

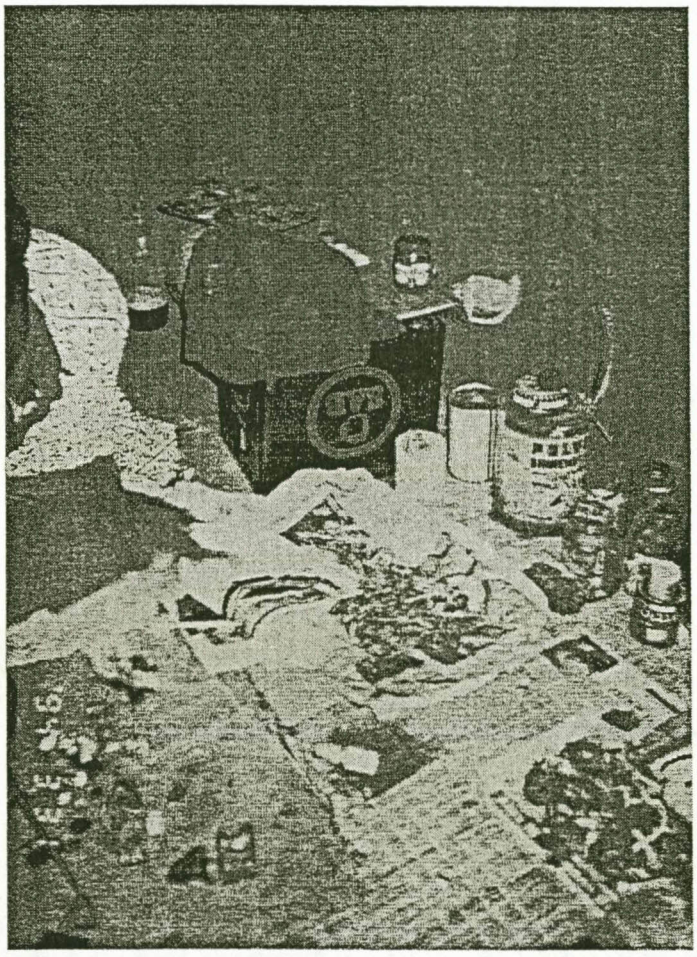


Photo 16
Photo: M A Masoga
A young diviner – healer at Ga – Maphopha displaying his bones and medicine.

Photo 17

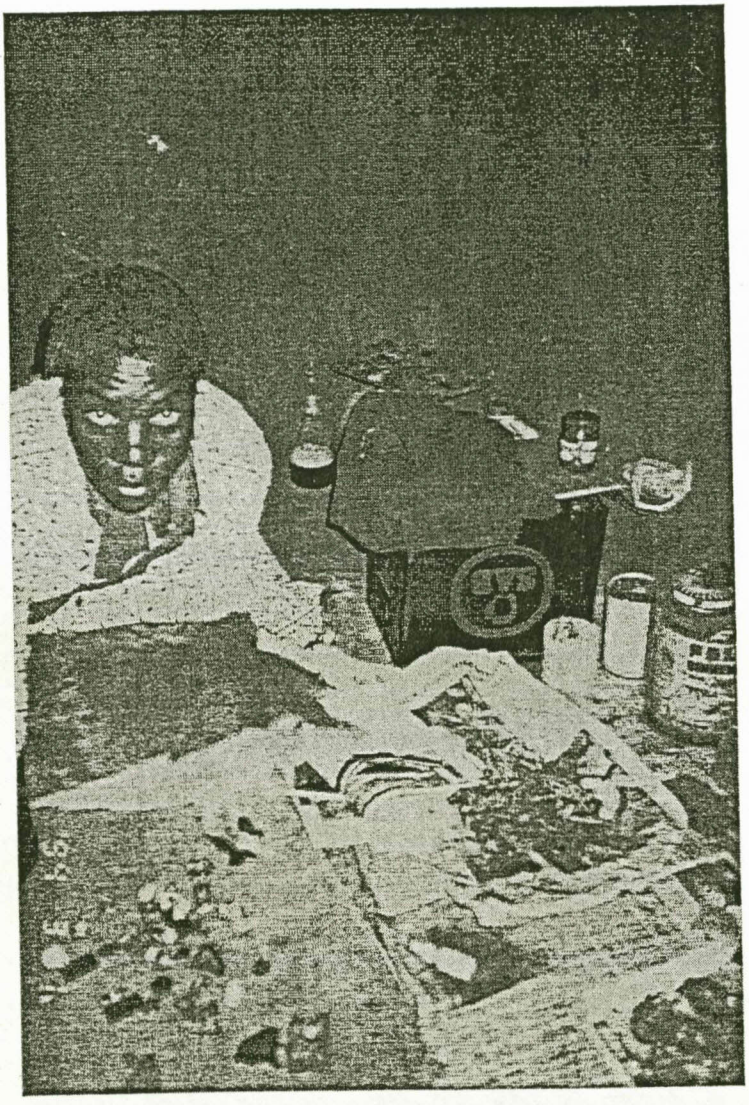


Photo 17
Photo: M. Masoga
A young diviner healer displaying his divining bones

Photo 18

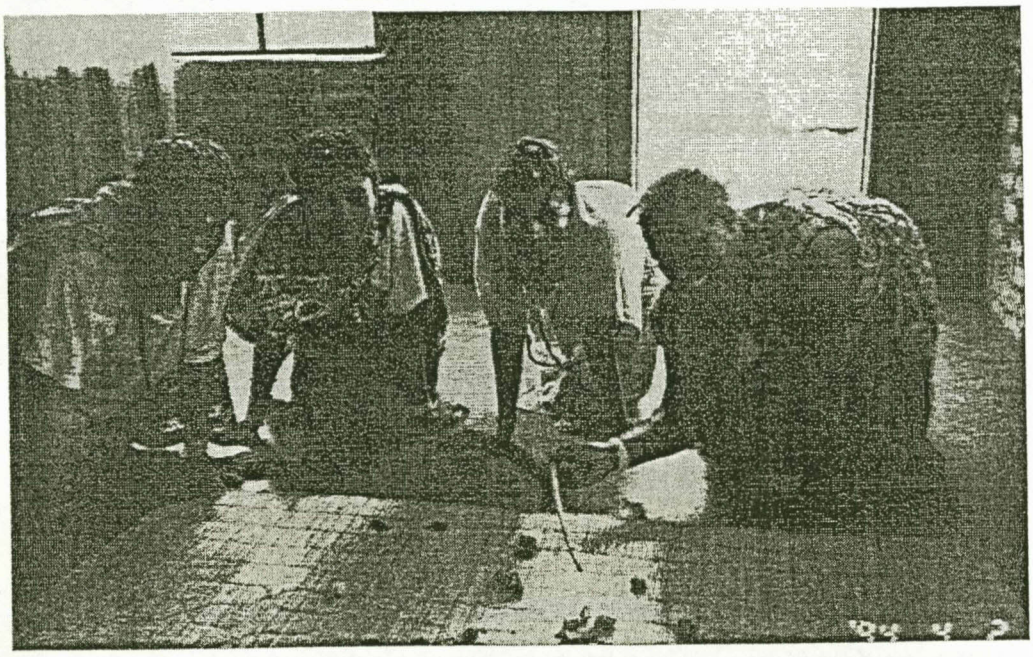


Photo 18
Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Salaminah Khumalo with her three novices in training (Marokolong village). She uses a short and tiny stick to carry the client through the divination process.

Photo 19

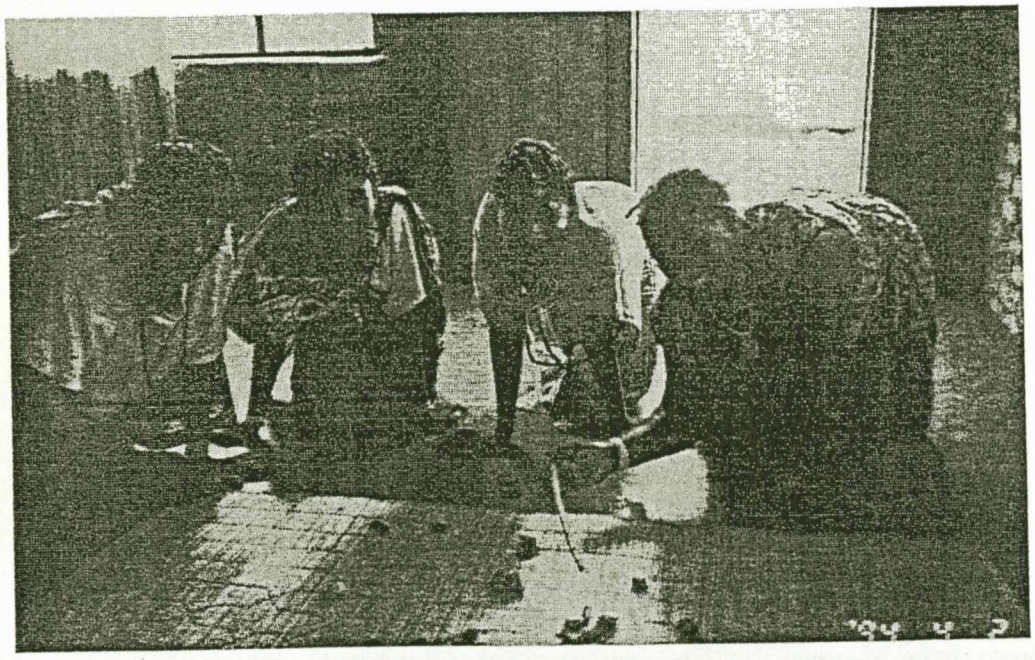


Photo 19
Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Salminah Maluleke with her three novices.

Photo 20

Photo 20
Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka Nkosi reciting her divination oracles.

Photo 21

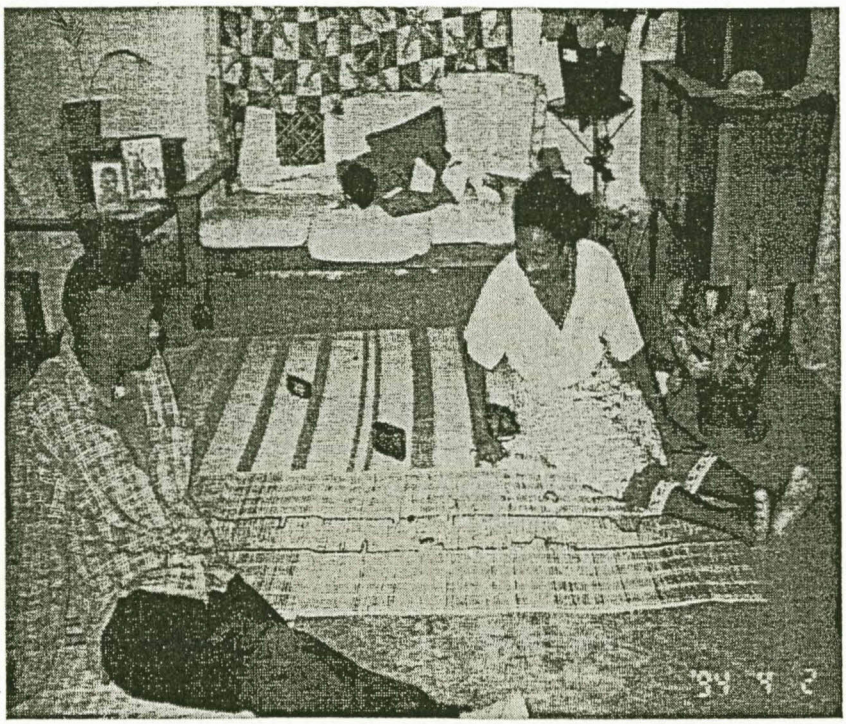


Photo 21

Photo: M A Masoga
Ngaka (Mme) Nkosi divining Mr Masobela (Suurman).

Photo 22

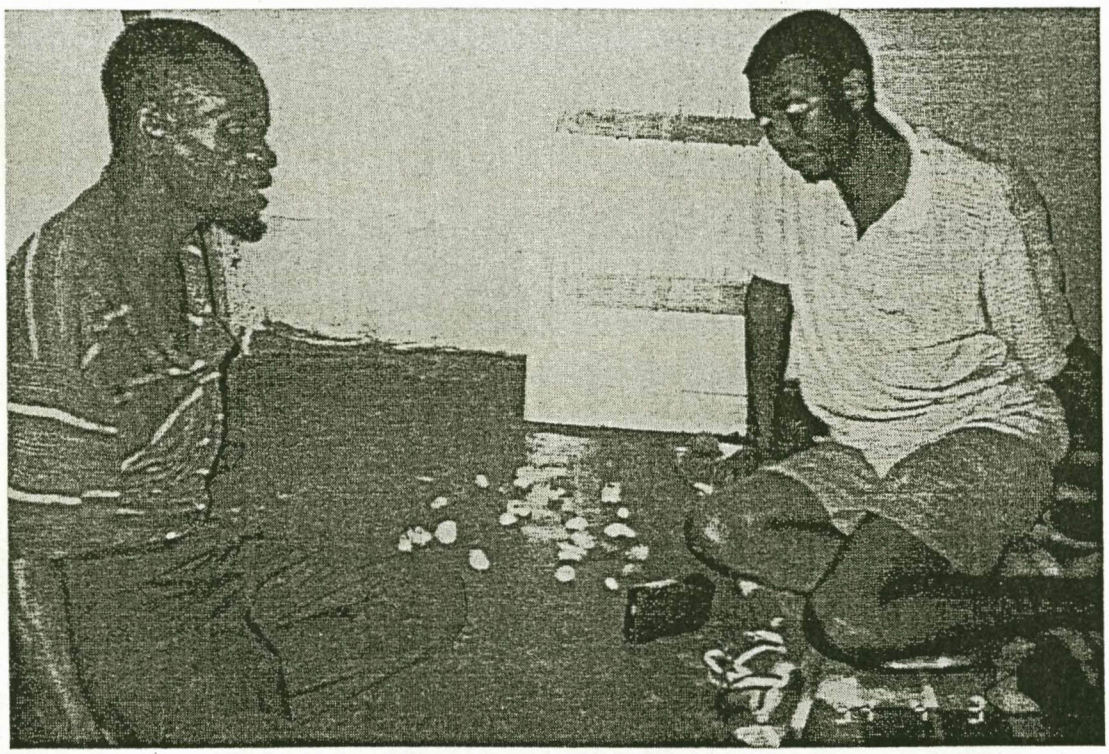


Photo 22
Photo: M A Masoga
The researcher (M A Masoga) during the divination process at Majaneng.

Photo 23

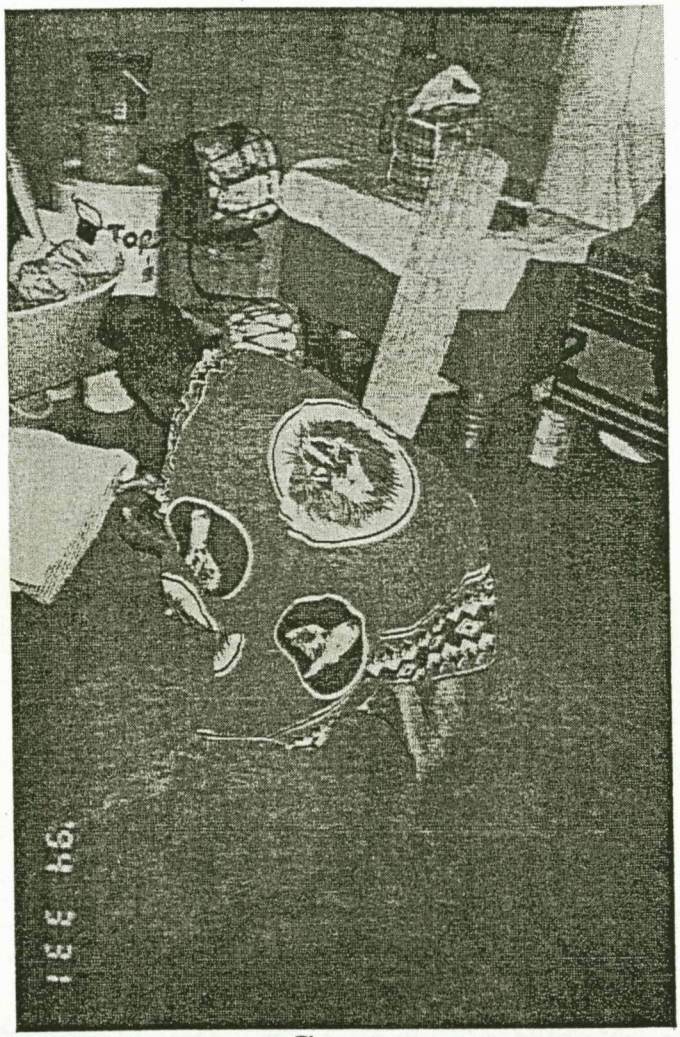


Photo 23
Photo: M A Masoga
A Mundawu diviner clapping hands imploring ancestors to reveal the oracle. She draped her body with a 'Tau' cloth. Red is mostly associated with Bandawu ancestry