

THE NATURE AND IMPLICATIONS OF SPIRIT POSSESSION
AMONG THE TSONGA

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

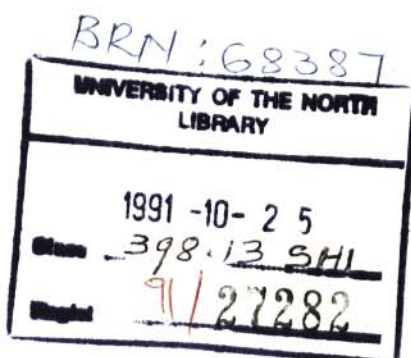
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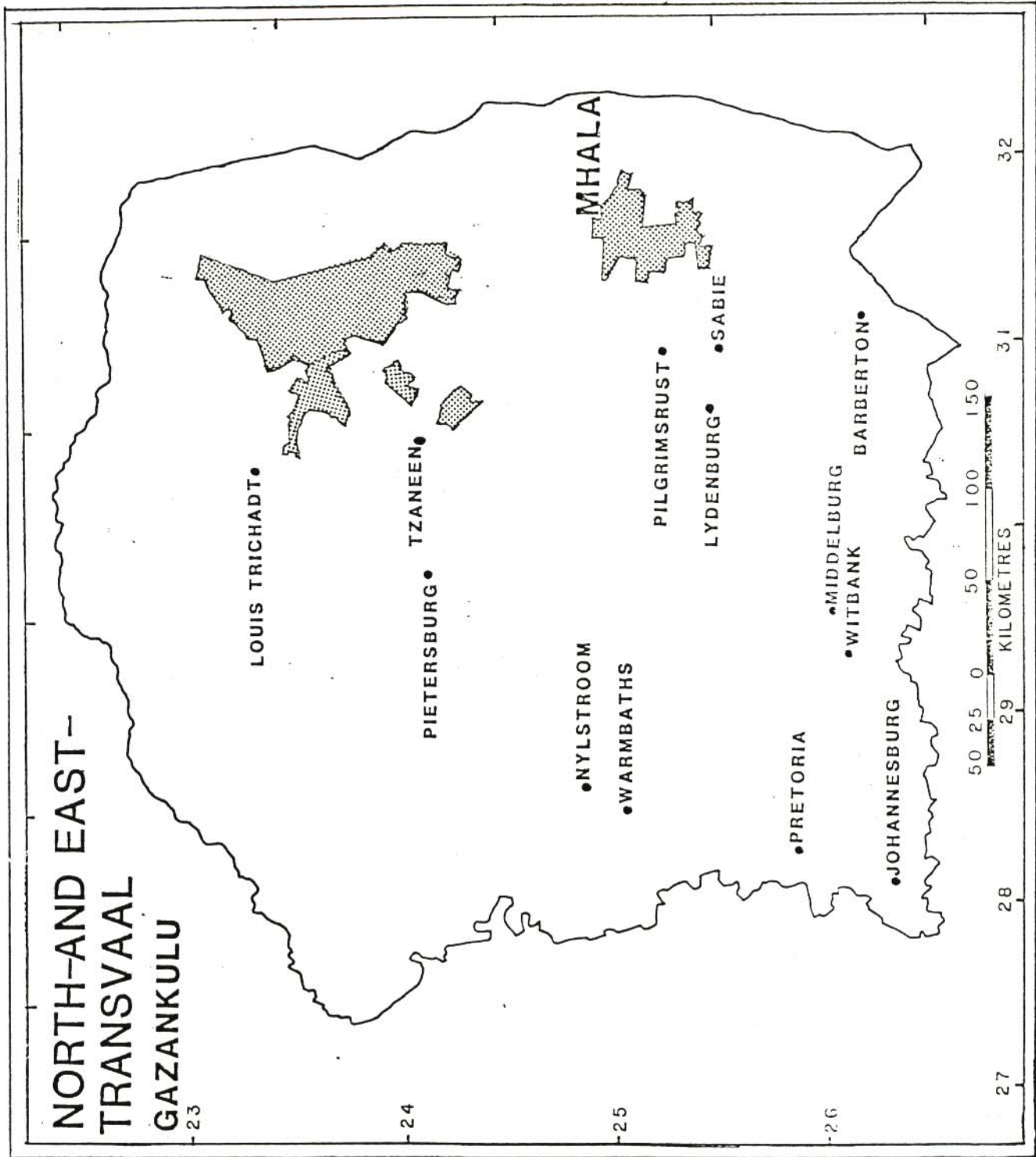
Lastly, the Almighty who gave me life, strength and ability to accomplish this work.

PREFACE

In the approach followed in the presentation of the research data, the following uses of terminology need to be clarified:

In the normal everyday English language a pronoun denoting male is used when reference is made to a general or undeclared gender. In this study however, a deviation from this normal trend has been made. All ethnographers who have done research on spirit possession have found that the cult is almost entirely confined to women, though men are occasionally involved. Such males will probably be trained by a female diviner, will adopt female dress and will behave like females. The female pronoun has therefore been used throughout this study to emphasize the feminine nature of the cult.

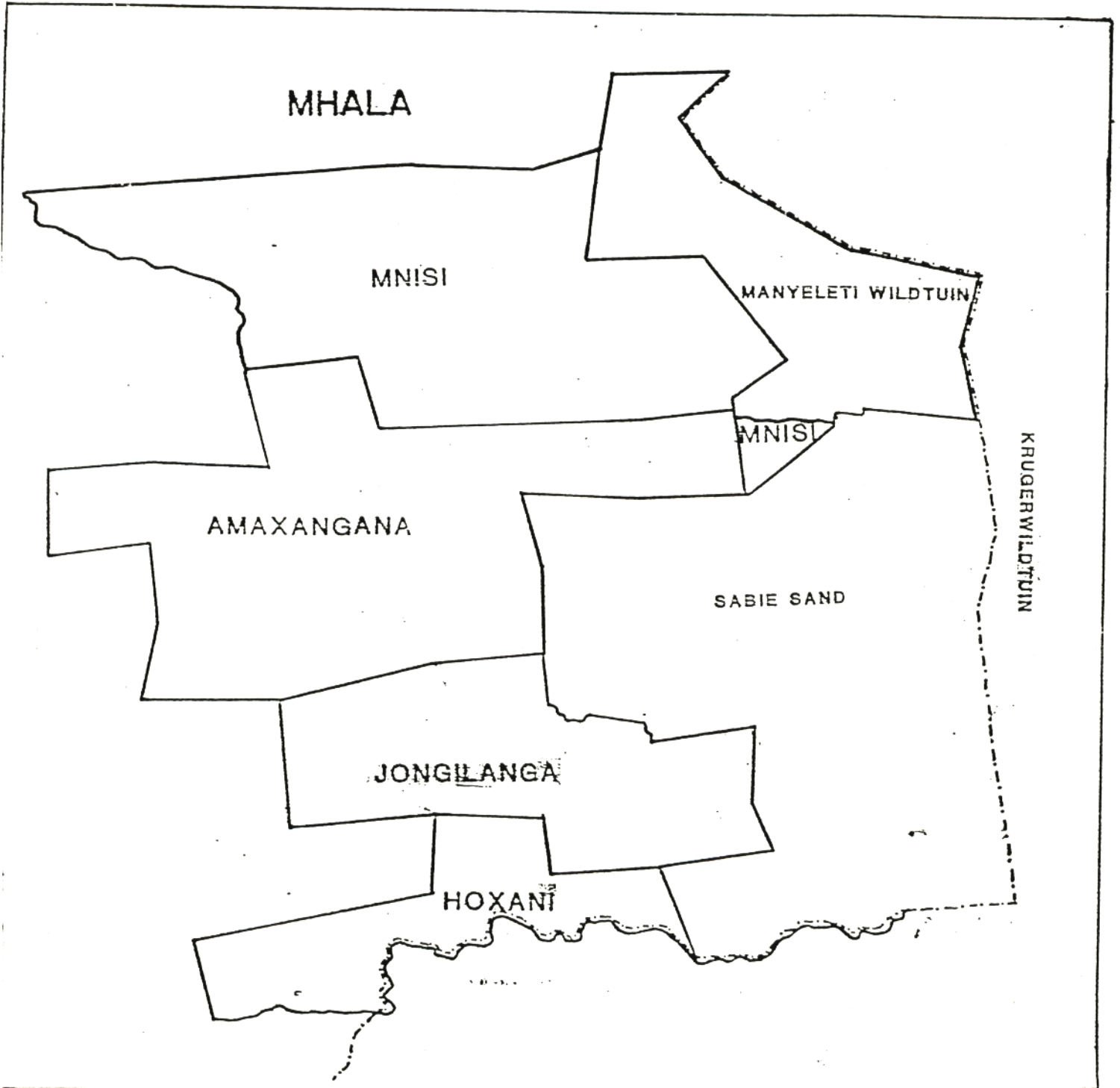
Where names have been used, these are pseudonyms and not real names. In most cases however, the first letters of the name and surname have been used, e.g. F.M. for Florah Mathebula. If the diviner is referred to by the name of her father, this has been indicated as N'wa-P or N-P, meaning N'wa-Phawundi, i.e. the daughter of Phawundi.



Gazankulu national state and its environment.

MAP 1





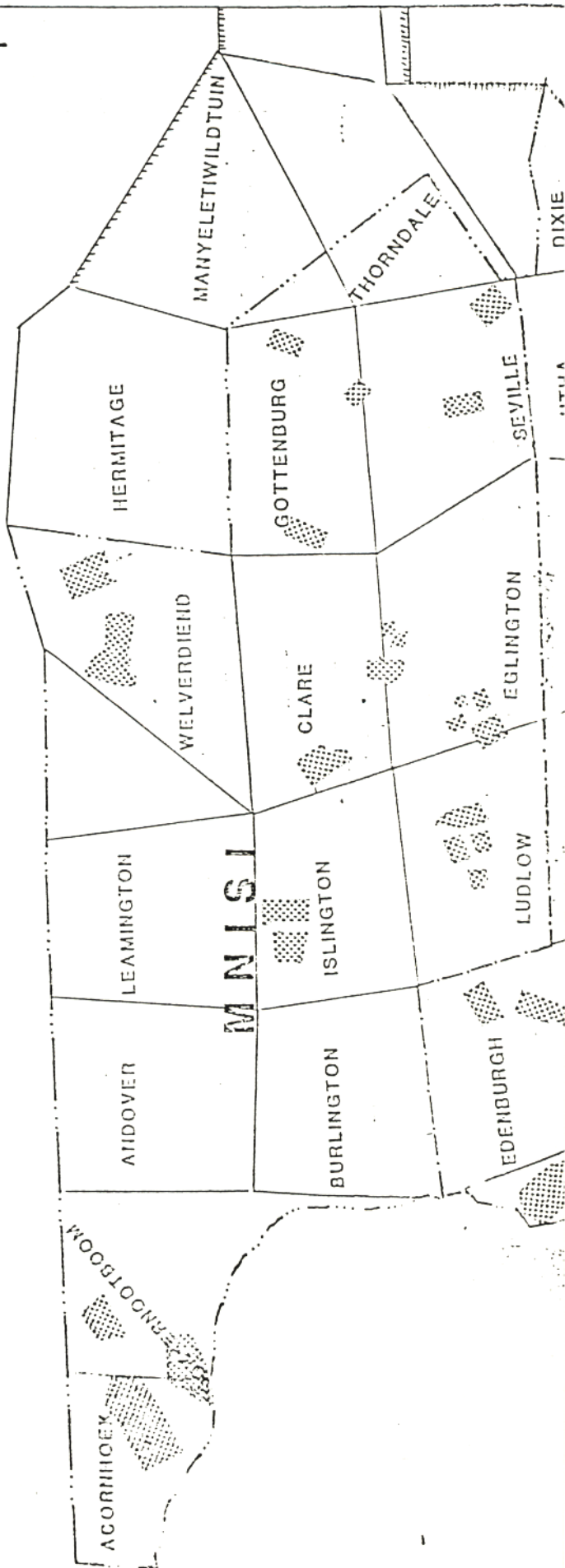
MAP 2 : Mhala district of Gazankulu

GAZANKULU BOUNDARIES

TRIBAL BOUNDARIES

SETTLEMENTS

SCALE 1 : 200 000



MAP 3 Farms in the Mnisi area of Mhala



Ritavi district of Gazankulu.

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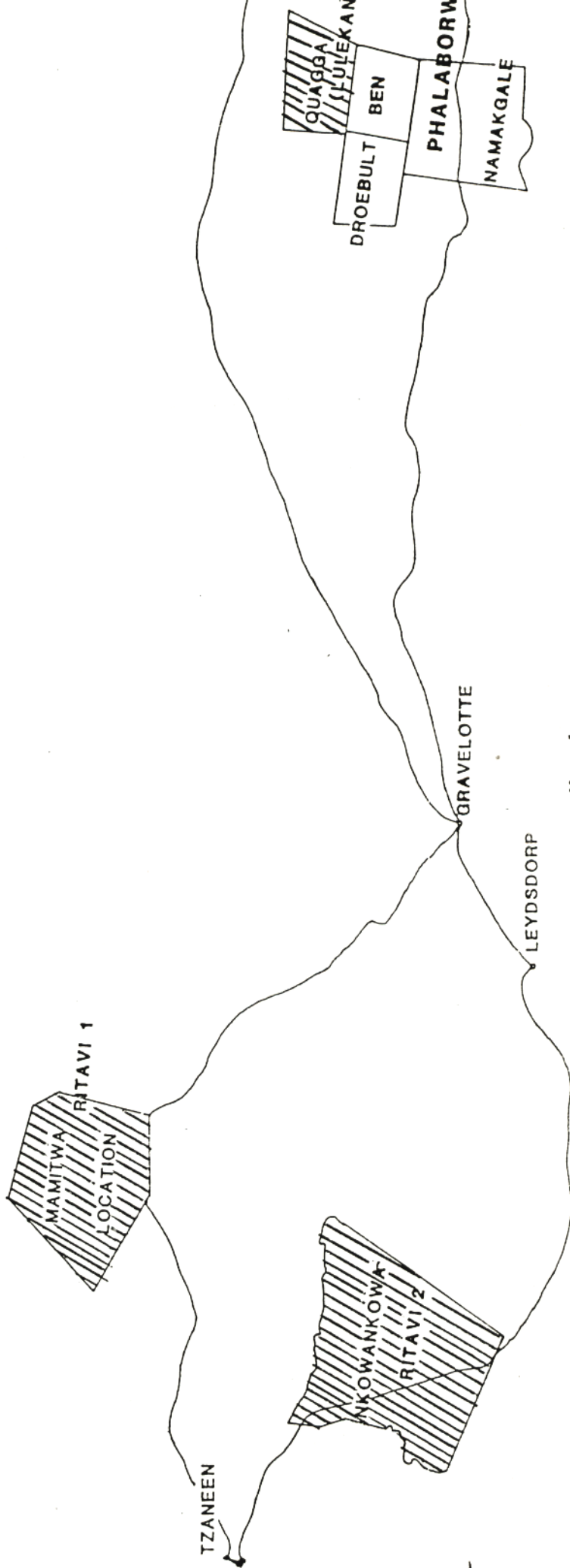


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CHAPTER 1

1. OUTLINE OF STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of spirit possession exists amongst most non-literate societies and even amongst more advanced peoples (Junod, 1913 Vol. II: 436). Moreover, it is integrally linked with the life of the communities in which it is found. Thus, we are concerned on the one hand with a possessed individual and on the other with a community to which the individual belongs. For instance, when a person in these societies becomes ill, his or her problem is regarded as not just an individual one but, rather, one that concerns the total person as well as the other members of the community with whom the individual interacts and the illness is treated on these levels, resulting in benefits for both the individual and the society. There is therefore an interdependence between the possessed and the community as a whole.

Among the Tsonga people, order and meaning are guaranteed by mediation of ancestral spirits, whose intervention in the lives of men brings illness, misfortune, death and their converse. In other words, these events are interpreted as displeasure of their dead forefathers. The phenomenon of

possession is connected with divine intervention, since, the person possessed very frequently progresses to become a diviner and as such has the power to appease the anger of the gods and avert human misfortune.

Because possession is viewed as a kind of epidemic, it is generally regarded as an illness as can be illustrated in the Tsonga expression:

"Mani mani u na vuvabyi bya swikwembu.

U ye ku alaphiweni etin'angeni."

(So and so has got the illness of spirits.

He has gone to the diviners to be cured).

However, the experience is itself a prerequisite for the office of diviner, which unlike many other traditional positions, such as chieftainship, is open to anyone. Thus, the status of diviner is acquired and not ascribed since it is generally one which is attained through achievement rather than determined by birth. As already indicated above, the only requirement is for one to pass through the necessary spiritual experience and training. One cannot be a diviner or treat patients who manifest symptoms of possession unless she herself has satisfied this requirement. All diviners therefore, have once been ill and undergone the process of initiation and training.

This fact has one very important corollary; because the cult is open to anyone, it has become an important socially recognized way by which means intelligent or ambitious individuals can attain status and power in the community (Hammond-Tooke, 1962: 244).

1.2 Motivation

Among some tribes such as the Nguni-speaking people of South Africa, spirit possession is a subject that has received a great deal of attention in anthropological literature. Sibisi (1975: 48), indicates that authors such as Bryant (1949, 1970), Köhler (1941), London (1959, 1965), Hammond-Tooke (1962), Laubscher (1937), Lee (1969) and Marwick (1966) have all drawn attention to different facets of this social and religious phenomenon and for this reason one can understand why Sibisi questions whether anything more can be said on the subject. However, it is suggested that amongst the Tsonga the picture is different; very little has been written on the phenomenon among them. Junod (1913) and Kotzé (1976) are notable exceptions, but firstly, Junod's work is dated and does not reflect the great social and economic changes in the last 70 years, and second, Kotzé confined himself to a study of the political and social structure of the Tsonga. The present study, therefore, aims at elaborating our understanding of spirit possession among

the Tsonga by researching hitherto little known aspects of the phenomenon.

The contact between Whites and Africans in this country has brought about a host of changes in the traditional life of the latter group. The introduction of mines and industries for instance, has altered the traditional economic and social order of these societal groups. It is therefore hypothesized that the frequency of spirit possession will increase in relation to the pressures of culture change experienced by such communities. The second problem of this study therefore is to investigate the relation between spirit possession and culture change among the Tsonga. In order to test this hypothesis three research areas among the Tsonga of Gazankulu have been selected. These areas differ in their degree of modernity and represent the orthodox, marginal and modern areas. They are Welverdiend (orthodox), Acornhoek (marginal) and Lulekani (modern).

Another motivating factor to this study is that being a Shangaan from a conservative rural area himself, the investigator has observed and even participated in some of the activities of diviners since childhood. The area of investigation was therefore well known to him. He now seeks to understand the phenomenon on a scientific basis.

Furthermore, the investigator assisted the anthropologist Kotzé, mentioned above, at the Mhala district as an interpreter in 1976 when the latter was researching on the structure and process in the political development of the Tsonga of Mhala district wherein he also investigated aspects of the possession phenomenon. The knowledge which resulted, interested the interpreter so greatly that he felt motivated to undertake this study.

Additionally, this investigation aims to provide information which may be useful to government agents especially health programmers who are involved in community development. This would enable them to reach a better understanding of the problems and fears of the people amongst whom they are working.

The last objective is in line with that of Lamla (1975: 5) viz. to place at the disposal of the rising generation of the Tsonga something of the history and beliefs of their people and to encourage in them a desire to reach and study their past in order to understand their present, and possibly foresee their future.

1.3 Definition of concepts

The following concepts need further defining:

1.3.1 Spirit possession

According to the Dictionary of the Social Sciences (1964: 689) the concept 'spirit possession' denotes a set of practices and ideas based upon belief in the entry of a spirit into the body of a human being so that the actions of the person affected are thought to be either those of the spirit or to be immediately directed by the spirit. While accepting this definition as proper, it could be added that possession involves assuming another identity.

1.3.2 Spirit mediumship

Using Raymond Firth's definition, Beattie and Middleton (1969: xvii) define spirit mediumship as "normally a form of possession in which the person is conceived as serving as an intermediary by spirits and men". The accent in spirit mediumship is on communication. Through the spirit medium it is believed that the spirits let their wishes be known to the community.

1.3.3 Trance

Lewis (1971: 38) quoting the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology defines trance as "a condition of dissociation, characterized by the lack of voluntary, and frequently by automatism in act

and thought, illustrated by hypnotic and mediumistic conditions". Although this concept has been defined here in its general sense, it will be used in this study as a condition during which the whole body of a possessed person is in trance or shaking tremulously.

1.3.4 "Ku thwasa" - Coming out

Ku thwasa is an idiom describing a coming out afresh after a temporary absence or disappearance. It is generally applicable to the moon. In spirit possession it is also applied to a diviner novice who, on having completed her period of instruction with an experienced diviner, appears again in public, reveals divinatory abilities and is officially acknowledged as a diviner. During the **ku thwasa**, the spirits are believed to be revealing themselves and are permanently accommodated in the neophyte.

1.3.5 Culture change

Substantively culture change may be defined as the modification of culture through time. In other words, culture change is the conceptual formulation that refers to the many ways in which a society changes its patterns of culture. Generally, the sources of culture change may be internal factors such as

new inventions which may lead to an increased food supply and population growth, or external factors such as conquest by another. The rate and type of change may be slow and gradual or fast and drastic. In this study we shall concern ourselves with the source of change which has been the result of contact between the Tsonga and western civilization. Economic factors are taken here as the main source of culture change amongst the Tsonga people.

1.3.6 Status and role

The term "status" is often not clearly distinguished from the term "role", largely because of the interdependent relationship between these concepts in which status contains the structural aspects and role the dynamic aspects of an individual's participation in an interaction relationship. Status, therefore, indicates the position occupied by a person in a specific social system in relation to the positions of other persons in the same system, while role indicates the organized actions of a person corresponding to her given status. Status defines **who** a person is (e.g. she is a diviner or a neophyte), while role defines **what** such a person is expected to do (e.g. she divines or heals people). The way in which a person acts or shall act in a given position determines her role in a specific system. For every status therefore, there is an appropriate role. Thus the status of a diviner has an appropriate role of healing.

He took part in the village life, especially in important or festive events. This meant that little was missed. For example, important quarrels and rifts within the community, cases of illness and deaths, all took place "under his eyes, at his own doorstep", as he put it. Nothing would escape his notice. For effective field-work therefore, Malinowski stresses that the anthropological fieldworker should totally immerse himself in the lives of the people. Following Malinowski's recommendation I established myself among the diviners and attended some of their ceremonial activities, such as **ku thwasa** and **ku vuyisa swikwembu** with active participation supplemented by immediate interrogation. By witnessing these ceremonies on several occasions as well as by participating in some of them, fuller details were obtained.

1.4.3 Comparative and statistical methods

Since this is a three-fold study of modern, marginal and orthodox areas, it inevitably involves the comparative method so that it is possible to determine the extent to which culture change has effected the phenomenon (The three areas will be described in full under Chapter 2).

Statistics was used to determine the frequency distribution of the phenomenon in each area of investigation.

1.4.4 The genealogical method

The genealogical method has long proved to be of value in Anthropological research (Royal Anthropological Institute, 1960: 50). In this study the genealogical method was used and it provided the following:-

- i) Among the Tsonga, the spirits that are credited with the power of possession are not the ancestors of these people themselves. But they are those of the **Vangoni** and those of the **Vandzawu** origin (Junod, 1913, Vol II: 436). As a matter of fact they speak a language of their own origin, i.e. **Xingoni** and **Xindzawu** and not that of their servants i.e. **Xitsonga**. But nowadays some of the diviners however, are possessed by their own ancestors and even speak **Xitsonga**. By using the genealogical method, it has been discovered that the afflicting Tsonga ancestral spirit was himself/herself actually possessed by the **Vangoni** and/or **Vandzawu** spirits.

- ii) By means of the genealogical method, the study of quasi-kinship was undertaken and the status position of each diviner, which is reckoned in terms of the time initiation rather than age, towards other diviners was clearly defined, especially during seances. It is

therefore no wonder why the principle of seniority in terms of age, which is so wide-spread and deep-rooted among the Tsonga, has to be overlooked by diviners. In terms of the principle of seniority by age, the elder must always receive due respect from those younger than him. For instance, if they eat meat from the same dish, he should be the first to take a piece thereof. He must be followed by the second eldest and further down to the youngest. But in the world of the diviners the principle of seniority is in terms of the time of initiation. A younger diviner has to be respected by an elder diviner if the former has initiated before the latter.

1.5 Problems encountered

The major problem facing a research worker, in an African community, is the suspicion with which the subjects regard him. This makes the establishment of rapport difficult. The present study was no exception to this problem.

The Tsonga are generally secretive about their knowledge of a particular phenomenon. People who have been to circumcision school for instance, will never divulge any information gained there. Similarly, diviners were not ready to impart any information to the investigator. One diviner even

remarked that I wanted to "make money" with her knowledge. This problem necessitated a lengthy explanation to assure the subjects that it was a purely scholarly project having nothing to do with money-making.

Because of their secrecy, diviners were sometimes not prepared to explain certain activities which they regarded to be highly surreptitious. When they have gone to the "sea" for instance, they make fire next to the water on the sand (see Chapter 3). But no one was ready to describe how the fire was made and also extinguished, except by saying that this was done magically. Even the purpose of the fire could not be disclosed. When I insisted on a detailed elucidation, it became clear that the interviewees were inclined to give what they considered an ideal answer instead of the real one.

Besides the problems mentioned above, there were advantages as well. One major advantage was that being a Shangaan myself I did not employ the service of an interpreter. Communication with the diviners therefore was without any language problem. The dialectical differences with some of the diviners at Lulekani were however easy to overcome.

1.6 Presentation

Chapter 1 is basically an outline of the study. It further deals with the aim and extent of the study, the

motivation, the definition of concepts used in the study, the methodology as well as the problems encountered.

Chapter 2 outlines the history of the Tsonga and discusses the socio-economic factors related to spirit possession as well.

Chapter 3 gives a full description of the process of spirit possession, i.e. identification of the possessing spirits, treatment of possession illness as well as the 'home bringing' ceremony.

Chapter 4 discusses the structural and cultural role of the possessed, the philosophy, the society and the funeral rites of the possessed.

Chapter 5 discusses some factors that are associated with the cult of possession.

Chapter 6 gives an integrated perspective on the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2

2. HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

2.1 Introduction

It is argued that there is some correlation between spirit possession and culture change. As people become more culturized the frequency of possession also becomes higher amongst them. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to test the validity of this argument. Hence the comparison of the three areas which differ in their level of advancement and acculturation.

2.2 Historical Review

Unless otherwise stated 'Tsonga' shall refer to the Tsonga-Shangaan-speaking tribes. It should also be realised that 'Tsonga-Shangaan' people are further sub-divided into **Vahlengwe, Vatshwa, Vahlanganu, Vangoni**, etc. The word 'Tsonga' has been used in this study as an inclusive term for all these tribal groups.

Although it is difficult to determine the original locality from which the Tsonga migrated, it is a well known fact that they have a long tradition of settlement in Mozambique where

they lived mainly as agriculturalists. Quoting Junod, Van Warmelo (1956: 55-56) agrees that the direction of immigration differ from clan to clan. Some claim to come from the north, some from the west, and others from the south. The inference is that the immigration of the Tsonga took place in remote times. Little has also been recorded of the early history of the Tsonga. The whole of the original Tsonga group lived in Mozambique. Although the list and grouping of clans given by Junod (1912, Vol. I: 16-17) may not be altogether satisfactory, probably due in part at least to the complexity of the situation created by the Ngoni conquerors, it is so far the only classification available. Generally, it may be said that the original Tsonga groups fall into three reasonably well-defined sections: Southern, Central, and Northern. To the southern section belong the clans of Maputa, Tembe, Mpfumo and others, collectively referred to as the Ronga. As representative of the southern group of Tsonga there is only one tribe living within the borders of the Republic of South Africa, and that is the Tembe tribe of Kosi Bay in the Ingwavuma district of Kwazulu.

To the central group belong the clans of Khosa, Nkuna, Mavunda, Valoyi, Maluleke, Nhlanganu, and others, classified by Junod into the sub-groups of N'walungu, Bila, Hlanganu, and Dzonga. To the northern section belong the Hlengwe, Tshwa, and others, extending far to the north and north-east.

2.3 The inhabitants of Gazankulu

Although little has been recorded and perhaps there has been little to remember about the early history of the Tsonga group, it is a well known fact that, as already indicated, they have a long tradition of settlement in Mozambique.

After having lived undisturbed probably for centuries, as a mainly agricultural people, they were suddenly hit by the storm that occurred when the rise of Zulu power caused many Nguni tribes of those parts to seek safety in flight.

The Tsonga territory in Mozambique was conquered by Soshangane with his following of Zulu-speaking tribesmen. He established himself in Gazaland and extended his rule over the Tsonga tribes. After his death, his sons Mzila and Mawewe fought over the chieftainship. Mzila, though the junior, remained victorious. His son again, Nghunghunyane, was the last of the independent Ngoni kings, for his rule was overthrown by the Portuguese. It should be realized that from the first days of Soshangane's invasion to the end of Nghunghunyane's reign, there was continual fighting and general insecurity. Moreover, many Tsonga were unwilling to subject themselves to the Ngoni kingdom. Because of all this, they sought safety elsewhere. Several great emigrations took place, with a steady trickle of migration

going on all the time. The only way open to the emigrant Tsonga was to the west, over the Lebombo hills into the low country of the Eastern Transvaal. Proceeding westwards, they ultimately settled all over the North-eastern Transvaal. In 1969, a Tsonga national state by the name of Gazankulu in this North-eastern Transvaal area was created. Following Junod's classification mentioned above, it can be said that the bulk of the Tsonga in the northern districts belong to the corresponding northern section of the Tsonga group, while those in the Eastern Transvaal are members of the Central Tsonga subgroup. Gazankulu therefore is constituted of the Tsonga belonging to the Northern and Central sections.

It should however be pointed out that like all displaced people, the Tsonga found it easier to move on again and again. Over the years, therefore, they have moved out of the Lowveld to the interior plateau, Louis Trichardt, Pietersburg, Potgietersrus, Nylstroom and Warmbad, where until today some of them are found on farms and under North Ndebele, North Sotho and Tswana chiefs, well into Rustenburg district (Van Warmelo, 1956: 70). According to the 1980 census reports, the Tsonga residing within the borders of the Republic of South Africa total around 1 095 000. Of this number, 439 740 are resident in Gazankulu national state.

Considering 3% per annum as the average growth rate of the Tsonga, as was found to be the case for Black population generally in the 1980 reports, it can be said that by 1984, Tsonga living in the RSA totalled 1 236 417 with 493 508 residing in Gazankulu only.

The 493 508 Tsonga are distributed over the four districts of Gazankulu: Mhala, Ritavi, Giyani and Malamulele. Since our chief concern in this study is the Mhala and the Ritavi districts of Gazankulu, we shall confine ourselves to the Tsonga-speaking groups of these two districts, with special reference to the Tsonga of Welverdiend and Acornhoek in the Mhala district and Lulekani in the Ritavi district. One of the objectives of this study is to determine the relationship between spirit possession and culture change or the extent to which culture change may influence possession. For this reason, areas which differ in degree of modernity are to be used; hence the three areas selected for study. According to the degree of modernity; Welverdiend represents an orthodox area; Acornhoek represents a marginal area, and Lulekani a modern area. In the ensuing discussion, a detailed description of each area of study is given. Such an exposition reflects the area's degree of modernity.

2.3.1 Three-fold differentiation

2.3.1.1 Welverdiend

As already indicated above, Welverdiend in this study represents an orthodox area. The area is under the jurisdiction of the Mnisi Tribal authority. The present ruler is chief Philip Mnisi, with Lucas Mlambo as the headman of the area. The first settlement was during the 1930's. From the time of their first settlement up to 1960, the inhabitants were scattered all over the area. It was not until 1961 when they were resettled in lots/stands.

Situated in the Mhala district of Gazankulu, Welverdiend has a size of 3 928,71 hectares with a total population of 2 365, according to the 1983 population registry. In terms of these figures, the area has a population density of 1,7 per km². With an average growth rate of the Black population as 3% per annum, Welverdiend had a population of 2 436 by 1984. In 1975, Kotzé (1976: 26) recorded a population of 1 808 at Welverdiend. In terms of his figures, by 1984 the area was to have 2 296 inhabitants. There is a difference of 140 more inhabitants which can be attributed to the fact that a few families were removed from Welverdiend's neighbouring trust farm, Morgenzon to the area in 1982. The population density of 1984, however, remains 1.7 per km².

2.3.1.1.1 Labour

The Mnisi tribal office at Islington serves *inter alia* as a recruiting office where employers may request labour either by way of requisition or by calling there personally to scrutinize applicants and to enter into service contracts with them. Such contracts stipulate the basic conditions of employment, including remuneration, and are annually renewable. The Welverdiend people are recruited from this office. The contractors recruit male labour only. Not all men from Welverdiend make use of this service; some of them prefer to go out and look for suitable employment themselves while a few others have been employed as migrant labourers long before the institution of contract services. Studies of 50 families at Welverdiend reveal that 96% of the families have labourers. Of the total number of labourers, 95,8% consists of male labourers while the remaining 4,2% are females. 2% of the total number of families interviewed receive old age pension while the remaining 2% depend on livestock for survival. Each of the 50 families has a piece of land (*masimu*) which it uses for agricultural purposes. Unlike other tribes in South Africa, such as the Bakopa in the Nebo district of Lebowa where agricultural land is allocated to individual families by the executive officer of the tribal authority with the average size of the lands as 3 hectares per family, at Welverdiend individual families make

their own choice as far as the sites and sizes of their agricultural lands are concerned.

Although the soil is rich and fertile, with the result that good crops can be achieved without the application of any fertiliser or manure, periodic droughts often hamper the success of agriculture in the area. The 1981 to 1984 drought for instance, virtually caused the practising of agriculture at Welverdiend to cease. Women, who are mostly responsible for agriculture in the area, had very little to do during this period.

At Welverdiend there is still a clear-cut division of labour and this is based largely on sex and age. Clearing of lands (*ku tshetsha*) for example, is a purely male activity while hoeing (*ku hlakula*) and reaping (*ku tshovela*) are the activities of women. In the building of a traditional hut, which constitute more than 90% of the dwellings in the area, the man's part is the digging of holes, the cutting and erection of both wall and roof poles as well as the thatching of the roof while the plastering of the hut with mud is the responsibility of the woman. Concerning the division of labour according to age, a boy must herd first goats and then calves before being allowed to herd cattle.

Communal labour in a form of working-party (*tsima*) is always organized whereby participants are remunerated with beer and

a common meal. Working parties are organized during occasions such as clearing of new land, hoeing or the construction of a cattle byre. Of late, participants in a hoeing working-party are given tea and bread instead of beer, especially when they are all young women or a Christian group.

2.3.1.1.2 Schools, clinics and churches

The first and the only primary school at Welperdiend was established in 1942. It was not until 1984 that the first junior secondary school was founded. Up to this time, these are the only academic institutions in the area. Community services such as crèches and playing centres are not only absent but also unknown to most inhabitants, especially women who spend most of their time within the area.

The area is provided with a clinic that falls under the direct control of the Tintswalo Hospital at Acornhoek. Since its establishment in 1958, nurses working here are all foreigners as Welperdiend has never produced qualified staff of its own. The clinic is rarely visited, especially by the elderly group which prefers the services of diviners and herbalists to that of the clinic. The only occasions during which they visit the clinic is when they are injured or when they need an injection. Otherwise, for diagnosis and

treatment of illnesses believed to have been caused by witches, they consult tribal doctors. The young group however, visits the clinic more regularly than the elder group. But they too believe that the clinic cannot cure certain diseases; for example, boys suffering from venereal diseases prefer to visit tribal doctors. On the one hand they regard it to be a disgrace to go to the clinic for treatment of this kind of disease and on the other they believe that herbs are stronger than Western medicine.

In the whole area there are only two church buildings. This does not however, mean that at Welverdiend there are only two church denominations. While it is true that for quite a long period there has been one denomination only - the Nazarene - many have now been founded. The total number of denominations in the whole area is 7. Although the number of church adherents is not known, it is far less than that of people who do not go to church. Of the 50 families interviewed, only 28% attend church. Most church-goers however still keep the hut for spirits of **Vandzawu**, the **ndhumba** and a tree within the yard, which serves as an ancestral shrine (**gandzelo**) for the family ancestor spirits. The horn of sacrificial animals are sometimes found nailed on the tree stem. In one of the Christian families a strip of blue cloth was found tied around the **gandzelo** tree stem. Judging from the fifty families a conclusion can be drawn that many

families at Welverdiend still cling to the traditional religious beliefs.

2.3.1.1.3 Trade

The first shop was opened in 1952. For quite a long period, this has been the only trading centre at Welverdiend. The increasing inflow of cash into the area has culminated in the opening of a mini supermarket in 1983. Apart from these there are a few hawkers from outside the area - some of them unlicensed. They come to the area once or twice per month. Although the general feeling of the inhabitants is that local traders charge higher prices for their goods, most of them still buy locally.

Mealie-meal and a few other commodities are bought at the local shops usually on credit which is payable on the following month-end. For this reason each woman prefers to support one shop-keeper in order to gain credit-worthiness which may be badly needed when the monthly allowance from the husband or working son does not arrive in time. Besides the above-mentioned trading centres, there are no others.

2.3.1.1.4 Technology

Technology can also be used as a yard-stick for the modernity of the area. The artefacts of the Welverdiend people do show

some degree of Westernization. While dress, furniture, tools and implements represent some level of acculturation, we find that other traditional material artefacts such as clay pots, mortar and pestle, grinding stones, etc. are still used extensively. Some of the few rectangular houses built with material such as bricks, corrugated iron, frames, fabricated beams, etc. have been built by non-specialists. Furthermore, they have not been built according to plan. Only 3 houses in the whole area were found to have been built according to a plan. Few other houses have been built by combining elements from traditional and modern technology. A good example in this regard is the plastering of mud walls with a mixture of mud and cement, with the aim of rendering it slightly more durable and weather-proof. Although a few people were found having stoves, none of them use coal. Ordinary fire-wood chopped into shorter pieces was used instead. Quite interesting were the stoves made of mud. They resemble the metal stoves in almost all respects. The chimney is made of tins of condensed milk joined together.

Of the 50 families interviewed, 98% keep one or two traditional granaries, **madulu**, (sing. **dulu**). Meanwhile a few other families have also big maize cribs known as **switlati** (sing. **xitlati**). Maize is stored on the suspended floor in the crib. Fire is always made underneath the floor. It is

said that the smoke keeps the weevils and other insects away from the stored grain.

Although beds are now used extensively, traditional mats are also still used, especially by old women. For sitting purposes, traditional mats are preferred by far to the modern chairs by all females irrespective of age.

2.3.1.1.5 Food consumption

Irrespective of all the changes that among others also led to the introduction of new foods by traders among the Black peoples of South Africa, the eating habits of others such as the Tsonga of Welverdiend did not change much. Their staple diet is still porridge and the traditional natural vegetables (**miroho**) such as **nkaka**, species of herbaceous climber (cucurbit), **swikowa** (mushrooms), **tinyawa** (young leaves of the bean), **tin'hwembe** (young leaves and flowers of the pumpkin), etc. Large quantities of young leaves of bean and pumpkin are dehydrated by cooking and drying on corrugated iron sheets for winter use. Vegetables dried as such are known as **mukhusu**. The dried product is cooked again before serving. Salt is put in, ground peanuts added and the mixture stirred once or twice. Porridge for all women in the family is served in one bowl. The same applies to young boys and girls. Besides each bowl stands a smaller one for relish.

Each group sits around its own two bowls. Women usually sit with legs stretched so that they do not face the bowls directly. Each one, using bare fingers, breaks a piece of a mealie meal cake, dips it in the dish and eats it.

There is no butchery in the area. Of late, pieces of chickens are sold at the two shops. If a beast has been killed by lions, as is often the case, the owner will sell the remaining meat from his yard. With the exception of fowl, cattle and small stock are only slaughtered during ceremonial occasions such as marriages and also for ritual purposes. Apart from the types of meat mentioned above, people occasionally buy meat from hunters who poach on the neighbouring trust farms.

2.3.1.2 Acornhoek

Like Welperdiend, Acornhoek also falls under the jurisdiction of the Mnisi Tribal Authority and has been selected to represent a marginal area. The size of the area is 2 183 hectares. According to the 1983 population registry, Acornhoek had 8 186 people. At an average growth rate of 3% per annum, the population had risen to 8 432 by 1984 when the study was undertaken. This figure does not agree with Kotzé's research findings; in 1975, Kotzé recorded a

population of 2 972 at Acornhoek. In terms of this figure (2 972), at an average growth of 3% per annum, Acornhoek should have a population of 3 774 by 1984 and not 8 432. There is a discrepancy of 4 858 and this can be explained by the boundary issue between Lebowa and Gazankulu; after the declaration of boundaries between the two national states, most Tsonga families voluntarily moved from the neighbouring residential areas given to Lebowa, into Acornhoek. Of all the Mnisi tribal farms Acornhoek has the highest population presently. In 1984, Acornhoek had a population density of 0,26 per km².

2.3.1.2.1 Labour and agriculture

The Mnisi tribal office at Islington serves among other things, as a recruiting office for this area as well. Some of the unemployed go to the magisterial offices at Thulamahashe, which offer a similar service, while a few prefer to go and look for suitable employment themselves.

Although agriculture is the most important traditional economic institution among the Tsonga, it is presently practiced to a lesser degree at Acornhoek than at Welverdiend. A few people have almost abandoned this activity. Of the 50 families studied in the area, 38% have no lands. They cultivate a small quantity of crops within the family yard which is about 2 000m². A number of factors

may help to explain this discontinuity; firstly, due to the lack of space, it became difficult if not impossible for those who came from the Lebowa area to get land. Secondly, the soil is rather poor and sandy. While old people maintain that they used to have good harvests during their early settlement in the area, they admit that the soil is presently exhausted.

The case study reveals that of the 50 families studied, 78% have one or more members who are temporarily absent as a result of migratory labour. Out of the total population of 8 432 it has been found that 19,5% (1 644) persons are temporarily absent due to migrancy. Although it may not be correct to assume that all 19,5% migrant labourers are men, they are by far in the majority. In the remaining 22% of the families which are not affected by the migratory labour system 15 persons were encountered who commute to Hoedspruit or Phalaborwa. There is a daily train for labourers which operates between Mkhuhlu, near Hazyview, and Phalaborwa. Others work locally at the Acornhoek business centres or at the local schools as teachers. Of the 15 commuters 9 are male employees. Of the 6 female employees, 4 were between 18 and 41 years old while the remaining 2 were over 45 years. It can be assumed therefore that a great majority of elderly women are found at home, no longer contributing much if anything to the subsistence of the family. Since they are

not likewise involved in agriculture, the decline in this means of livelihood is further explained. **Tsima**, the most distinctive form of co-operative work, is practiced at some parts of Acornhoek A and B. At Acornhoek C, all informants denied any practice of **tsima**. It has been indicated early in the chapter that co-operative working arises chiefly in agricultural and building activities. At Acornhoek C, the great majority if not all families have no agricultural land. Most of them are either migrant labourers or local employees. **Tsima** is most effective for people who are not involved as migrant labourers or employees. Another reason for the absence of the **tsima** practice in this section is because of the people's adoption of the Western style of building houses. In house building, a skilled craftsman is always employed. Although he may have a few ordinary assistants, this cannot be regarded as **tsima**. Besides, most families, even in the whole of Acornhoek do not have cattle any more. Giving a **tsima** for the construction of a cattle byre nowadays is very rare if not completely absent. Those with cattle rarely keep more than 10. The number is so low that smaller cattle byres are needed than the big traditional ones. Besides, almost all of them are built with wire fencing. The building of a cattle-byre nowadays does not involve hard labour. Consequently the giving of a **tsima** is no longer necessary. Instead, the service of one individual who may be accompanied by his friend or son, is hired.

Moreover, some of the inhabitants who still cultivate a few hectares of **masimu** prefer the service of a tractor to that of oxen. Giving **tsima** for ploughing also necessitates big land. Families which are without cattle and cannot afford to hire a tractor, will hire the service of the oxen instead. Although informants agree that the giving of **tsima** is still practiced in the area, they admit that nowadays, this practice is very rare and gradually dying out.

2.3.1.2.2 Schools, clinics and churches

The first school in the area was established by the Swiss Mission in 1916. The school was named Timbavati. In 1971, a secondary school was established. Today in the whole area, there are 7 schools altogether. About a kilometre away from the secondary school, there is a technical school. Although this technical school is in the Acornhoek section of Lebowa it has a significant influence in the area.

In 1936, the first clinic in the area was established by the International Holiness Mission (IHM). After the amalgamation of the IHM with the Nazarene Mission the clinic was expanded to a hospital and became known as the Ethel Lucas Memorial Hospital. The Nazarene Mission later established its own church structure within the hospital premises. The church structure that was built by the International Holiness

Mission was converted into a hospital kitchen. The hospital was later handed over to the Gazankulu National State by the Central Government and in 1976 it was re-named the Tintswalo Hospital. About a kilometre to the south-east of the hospital there is a surgery.

The hospital is the only one in the Mhala district. According to one of the medical practitioners at the hospital, the Acornhoek people visit the hospital more regularly than people from any other area in the district. While he agrees that some of the elderly people at Acornhoek still make regular visits to the tribal doctors, others prefer the hospital. For certain types of illnesses such as serious wound injuries, all elderly people prefer hospital treatment to the traditional method. For child delivery, almost all the mothers prefer going to the hospital. The medical practitioner further indicated that for the treatment of illness such as venereal disease, patients from far-off places first attempt the traditional treatment before ultimately going to the hospital. Acornhoek people however, regard the hospital as their first choice. For the sake of privacy, some of them go to a nearby surgery, especially the young people.

Of all the churches present in the area, the Church of the Nazarene is the most popular. Most church denominations do

not have church buildings. While some, such as the Presbyterian make use of school classrooms for services, others such as the ZCC hold theirs under trees.

Of the 50 families, 68% either have a **gandzelo** or both a **gandzelo** and a **ndhumba**. This figure includes some Christians who do not want to admit that they still recognize and sacrifice to the ancestors. Some non-christian leaders however, quoted names of some Christians and even church leaders who pacify their ancestors at night. Such individuals keep some clothes belonging to the ancestors in their steel trunks, it is alleged.

2.3.1.2.3 Trade

Acornhoek has got one of the biggest railway stations in the Eastern Transvaal. Consumable goods such as oranges from Champagne as well as tomatoes, guava fruits and a few cabbages, all from the Chochocho (Dingleydale) Irrigation having a railway station, it has got a bigger bus and taxi rank in the far Eastern Transvaal. Every month end, buses from the Reef and other places such as Phalaborwa, Ermelo, etc, transport migrant labourers to and from the Acornhoek rank. There are also daily buses and taxis which transport people to and from the rank.

The following licenses have been issued:

super-market	:	4
general dealer	:	4
wholesaler	:	2
dry cleaner	:	1
restaurant	:	6
fruit market	:	2
hotel	:	1
bottle store	:	2
butchery	:	3
motel	:	1
hardware store	:	2
hair saloon	:	1
coal yard	:	1
filling station	:	2

A few other business complexes are still under construction at Acornhoek. There are also a few unlicensed hawkers. The area has really become the centre of attraction as far as business is concerned.

2.3.1.2.4 Technology

The material culture of the people of Acornhoek, like that of Welverdiend, also shows some degree of westernization.

Dress, furniture, tools and implements for instance show a westernised style. Girls and young mothers wear slacks. Traditional 'cradles', known as **n-teha/dzovo**¹⁾ are becoming rare. They are either replaced by prams or have been modified.²⁾ Traditional artefacts such as mortars and pestles, grinding stones, bushels, winnowing baskets, etc. have completely disappeared in many families. In a few families where they could still be found, the family members said that for the past few years they never used some of these tools.

Of the 50 families, 22 had rectangular houses. Some of the houses have been built by specialists and are according to plan. Of the remaining 28 families, 18 have both traditional huts and 'semi-modern' houses. The 'semi-modern' houses are those houses in which elements from traditional and modern technology have been combined. Such houses have been built with the poles of blue gum trees, corrugated iron, steel door and window frames and the walls are plastered with a mixture

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1. **N-teha** is made of a softened hide of a goat. It is somewhat rectangular in shape and is used to carry babies on the back of the mother. In each corner there is an average of five skin strips.
 2. A modified one is made of a cloth material. It is known as **dzovo**.

of mud and cement; some of these houses are plastered with cement only.

Of the 50 families only 18% still keep **madulu**. Some of them have also been modernized. They are rectangular in shape and the walls have been plastered with cement. There is not a single family with a maize crib. Some of the informants do not know how a maize crib looks like, especially the young ones. Maize cribs are known to be the oldest traditional grain storages. Some of the families with **madulu** indicated that for the past few years they never used them. Other families keep their 'little' harvest in some of the rooms which are not used.

Traditional mats have been replaced in the main by modern beds. Even some of the elderly people prefer sleeping on bed than on the traditional mat. Sponge mattresses, without bedsteads, are used for sleeping purposes by young people. For sitting purposes, chairs are preferred.

2.3.1.2.5 Consumption

The eating habits of the Tsonga of Acornhoek show a difference to Welverdiend. Every morning they drink tea and bread before going either to work or to school.

Although porridge is still a staple diet, some of the **miroho** such as mushrooms, **thyeke** - the herb **Amaranthus thunbergi** **Moq.** and others still obtainable at Welverdiend are almost unknown at Acornhoek. Dried vegetables, especially of the young leaves of the bean are found in some families. Otherwise as relish most families buy cabbages, spinach and tomatoes from the markets. Onions and potatoes are used as part of the relish. Meat is readily obtainable.

Men generally use spoons when eating. Elderly women on the other hand still adhere to the traditional style of eating. In young families, the members sit around the table and eat from individual plates, using either fork and knife or spoons. But young mothers from such families sometimes use their fingers.

After lunch, they usually drink either orange squash or cold drinks. Their evening meal is usually followed by tea or coffee. Children are generally not given any drink in the evening for fear of bed wetting. Some men visit the bar lounge immediately after lunch and have their supper very late in the evening when they return. European liquor at Acornhoek has almost replaced the traditional African beer, with the exception of the **marula** beer (**vukanyi**) which is still highly favoured and the distilled liquor known as **xipanyoni**.

2.3.1.3 Lulekani

The area selected as a modern region for the purposes of this study was initially a trust farm known as Quagga. It is situated about ten kilometres north-west of Phalaborwa. The farm was later incorporated into the Gazankulu Homeland. In 1980, the first group of the Tsonga from the Namakgale township which is under the jurisdiction of the Lebowa Government was settled in this area. As the township expanded, many more Tsonga from various parts of Gazankulu became settled. The area falls under the Ritavi district of Gazankulu. In 1983, the Gazankulu Government honoured the Chief Minister, Prof Dr H W E Ntsanwisi by declaring him the chief of Lulekani. This is very much unusual because the status of a chief amongst the Tsonga is always ascribed and not nominated.

The area has a size of 155, 8306 hectares with a total population of 14 886, according to the 1984 population registry. In terms of these figures, the population density of the area is 0,01 per km². The area is growing very fast however, and the population could be very high in the foreseeable future.

2.3.1.3.1 Labour

Case studies of 50 families was undertaken. The study reveals that there is not a single family which does not have one or more members who are not labourers; 88 individuals were labourers. Of the 50 families, there is not a single family which has got a member who can be regarded as a migrant labourer who is temporarily absent from home. Of the 88 workers only 4 perform their labour outside Lulekani or Phalaborwa. These work either in Giyani or in the Mhala district. Their temporary absence from their homes is so short that they do not qualify to be termed migrant labourers in the true sense of the word. They come home every Friday afternoon and return to their respective works every Monday morning. All the remaining 84 employees perform their outside labour so near that they return home every afternoon or evening. The majority of these people is employed at the Phalaborwa Mining Company (PMC); Foskor and Bosveld. All three mining companies are in the vicinity of Phalaborwa. A few more have been employed in and around the Phalaborwa town. The case study further reveals that there is not a single family with **masimu**; each family only has a garden within the family yard. The word 'garden' is translated as **nghadi** by the Tsonga people. What they cultivate most in the garden are vegetables such as cabbages, spinach, onions, carrots and tomatoes. Besides their gardens they have no

other land to cultivate crops in large quantities. Working-parties (**tsima**) are totally unpracticed. At Lulekani, not a single case has been found of a family that is committed to the practicing of the traditional subsistence economy of the Tsonga.

The fact that none of the 88 employees in the survey of 50 families at Lulekani are migrant labourers, points to the very low incidence of this phenomenon in the community at large.

2.3.1.3.2 Schools, clinics and churches.

As already indicated above, the township is very recent. Consequently only two primary schools and one secondary school have up to now been built. According to the plan of the township many more schools are to be built. Many Tsonga pupils still attend schools at Namakgale. Some of these schools have Tsonga medium only. Some Tsonga students from the Namakgale township who undergo their secondary education at Lulekani, travel daily by bus. With the establishment of the township, a big health centre was also built. The clinic is under the trusteeship of the Letaba Hospital. It has been provided with an ambulance of its own. There are until now three permanent nursing sisters, two nursing assistants and one social worker serving in the clinic. Medical practitioners visit the clinic thrice a week. The clinic is

to receive its permanent medical practitioner in the foreseeable future. It is attended by an average of 55 patients per day. A night watchman has been employed to call the nursing sister on call should any patient come during the night. For serious cases, patients are transferred to Maphutha-Malatji Hospital at Namakgale. Although it cannot be denied that there are some people at Lulekani who still prefer tribal doctors and also still believe in witchcraft, people of this nature are by far in the minority. Even very old people were seen visiting the clinic more regularly than elsewhere in the areas of investigation. Cases of patients who first visited the tribal doctors and went to the clinic as the last resort were very few at Lulekani.

In spite of the fact that the township was only established, about seven years ago, there are already nine church denominations in the area. Many more denominations are anticipated. In the 50 families visited, not a single **ndhumba** hut was ever found. This does not however mean that all families do not worship the spirits. All township houses are built according to an approved plan and any extension of the house or any additional structure within the yard should first be approved in order to meet the expected health standard. It stands to reason therefore that an additional structure within the yard in a form of a **ndhumba** is an impossibility. Consequently, families which were supposed to

have the **ndhumba** huts have kept their ancestor spirit clothes in one of the bedrooms. Of the 50 families, six such instances were recorded. Of the six families, three adopt trees as ancestral shrines (**magandzelo**).

2.3.1.3.3 Trade

Although the township is still in its nascency, shops and trading centres, including enterprises which offer various other services to the public have been opened. The following trading centres have already been accomplished:

General Dealer	:	3
Supermarket	:	2
Cafe/Restaurant	:	5
Panel beater	:	1
Brick-yard	:	1
Hardware store	:	1
Dry cleaner	:	1
Bookshop	:	1
Bottle-store	:	2

As far as trade is concerned, Acornhoek seems to be more advanced than Lulekani. It should however be noted that while Acornhoek is more than a hundred kilometres away from its nearest town, Phalaborwa, Lulekani is about ten kilometres away from this town. The level of acculturation

at Lulekani is far greater than that of Acornhoek. Moreover, many more trading centres are still to be built at Lulekani. The plan of the whole township represents a higher level of westernization.

2.3.1.3.4 Technology

As already indicated, the material culture of the Tsonga of Lulekani shows the highest degree of westernization. All houses are rectangular in shape and have been built with western material; bricks, cement, tiles, fabricated beams, windows, corrugated iron, etc. Western furniture has completely replaced traditional tools. All houses as well as the streets have been electrified. Electric stoves or hot plates are used instead of fire-wood. Living rooms are filled with lounge suites, radiograms and sometimes wall units. Average as well as more wealthy families have television sets as well as videos. Some houses have also been carpeted. A few families have one or two family cars.

Some traditional artefacts have been modernized. In two families for instance, traditional mortars made of the "kiaat" (*Pterocarpus angolensis* Welw.) wood were noted. The pestles are shorter and thinner than the traditional ones and are made of steel instead of wood. These tools are kept for pounding ground-nuts only and not maize. Grinding stones as

well as other traditional material objects have completely disappeared at Lulekani. Many women push their babies in their prams instead of carrying them on their backs. Even as far as dressing is concerned, there is a marked difference between the Lulekani people on the one hand and the Welverdiend and Acornhoek people on the other. The Lulekani women for instance can freely wear slacks without condemnation by the menfolk. At places like Welverdiend, a pair of slacks is publicly scorned.

2.3.1.3.5 Consumption

The eating habits of the Tsonga of Lulekani has changed drastically. Although porridge is still regarded as their staple food, traditional vegetables (**miroho**) used as relish (**xixevo**) have, to a large extent been replaced by various types of meat. Whereas meat in the past was an occasional type of food, it is presently a daily relish at Lulekani. In addition to porridge, rice is also a staple food. Chicken and rice are normally set aside for Sundays. In some families, rice is consumed also during the week.

Sunday meals are usually called 'special'. The informants say

"Hi Sonto hi dya spexali"

(On Sunday we eat special)

The Sunday meal usually consists of chicken and rice, mashed sweet-potatoes, mashed pumpkin, salads and sweets. The meals are taken with cold juice. Such meals are usually prepared before going to church. After the church service, the meals are simply warmed before they are dished up. The lunch meals seem to be the most enjoyable with almost everybody present at home. The meals are eaten leisurely and enjoyably.

The eating habits of the Lulekani residents differ from those of the rural people. Everyone eats from his or her own plate. Small children usually eat with spoons while the elders make use of a fork and knife. In some families however, women - even the literate ones - prefer the traditional form of using bare fingers to fork and knife. They argue that the food is nicer when eaten with bare fingers than with a spoon or a fork and knife. It is only the Sunday lunch that is eaten with a fork and knife even by such women. Children usually have their meals in the kitchen whereas the adults have theirs in the lounge room. If the children join the elders in the sitting room during meal time, they are always seated on the floor, the reason being that they can dirty the lounge suites. Workers are generally not at home for lunch during the week. Those who work locally are always present during lunch time. During the evening meals everybody is present at home. The afternoon

meals are usually taken with cold drinks while the evening meals are usually taken with coffee or tea.

As a result of the high degree of acculturation, the Tsonga of Lulekani have developed many other needs which all contribute towards increased consumption. The intensive adoption of Western modes of living and its proximity to Phalaborwa town have placed Lulekani on a higher degree of modernity than Acornhoek and Welperdiend.

2.4 History of possession among the Tsonga

After having analyzed and described each area of investigation as such, we now come to the history of possession among the Tsonga. Such an analysis will help to explain the extent to which spirit possession is related to culture change. At face value possession among the Tsonga, seems to be connected with the change in their culture. Among the Tsonga, possession was not known. Junod (1913, Vol.II:436), for instance writes that the Tsonga themselves state that the 'disease' was previously very rare or even unknown. He indicates that it was only towards the end of the last century that the disease spread enormously amongst these peoples. The more recent type of possession found in some Tsonga tribes appeared as early as 1913.

Tsonga possession can here be contrasted with the Zulu. Among the Zulu, possession seems to be having a long and different history from that of the Tsonga. Lee (1969: 129) for instance, maintains that the history of **ukuthwasa** possession is as long as the recorded Zulu history itself. Sibisi (1975: 48) even refers to this type of possession as an old or traditional form. It is only the **indiki** possession that is regarded to be of a relatively recent origin amongst the Zulu people (Sibisi, 1975: 50). Like the Tsonga, this new type of possession among the Zulu appeared at the turn of the century in about 1911 (Sibisi, 1975: 50).

The history of possession among the Tsonga compares well with that of the Venda and the Lovedu. About the Venda, Stayt (1968: 302) reports that possession was very rare to these people and became known in about 1914 when it spread from Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and gained popularity with extraordinary rapidity. Among the Lovedu also, the cult is not indigenous. This is indicated by Krige (1965: 241) when she writes that the cult was received from the Thovolo people in about 1914, and it has ever since gained considerable popularity.

The history of Tsonga possession therefore resembles that of some other South African tribes. This does not however imply that Zulu alone has got an exceptional history of possession.

Other tribes also, such as the Xhosa, have a long standing history. Lamla indicates that Xhosa lore reveals that the great Xhosa chief, Tshiwo, in the seventeenth century made use of diviners to have all his opponents eliminated. The punishment for anybody 'smelt out' by a diviner was death. He concludes by indicating that another great Xhosa chief, Gcaleka (1739 - 1792) ultimately became a diviner (Lamla, 1975: 23).

Despite the fact that possession among the Tsonga has a recent history, it is presently so wide-spread and deep-rooted among the people that it appears as though it were an original traditional phenomenon among them.

2.4.1 Who becomes possessed? N.B.

It has been established in this and other investigations by other researchers that nobody can become a diviner of personal choice, at least not in theory. All diviners interviewed during the investigation were emphatic that they had experienced a definite call to the office of the diviner by the spirits. Berglund (1976: 136) also gives a similar account about the Zulu. In theory therefore, the cult is open to anybody irrespective of sex and to a lesser degree, of age as well. In practice however, the overwhelming majority are women with an average age of between 30 and 40 years.

Lewis (1971: 309) notes that the categories of persons that most frequently succumb to spirit possession, and figure most prominently in possession cults, are women. Fortune shows how amongst the Manus of Guinea, women are 'spiritually disenfranchised in the (paternal) Sir Ghost cult', but spiritually enfranchised in the **tandritanitani** cult (1963: 95). Fortune further indicates that whereas the morally significant patrilineal ghost cult is controlled by men, it is women who consecrate male diviners and practise as mediums.

Lewis (1971: 310) indicates that in her magnificent record of the life of an old Hausa woman, Mary Smith comments that in this male dominated Moslem society, the inability of the Hausa women to participate adequately in the ceremonial and public life of Islam leaves a gap which is filled by the spirit possession cult.

In the same vein Hunter (1936: 320) in her study of the Xhosa finds that in the **ukuthwasa** possession, women figure more than men. Of the 26 diviners that she knew, 21 were women. The ratio therefore is 4:1 in women's preponderance. Boersema (1984: 51) reports that of the 57 **malopo** patients, 45 were women. Again this gives us a ratio of roughly 4:1.

In the Mhala district of Gazankulu, Kotzé (1976: 374) found the ratio to be 5:1 in the women's preponderance also. While the present investigator has found the same ratio in the Mhala district as the one found by Kotzé, he found the ratio to be 4:1 in the Ritavi district of Gazankulu. Stayt (1968: 303) also finds that amongst the Venda, it is generally women who become victims of spirit possession. Hammond-Tooke (1962: 245) also finds that the majority of diviners among the Bhaca people are women. Writing about the Lovedu, Krige (1965: 248) says that although the cult is open to men as well, it is largely confined to women.

These and similar comments by many other observers of such cults typify that line of interpretation which views the prominent role of women in spirit possession as a compensation for their exclusion and lack of authority in other spheres. Men who become votaries are usually those of lower social status in the society. Such men are often abnormal, like the homosexuals in the Bahian Candomble as was found by Walker (1972: 6). Colson (1969: 95) refers to such men as neurotics. Lee (1969: 143) similarly refers to these men as of homosexual bent and he adds that they are usually young and unmarried at the initiation of their possession.

Among women, spirit possession occurs mostly to those who are married. Boersema (1984: 51) reports that the majority of

the females possessed are between 30 and 40 years of age. Hunter (1936: 320) also notes that although an **inkathazo** (literally trouble - used technically for sickness before **ukuthwasa**) may come at any age, many women **ukuthwasa** about menopause. This investigation also noted that the majority of the females who are possessed are the married ones.

There should be reasons why it is women who most frequently succumb to the cult. Kotzé (1976: 378-379) maintains that the reasons are found in both the modern social order and the traditional kinship system. He indicates that under the present conditions the opportunities of men to gain self-esteem through personal achievement are more favourable than those for women. A man with no social recognition, for instance, can improve his position through church leadership or appointment as manager of an association or club. Admitting that women can also have such opportunities, Kotzé indicates that they ultimately become house-wives again.

The second reason which Kotzé (1976: 379) established with the Tsonga during his study of the people, concerns the traditional kinship system as already mentioned above. Traditionally, as a married wife, a woman played a cardinal socio-cultural as well as socio-political role in the tribe. She was a means to the formation of alliances and as **hahani** (FaSi) she occupied a honorific status position. With the

loss of significance of the kinship system, the **hahani** has now been replaced in her status position. As house-wives women are more subjected to this socially disintegrated situation and are also more sensitive towards change due to the present position.

Another reason why it should be women who most frequently succumb to the cult, could be emotionalism. The profession itself is a highly emotional one which necessitates highly emotional practitioners. Women are mostly subjected to emotionalism brought about by unavoidable emotional disturbances of purely feminine functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and the menopause (Hammond-Tooke, 1962: 245).

how to become Shaman

The fourth reason could be the outlet for mental stress. Possession cults usually arise in traditionally male dominated societies. In such societies women are generally regarded as weak and submissive creatures. As put forward by Wilson (1967: 367) they are excluded from social and political life. Furthermore, they are regarded as ritually inferior and even legally deprived in comparison with men. In such societies tension is created by a man when he marries a second woman. Wilson found that a married woman whose husband is about to take a new wife may succumb to possession

Y.B

by spirits. Through possession, such a woman is able to reaffirm her status and prestige in public (Wilson, 1967: 370).

2.4.2 Possession in the three-fold differentiation

Possession in the three areas of investigation can be shown by means of the following table:

AREA	TOTAL POPULATION	POSSESSED WOMEN	POSSESSED MEN	TOTAL NO. POSSESSED	PERCENTAGE POSSESSED
1	2 436	17	4	21	0,9
2	8 432	14	3	17	0,2
3	14 886	7	2	9	0,06

1 = Welverdiend

2 = Acornhoek

3 = Lulekani

2.5 Conclusion

From the above discussion, the following may be deduced:

- (a) that the three areas of investigation differ markedly as far as their degree of modernity is concerned. At Welverdiend the traditional way of living is still in existence. Besides the full practice of *tsima* for instance, traditional style of living as well as artefacts can still be observed. As such Welverdiend can be regarded as a representative of an orthodox area while Lulekani on the other extreme represents a modern area. As already indicated, the inhabitants have transformed their traditional style of living into a western style. Working parties as well as many traditional artefacts such as winnowing baskets, bushels, grinding stones and also traditional activities such as ploughing have disappeared completely. Acornhoek seems to have the elements of the two previously mentioned areas. While it possesses some of the traditional artefacts still found at Welverdiend for instance, it lacks some of the modern ones obtainable at Lulekani. Consequently Acornhoek represents a marginal area in this study;
- (b) that the three areas differ in the extent of migrancy. Of the three areas of investigation, Welverdiend is the most affected by migrancy. Out of the total population of 2 436, 21,5% has been affected by migrancy. Lulekani on the other hand has not been affected.

(c) that the rate of possession in the three areas is not the same. The investigation reveals that Welverdiend has the highest percentage of possession (0,9%), Acornhoek has the second highest percentage (0,2%) while Lulekani with 0,06% has the lowest.

CHAPTER 3

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS OF POSSESSION

3.1 Introduction

Types of spirit N.D

Like the Xhosa, the Tsonga tribal doctors are basically of two classes: the 'herbalist' and the 'diviner'. Their functions overlap for both are practitioners in the art of healing and both manipulate medicines to that end. Perhaps it is for this reason that a common term **n'anga** is used for both classes - a fact which might be confusing. However, there is a difference between the two 'doctors'. Hammond-Tooke (1962:244) seems to have described the difference much better than Hunter (1936: 320) when he says that the main difference is in training. Hunter on the other hand says the distinction is based on the difference in initiation. The usage of the concept 'initiation' is misleading here because in the context of this study initiation refers to the process of becoming a diviner and not a herbalist. So a diviner is initiated but a herbalist is not. Hence the idiomatic expressions:

Ku tsema vun'anga (lit. to cut medical practice) and

Ku thwasa vun'anga (lit. to appear medical practice)

Ntsanwisi (1980: 112-116). The solution to the problem lies in the two words **thwasa** and **tsema**. As already explained in Chapter 1, the concept **thwasa** means re-appearance on the public scene after temporary disappearance. As a matter of fact **ku thwasa vun'anga** means 'to become a diviner' while **ku tsema vun'anga** is 'to become a herbalist'. This chapter concerns itself with diviner doctorship and not herbalism. Moreover, a diviner is a person who is possessed by spirits. The chapter describes how possession begins up to the time when the possessed becomes a fully-fledged diviner.

In the main, diviners are characterized by two factors. Firstly, they appear to be the greatest traditionalists. This is evident from their paraphernalia, their authority over their juniors as well as their belief in ancestral spirits which is so much stronger than the belief of ordinary people. For this reason, very few if any are church members, although some diviner informants have claimed to be church members. In theory they might belong to some church denominations but in practice they are not church-goers. Secondly, diviners are people who are regarded as second-class citizens in a society who also suffer from psychological instability. Such individuals are found especially in traditionally male dominated societies as exemplified by the Tsonga of Gazankulu.

Possession, therefore, is associated with people of lower social standing who are subjected to mental and emotional frustrations. Through the possession cult such individuals project their frustrations and want to be first-class citizens. The ensuing discussion of the process of possession will demonstrate how the possessed individuals endeavour to upgrade themselves.

3.2 Symptoms of possession

Berglund (1976:136-137) refers to the symptoms of possession as signs of a diviner's call. This is so because the symptoms are believed to be caused by the spirits calling a person to the office of diviner. The following are some of the basic symptoms of possession: illness, dreams and misfortunes.

3.2.1 Illness

Like many groups in South Africa, the people of Gazankulu believe illness is caused either by witches or ancestral spirits and rarely by nature. Possession amongst them is bound up with illnesses caused by the ancestors (**swikwembu**). A person affected by such illness is spoken of as:

I vabya hi swikwembu

(He sickens of ancestors i.e. he suffers
from illness caused by ancestors).

Typical of the illness is the fact that it tends to follow stereotyped patterns; the novice always suffers from paralysis, her limbs become paralysed like the paralytics we read of in the Bible. The novice begins to be particular about food, and abstains from certain kinds of food, requesting her friends not to give her that food, because it makes her ill. She chooses what she likes, and she does not eat much of that (Lee, 1969: 137). Dietary prohibition of course is a common element amongst the Tsonga people. A young man for instance, whose father is still alive is not supposed to eat the gizzard of chickens or birds for that would cause the death of his father. Similarly, it is also taboo for women to eat chicken and eggs as it will cause repercussions during child-birth. (It is believed that the woman would give birth with great difficulty and that the complications might even lead to her death). Again the novice would continually complain of pains all over the body. She would end up becoming emaciated and might be ill for six months without getting better; perhaps even longer than that. Some claimed to have been ill for so long that they became skeletal in appearance. Such a person, even if taken to

witch-doctors, would never recover unless she were initiated into the cult.

The above condition of illness can be illustrated in the following accounts:

Case 1

A.M.: I had been sick for over two months. I was very ill and could not sleep peacefully. I suffered chiefly from pains in the sides. The bones all over my body were aching and the heart palpitating. A week after falling ill my mother consulted a **n'anga** (herbalist) whose divinatory bones revealed that she (the mother) should **phahla mhamba** (perform sacrifice to ancestors). The herbalist said the spirits of my ancestors were angry, so they were stabbing me. A goat was then killed to propitiate them. After the ritual sacrifice I felt I was recovering. But a few days thereafter I was once again attacked. This time it came back much more serious than before. Instead of the sides only, my whole body was painful. Mentally also I felt as if I was no longer normal, but just going to become mad. I lost my appetite altogether. For several days I could not eat anything at all; I could not drink either. I became horribly emaciated. Ultimately my

arms and legs became paralysed. Although I was undergoing medical treatment it did not help. Instead I got worse and worse. My mother went to another herbalist K.M., who discovered that I was 'having ancestors' and that I was therefore supposed to **chayeriwa** (to be beaten for, i.e. to be exorcised).

I was troubled by the matrilineal ancestors. The ancestral spirit that wanted to **huma** (to come out i.e. to manifest himself) was once a diviner and was complaining that **mirhi yakwe yi tshame handle** (his herbs were left outside) i.e. there was no one taking care of his herbs. So I should perpetuate his doctorship. They asked the bones whether the troublesome ancestor was my mother's father and the bones said it was not. Then asked if it was M. (her mother's father's father) the bones agreed. Asked where I could be exorcised, the bones pointed to the east. Asked if I could be exorcised by K.M., the bones refused. Asked if it could be N'wa-B,¹ they still refused. Asked if it could be N'wa-N² of Gottenburg the bones agreed.

1. The prefix **n'wa** - is a contracted form of **n'wana wa** (the daughter of). In this case the daughter of B.

2. The daughter of N.

Case 2

R.J. One day I had gone with four other girls of my age to fetch some water from the nearby river. On our way home I began to feel a headache. Arriving at home I slept on a mat. An hour thereafter I woke up vomiting terribly. By then my whole body was extremely weak. I needed someone to support me as I could not walk on my own. That night I did not sleep. I completely lost appetite. I became boney and my skin also became pale. The illness continued until after two weeks when I began to improve. I, however, never gained any full recovery as the illness prevailed on and off for four months, until my father predicted that I was possessed. When this was confirmed by three different herbalists, I was then taken to a qualified diviner for exorcism.

These are typical accounts of possession illness. Besides the above-mentioned type of illness, the spirits may indicate their calling through frequent sneezing, yawning, hiccups and belching (Berglund, 1976:137). Although these signs are usually experienced by a normal person, the difference is that with a novice these are experienced to an abnormal degree; belching is excessive, there is frequent sneezing and yawning is extraordinary (Junod, 1913, Vol II:438).

3.2.2 Dreams

The Tsonga people differentiate between three kinds of dreams: Those sent by the ancestors, those sent by witches, and ordinary spontaneous dreams. The third category is regarded as natural and harmless but nevertheless still plays some role in the lives of the people as they attach meanings and interpretations to such dreams. If one dreams of a sick person having died for instance, this is taken as an indication of his recovery, since such dreams are generally interpreted by their contraries.

The second category is regarded as dangerous. If one dreams of an owl, cat, baboon or skunk, the dream is thought to have been caused by witches for these animals are thought to be nocturnal familiars used by witches as means of transport when going to 'eat up' people. The first category however, is our main concern in this study. The ancestral spirits, as it is believed, communicate with their 'children' through dreams, especially in times of crisis, illness, or death in the family.

Many writers on possession regard dreams as the initial and the most important symptom of possession. Berglund (1976:136) for instance, writing about the Natal Nguni, regards dreams as the most important instrument through which

the spirits call their servants. Lamla (1975: 83) also indicates that a person who shows signs of possession begins by dreaming in an extraordinary manner. Similarly, Sundkler (1961: 266-267) emphasizes the importance of dreams in possession when he says that in the case of the diviner 'dreams play a central role'. Furthermore he indicates that not only must the diviner's call be extended by the ancestors through a dream but that she has to go on dreaming in order to assert herself as a real diviner. Such dreams are often accompanied by visions. Typical of these dreams and visions is that they are frightening, unclear and not understandable (Berglund, 1976: 136). To receive clear dreams, the dream-diviner-to-be should avoid certain food and also smear herself with white earth (Sundkler, 1961: 267). This emphasizes the importance of dreams and visions in Nguni possession.

Research has shown the picture to be slightly different in the case of Tsonga diviners. Dreams amongst them appear to play a secondary role in the cult. Assertions such as "a swi tangi hi milorho" (it did not come through dreams) or "a ndzi zangi ndzi nga lorha" (I never dreamt) were the most common answers by many informants. Those who admitted to having dreamt indicated that the dream came only once and rarely more than twice. Nevertheless a few informants have dreamt as illustrated below in the accounts of F.M. and T.N.

Case 3

F.M. It started with a dream. In the beginning of it I dreamt of some diviners that I could not identify. I was going to the neighbours opposite the street. As I approached the Rooiessenhout (*Trichilia emetica* Vahl) tree, I found a group of diviners with plaited hair smeared with red ochre seated underneath. They did not look at me. They were all looking down. They never talked to me. After a few days I became ill. It started with my legs. When I tried to walk, I found that I could not control my feet. From my legs it gripped my waist and then reached my shoulders. When it arrived at my head it caused dizziness. When they gave me soft porridge to eat I could not eat any of it.

Case 4

T.N.: It started with dreams. I just dreamt of the eggs of a guinea-fowl. The eggs were by the river side. Next to them there was a big object that I could not identify. This object was right in the water. Two days after, the dream came back. On that very same day I became ill. All my limbs became paralysed. Afterwards I felt as if I was becoming mad. When the

diviners were consulted they discovered that I was suffering from the illness of the spirits and should therefore be sent away for exorcism.

Both diviners gave some interpretations of their dreams. F.M. said that dreaming of diviners was an indication that she would become a diviner too. Plaited hair with red ochre meant that the spirit possessing her would want her to have such hair. T.N. on the other hand explained that the eggs he dreamt of represented a **gone** or **gona**¹. It meant that his **gone** would be made of an ostrich egg shell instead of gourd as it is usually the case. A guinea-fowl symbolizes 'doctorship' and money. He will therefore be a diviner and would get money. The water that he dreamt of meant that he would be initiated in the river - this is known as **nzunza** or **ku thwasa nzunza**. The object in the water represented his diviner - tutor in the river.

1. This is a medium size calabash kept by diviners for storing honey mixed with medicine smeared on the sides of a client's mouth during the smelling out of witches. Because of dialectical differences, some call it **gone** and others **gone**.

In the **ku thwasa** possession therefore we find: physical symptoms which include avoidance of food and consequent emaciation; behavioural symptoms of fugue states, belching and yawning; and to a lesser degree psychological events of dreaming.

3.2.3 Misfortunes

The physical as well as the psychological symptoms described above are directed to the novice alone. Apart from these symptoms there are a few others that affect both the spirit servant and the community at large. In this regard Kotzé (1976: 374) writes that the presence of a foreign spirit in the body of a person is accompanied by:

"onnatuurlike toestande soos kinderloosheid, konflik met verwante, konflik met die bure of werkgewer, slegte oeste of verlies van 'n werkgeleentheid".

Unnatural conditions such as childlessness appear to be more prevalent in this category. One diviner at Acornhoek for instance, could not bear children. Long after her marriage when it was evident that she would never have any child, she paid bride prices for two women on her husband's behalf. One woman bore girls only and the other boys only. A similar

situation was found at Welverdiend where a female diviner who herself never got married paid bride price to another woman on her own behalf. The two women were staying together as 'husband' and 'wife'. The 'husband' however, requested her younger brother to cohabit with 'his' wife and a baby boy was ultimately born. Such children refer to their supposed 'father' as **kokwana** as if she was a mother to her own brother.

One woman was always in conflict with both relatives and neighbours. She always quarreled with her maternal uncle. On two occasions she fought with her neighbours. Ultimately she moved and settled at Gottenburg and soon she was initiated into the cult.

3.3 Treatment of possession

Possession can be treated either negatively or positively, depending on whether the individual can resist entry of the spirit or not. Some informants who ultimately succumbed either welcomed the spirits because they were themselves interested in the profession or did so against their will after all attempts to prevent them (spirits) had failed.

3.3.1 Barring the spirits

N.B

As soon as it has become clear that a person's ailments are due to the spirits, it is important first to clarify which spirits are responsible for the calling. Basically the Tsonga distinguish between three types of spirits: **swikwembu swa le kaya** (spirits or ancestors of the home) i.e. family or paternal spirits/ancestors; **swikwembu swa le ka vakokwana** (spirits/ancestors of the grandparents) i.e. maternal spirits/ancestors, and foreign spirits not of the Tsonga origin. These foreign spirits are attached either to the paternal or the maternal ancestor and will always afflict their host (Junod, 1913, Vol II: 436).

Of the three spirits mentioned above, it is paradoxically the foreign spirits which is our concern in this study. These spirits are known as the **swikwembu swa Vangoni** (Nguni spirits) and the **swikwembu swa Vandzawu** (Ndau spirits). It is essential therefore to be clear whether the responsible spirits are those of the **Vangoni** and/or **Vandzawu** from the father's or mother's side. An individual may either yield to the spirits or reject them. While informants agreed that possessing spirits can be rejected they admitted that such a reaction is rare for it is seen as a negative reaction. Some informants further indicated that such a reaction usually precipitated serious consequences. The patient may or may

not be restored to full health and in some instances she may even die. Sometimes, if health is restored, the patient becomes ill again and the diviner identifies the renewed illness as the work of the spirits. It is generally accepted that more determined attempts at rejection will prove fruitless if the spirits repeat their challenges several times. The person therefore should just embark on the new life of becoming a diviner.

Lamla (1975: 88) explains that if an individual is troubled by a spirit, her people have to decide whether to allow her to train as a diviner or whether to ask a diviner to bar the spirit. Among the Tsonga people however, the decision to reject the spirit is that of the individual and not her people's. R.N. of Wilverdiend is one such example. Her mother as well as her mother-in-law both of whom were possessed, persuaded her to accept the call after it was established that her ailments were due to the spirits. She however decided on her own to reject them - something she did successfully. Several such cases where challenges to an individual decision to reject spirits against the will of her people were met although many of them were not successful.

Rejection itself is often by means of herbs and must take place before initiation. The process of rejecting spirits is called **ku kandziyela swikwembu** (to walk upon or tramp on the

spirits repeatedly i.e. to "suppress the spirits"). They should be suppressed before they 'come out'. The diviner gives the patient herbs that will inactivate the spirit in her.

The medicine should be taken daily in the morning and afternoon. It is first boiled after which it should be drunk. Such medicine is called **murhi wa ku pfala swikwembu** (medicine for closing the spirits i.e. medicine for rejecting spirits) and has no specific name of its own. Each drink is followed by the usage of another medicine called **baso**. **Baso** is a concoction made of various types of ground roots and animal fat. The whole mixture forms a kind of wax which is burnt on the glowing embers of wood placed on a broken piece of clay-pot called **xirhengele**. The patient sits with legs astride and a **xirhengele** is placed in between the legs. She is then covered either with a blanket or a few sheets and is supposed to inhale the smoke produced as a result of the burning **baso**. The application of the **baso** medicine as such is called **ku orha baso** (to bask for **baso**) and its duration is determined by the diviner. Informants however, claim that it usually lasts for two to four weeks depending on the strength of the spirit to resist the medicine.

3.3.2 Accepting the spirits

While rejecting the spirits is seen as a negative reaction to the call of the spirits, accepting the call is a positive response; assuming that an individual accepts the call of the spirits, the next step towards becoming a diviner is training under an experienced diviner called **govela**. The herbalist who has been consulted and has discovered that the ailment is a result of spirits also discovers the particular diviner-tutor to whom the neophyte should be taken for training. Perhaps the insignificance of dreams amongst the possessed people of Gazankulu can be seen here once again. Whereas the tutor is indicated by the spirits themselves in dreams among the Zulu people (Berglund, 1976: 150) for instance, this does not hold for the Tsonga. All informants agreed that the tutor is revealed by the divinatory bones. The tutor is also not chosen by the novice herself as again is the case with the Zulu (Berglund, 1976: 150). The divinatory bones will indicate the tutor to be.

3.3.2.1 Training

Training has a two-fold goal; first it is aimed at restoring the novice to health which presumably has been disturbed through the process of the calling. Secondly, through training the novice learns to adapt to the life style of a

diviner. Adaptation in turn, comprises two essential aspects; firstly introduction to the knowledge of divination and second, a modification of one's life to a mode which will allow for the constant brooding of the spirit without the diviner becoming mentally disordered.

Once it has been established which **govela** should **thwasisa** the neophyte, the latter is sent to her for the purpose. Training commences immediately after the novice's arrival. The initial step in training is called **ku gajeka** or **ku tlhandleka comane**¹ (to put rattles on) i.e. to beat rattles for the patient for the first time in her life. From then on the drums will be beaten continuously morning and evening everyday. This continuous beating of drums is called **ku chayela** and the process of **ku chayela** is aimed at **ku vupfisa swikwembu** (causing spirits to be well cooked).

During **ku chayela**, the neophyte is always completely covered with either a blanket or a white sheet - the latter being the most preferable. The novice sits on a traditional mat called **sangu**; spread on the floor; always facing the east with legs outstretched. She is not supposed to shake any part of her body; she must sit motionless. It is said that if spirits are about to enter into the body of an individual and she

1. **Comane** is a hemispherical drum.

shakes her body - even if it is just a little, they will go back. They can enter the body of a motionless person only. Sitting motionless on the floor without changing positions has some implications; the buttocks become tiresome and the individual feels uncomfortable. Sitting in such position for a long time is very tedious. A neophyte therefore is expected to sit motionless everyday for more than two hours. By displaying ability to withstand such prolonged strain, the neophyte proves that she can do what normally characterises manhood-endurance.

Every morning the occasion of **ku chayela** is always preceded by the taking of a compound of herbs, mixed with water, in a vessel, and stirred with a stick until white foam froths up. The medicine prepared as such is called **bhudlu**. The process of taking the medicine is known as **ku dya bhudlu** (to eat **bhudlu**). The medicine is said to be 'eaten' and not taken because it is the foam that is sipped and not the water itself. When sipping, the novice must always face the east. In the evenings another compound is used. This is contained in a clay vessel. The medicine is first boiled and thereafter removed from the fire. With legs astride, the novice sits with the vessel placed between her legs and covered with a blanket until she perspires profusely from steam. The medicine prepared as such is called **phungula** and the process known as **ku sweka phungula** (to cook **phungula**

medicine) i.e. to make one to perspire from steam. When the water in the vessel starts producing less steam, some red hot stones are added. Once again we find an element of endurance among women. The novice enters the second stage towards becoming like a man.

Throughout the period of training the novice undergoes healing cures. The aim of the cure is (i) to remove sickness caused by the spirits and (ii) to strengthen the diviner's physique and a sharpening of her alertness. The patient undergoing healing cures as such is referred to as **mulaphya** (pl. **valaphya**). This word is a variant form of **mualaphiwa**. The personal noun **mualaphiwa** on the other hand is derived from the verb stem **u alapha** (treat medically). **Mulaphya** therefore means a person who is medically treated. Informants distinguished clearly between a patient suffering from possession illness and the one suffering from any illness other than possession. While **mulaphya** is anyone suffering from possession illness, the one suffering from any other illness is referred to as **xigulana**. A diviner who was treating four patients at a time, called the three novices her **valaphya** and the remaining patient her **xigulana**.

No novice is assumed ready for initiation until health is fully restored and the spirits have manifested themselves. Beating of drums everyday is aimed at calling the spirits and

the **bhudlu** medicine makes spirits manifest themselves more quickly. One day during the **ku chayela** process, the spirit will enter the patient. On the entry of the spirit, the novice falls down on her back. Hence the process known as **ku wa ka swikwembu** (the fall of the spirits). The diviners' attendants will lift up the 'fallen' spirits. Once helped to a sitting position again, the neophyte's body starts shaking tremulously. The spirit is given some water to drink in the belief that it is tired and thirsty. After drinking water, the spirit is asked certain questions by the attendants. The procedure is more or less as follows:

"Ha mi losa vakokwana.
 Mi njhani phela vakokwana?
 A hi mi tivi hi n'wina va mani?
 Hi byeleni leswi mi lavaka swona
 vakokwana se hi mi tivile".

("Hallo the ancestors.
 And how are you the ancestors?
 We do not know you, who are you?
 Tell us what you want ancestors
 because now we have known you").

It should be realized here that the spirit is addressed in a plural form even though the attendants are quite aware that it is just one spirit only. This is an indication of respect towards it. The attendants address it as **vakokwana** and it in turn addresses them as **vazukulu**. The spirit will disclose its identity and announce its wishes. It will reveal its name and ties with the patient's family. Although the spirits may not necessarily have connection with the novice's people, they usually had possessed one of her ancestors. Such spirits usually come in the name of the once possessed ancestor. The **Vandzawu** spirits will claim to have been killed or persecuted by the novice's ancestors. Although they are coming to help the novice socially and economically, their coming appears like vengeance on behalf of a relative killed by the novice's ancestors.

There is a difference in the manner in which the two different types of spirits manifest themselves. The **Vangoni** spirits cause a person to fall backwards whereas those with the **Vandzawu** spirits fold legs (**swo khondla**). After its manifestation the spirit announces the choice of its attire by saying:

"Ndzi lava qhovo ra mina".

(I want my attire).

The attires are more or less the same with slight differences

here and there. Basically this consists of **sindza** - bracelet of brass worn on arm wrist or ankle; **palu** - a blue cotton cloth introduced by early traders; **goloza** - white cotton cloth; **xiyandhana** - red, light cotton material as well as another cloth with an animal(s) picture(s) which could be that of a lion, elephant or a leopard or a combination of all these animals on one cloth. The spirit will also indicate whether the host is supposed to plait and smear the hair with red ochre or not. Plaiting and smearing hair with red ochre is known as **ku horha misisi** and is a peculiar feature of the possessed only. The choice of plaiting therefore lies with the spirit and not the novice as such.

An analysis of the above-mentioned attire suggests a marked change with regard to a woman's social standing. She possesses clothes which no ordinary person in the society may have. Like an academic dress, for instance, these clothes are obtainable only after a great achievement. Moreover by having clothes which are associated with spiritual beings, the woman enjoys a particular status in the community. The clothes with animal pictures have particular significance. The lion is characterized by strength, bravery and cleverness and the elephant is the largest of all the animals and also the strongest. The leopard on the other hand has a power of its own, it is exceedingly quick in its movements, difficult to kill, and dangerous too. So, any woman who is possessed

is endowed with all these qualities mentioned above. Such women elevate themselves above the status of any ordinary woman to that of men or even above.

After pronouncing all its wishes, the spirit is requested to initiate a song of its own. This song will be sung on the day of the initiation by which time the diviner's helpers will have mastered it. From now on the spirit will emerge on its own everyday. The novice ceases to 'eat' the **bhudlu** medicine while the beating of drums continues everyday until one day when the spirit announces:

"Se ndzi lava ku fa ka mina"

(Now I want my death, i.e. I want to be initiated).

On hearing this, the tutor will decide on a suitable day for the initiation of the novice. Word is sent to the novice's home that their 'child' is to be initiated.

3.3.2.2 Ku thwasa - coming out

As already defined in chapter 1, the concept **ku thwasa** is an idiom referring to a coming out afresh after a temporary absence or disappearance. Although generally applicable to the appearance of the new moon, in spirit possession it

refers to a diviner-novice emerging from her initiation to start practising. The 'coming out' marks the turning point in the life of the novice and here ideas of 're-birth' as a 'new' person are involved.

The initiation day has several names of references; **siku-khulu** (the great day); **siku ra ntwaso** (the day of the initiation); **siku ro teka nyongwa** (the day of taking the gall-bladder); or **siku ra ku fa** (the day of dying). Consequently the occasion is also described as **ku dya ntwaso** (to eat initiation), **ku teka nyongwa** (to take gall-bladder) or **ku fa ka munhu** (the death of a person). All these various names suggest that the day is an important one in the life of the novice. On this day she does not only become a central figure, but she also achieves and experiences that which no ordinary person can. Besides discovering the hidden gall-bladder for instance, the novice has to die and resurrect. All these acts elevate a woman far above the status of womanhood. It is this day that makes a woman feel like-man.

The following description of F's initiation ceremony which contain all the essential elements of a seance illustrates some of the main features of the cult. Her diviner-tutor was N-P. Since diviners are addressed as **bava** (father) irrespective of their sex, by their 'students', N-P therefore

was F's father and she was her child (**n'wana**). After F's spirit had indicated one day that it wanted 'its death', N-P sent word to the M's (where F is married):

"Tivani leswaku nsati wa n'wina i wa thwasa".

(know that your wife comes out).

She specified the exact date of the coming out. M. in turn sent his daughter-in-law to N-P's place to brew some beer which was supposed to be ready for drinking by the Saturday of the 'coming out'. On a Thursday the tutor together with her attendants went to the bushes to obtain root medicines which they later brought home. In the evening while some of the attendants were beating drums, the tutor and a few important attendants as well as some visiting diviners simultaneously prepared the medicine. The medicine was prepared by means of mixing and boiling the roots. Should the drum beaters stop beating for a while, the group that prepares the medicine follows suit. Conversely as soon as the drummers resume, those who are preparing the medicine continue as well. An interruption of rattles also affects the preparation of the medicine. The medicine thus prepared is known as **ntwaso** and the process of preparation called **ku sweka ntwaso** (to cook **ntwaso** medicine). After preparation the drum beaters were officially told to stop also. On Friday very early in the morning the **ntwaso**-medicine was

strained and its dregs broadcasted to all four cardinal points. It is said that the idea behind is to reduce the strength of the medicine. At sunrise F together with some three **mathwasana** (recent initiates) who were her companions knelt in front of **yindlu ya swikwembu**¹ (the hut of the spirits). An earthenware pot with **ntwaso**-medicine was brought before them. Each **thwasana** (singular form of **mathwasana**) was given a dosage of one cupful while F, who was the **n'wini wa ntwaso** (owner of the initiation or the main initiant), was given a double dosage. The medicine was drawn for them and theirs was to drink. They were not allowed to touch the cups. After taking the dosage they left the tutor's home for the bushes since the medicine acts both as a laxative and an emetic. Toward midday they came back and once again knelt but this time at the home entrance, facing the east. At this stage they were given only an emetic and consequently were very pale and of sickly appearance. This type of condition symbolizes death.

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1. It is the kind of hut believed to accommodate the Vangoni spirits and unlike the **ndhumba** hut, it faces the east. The interior contains a forked pole on which some spiritual belongings are hung. Today however, only a few diviners possess this hut, while they all have the **ndhumba** hut.

Late in the afternoon when they had all ceased to vomit, they were fed with soft porridge while in the evening they were given normal porridge. The purpose of the laxative was to clean the stomach so that they should feel light and active while vomiting was aimed at 'cleaning the chest' in order to enable the spirits to function fully. Meanwhile on that same Friday the M's brought a he-goat as a ritual animal. (A he-goat was slaughtered for F. who was a female, while for a male initiate a she-goat would have been used instead). The Friday evening, the initiation eve, is called **xilalu**. This word is derived from **ukulala** (to sleep) but in this context it refers to its opposite - 'not to sleep'. Consequently the drummers beat their drums throughout the night and F's spirits 'came out'. (The spirits of other possessed people also came out occasionally). Many visiting diviners who were mostly N-P's friends had all arrived by Friday evening. The guest of honour was N-P's 'father', a female diviner from Islington.

The following day on Saturday, known as **sikukhulu** early in the morning, the diviner took some dry tobacco leaves and ground them. This was mixed with a little bit of the remaining **ntwaso**-medicine. Together with a few other diviners, N-P stood next to the goat, called the M's and said unto them:

"Ku fa ka nsati wa n'wina hi kwaloku"

(The death of your wife is this)

Without any further discussion, they then speared down the animal in its side. F. who was also by the goat immediately knelt and sucked its blood before the goat could fall on the ground. By sucking blood she further distinguishes herself from any ordinary person. She displays another important quality; that of possessing supernatural power in the form of spirit which enables her, like any carnivorous animal such as a lion, tiger or leopard, to drink fresh and raw blood without vomiting. By comparing herself with these animals she places herself in a superior social status which correlates with the positions of these animals in the animal world. Unless she is removed from the goat she will not stop sucking the blood. After she was removed she was taken to the hut of the spirits. The goat was then opened up and six small pieces of the small intestines cut up. These pieces were mixed with the **ntwaso**-medicine which was already mixed with ground tobacco leaves. Bile was then sprinkled on the mixture and the resulting mixture placed on a winnowing basket. The basket was then placed on the ground at the entrance of the 'hut of the spirits' where F. and her companions have been. She (F) was called out; she had to hop on her knees and hands up to the point of destination. When F. approached the basket, the diviner pulled it with a plant



PLATE I : A goat is led away for the thwasa ceremony.



PLATE II : Initiants sucking blood from the goat.

stem of a **nkwangula-tilo** (wild asparagus) which was about 1m long. The stem used thus is called **n'ovolo**. As the basket was dragged out, F followed it hopping and swallowing the mixture of the **ntwaso** and the six intestines from the basket. At the gate, which was the destination, there was a small pit next to which was placed a tin of water mixed with medicine. By the time she reached this point, she had finished all the mixture from the basket. Before and during the process of eating she was possessed by the spirits; drums were beaten and the following refrain sang:

"Nyongwa yami, womkhalela nyongwa".

On reaching the pit, the diviner beat F. with a gnu-tail to dismiss the spirit from her, saying:

"Suka rigodo ra wena se ri lava ku tirha"

(Go away your 'log' wants to work now).

She was then given some medicated water to drink after which she vomited into the pit the blood she had sucked up. The diviner continuously stirred up the vomited blood and counted the pieces in the vomit. The essence of not chewing up the pieces is that they should be counted easily when regurgitated to see if they have all come out as they are not to be digested. By the time she was vomiting water only and no more blood, that was taken as an indication that all the

blood had been vomited up. It is imperative that all the blood should be ejected lest it forms blood clots in the chest, the slightest amount of which could cost the life of the novice. N-P quoted three novices whom she knew to have died as a result of blood-clotting during the ceremony.

The ceremony is therefore regarded as dangerous because it is a risk to one's life and for this reason is called **siku ra ku fa**. All diviners maintained that the chances of surviving equal those of dying; "**ku thwasa i nghozi**" (initiation is dangerous), they said. After vomiting she was sent back to the hut to join her companions. Meanwhile F's husband was hiding the gall-bladder. (The gall-bladder is hidden by the one who provides for the initiation. If provided for by her lineal relatives, it has to be hidden by them but if it is her affinal relatives then it is they who have to hide it). F. and her companions were clad alike. Each had tied a cloth around her waist that reached to below the knees; had worn a headgear of ostrich feathers called **nghundhu** and suspended around the neck over the shoulders in a bandolier fashion, were two strings threaded with the horns of bucks and beads. The strings crossed each other on the chest and the back. In the left hand each had a spear with short handle and a short stick; in the right hand a gnu-tail which they kept swaying to and fro.

For the first time in her life the novice on this day acquires dresses which are normally put on by persons of high prestige in a society. In Swaziland for instance, a head-dress is worn by a king only (Malan, 1985: 11). Moreover by vomiting up all the dangerous blood she had survived death.

F. entered the most crucial stage in her life when the husband hid the gall-bladder. On hiding it, he said:

"M. loko u ri xikwembu xa ntiyiso teka".

(M. if you are a genuine spirit find it).

After hiding the gall-bladder, the door of the hut of the spirit was flung open and F, together with her companions ran outside and started dancing in front of the hut. The spirits manifested themselves. They all danced at a great tempo. F., this time known as M., her spirit, dashed and greeted me. It then said: "it is you who have hidden my death". I denied and it immediately went to another spectator who also denied the allegation. After asking the third spectator who was a woman, it came back and asked F's husband who admitted to having hidden it. His actual words were:

"E, hi mina. Famba u ya teka"

(Yes, it is me. Go and fetch it).

The spirit then joined her companions in dancing and immediately they followed one another in a row taking the eastern direction with F. in the lead. They were running. They disappeared into the bushes only to come back after about a quarter of an hour. As they were coming back, it was clear to most of the spectators present that they had not found it. They looked searchingly as they kept on glancing in all directions. Back home they rounded the yard twice without talking to anybody and once more at a faster rate than before. On their second return from the bushes, they all showed signs of exhaustion but had not yet found the gall-bladder. Arriving at the centre of the homestead they danced enthusiastically. Looking more eager than before, F. glanced in all directions and immediately ran into the hut of the spirits, leaving her companions dancing. She took a north-westerly direction. On arriving at a **marula** tree, she made a turn back home and went straight into one of the six huts in the homestead. After a few seconds she left the hut and went into another one, opposite. She came out running very fast towards the diviners who were all seated together in front of the hut of the spirits. She had a mug in her hand which had contained the gall-bladder. As she was approaching her tutor, the latter jumped up in great jubilation. The tempo of the drums also increased tremendously. She handed the mug to the jubilant 'father', who publicly stuck the bladder in F's hair to symbolize the

happiness and good fortune that the sacrifice had ensured. The singing became much louder than before and great ululations were heard from many female spectators. For a moment there was an atmosphere of joy and excitement. After the bladder had been stuck in her hair, F. danced vivaciously with the others.

The whole 'moment of crisis' is characterized by continuous agility and running - something not common amongst Black women. Hence they could neither hunt nor fight in a war as these were men's activities. Women on this occasion publicly challenge men that they can also do like them. She has got a reason to be excited with the discovery of the gall-bladder for she has triumphed in the 'war' she was engaged in. Like men, she has also achieved victory. The great ululations from the female may be intended to invite men to the scene as it was traditionally the case when girls who had gone to collect fire wood in the bush would laugh continuously and at the pitch of their voices thereby drawing the attention of the young men.

N-P later revealed that she had been the happiest of all the people on that occasion. She indicated that failure to discover the gall-bladder reflects badly on the tutor. In such instances the tutor feels the most disappointed for it shows some weakness in her training. She compared the

occasion with a school situation where a teacher who produced bad results at final year examinations would feel the most disappointed. The community will blame him and not the pupils. She again revealed that when they went to the bushes for the second time she became very worried because it was clear that they had begun struggling, and she began having doubts whether F. would ever find the gall-bladder or not. Although she knew that the bladder was not hidden in the bushes, N-P was however not worried with their first disappearance. Going to a wrong direction for the second time proves the weakness of the spirit; although of course discovering a hidden bladder without any struggle also leaves some doubts in the minds of people present at the ceremony - it appears as if the novice had been tipped off. N-P was however relieved when F. left the hut of the spirits running towards the north-west.

The dancing continued until lunch time after which they all rested for about three hours. Thereafter the dancing was resumed until the evening. Arrangement was then made that evening for going to the 'sea' (**lwandle**) the following day. 'Sea' in this context refers to any small body of still water. This could be a pool or dam. So early on the Sunday morning some diviners and a few **mathwasana** left for the 'sea', a nearby dam. F. was amongst them. Those remaining at home continued beating drums. F., her companions as well

as the 'young' diviners who had not initiated anyone were left behind at a distance of about 400m away from the dam. The rest descended to the dam where they made a cross on the sand next to the water. They took some river sand and stones and mixed all this with some medicine. The stones were altogether four in number and each stone together with a handful of river sand was thrown towards each cardinal point. It is believed that the medicine will repel all reptiles nearby. Fire is made on the drawn cross. F. and the company were called on. Their spirits were induced to come out after which they got into the water to bathe. It is said that they will bathe without feeling any cold no matter how cold the water may be. In some 'school' objects are hidden in the water to be discovered by the initiate. Other schools however do not hide anything. After bathing F. and the company left the dam and waited at the spot where they had waited before. Meanwhile diviners extinguished the fire magically. The ash was thrown into the water and the spot was so thoroughly cleaned that one could hardly see where the fire had been made. Back home they continued dancing until Sunday midday, and this marked the last phase of the **thwasa** ceremony. The novice is henceforth called a **thwasana** and not yet a **goveia**. So after the ceremony the novice is not immediately acknowledged as a diviner. She will however gradually build herself to the status of **goveia**; and much will depend on her ability to reach this status.

3.3.2.3 Ku parula - coming out.

Although the **ku parula** ceremony seems to be an extension of the **ku thwasa** ceremony, it is entirely independent and separate. A few diviners have been **paruriwa** without having been **thwasisiwa**. The word **parula** is a Ndaun concept for **thwasa**. Whereas **thwasa** means to 'graduate' in Zulu spirits, **parula** means graduating in the Ndaun spirits.

When the **ku thwasa** ceremony ceased on Sunday at midday, all the exhausted attendants took a nap for the whole afternoon. The Sunday night was once more regarded as **xilalu**. This time they beat only the conical drums called **tinghunghu** and a type of hand rattles called **magoxa** (sing **goxa**). On Monday morning F. was brought in front of the hut of the spirits. Next to her was her daughter's daughter A. Such a person is called **nsati wa swikwembu** (wife of the spirits) and is known as **nyawuti** in Ndaun. The **nyawuti** has several duties to perform on behalf of the diviner:

- (a) She carries the diviner's **mitundu** (wide bottom basket containing diviner's medicines and a few articles pertaining to the Ndaun spirits) when the diviner goes out to smell out witches or if she is called on to perform similar duties.



PLATE III: Diviners beating the tinghunghu drums.

- (b) She is a direct link of communication between a client and the diviner. A visiting client will tell the **nyawuti** the reason for his visit and the **nyawuti** will carry the message to the diviner. The diviner in turn will send her to tell the client the amount she charges for the smelling out of witches. Everything must be consulted upon with the **nyawuti** as a go-between.
- (c) She is responsible for the handling of fees paid by clients. She is responsible for the flow of money to the **xica** and out of it. As such she is accountable for all such moneys.
- (d) She is further responsible for all preparations during the smelling out of witches. As a 'wife' she must dress her 'husband' accordingly. She must 'remove' the familiars from 'him' during the smelling out process.

While the two were seated together in front of the hut of the spirits, a white cock was killed, the blood of which was caught in a dish. N-P slapped F. on both cheeks and immediately the latter's tongue elongated, protruded from her mouth and remained hanging. The tutor then made an incision on F's tongue with an unused razor. N-P caught the blood with the same dish containing the cock blood. She smeared some medicine on the incision and slapped F's cheeks once

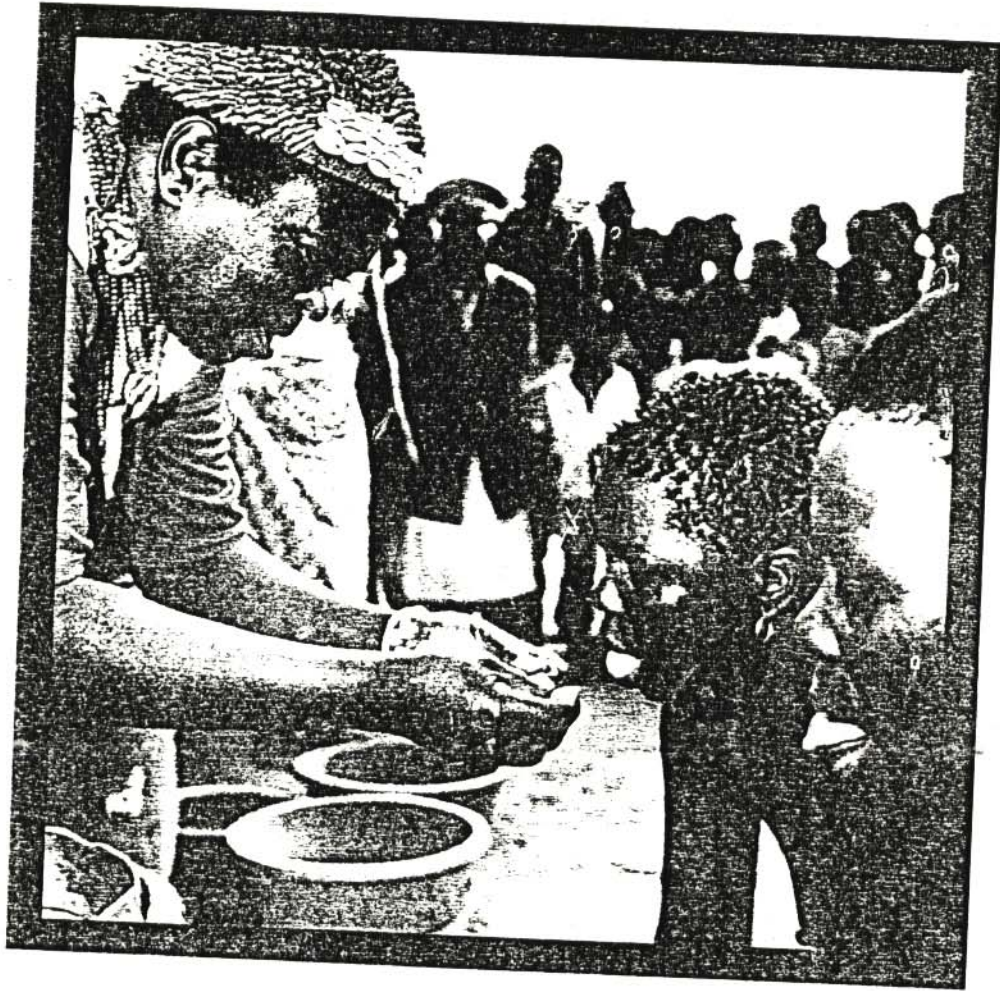


PLATE IV : The tongues of the initiants are protruded and remain hanging after being slapped on the cheek by their diviner-tutor.



PLATE V : After making an incision on the tongue, the blood is caught in the dish.



PLATE VI : A diviner-tutor prepares the blood mixture in the dish to be ingested by the initiants.

again; and the tongue retreated into her mouth. Some medicine was added to the mixture of blood, the complete mixture being termed **mparulo** and ingested by means of licking. The whole process is called **ku dya mparulo** (to eat **mparulo**-ceremony) or **ku dya xiropo**. F. licked almost all the blood mixture and left very little for A. who licked the dish clean.

Once again we have another situation here where like men, women are subjected to severe pain which they are expected to withstand. A tongue is a very sensitive organ, especially to injuries. Despite its sensitivity women show some endurance like young men who withstand pain when their foreskins are circumcised. Besides, licking raw blood, especially one's own blood calls for a great perseverance. Whereas the goat blood is vomited out, the **mparulo** blood is retained in the stomach - a further proof that women can do what appears impossible or dangerous. The fact that goat blood is vomited out while that of **mparulo** is retained in the stomach explains why the **ku parula**-ceremony should always be preceded by the **ku thwasa**-ceremony. Should the **ku parula**-ceremony precede the **ku thwasa**-ceremony, then the **mparulo** blood will be *ipso facto* regurgitated during the vomiting. Under no circumstances therefore should this ceremony precede the **ku thwasa** ceremony. One diviner at Welverdiend initiated the

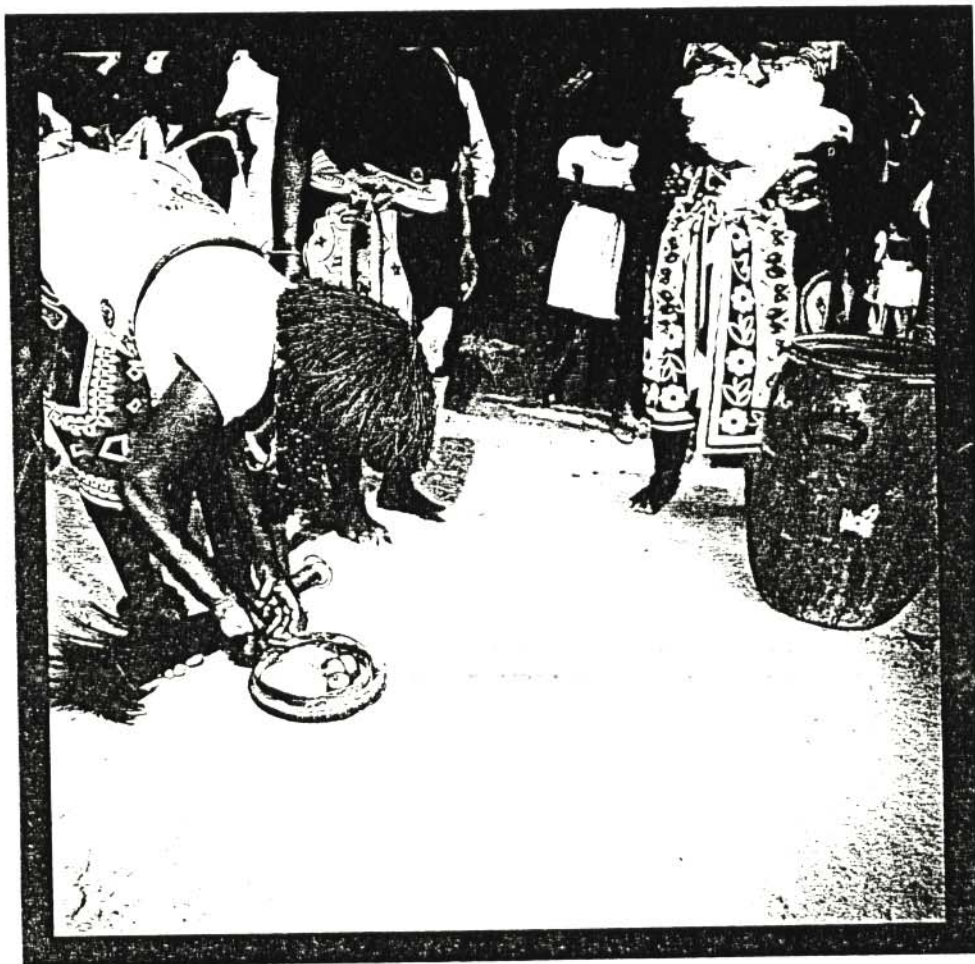


PLATE VII : Diviners preparing the mparulo ceremony. A diviner on the right is seen with a chicken to be killed for the occasion. Next to her is one of the plastic drums filled with water to be poured over the initiants.

Vandzawu spirits first; when it was later discovered that she had the Nguni spirits as well, she could not initiate them.

After eating **mparulo**, the **nyawuti** was taken to the 'hut of spirits'. F. was taken to the side of the hut where she was then made to sit on a traditional mat called **sangu**, facing the east with the legs stretched out. Some other mats were placed around her in a vertical position so that she was completely surrounded by them. Beside her there were about nine buckets full of water, four of which were poured over her. It was said that they would have poured the water from all nine buckets over her if her husband had not paid R5. Such an amount prevents them from pouring excessive water. The surrounding mats were immediately removed and she was very wet. She was then covered with a dry green cloth. It is said that a white cloth is most preferred but a cloth of any colour can be used if a white one is not available. White is always taken as the colour of the spirits since it is associated with sacredness. Her 'father' then carried her on 'his' back into the 'hut of the spirits'. In the hut all her wet clothes were removed and she was clothed in the Ndaus. It was a red cloth with designs on it, worn from the hips and hanging immediately below the knees. The cloth is called **njeti**. Around the loins she was dressed in another cloth called **goda**. It is tied in such a way that it leaves a small rim at the back. The purpose of this rim will be

indicated towards the end of this chapter under the discussion of the smelling-out of witches. Around her chest they tied another **njeti** cloth. By doing all this the tutor and her colleagues were showing the **nyawuti** how to dress her 'husband'. F. was then taken outside to a hidden spot. In the meantime they remained, hiding some articles and objects.

The 'hut of the spirits' was almost full to capacity, with all the diviners and some **mathwasana** as well as a few spectators and the attendants who were beating the **tinghunghu** drums. Besides these people, there was also some equipment belonging to the spirits. At the centre of the hut there was a space on which another **sangu** was spread out. A volunteer who acted as a client was brought into the hut and some objects were hidden in his shirt. The hidden articles are collectively called **timfihlwa**. F. was later brought in and she embarked on the search without any delay. She removed a mat that was placed against the wall and found a bundle of **switshungulu** while all the women in the hut ululated. She gave this to her 'father' who put them over her shoulder in a bandoleer-fashion. Looking searchingly in all directions she dashed towards one woman in the hut and forcefully pulled her up. She found a hidden gnu-tail on which the woman was seated. This was followed once more with great ululation. She gave it to the 'father'. She continued searching and for a while she could not find anything. Ultimately she

approached the 'client' and found in his shirt a **xizingu**¹⁾ hidden by her 'father'. She gave it to her 'father' once more. After another search she found a **zangu**²⁾. This was also given to the 'father' who put it on F. in a bandoleer-fashion in the opposite direction to the **switshungulu** so that the two strings formed an X on the back and on the chest. Thereafter, she knelt on the mat spread out at the centre of the hut. The 'father', with a calabash in 'his' hands knelt in front of 'his' 'child' so that they faced each other. Such a calabash containing some medicated honey is called **gona** or **gone**. Holding **gona** with both hands, the 'father' moved it round and round, but in such a way that the 'child' who was trying to catch it, was unable to do so. It appeared as if the 'father' was tantalizing the 'child' with it. After a while the 'father' handed the **gona** to the 'child' who placed it on the floor and clapped hands in such a way that they produced a hollow ringing sound. Such a hand clap is called **ku ba gugu**. The whole process described above constitutes the first phase of the **ku parula** ceremony.

1. A medicated hyena-tail.

2. Object made of laces threaded together on one string.

3.3.2.4 Ku femba - smelling out

The **mparulo** ceremony is extended to another cult called **ku femba** (to smell out witches). The novice performs this cult as a test of her ability. On this particular day, any volunteer amongst the people present in the ceremony could be used as a client. A male volunteer came out and took off his shirt so that he remained half-naked. He sat on the mat that was spread out at the centre of the hut. He stretched out his legs and arms so that the hands rested right on the knees with the palms facing upwards. One of the attendants was doing some preparatory work and this was a lesson for the **nyawuti** because such would be done by her in future. This attendant took a dip-stick from the **gone** calabash and lightly smeared the lips of the 'client' with it. She took a safety pin and rubbed it on the 'client's' head. Thereafter she told him to spit on it. Further, she moved a lighted match right round his head and armpits. This process is known as **ku voningela** (to illuminate). All this together with the dressing up of the spirit-diviner before the smelling out commences is supposed to be done by the **nyawuti**. After all these preparations, the **nyawuti** kneels before her 'husband' and says in Nda: "**Zwa phela**" (it is finished) i.e. all the preparations have been accomplished. The novice then moving on her knees only, approaches the client. Still on her knees, she moves around the client, holding a gnu-tail in her

left hand and a hyena-tail in the right hand. As she moves around him she simultaneously searches for familiars in the body with her **xizingu**. The familiars are believed to have been sent to the victim (client) by witches and such familiars are known as **mabvuri** (sing. **bvuri**). The process of detecting the familiars is called **ku khoma mabvuri**" (lit. to catch or hold familiars). After 'catching' a familiar the novice throws down the gnu-tail (**chovo**) and the **xizingu**. Immediately she then assumes the 'form' and nature of the familiar. If the familiar is a snake for instance, she will lie flat on the floor and initiate gliding movements similar to that of a snake. If it is a ghost, she will walk on one foot only and if it is a baboon, she will show a movement similar to that of a baboon. Spectators identify the type of familiar by means of its movement and actions. An interesting point with the spectators is that they are very quick in identifying the familiar. How the imitation is done is puzzling because normal persons are not as accurate as diviners in imitating the actions of familiars. Diviners denied vehemently having trained their novices in these imitations. They maintain that the 'perfection' comes spontaneously because it is something real.

In the event of a familiar being a human witch, it is easy to realize whether it is a male or a female. The manner of talking as well as the voice are the most distinguishing

features. It is said that in olden times some of the most powerful diviners were real ventriloquists. The diviner-ventriloquist would mimic the sorcerer so well that if the spectators knew her, they would easily identify her by the similarity of the voice. It was therefore not even necessary to force the familiar to reveal its name. Attendants have of late refrained from forcing a human-familiar to identify herself. The argument raised is that after identifying herself, the witch might go to the extent of killing the victim. The attendants will usually ask her what she wants from the client. When talking to a human-familiar, they are joyous and aggressive at the same time. The procedure is usually as follows:

"E! hi nga va vo.

Hi n'winā va mani, a hi mi tivi.

Se mi lava yini la ka munhu loyi?"

(`E'¹, look at them.

Who are you, we do not know you.

And what is it that you want from this person?)

-
1. The word or vowel "e" in this context is used as an interjection of surprise.

The attendants seem to enjoy cross-questioning and teasing with him. After asking him several questions, they plead with him to "straighten out" their client, saying, "n'wi ololeni phela" (kindly straighten him out). By straightening him out, it is believed that the familiar is curing the victim of an illness the witch has already inflicted on him. This he does by pulling the fingers of the victim as well as his limbs, ears, neck, the back, shoulders and the spinal cord. Up to this stage, the familiar is addressed in a plural form as if they respect him. By so doing they are flattering him so that he can meet their requests of 'straightening out' their client. After the familiar has 'straightened out' the victim, the attendants become aggressive and start upbraiding him.

"Famba, hi nga n'wi vo!

A wu dani ku famba u dya vanhu

Noyi ndzina

Loko wo tlhela u vuya hi ta ku dlaya

Famba noyi ndzina".

(Go away you stupid.

You are not even shy to eat human flesh

You witch

Should you come back again we will

kill you

Go away you witch).

Unlike before, they now address him in the singular. They beg him no more and try to frighten him.

Sometimes it happens that the familiar can be an ancestral spirit of the client. In such a case, the diviner will simply sit down next to the client with folded legs. She (the diviner) will 'gedezela' i.e. shake the body tremulously with nervous twitchings as if possessed by her own spirit.

The attendants will request the spirit to identify itself and also divulge its complaints. When talking to an ancestral spirit, the attendants will usually humble themselves:

"Hi pfuxerile vakokwana
 A hi mi tivi vakokwana
 Hi n'wina va mani?
 Se hi dyohe yini phela vakokwana?"

(Hallo the ancestors.
 We do not know you the ancestors
 Who are you?
 What have we offended you about?)

After revealing its wishes they usually make a promise to rectify the mistake.

"Hi swona vakokwana hi ta lunghisa.

Fambani kahle vakokwana.

Va runguleni!

(We accept the mistake, it shall be
rectified.

Farewell the ancestors.

Send our regards to others).

All familiars except ancestral familiars, are to be 'removed' from the body of the client at the doorway. After 'catching' each familiar the diviner is led to the doorway where the familiar is expelled. The process of removing the familiar from the diviner is called **ku phyisa** (to cause to burn). The **nyawuti** places a **xizingu** beneath the diviner's nose and shouts:

"wa phya, wa phya, wa phya, wa phya"

(you are burning, you are burning,

you are burning, you are burning)

This is shouted repeatedly until the diviner sneezes. Usually she sneezes more than twice. The longer she remains possessed by the familiar the more and the louder they shout. After sneezing she immediately is possessed by the **Vandzawu** spirits and goes back to the client to search for other

familiars. If another one is caught, a similar procedure must be followed. Human familiars usually run away when the diviner is led to the doorway for 'burning'. The purpose of the *goda*, mentioned earlier on, is to hold tight the *goda* cloth on its rim so that if the familiar who has taken possession of the diviner escapes, he should not outrun the *nyawuti*. It is said that should she do so, she might disappear forever.

An ancestor-familiar is not 'removed' from the body of the client. Instead it is retained by 'burning' it on the head of the client and not at the doorway. Unlike other familiars, the ancestor ones are approved of when they have 'annexed' the client since they protect him from evil forces that might otherwise harm him.

When the diviner-novice could not find familiars any longer she 'straightened out' the client in the same manner indicated above. She searched for them in his clothes which were put beside him - it is believed that some familiars may take shelter in the clothes during the *ku femba* process to avoid to be discovered. Thereafter, the client is to stand up without touching the ground with his hands. She continues to search by smelling out the mat on which the client was seated. She does this whilst rolling it up. She then sits on the ground and stretches out her limbs, neck,

shoulders and back. Thereafter her **Vangoni** spirits come out to interpret what have been said by the **Vandzawu** spirits and also to express their happiness for the successful accomplishment of the whole work of 'coming out'. The spirits of the other diviners and **mathwasana** also come out to express their joy after which they all dance to honour and conclude the occasion.

During the process of smelling out, it is said that there are always two Ndaus spirits in operation. One is a male and the other a female. They have different but complementary functions. The female smells out witches (familiaris) and the male one 'catches' them. In the case of F., it was indicated that Garara, a Ndaus male spirit was 'catching' the familiaris while Garara's wife was smelling them out. At the end of the ceremony, F. was officially acknowledged as a **nyamusoro** and not only a **thwasana**. Had she not 'eaten the **mparulo**', she would not have been regarded as a **nyamusoro** as well.

Before F's husband finally left for home, he was asked to pay out more money called **mali ya makhwati** (money of the bushes). This amounted to R10.00. The amount is paid as tuition fee for receiving intensive instructions on pharmacopoeia. It is named 'money for bushes' because the novice will from henceforth accompany her 'father' on excursions to the bushes to be shown different types of medicines. Teaching is therefore done practically. In the bushes the diviner tells

the novice to dig up certain roots or to hack off the barks of certain trees. Back home the diviner shows the novice how to grind root medicines and all other preparations. Should there be patients at the diviner's home, the novice will be instructed to treat them. At this stage she receives better treatment from the diviner than before. She is exempted from many duties such as cooking and looking after the diviner's cattle. All this is left for other **valaphya** who have arrived. In the case of F. the period of receiving instructions on medicine lasted for about two weeks.

3.3.2.5 **Ku vuyisa ekaya - Home-bringing ceremony**

Two weeks after the end of F's initiation, her 'father', and a few other diviners as well as their attendants took her to her place. This is known as **ku vuyisa nyamusoro** or simply **ku vuyisa ekaya**. On entering the gate of F's home yard, they all sat on the ground without talking to anyone in the homestead. F's husband gave them R2. This is known as **maliya nkumande**, and is paid as a welcome fee. After taking the money they went straight to F's hut (the main hut in the family/homestead). They spent the night there. The following morning they were provided with tea and bread as their breakfast. The 'father' was given a chicken instead. This was to distinguish her from all the other people, though she ate the chicken with other diviners. At about 09h00, a

goat was slaughtered, the chyme and blood of which was mixed with river sand and medicine. Meanwhile some attendants dug a hole of about 20cm towards the corner of the main hut. The mixture was then poured inside the hole. Later they implanted a tri-furcated pole called **phandze** in the hole. The pole is slightly less than a meter high. On it is placed some clothes and inserted into it the horns of the goat just slaughtered. The openings of the horns were sealed with the wax of bees. Around the horns they sewed on some beads and hung them on F's neck. She was also given some **timfiso** (amulets) some of which she hung over the shoulders bandolier-fashion. Others she tied around her waist and wrists. The purpose of the amulets is to protect her from enemies that might bewitch her. Thereafter each **mathwasana's** spirit came out and expressed its joy and happiness. In the end, N-P's spirit also came out to seal the occasion. They were given food to eat after which they dismissed leaving F. behind.

3.4 A diviner's equipment

As found by Berglund (1976: 173) among the Zulu, Tsonga diviners are also emphatic that it is not the possession of certain articles in themselves which makes for divination. Rather, what weighs far more is the association of the articles with the spirits. But they also point out that remembering the spirits by worshipping and sacrificing to

them is the most essential point. Sacrificing to spirits brings them nearer. If the spirits are not near the articles, they (articles) help in no way. One informant at Lulekani in this regard, gave an analogy of a Christian. For a Christian being in possession of a Bible and hymnbooks is meaningless. He should also pray. A prayer brings him closer to the Almighty.

It has been established during the investigation that among the Tsonga also there is no set list of equipment that a diviner is required to have in order to be able to divine. No two diviners will have the same equipment. The most elementary equipment is however, very similar. Even in cases where the equipment does not appear similar, the symbolism attached to it is alike. The list below is a cross-section of what diviners generally have and not necessarily a prescribed list of equipment. Nevertheless, the various items can be said to be representative of Tsonga diviners.

3.4.1 The hut(s) and its (their) equipment

Any diviner of standing will have a hut set aside in the homestead. It has already been pointed out that Tsonga diviners are possessed by the Nguni and the Ndau spirits. Consequently some diviners will have two huts dedicated to the two groups of spirits. One is called **yindlu ya swikwembu** and the other **ndhumba**. The former hut is built for the Nguni

spirits and the latter for the Ndau spirits. Very few diviners have however two separate huts. Only four diviners were found having both huts. The rest use only one i.e. the **ndhumba** hut for all purposes. Incidentally, the **ndhumba** hut among the Tsonga is kept even by some families which do not have a diviner. Even in such families the hut is kept for the Ndau spirits. Many diviners who do not have the **yindlu ya swikwembu**, substitute it either with the **ndhumba** or the diviner's main hut. Since the majority does not possess the **yindlu ya swikwembu** but all have the **ndhumba**, we shall focus our attention only on the latter hut.

The **ndhumba** is occupied by the diviner alone and such visitors and friends as may be invited to enter it. Some diviners are very particular about the people who enter their huts, while others are less particular. Without exception, however, the hut is said to be very closely associated with divination and the activities of the spirits. Culturally, Tsonga huts face east. But in the case of the **ndhumba**, under no circumstances should it be faced in any direction, but the west. This appears to be a standing rule and it is a distinguishing feature of this hut. One informant at Acornhoek said: "It keeps an eye on all other huts in the homestead". Another distinguishing feature is that it still assumes a circular shape rather than the present preferred rectangular shape.

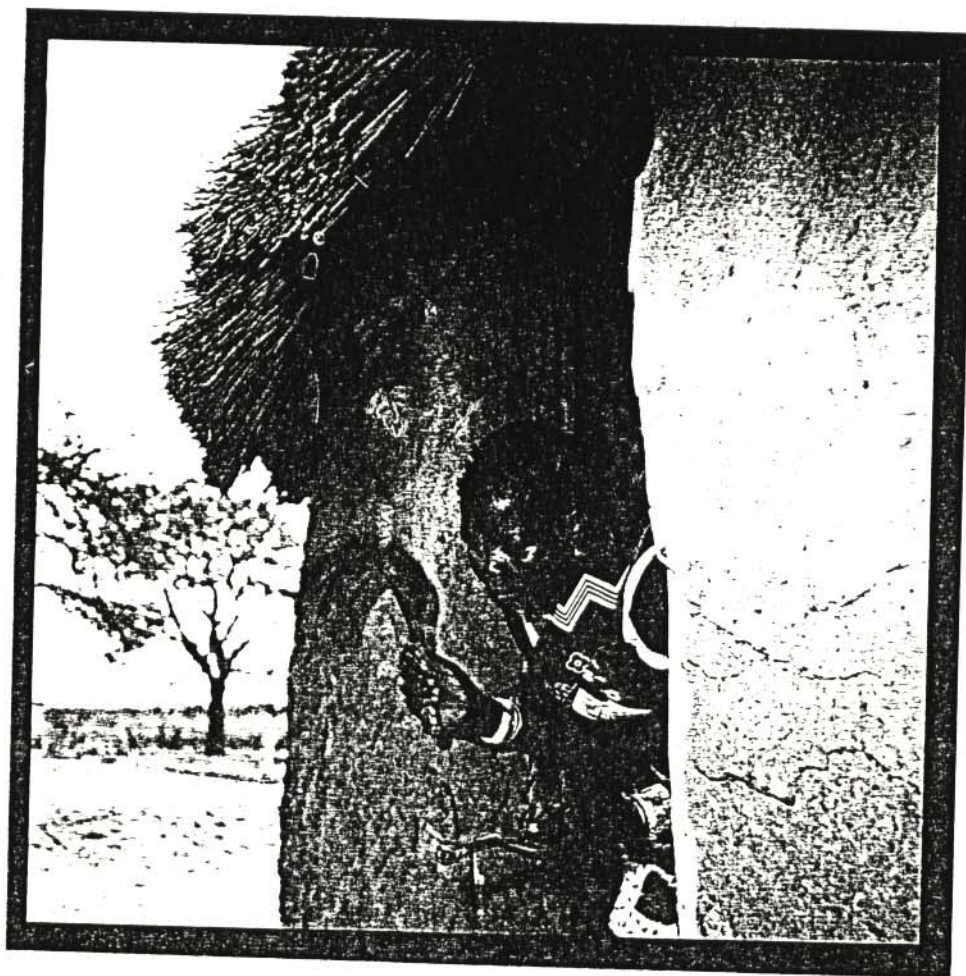


PLATE VIII : A young diviner with a gnu tail going out of the ndhumba hut.

Such a hut is generally revered. On entering it, the diviner or any other person privileged to enter it, should kneel down near the doorway and clap hands in such a manner that a hollow echoing sound be made. This is called **ku ba gugu**. When going out of the hut, a similar action is repeated towards the doorway. Such actions are indications to the spirits that the person coming in or going out of the hut humbles himself. In this hut, diagonal to its entrance, is implanted a forked pole (**phandze**). On the **phandze** is usually placed a **xica**¹). All the **Vanzawu** clothes are kept in the **xica**. Such clothes are **njeti** (red cloth with white designs); **xiyandhana** (red, light cotton material) as well as **palu** (blue cotton cloth). Diviners who use the **ndhumba** for the Nguni spirits as well keep additional clothes in the hut for the Nguni spirits. It is a white cloth called **goloza**; another one with spear and clubs; and yet another one with animal pictures such as an elephant, lion or a leopard. These pictures symbolize the power of the spirits and also show how the spirits are feared by people. In the hut, along the wall on the floor are diviner's medicines. Some of the medicines, especially bark or root medicines, are spread out on the floor or inserted into the thatching, usually above

1. **Xica:** This is a round basket with a bottom of interwoven flat pieces of wood, the side made of one wide and thin piece. Usually it has got a lid.

the doorway. Other medicines are kept in very small calabashes shaped like the figure 8. Such calabashes are called **tinhunguvana** (sing. **nhunguvana**). They contain medicine in powder form. Still other medicines are kept in small bottles. Alongside the wall is a set of three, four or five **tinghunghu** drums. The **macomane** drums are usually hung on drum sticks called **swichayi**, the other ends of which are inserted into the thatching. Also inserted into the thatching are the so-called **magoxa** (sing. **goxa**). They are also musical instruments for diviners which are more or less similar to **mafahlawana** (sing. **fahlawana**). **Fahlawana** is a type of rattle made of small calabashes containing pebbles and is tied to the ankles during a dance. **Goxa** is also a rattle made of a small calabash containing pebbles but with a stick as handle and is played by hand. Also hung on the wall is a **nghundhu** - a headgear of ostrich feathers or skin worn when dancing. Amongst a lot of other equipment on the floor is the diviner's **gona** or **gone**. Also hung on the wall is a gnu-tail (**chovo**) and a hyena-tail (**xizingu**) as well as a set of divinatory bones called **tinhlolo** kept in a **funeko**¹).

1. **Funeko** is a satchel-like basket, the lid of which is almost a duplicate of the basket itself, and is run on the string by which the latter is carried.

The special **Vangoni** clothes together with other ordinary clothes are hung on a rope suspended horizontally in the hut.

3.4.2 Diviner's dress and her appearance

Most diviners twist their hair into thin strands and smear it with red ochre called **tsumane**. The process of plaiting hair in this way is called **ku horha misisi**. Not all diviners however plait their hair. They have indicated that **ku horha misisi** is not an individual choice, but that of the possessing spirit. Consequently male diviners are also found with plaited hair in spite of the fact that ordinarily plaiting in Tsonga culture is for women and not men. A diviner at Lulekani attempted to normalize her hair after plaiting and became seriously ill because her spirit wanted her hair to remain plaited. Whether the hair is plaited or not, a diviner wears the gall-bladder in a tuft of her hair. Also tied to the tuft are a few small sea shells, about three or four in number. These signify that the diviner has really been to the 'sea'.

Around the neck is hung **timfiswa**. These serve as diviner's protecting charms against any evil force. The **timfiswa** are made of coiled strings. On its front, i.e. the part that rests on the upper chest, it is threaded with about four or five fingerlike objects which are completely covered with



PLATE IX : Diviners in their usual sitting position are in an ecstatic condition. Some have tufted while others have plaited hair. Protective charms can be seen around their necks and wrists.



PLATE X : A group of singing and dancing diviners clad in their full regalia. Animal pictures are visible on their clothes.

beads. Diviners say that these finger-like objects are pieces of reeds. The hollows are filled with protective medicines. A strip of goat skin is tied loosely over the diviner's left shoulder in a loop under the right arm, the loop reaching just to the shoulder and under the left arm, allowing the two strings to form an X on the back and on the chest as explained before. These are the so-called **mazangu** and on them are threaded some **tinhunguvana** containing medicines. Some diviners put snuff in one of the **tinhunguvana**. Some diviners replace the skin strips with coiled strings, arguing that skin strips give off an unpleasant odour.

The diviner takes a bit of powdery medicine from each **nhunguvana** and puts it on to her palm and sucks the mixture into her mouth. The medicine helps her in divining; it 'opens' her chest so that she can 'see clearly'. For this reason, the **mazangu** form an essential part of a diviner's equipment. All the informants have them although not all wear them all the time. During special occasions for example such as seances or serious divination, they do wear them.

Some male diviners rarely wear trousers. Instead they tie either a red cloth (**xiyandhana**) or white linen round the waist so that it hangs below the knees. The tied knot is usually on the right hand side. A male diviner at

Welverdiend who works in Germiston said as long as he was not at work, he would always wear a cloth instead of a pair of trousers. Female diviners also wear such a cloth at times but more usually a dress or a skirt. The cloth is regarded as being the cloth for attracting spirits; wearing it induces spirits to come closer to the wearer. The more regularly one puts it on, the closer will the spirits be drawn to her. One diviner explained that spirits do not really like dresses and trousers. They feel happier to see their **rigodo** dressed in spirit clothes.

A length of skin, from an animal slaughtered for sacrificial purposes, is found tied around the waist. Some diviners in addition also wear a bangle of shells and black rubber bangles. The whole combination worn around the waist is termed **michivo** (a Swazi concept meaning bracelet of brass). Also as part of **michivo** there may be a mixture of white and red beads. The function of the **michivo** of whatever variety is to indicate the side from which the spirits come. If the spirits are patrilineal, the bracelets are worn on the right wrist and if they are matrilineal, they are worn on the left (right representing the father and left the mother). Very few diviners wear bracelets of brass on their ankles. Whether the **michivo** are worn on the wrist or ankle, the purpose however remains the same. Other diviners wear the **michivo** on both wrists and both ankles. This indicates

spirits from both sides. A diviner's dress undoubtedly distinguishes her from any ordinary person and it most probably adds status to her profession.

3.4.3 Diviner's switch

Every diviner was found to be in possession of a switch, called **chovo**. Zulu diviners have been found in possession of switches of varying sizes. This is probably due to the fact that Zulu diviners possess switches made of the tail of either a wildbeast, zebra, gnu or even a goat at times (Berglund, 1976: 184). Tsonga diviners, however, were found in possession of switches of the same size, the reason being that all their switches are made of gnu tails. Lamla (1975: 95) discovered that Xhosa diviners in the Transkei use cow tails, although he indicates that in former days a gnu tail was most characteristic. He observed however that today gnus are extinct in the Transkei. In Gazankulu however, gnus are still in abundance, especially at Welverdiend which borders the Manyeleti Game Reserve on the east as well as a few trust farms on the north and north-west. Hunters from Welverdiend trespass on these farms and diviners buy the tails from them. It is interesting to note that gnu tails are the most preferred among all tribal groups probably because they are easy to handle and specifically because of

their sensitive reaction which "shows" when danger is approaching (Malan, 1985: 12).

A switch has several functions:

- (a) It is a symbol of distinction. No individual may possess a switch except a diviner. A switch not only distinguishes a diviner from ordinary people, but also adds to her dignity. Berglund, also indicates that among popular diviners the switch is often carried as sign of dignity (1976: 184). Sometimes it is also used by diviners to sprinkle medicines. A switch therefore is widely associated with spirits and status.

- (b) Sometimes it is used as a weapon during divination. One time as F. was divining through the Nguni spirits, for a moment she remained silent while beating her shoulders lightly with her switch as if fanning away something. People present seemed to understand what was taking place, for they spoke disparagingly of the Ndaui spirits while sympathizing with the Nguni spirits. After about 10 minutes of silence, the Nguni spirits announced that they had defeated the Ndaui spirits. One of the visiting diviners explained the situation; she said that the Ndaui spirits were trying to prevent the Nguni spirits from talking. As the latter refused, the

former wanted to 'enter' into F. and take possession of her. As the Nguni spirits also resisted, a fight between the two groups broke out. The Nguni spirits using the switch as a weapon defeated and dispelled the Ndau spirits. The visiting diviner maintained that without the switch, the Nguni spirits whom she regarded as inferior to the Ndau spirits would undoubtedly have been defeated.

- (c) Of major importance is the fact that the switch is used in divination to pin-point a witch. If one accuses another of witchcraft and the accused denies the allegations, the two parties together with their relatives will go to a **mungoma** (pl. **vangoma**) who will point out the witch with his switch. This is known as **ku tlhandleka chovo** (to put a switch on someone), i.e. to pin-point a witch with a switch. A **mungoma**, who is exalted far above even the status of **govela** is the most revered in the world of Tsonga magicians. During divination the **mungoma** will beat the guilty party with his switch as a sign of guilt, hence the expression **ku tlhandleka chovo**. Similarly a **govela** will also use a switch in divining, pointing it at a witch. Because **govela's** use the switch for the same purpose as the **mungoma** it could possibly be for this reason that it is called **chovo ra mungoma** and not **chovo ra govela**. Some

switches were found threaded with beads around their handles. Diviners dismissed the presence of beads as meaningless on switches. They were more for decorative purposes than anything else. Whereas Zulu diviners lay emphasis on the beads and not the switch itself (Berglund, 1976: 184), for Tsonga diviners the opposite is true.

3.5 Schools of diviners

Diviners have formed schools known as **marhengele**¹). A few schools were observed during the investigation - Dungamanzi, Maphyayila, Nghunghwa and Dumela schools. These schools have been named after their founders. Thus Dungamanzi, for instance, is the founder of the Dungamanzi School. Although some of the diviners could still recognize founders of their schools, others could not. To establish the school to which an individual belongs, the following question is often asked

"U wa rhengele rihi xana?"

Of which broken piece of claypot are you?

(i.e. to which school do you belong?)

-
1. The original meaning of the word **marhengele** refers to broken pieces of a claypot. The singular form of the word is **rhengele** (the association between the idea of school and claypot or its broken piece is however not clear).

Initiation procedure vary from one school to another. For instance, while in Nghunghwa School, patients are given **bhudlu** medicine to 'eat' every morning and evening in order to precipitate the manifestation of spirits, in others such as the Dungamanzi, patients are not supposed to 'eat' the medicine. Although the medicine must be prepared daily next to the patient, she will not be given any to drink. Instead the diviner-tutor will stir it next to the patient until a foam is formed. By so doing she tantalizes the spirits so that they can manifest themselves quickly. After manifestation, it is then that the patient will be given the medicine to eat. The aim of the medicine however, remains the same in all schools.

3.6 Conclusion

The illness of a patient, which will not yield to treatment, will be diagnosed as due to an ancestral spirit 'pressing her down' because it wants to manifest itself in her. So the entire process of possession is a form of illness. For this reason we fully agree with Junod who sees possession as a form of disease (Junod 1913: Vol. II: 436). Even informants themselves indicated that they were ill all over the body. The only exception was just one male diviner at Welverdiend who suffered no illness at all; the spirits simply manifested themselves one day and he went to Mozambique for initiation.

During the entire process of training the novice is always in danger of ritual impurity and so must live a secluded life at the diviner's home. Therefore she is not supposed to attend any drinking party or social function whatsoever to avoid contamination from other people and certain types of food eaten during such gatherings.

Also to be observed is chastity. A novice who indulges in sex during the period will be accused of **ku thyakisa mirhi** (to dirty medicines) or **ku nyamisa swikwembu** (to weaken spirits). The school of Dungamanzi claim that the **bhudlu** medicine will not produce any foam when stirred if the novice has contravened chastity. A penalty of R20 or alternatively a goat is payable for ritual cleaning in the event of contravention. The whole idea of purity of the initiate as well as the preference for the colour white above all others and the particular artefacts associated with the spirits emphasize the latter's sacredness.

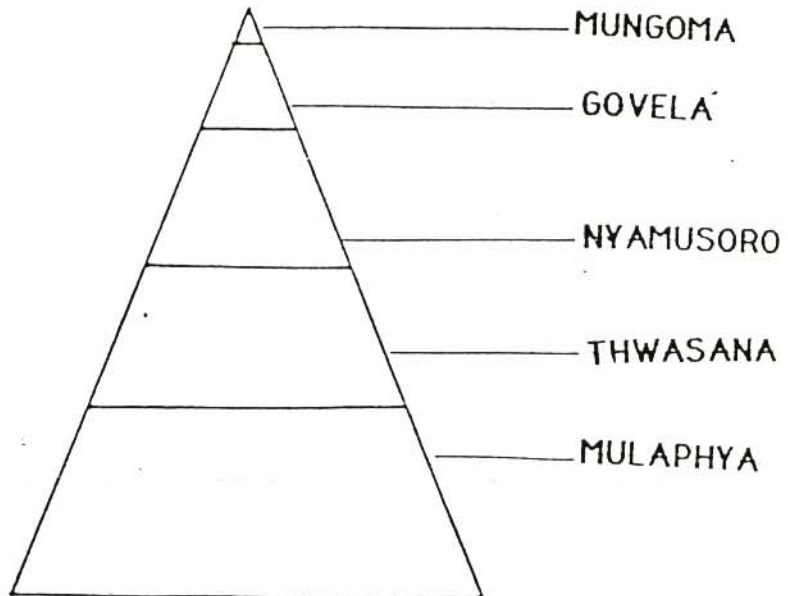
The **ku thwasa** and the **ku femba** cults call for great endurance and perseverance. The sucking of the goat blood and the eating of chicken blood - all raw, distinguish the novice from other people. She can do what ordinary people cannot do. The articles that are hidden as a test for her ability further distinguish her from ordinary persons. She is endowed with supernatural powers that guide her to the

discovery of the articles. She is also highly privileged to be in direct contact with the protective spirits. Furthermore during these cults she becomes a central figure and a focus of attention and is also publicly and officially elevated from the inferior position of womanhood to the superior status of manhood; hence her endurance. She is made to be like man.

By isolating her not only from her family but also from the society at large, she is being psychologically prepared to be independent and disciplined. It is only a disciplined individual for instance, who can abstain from sex for such a long period of time.

The whole process of initiation could be regarded as a rite de passage with a number of stages to go through before finally becoming a fully fledged **mungoma**. Starting out as a patient, **mulaphya**, an individual becomes a **thwasana**. Although most individuals remain at this level, some of them 'graduate' in Ndau spirits as well so as to proceed to the next highest status level of **nyamusoro**. A **nyamusoro** on the other hand can progress to a **govela**-status depending on the number of people she has initiated. The highest status in the realm of Tsonga magicians is that of **mungoma**. It must be made clear here that a **mungoma** need not necessarily be a

diviner but she may be a herbalist. The hierarchy described above can be diagrammatically represented as follows:



CHAPTER 4**4. THE ROLE OF POSSESSION AND THE POSSESSED****4.1 Introduction**

The process of possession has been described in detail in Chapter 3, where the home-bringing ceremony is mentioned. This is a ceremony whereby the **nyamusoro** is officially taken back to her home by her "father", a few other diviners and their attendants. From now on there are new role expectations for the novice; she has acquired a new profession which requires her service to the society. In Chapter 1 mention has been made that possession illness should be viewed not as an individual problem but, rather, a problem that concerns the total person as well as the other members of the community with whom the individual interacts. The illness is treated on these levels, resulting in benefits for both the individual and the society. Because of such interdependence between the possessed and the community as a whole, it stands to reason that the novice has a major role to fulfill in her community.

After the acquisition of her new profession, the novice must also join the society of the possessed which forms a secondary social group sharing quasi kinship within the

Tsonga culture. In the fulfillment of the roles, the novice can act individually or in a group. The roles are fulfilled most comfortably when the **nyamusoro** has advanced herself to the status of a **govele**. At this status-level, she has developed self-confidence. Where the roles are fulfilled by the diviners as a group, there is usually a leader or a few leaders of the entire group - usually the most powerful diviners.

4.2 The place of the possession cult in the Tsonga culture

Traditional Black and Western cultures differ considerably. Among the Westerners, if an individual has qualified in a specific profession, he will perform those duties related to his profession only. A medical practitioner for example, will perform medical functions only; the teacher, academic duties and the head of a state, political duties only. Among the Black peoples however, the picture is quite different. An individual will perform duties not directly related to his position or profession. An African chief for instance, will not only be an executive head of his tribe, but also the commander-in-chief of its army, its legislator and supreme judge, its supreme priest and ritual head (Mönnig, 1983: 253). A father is likewise, by virtue of his position in the family, an executive head of his family, its judge, its priest and ritual head. In the same vein, the diviner's functions in the society are wide and varied.

4.2.1 Medical function

Although the diviner has various functions to perform, her activities seem to be mainly directed towards the healing of sickness and its diagnosis through various techniques of divination. We will first consider the treatment of sick people before we come to the various techniques of divination.

4.2.1.1 Treatment

Mention has been made in Chapter 3 that after the conclusion of the whole process of initiation the **nyamusoro** continues staying with the diviner-tutor and receives intensive instructions on pharmacopoeia. During this period, the **nyamusoro** is also taught the various methods and techniques of divination. A few weeks of training will be sufficient for the **nyamusoro** to have acquired enough knowledge for her profession. Such training is followed by the home-bringing ceremony, also described in the preceding chapter. By this time, the **nyamusoro** has 'graduated' medically and by coming home with a profession, she re-appears in her society as a new person with socially changed status and an important role to render to the community.

A patient may receive treatment either at his own place or at the place of the diviner, depending on the circumstances. If the illness is suspected to be caused by the relatives of the patient or by a neighbour, the patient is sent away from home. If on the other hand the witches are not known, the patient will receive treatment at his own place. The diviner may visit him to check on his condition.

Before describing the treatment of any one disease, mention should be made how the Tsonga name the diseases. Junod (1913, Vol. II:430) asserts that the way of naming the diseases is most childish. The reason, according to him, being that the Tsonga call the complaint from which they suffer by the name of the organ affected. A person who has got a pain in his foot, his chest or his head usually says: "I have a foot", "I have a chest" or "I have a head" respectively or, "I feel a foot", "I feel a chest" or "I feel a head". While it is true that the naming is associated this is most childish because by saying "I have/feel a foot", is in the first place not the name of the disease. Secondly, it is an idiomatic expression.

In short, the implication is that I have/feel a pain in my foot. Likewise there is an association between trees and the medicine derived from them. This association is so close

that the name for a tree (**murhi** or **xihlahla**) also denotes medicine. The medicine used to treat bile for instance is called **xirhole**. The tree from which the medicine derives is also called **xirhole** (*Plectroniella armata* - K. Schum. Robyns).

Here follows a brief account of the treatment of **midlukulu** disease (a kind of harmless insanity). The word **midlukulu** is derived from the verb **dlukula**, which means to bewitch someone by calling his name. This usually takes place at night. The witch takes a concoction of herbs and put it into a duiker's horn called **ndweva**. He blows his **ndweva** intermittently. During the intervals the name of the victim is called. The victim dreams of a relative or friend calling him. In response to the calling he shouts loudly. If his room-mate is not asleep he will hear him responding to the call which he himself will not hear. If nobody shall have heard him responding, he will ultimately manifest symptoms of **midlukulu**. Once this is confirmed by a **n'anga** through his divinatory bones, the patient is taken to a diviner for treatment. The diviner prepares her medicine. She takes a mixture of plant roots and tree barks and boils them in a small claypot called **ximbitana**. The patient drinks the medicine three times a day, always before meals. Meanwhile he takes another treatment called **phungula**. This is a kind of turkish or vapour bath. A circular enclosure is made,

with a screen of mattings, in the middle of which the patient is placed, and, close by him, a big claypot on live embers containing leaves, barks and roots which are supposed to possess medical properties. Either a blanket or another mat is spread over the top of the enclosure, thus shutting the patient up in a sort of mini hut. Sometimes the claypot is not placed on the fire. Instead red hot stones are dipped into the pot. The hot vapour from the pot induces profuse perspiration from every pore, and the patient is left for a considerable time in this intensely uncomfortable predicament. When, at length, the remedy is supposed to have had sufficient time to act the mats are removed. The patient suddenly finds himself in the open air, absolutely dripping with perspiration. This process is called **ku sweka phungula** (to cook **phungula**) i.e. to be treated vapourly with the **phungula** medicine. This act is done twice a day, early in the morning and also early in the evening. It comes immediately after drinking the medicine from the **ximbitana**. The whole process is carried out daily for a period of about a week or so.

By the end of the process described above, the patient shows signs of recuperation. The process is followed by another practice called **ku orhokela** (to bask for) i.e. to inhale smoke from medicines laid on embers. Instead of embers they make use of glowing coals. These are placed on a piece of

broken claypot called **xirhengele**. The patient sits astride with the **xirhengele** between his legs. On the coals they place a marble-like medicine called **baso**. The **baso** is made of ground roots and animal fat. The patient is usually covered with a blanket and he will inhale the smoke. Meanwhile the diviner walks round the patient, blasting her **ndweva** and saying:

"So and so, come back from where
you have been taken to. Come! come! come!
Defeat your enemy and come back".

This is done for a period of two or three days. The final stage of treatment is when incisions are made with a razor (**rikari**). This is known as **ku tlhavela**. A medicine called **maringo** is smeared on the incisions. This marks an end to the whole process and the patient is regarded as having fully recovered.

4.2.1.2 Divination - **ku hlahluva**

Divinatory practices are very common amongst the Tsonga. The most common method is that in which a set of divination bones called **tinhlolo** is used. This, actually, is the principal method since even if other methods of divination are used, they will usually be preceded or concluded by consultation

with the bones. The second method of divination is by means of 'chest'. This is called **ku hlahluva hi xifuva** (to divine by chest). These are the most commonly used methods. The third method known as **ku ba hakati** is of an ancient type and only two diviners were still found to be practising it. As Junod (1913, Vol II: 491) explained, **hakati** is the name given to the seed of a fruit growing in the desert. This seed is oval shaped and is cut down the middle so as to form two pointed cupules presenting a small notch at each extremity. These extremities are both called **nomu**, (mouth), though there is an anterior part, which is pointed, and a posterior part, which is blunt. Six of these cupules constitute a whole set, three males and three females. The males are larger in size than the females. This method is not our concern in this study since it is virtually extinct.

4.2.1.2.1 Divination by bones - **ku hlahluva hi tinhlolo**

The divinatory bones is the most common system of divination and play a considerable part in the life of the Tsonga. The set of divinatory bones **tinhlolo**, is kept by both diviners and herbalists. All diviners interviewed were in possession of a **tinhlolo** set. As Junod described, (1913: Vol II: 495) the set is divided in two kinds: the bones strictly speaking, most of which are astragalus bones, and the various objects which are not bones. Among the various objects are

sea shells. No fixed number of bones was found among the diviners. Some had many, others few. The average number of bones however is around 15.

The Tsonga believe that the divining set, when used by a properly trained specialist, has no limits in its ability to divine or predict. It can for instance, deduce whether the cause for a mishap should be ascribed to witchcraft or to the dissatisfaction of the ancestor spirits. It will also show who the witch is, or which ancestor is dissatisfied. It can indicate what type of magic should be applied and how it should be used against the witch, or what sacrifice should be made to the ancestor. Furthermore it may indicate the cause of a disease, the nature of the disease and the curative methods to be administered. It can show where one will find a lost or stolen object or strayed domestic animals such as cattle. It can also predict rain or drought, the cause of a war, the results of a journey or any other future event about which one wishes to know.

In divining, a small traditional mat (**xisangwana**) or a goat skin is spread on the floor. Clients sit opposite the diviner with legs stretched and shoes removed. The fee charged is paid in advance and placed under the **xisangwana** or goat skin. The diviner holds the set of **tinhlolo** firmly in her two hands, chews a little piece of an odoriferous root

(the bulb of Liliacea called **xirhungulu**), spits on them in order "to awaken them", or "to make them see" (**ku tihanyanyisa**). Whilst holding them firmly, she utters some spells and throws them onto the mat. For interpretation she considers the side on which the bones have fallen, the direction towards which they face, the position they have taken in regard to each other, and the relation of the male and female bones to each other.

In her introduction she will tell each one of the consultees about their health. This is known as **ku pfuxela**. When she throws the set for the second time, she relates the actual problem about which they consult her and she speaks in short phrases. The party responds at the end of each phrase by saying: "**Savuma**" which means "we agree". If she tells them something they do not agree with, they say, **savuma**, softly. But should they agree with what she tells them they say it loudly. The diviner therefore, will deduce from their response whether or not they agree with the bones. If they are not satisfied, they will proceed to another diviner.

4.2.1.2.2 Divination by chest - Ku hlahluva hi xifuva

The second common practice of divination is through the 'chest'. It is thus called because the individual in this method divines through spirits. The spirits are believed to

be located in the chest. For this reason, a good chest diviner is said to be having **xifuva xo basa** (white or clean chest). Individuals who practise this method therefore, are those spiritually possessed i.e. the **vanyamusoro** and **magovela** only. In order to divine, the spirits should 'come out' first. The diviner can induce the spirits by a certain medicine. It is usually the **Vandzawu** spirits that will 'come out' to divine. The **Vangoni** spirits may also or may not 'come out'. If they do, they merely want to supplement or support what has been said by the **Vandzawu** spirits. Consultees usually hide an object from the diviner and such an object is called **mfihlwa**. This is the first thing that an able diviner will discover. Should she fail to discover it, the party will doubt her ability. Here again the diviner speaks in short phrases, to which the party reply by saying: "**He zake**", if it is the **Ngoni** spirits divining, and "**ndawuwe**", if it is the **Ndawu** spirits. When divining by chest, a diviner always hold her switch in her hand.

4.2.2 Social function

The social functions of possession are double-sided. Possession on the one hand provides solutions to societal problems, while on the other, it provides the medium with extra-ordinary and exceptional attention from her family and the community/society at large.

Should a serious disease or an epidemic break out, or a person die of suspected witchcraft or any other mishap that affects the community as a whole, a diviner is consulted to discover the culprit or the witch. The witch will be discovered either by means of divination or "smelling-out".

Community representatives are delegated to the diviner. If the culprit is not amongst the delegates, the diviner will fix a date on which to come and divulge the witch. Or she may give them a full description of the witch which coincidentally concurs for the most part with the general features of the one they have been suspecting even before consulting the diviner. After the culprit has been revealed, he is publicly prosecuted. Junod (1913, Vol. II: 48) explains how Mudebane of the Nkuna clan was publicly executed after having been smelled out as a wizard. A similar incident occurred at Lulekani in 1985 after the mysterious disappearance of two small girls aged 4 and 5 years. Residents believed that witchcraft that might have led to ritual murder was involved. Consequently a delegation was sent to a diviner whose description of the witch depicted the old woman whom the school children claimed to have seen with the disappeared children. She was then killed by the mob. (The whole event is described in the Hit, August 1985: 10-12, apart from information obtained directly from informants).

4.2.3 Religious function

The Tsonga society is basically a community of the living and the spirits where the living and the dead are inseparable. The existence of the living separate from the dead is unthinkable. As such contact must always be made between the living and the spirits for the former are highly dependent upon the spirits for their future survival.

It does however happen that the living neglect their family ancestors. Under such circumstances it is believed that the family ancestors will leave the premises to reside elsewhere. By abandoning their descendants, they render them vulnerable to all sorts of social dangers. The descendants are usually not aware of such a boycott until such time that they are beset by a calamity of some kind. To elucidate the cause of the calamity, the senior member(s) of the family will consult divinatory bones. Usually the divinatory bones are those of the herbalist. From the side on which the bones have fallen and the direction towards which they point, the **n'anga** will tell them about the disappearance of the family's ancestors:

"Swikwembu a swa ha ri kona laha kaya.

Swi tsuvile, swi fambile.

Mi fanele ku lava nyamusoro

a ta swi vuyisa".

(The ancestral spirits are no longer here at home. They are sullen and have left. You should look for a diviner who will bring them back).

The herbalist will usually tell them the whole cause of their displeasure and the place where the ancestors have gone to. It is usually not very far away from the home premises.

Among the spirits there is always the main spirit, i.e. the one that has incited all his fellow spirits to leave the family and it is he who must be discovered and taken from the hidden spot which is usually a tree, a tree-stump or a stone. As soon as the main spirit is discovered, the **nyamusoro** will take it back home and all the other spirits will follow automatically. Hence the process known as **ku vuyisa swikwembu** (to bring the ancestors back home). The divinatory bones will also confirm the rightful diviner to be called for the purpose.

Back home the consultee will send a message to all his cognates. Each one of them will be expected to contribute some corn to be used in brewing beer for the purpose. The beer is always brewed at the home of the eldest lineage member. Even if the consultee was one of the junior brothers, the ceremony would still be held at the place of

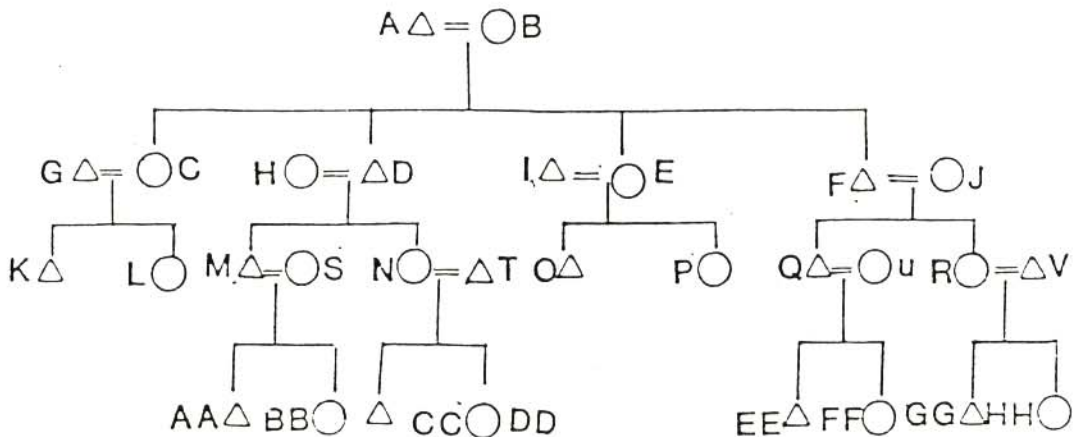
the eldest lineage member. The beer prepared as such is known as **byala bya nhlengo** (the beer of contribution). A day will be fixed for the ceremony (this usually coincides with the readiness of the beer). On the day, all lineage members gather at the senior member's family. Later towards sun-set, the diviner, together with her attendants will then arrive. The following description is an example of how the whole ceremony takes place.

1984 was a bad year for a certain Mathebula of Clare. His eldest son who had been ill since 1982 had not improved. Three of his other sons were convicted on charges of assaulting a taxi driver with extenuating circumstances. All his sons were married and had all been staying together with their father as an extended family. Ultimately the sons' wives started quarreling with their in-laws and among themselves. There was thus no peace in the family. Mathebula and his wife consulted a herbalist who discovered that the family ancestors had left them. The divinatory bones also indicated that the ancestors had 'hidden' at a **marula** tree which was on the eastern side of the family home. The bones further depicted N-R of Welverdiend as the rightful diviner to bring home the ancestors. Mathebula informed his younger brother who also resided at Clare and his two sisters (both married at Welverdiend). Each sibling contributed corn for the preparation of **byala bya nhlengo**. A day was fixed

for the occasion. Anybody from far and wide was at liberty to attend the ceremony. The following groups however, were compelled by the custom to have honoured the occasion:

- a) Mathebula, his wife, sons, sons' wives, sons' children, daughters and daughters' children.
- b) Mathebula's brother, his wife, sons, sons' wives, sons' children, daughters and daughters' children.
- c) Mathebula's sisters with their children only.

The following diagram represents the persons who are required by custom to be present in any such ceremony:



In the sketch, C, D, E, F, M, N, Q, R, AA, BB, EE and FF are members of the same patrilineage by virtue of their common descent from A. D, being the senior member of the lineage accepts the corn contribution from his siblings C, E and F; while he himself also makes a contribution. The ceremony takes place at his family's place. K, L, O and P are regarded as **vatukulu** (grandchildren) in the lineage. Likewise AA, BB, CC, DD, EE, FF, GG and HH are also regarded as **vatukulu** in the lineage. The former group of 'grandchildren', however, do not belong to the same generation level with the latter. Hence they are known as the **vatukulu lavakulu** (The main grandchildren as opposed to the other **vatukulu**, who by virtue of birth belong to the lineage.

During important rituals and ceremonies, the presence of the main grandchildren is essential. They are for instance, the first to taste beer prepared for the ancestors. Besides, to any individual there are two types of ancestral spirits that are important; the paternal and maternal ancestors. At D's lineage, the main grandchildren are attending their maternal ancestors. The children of the ordinary **vatukulu**, known as the **vatukulu-xinguhe** (great-grandchildren) are also compelled by custom to be present in the ceremony.

The day fixed was a Saturday. On that day many people arrived at the Mathebula's place to attend the ceremony. It

was not until the evening that N-R and her attendants arrived at the kraal. A large fire was made in the centre of the kraal and all visiting spectators were seated around it. A short distance from the fire a number of traditional mats were spread out on the ground. All the lineage members and the main grandchildren mentioned above seated themselves on the mats with their legs stretched out while facing the east with arms resting on their knees. They were also all half naked and numbered around 40. Although Mathebula, his younger brother and the two sisters were all present, they were not, however, seated on the mats but among the visiting spectators for a reason which could not be established. By sitting on a mat, each one of the participants automatically became a client. The attendants began with the process of **ku voningela**, described in Chapter 3. N-R then began the important task of searching for familiars from each client. After searching the last client, she started all over again. Ultimately, each client was "smelled out" thrice. The whole process was a duplication of the **ku femba** process described in Chapter 3 (section 3.3.2.3) and will not be repeated here. In some participants familiars were 'caught' while in others nothing was found. At the end of the process, N-R and her attendants left the yard with a burning lamp and as they left, N-R began crawling on hands and knees while smelling the ground in search of something. She led them while still crawling on the hands and knees and when she came to a **nkuhlu**

tree (*Trichilia emitica* Vahl.), on the south of the family homestead she stopped and 'caught' the ancestor. Still applying the same movement, she led them back to the yard and moved straight to the family ancestral shrine where she placed the recovered ancestors. Since the arrival of N-R and her team, up to this point, only the **macomane** drums are beaten. After the discovery of the ancestors, all participants with the exception of those who were already asleep were taken into the **ndhumba** hut where only N-R and a few attendants were able to enter. The **tinghunghu** and no longer the **macomane** were then played. Towards dawn, all participants including those who had slept were taken to the ancestral shrine. Once again they played the **macomane** drums the main aim of which was to induce one or more of the ancestral spirits to 'come out' and manifest himself so that he could reveal the cause of the ancestor's neglect. The ceremony continued until such time that a spirit came out. In this case it was not until after sunrise that one spirit manifested itself in one of the female participants. The spirit did not say anything, except to demand some water to drink since it was 'tired'. Barely ten minutes later, another spirit also manifested itself in yet another young girl. This second spirit explained that they (the ancestors) felt completely neglected as no sacrifices were made for them and they were no longer worshipped. There had been many things that they required but nobody had bothered to attend

to them. For those reasons, they decided to turn their back on their living descendants. The spirit further indicated that they were the cause of all the misfortunes. The two young girls were in the same ecstatic condition as any possessed individual. Despite the fact that they resembled a possessed person in all respects, the two young girls are still uninitiated. A possibility however, is that one day they may become possessed. What was not very clear to the Mathebulas was that the herbalist told them the ancestors had hidden at the **marula** tree in the east while in fact the diviner had found them at the **nkuhlu** tree to the south.

The ceremony described above is very common among the Tsonga. Although the frequency was not known, diviners however, indicated that time and again they are called upon to bring home sullen ancestors.

4.2.4 Economic function

Like all people, diviners participate in the economic activities of the area in which they live. Under traditional communal ownership of land, they are regarded as ordinary people and are therefore entitled to pieces of land for cultivation and for dwelling. They are also at liberty to keep livestock.

Traditionally Tsonga people doctored their fields (**masimu**) and seeds (**timbewu**) before cultivation and sowing. Although this was to be done mainly by herbalists, the services of diviners were also employed. Similarly, during the first fruits ceremonies herbalists as well as diviners played an important role. Nowadays however, only a relatively few families still rely on the doctorship of these magicians. The majority, especially Christians, make use of the knowledge introduced by agricultural officers. First fruits ceremonies are no longer practised. In short, as regards agriculture, diviners no longer play a major role.

Most diviners are generally rich in terms of their own standards. Those who have attained the **govela**-status are either having a lot of cattle or owning shops and cafes. At Welverdiend two diviners have bought cars for their husbands. In certain areas like Acornhoek, some such diviners have built modern big houses. Possession therefore, is used by most diviners as their prime source of income.

4.3 Funeral rites of the possessed

The diviner informants admitted that the present funeral procedure is totally different from the traditional one though there are however, a few vestiges of the traditional practices remaining. The funeral of the possessed is

attended by her disciples, her colleagues and their disciples, as well as any adult member of the community. Usually on her deathbed, the diviner gives instruction on how she should be buried and this may vary. Most diviner informants described how K.S of Merry Pebble Stream, near Thulamahashe was buried. This is described as it illustrates aspects of traditional burial rites of diviners. K.S. was one of the most famous diviners in Mhala. He became ill and died in 1982. Even when his condition had deteriorated badly, he refused to be taken to hospital. On his deathbed, he instructed his four wives how he should be buried after death and all his instructions were carried out accordingly.

Thus after his death, the body was not taken to the mortuary and he was buried exactly four days after he had died. By then the body had started to decompose. No minister of religion was called to conduct the funeral service. Instead, a lot of diviners with their disciples came and played the **macomane** throughout the special service. His grave was dug almost at the centre of the family homestead. It was dug in such a manner that a place was left in the grave for him to sit upon, his body was carried on a blanket by his four wives who were all completely naked. As such they had to run with the body from the main wife's hut to the grave. The **varikwavo** i.e. every woman's lineage kinsmen were waiting at the grave side with a blanket to cover their 'child' with.

The body was lowered into the grave by the deceased's sons. It was placed in a sitting position facing the east (under normal circumstances a dead person faces to the west) with one hand holding an assegai and the other a knife. He would kill his enemies with his assegai and cut their flesh with the knife. In between his legs they placed a clay pot vessel which was filled with water. A long steel pipe which was inserted in the vessel protruded slightly above the surface of the water which was intended to cool him. Right around and above the body were placed pieces of corrugated iron to protect the body from contact with the soil. Eventually the grave was filled with soil. Through the protruding steel pipe the vessel is always re-filled with water. This is typical of the traditional way of burial among Tsonga diviners; a similar account of which has been described by Junod (1913, Vol. II: 458-459).

Most diviners however, are currently buried like any ordinary person with the exception that they are made to hold either an assegai, a hatchet, knife or blade. Otherwise they are buried in coffins beside which the diviner's paraphernalia which include her switch and switshungulu are placed. All her drugs and drums are stored in the **ndhumba** hut. Anyone of her lineage kinsmen who might need to use them will be free to do so.

4.4 Conclusion

After initiation the diviner has a role to play in the community as a whole - the role she did not have before. In addition she must associate with the society of diviners. Among her new and varied functions we delineated the medical, social, economic and religious functions.

The medical function includes the art of divination by means of such methods as the bones, and the chest, and the general cure of patients which necessitates a fairly elaborate knowledge of the pharmacopoeia used in these instances. The social roles are directed to problems that usually affect the whole community. Her duty here is to divulge the cause of the mishap or calamity and the solution rests with the community. Because diviners must remain in close touch with ancestral spirits they can be regarded as the protectors and guardians of ancestor beliefs. They are a class of people who daily devote time to evoking ancestral blessings. Thus there is much more religiosity in diviners than in ordinary people. When a society neglects the ancestors, it is the diviners who remind the people about such negligence. They also interpret the wishes of the ancestral spirits. By acting as the single most important mediator between the living and the ancestors, a connection crucial to the cosmology of the Tsonga, a diviner brings the society into

close contact with the ancestors. Finally the role of possession involves economic advantage to the diviner and to some members of the community especially among the competing entrepreneurs in the private sector.

Lastly, a description of diviner's burial rites was given. Although buried much more like ordinary people nowadays, they are still distinguished from such people by means of protective tools being placed in their hands.

CHAPTER 5

5. FACTORS THAT ARE CONCOMITANT WITH SPIRIT POSSESSION

5.1 Introduction

It has already been pointed out that diviners had experienced a very definite call to the office of diviner by the spirits and not because they wanted it. Diviners therefore take up the profession not because of personal choice but because of some motives and forces. And since the phenomenon is not an original traditional custom among the Tsonga, there may be factors which *inter alia*, may be connected with the people's historical background. On the other hand the phenomenon shows an increase, which appears to correlate with wide-spread social and economic change. It appears that spirit possession in its current form is in part explainable in terms of these socio-economic factors rather more than in terms of the historical background of the people.

5.2 Social dimensions

5.2.1. Culture contact

This is a contact between two different cultures. Relating this to the Tsonga, the contact between the Tsonga and Zulu

in Mozambique has been indicated. Towards the middle of the nineteenth Century when Soshangane fought his main campaigns with the Tsonga of Mozambique, the latter were conquered and incorporated in a Zulu-type kingdom. As a result of this contact the Tsonga have probably first and foremost adopted the superior fighting methods of their conquerors. Besides fighting methods, they were influenced by the language and the customs of their conquerors (i.e. the Zulu). It has also been indicated that possession among the Tsonga was previously unknown whereas among the Zulu it is an old or traditional practice. As the Tsonga were influenced by Zulu language and customs, it is likely that they adopted the possession cult as well.

Although it is difficult to surmise the nature of the early history of Tsonga and Ndau, the fact that they are neighbouring tribes cannot be disputed. Junod writes for instance that the Tsonga were possessed by the spirits of the neighbouring Ndau and Zulu (1913: Vol. II: 436). Even if the possession history among the Ndau is not known one can assume that like the Zulu, possession among these people has had a long history and thus in all probability one of their original traditional customs. This assumption is by the observation that the spirit language employed during possession, always reflects the cultural group which has a long-standing tradition of possession. In other words,

the afflicting spirits speak the language of their origin. Lewis (1971: 108) for instance reports that amongst the Pokamo who are possessed by Arab spirits, the votaries always speak in Arabic. Similarly Stayt (1968: 302) reports that Venda diviners always speak Tshikaranga when possessed and he further explains that possession is not an original custom among the Venda but it is among the Karanga. Among the Tsonga, the incantations used are in Zulu for Nguni possession and in Ndaue for Ndaue possessions (Junod, 1913, Vol II: 437). In the light of the above explanation it is justifiable to conclude that possession among the Ndaue could be an original traditional custom. When Tsonga and Ndaue cultures came into contact in Mozambique, it is quite probable that the Tsonga adopted the cult from the Ndaue.

The above explanation of culture contact between Tsonga and Zulu and also between Tsonga and Ndaue does not suggest that it is the Tsonga people only who borrowed from Zulu and Ndaue. The two foreign groups have also borrowed from the Tsonga since borrowing as a result of culture contact is usually a two-way process. Furthermore the explanation does not suggest that the Tsonga borrowed and adopted only one cultural trait, i.e. possession cult, from its two mentioned neighbouring groups. It has also adopted things like methods of fighting, words and material culture.

The fact that it is the spirits of neighbouring tribes that possess the Tsonga might indicate social situations such as conflict between the groups. Writing about the Zulu and Tsonga, for instance, Omer-Cooper (1978: 59) indicates the conflict between the two groups. The conflict was due to the fact that the Tsonga were segregated in many spheres such as the military. They were subject to discrimination and on the battlefield these more expendable subjects were put in the front line. Omer-Cooper concludes that as a result of the conflicts, a party of Tsonga broke away and succeeded in escaping to the Transvaal where they settled in small parties (1978: 60).

With regard to the Ndaus, the Ndaus spirits that possess the Tsonga seem to seek vengeance of some kind, and oral evidence confirms that the Tsonga once came into conflict with the Ndaus.

The conflict culminated in a war of some kind between the two groups where it is claimed many Ndaus people were killed. In the present study each diviner informant when asked why it was that she became possessed by Ndaus spirits, the reply was usually that her ancestors had killed that particular Ndaus. The dead Ndaus is said to resurrect and prosecute its slayers and/or even their descendants. It would appear that the conflict took the form of a feud for some families claimed to

have killed the Ndaus even after their settlement in the Transvaal. By returning to their conflicting neighbours after death in the form of spirits, the afflicting Ndaus are perceived as or thought to be exacting revenge. The irony here lies in the fact that, although they are afflicting and seeking vengeance they become valuable to the Tsonga people by providing treatment for their sick.

5.2.2 Social situations which regularly, though not necessarily, give rise to conflict, competition or jealousy between members of the same sex

Social situations like polygyny, as found by some ethnographers such as Lewis (1971: 76) and Wilson (1967: 373) may lead to spirit possession in the first wife. Lewis reported that to several women the onset of spirit affliction coincided with her husband's opening moves to marry an additional spouse. Wilson too indicated that a woman whose marital status and prestige was threatened by the public action of her husband in taking a new wife, would become possessed, thereby enabling herself to re-affirm her status and prestige in public - especially her standing with respect to the new wife. He concluded that Somali possession among women was due to the jealousies and tensions of polygyny.

Among the Tsonga we have two types of polygyny, viz. sororal polygyny and non-sororal polygyny. Sororal polygyny stems

from an agreement between the man and his first wife and the whole idea is usually initiated by the woman. Should the woman not have a younger sister, the man will marry his wife's brother's daughter. Such a woman will become a **hlantswa** (washer woman) to her **hahani**-father's sister. The main purpose for such a marriage is for the second wife to relieve the first one from almost all her domestic duties and it is expected of her to be obedient to and treat the senior co-wife with great respect. In this way the first wife gains authority over her junior co-wife. In this instance it is the second wife who succumbs to possession. Five such instances were recorded. Non-sororal polygyny on the other hand, is initiated by the man himself. In this instance the situation resembles that of the Somali where it is the first wife who becomes possessed by spirits. Nine such cases were encountered during the investigation.

5.2.3 Emotionalism

It has become a truism to state that black people are emotional while other races like Caucasians are not. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore this topic and I will confine myself to what is known about emotionalism among the Tsonga and its relation to spirit possession.

Firstly, the Tsonga seem to demonstrate a high degree of

amaNazaret of Shembe or members of the Zion Christian Church dance with enthusiasm while displaying emotion (cf Sundkler, 1961ff). During students' mass-meetings especially when national issues are discussed, the mass is usually emotionally charged. The tone of their resolutions clearly shows their emotions. In the same way, the profession of divination which involves the state of possession is an emotional one, which necessitates a highly charged and semi-hysterical state. Amongst societies such as the Tsonga which are so highly emotional, possession can be expected.

The explanation above does not suggest that people of other races lack emotion. While they have emotions, they are however supposed to control such. The Japanese of the Samurai class for instance, are expected to control the manifestation of emotions. Similarly the English and the American cultures also expect one to control emotion, particularly in public, and such a control is evidence of a strong character. But among people such as the Tsonga, emotions are never controlled but encouraged. So it stands to reason that in such societies possession fits well.

5.2.4 Ostracism

In Western context ostracism was an Athenian political institution designed to rid the community temporarily of

persons who appeared to menace its welfare by their very prestige and influence. It however involved no disgrace and neither accused nor condemned on grounds of wrongdoing; nor did it signify for its victims perpetual retirement from public activity. All men who suffered ostracism were outstanding Athenians and upon their return regained their positions in the life of polity (Seligman, 1959, Vol. II: 501-502).

Currently the concept has assumed a different meaning altogether especially in the African context. Ostracism therefore is a tendency to exclude an individual for her malevolent behaviour such as witchcraft or sorcery - or for any act which is not socially approved of. Traditionally any group member who was accused of witchcraft was publicly executed among the Tsonga. But when the government enacted laws prohibiting the killing of people accused of witchcraft, witches began to be ostracised instead of getting killed. The witch is banished to some other places. She becomes a social outcast. Whether banished or not she is denied many social activities and remains a non-member. Some of these 'social outcasts' ultimately become possessed as the following cases will illustrate.

Case 1

F.N. was accused of witchcraft following the disappearance of two small boys in April 1981. The boys aged seven and nine years then. A diviner who was consulted by a representative group pointed at the woman as a witch and also confirmed their allegation. The residents then ordered that she be removed from the area. After thorough investigation into the matter however, the district magistrate acquitted the woman. She then stayed in the area as a social outcast until December 1983 when she was initiated as a diviner.

Case 2

In 1972, M.C. was also accused of witchcraft after the death of one resident who had been ill for some months. The mob demolished all the huts of the suspected witch and banished him. He sought refuge in another area where he was however, accepted as a social outcast. A few months thereafter he became possessed and today he is one of the most powerful diviners in the area.

Case 3

G.M. was a widowed young woman staying with her two sons and a daughter B.M. who was seven years old in 1981.

Within a year six children aging between three and ten years had died. G.M. was held responsible for the death of the children. It was alleged that she had turned them into zombies and had become her servants and were also playing games with B.M. at night. G.M. was then forced by the community to leave the area. Her uncle who was a headman of the neighbouring area gave her and her children an asylum. In 1982, she together with her daughter became possessed.

Case 4

C.F. lost her husband in 1976; five years after their marriage. In 1979 she stayed with a concubine who died the same year. She went to Sabie where she got employment. She returned home with another concubine in 1982. The concubine also died instantly. Although nobody openly accused her of witchcraft she became the talk of the area; people blaming her for bewitching her 'husbands'. Men distanced themselves from her. In 1984 she became possessed. She was however, ultimately converted to Christianity in 1986. She has since burnt and destroyed everything pertaining to spirits.

Cases like those described above were found during the investigation. After becoming a social outcast, the

individual member looks for a way in which she may be re-admitted to the group. Possession therefore appears to be one possible way through which a social outcast can regain acceptance. The social group is likely to re-accept a person of this nature because as already indicated, possession results in benefits not only for the individual herself, but also for the society.

5.3 Economic dimensions

Economic conditions have been affected by the influence of western civilization which resulted in the disintegration of the traditional social order. Economic factors which are contingent upon the latter have led to great changes in traditional societies and this is very clear with the far-reaching effect of migrant labour on the communities. Like all other cultural groups, the Tsonga have consequently changed from a subsistence farming economy to a cash economy. They have been rendered to a position of utter dependence on migrant labour earnings. Migrant labour therefore caused many Tsonga men to be absent from their wives. Opportunities for earning money within the homelands were minimal for men and absent for women. Only a very limited number of males were employed within the national state as labourers, clerks, teachers, etc. The majority left the area and this left most Tsonga married women without husbands in the home for

extended periods of time. A migrant labourer for example, was given only one month work-leave per year while for the rest of the year he was away at work.

In this regard Lewis contrasted the conservative, traditionalist, Valley Tonga with their more sophisticated and acculturated Plateau countrymen. Since the 1930's the Plateau Tonga had been increasingly involved in the modern market economy of Zambia. With local opportunities for earning cash wages their menfolk were not required to work extensively as absent migrant labourers. There had been therefore a virtually parallel acculturation of men and women. Furthermore the traditional pattern of relations between the sexes was one of equality rather than inequality (Colson, 1969: 96-102). Like men, therefore, whether married or unmarried, women participated in men's social activities and were not strongly hedged about with mystical or other restraints. She concludes by saying: In this situation possession is today rare, and in so far as it exists, affects men and women equally.

Among the Valley Tonga however, the situation was different. Colson found that for long men had participated through labour migration in the wider European-orientated world, while women had remained at home fascinated by the town delights and mysteries from which they had been excluded.

She discovered that it was these secluded and excluded wives who were regularly subjected to possession by spirits.

The question now is to what extent the factors discussed in Tonga society can be regarded as prerequisites for or the cause of spirit possession among the Tsonga. In the comparison of the three areas in the investigation, this phenomenon was confirmed. In Lulekani, where there is a very low rate of male absenteeism, due to work, the incidence of possession is the lowest in these areas. In Welperdiend, where migrant labour frequency occurs, spirit possession proved to be markedly higher.

CHAPTER 6**6. CONCLUSION**

The cult of spirit possession begins with an individual being tormented by some spirits. Such a person is believed to be ill and appears almost insane as she lingers about. Her behaviour changes also to an abnormal state. As a matter of fact she becomes rejected by her community and turns to be a social outcast. Moreover her illness is unique in that it can only be cured by a diviner - someone who went through a similar experience. Ironically, after some temporary disappearance, i.e. after completion of her training period, the very individual who was seen as an 'outcast' returns to the same community not only as a new person but also with a role to fulfil in her community. Before the role of the possessed could be summed-up, it is essential to give the religious outlook of the Tsonga people.

In this regard, mention could be made that although there is nothing external to attract attention to their religion as there is no temple, no Scripture text, no special day set apart for worship, the Tsonga are nevertheless highly religious - ancestor worship being their religion. This religion has led to a strong interdependence between the living and the dead. For this reason even after more than a

century of vigorous Mission, and to a lesser extent also of Government opposition, the cult is still widely practised; at an increasing rate for that matter. Because of this deep-rooted belief in ancestors some of the Tsonga evangelists are known to still be in possession of some paraphernalia belonging to their ancestral spirits. These are often kept in steel trunks. Also, most of the independent church movements still give great recognition to the existence of ancestors and encourage ancestor worship. Some Tsonga members of the Z.C.C. for instance revealed that when faced with problems or illnesses, they consult their church leaders who usually tell them about their sullen ancestors and direct them how to pacify these.

To a large extent therefore, the whole life of the Tsonga people is dependent upon their ancestors. This idea was also observed by Junod (1913, Vol. II: 360) where he maintains that the very existence of the village, of the clan and the welfare of every member of the village depends on the ancestors. The Tsonga therefore strongly believe that the ancestors have the power of killing or of making alive, of enriching or of making poor. They are seen as the masters of earth, fields, trees, rain, children, witches, animals, etc. In short they are believed to have a full control over everything. These gods are feared, respected and worshipped. There is therefore some strong relationships between ancestor

spirits and their living descendants. As indicated in Chapter 4 one major role of the possessed is to bring the living and the spiritual world together. Being in position to communicate directly with the dead and the living, the possessed acts as a link between the two groups.

Ancestors seem to need a great deal of attention from their living descendants who many a times appear to neglect them. Usually they are not aware of their negligence. The ancestors therefore send, as punishment, forms of illness to some living descendants. Instead of protecting their descendants, the spirits will leave them vulnerable to malevolent beings such as witches and sorcerers who are thieves, killers and enslavers. The ancestors become sullen and desert their members. In this regard the service of a diviner becomes imperative. When consulted, she interprets the wishes of the spirits and at the same time give many indications to the living, e.g. what is the cause of the misfortune; what must be the nature of the offering; to which ancestor it must be consecrated; in which place the act of worship must be performed. A classic example is that of the Mathebulas described in Chapter 4.

One other valuable role played by ceremonial possession is that it provides entertainment and aesthetic interest for people whose normal lives are in many cases quite routine.

During such ceremonies people have a chance to laugh, enjoy and entertain themselves. During a great sacrifice (**mhamba leyikulu**) people dance and enjoy themselves in making the gods happy and then be doubly blessed as the contented ancestors ensure their well-being. Such an occasion does not only ensure individual and community well-being, prosperity and the favour of gods but brings social unity as well.

As the Tsonga is a traditionally male dominated society women are automatically excluded from social and political life. They are ritually inferior and jurally deprived in comparison to men. They are regarded as second-class citizens. In everyday life they occupy positions of relatively low status. In a society like this, possession is a means through which any strong-minded and intelligent woman can raise herself above the common level of wife and motherhood and become a respected, wealthy and influential member of the society. Through possession therefore, people of lower social status can gain meaningful positions. The prominent role of women and men of low social standing in spirit possession can be viewed as compensation for their exclusion and lack of authority in other spheres.

The endurances and hardships that the diviner undergoes during training and initiation periods elevate her far above the status of womanhood. Sitting motionless at one place for

a long time is tiresome. By sucking raw blood she further distinguishes herself from any ordinary person. She does what is normally done by carnivorous animals like lions, leopards, tigers, etc. By so doing she places herself in a superior social status correlating with the positions of these animals in the animal world. Again she is supposed to lick raw chicken blood that is mixed with her own and also to withstand the pain in her tongue. Moreover she risks the whole occasion of **ku thwasa** which is so dangerous that it could claim her life. After initiation she dresses in special type of clothes. Above all these things, she possesses some supernatural powers that make her to be a supernatural being. All these make her a distinguished person in her society.

Another observation with regard to this phenomenon is that the rate of possession in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas. Of the three areas of investigation, Welverdiend with a total number of 21 possessed has the highest incidence of possession as compared to Lulekani with 9 only. On the other hand, Acornhoek which represents a marginal area has more possessed than Lulekani but fewer than Welverdiend. Given these factors, it becomes reasonable that the more people become culturalised the less is the incidence of possession among them.

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