

CHAPTER 3

BAKALANGA MUSIC IN BOTSWANA AND ZIMBABWE

The author of this document has chosen Bulilima-Mangwe District as his research area in Zimbabwe because of its location of the Njelele sacred place whose activities are shared by both *Bakalanga* of Zimbabwe and Botswana. To support the choice of this research area by the author, one of the most comprehensive first-hand accounts yet written, as cited by Kuper (1954: 41), deals with Mangwe District. It describes it as an area still known as “Bhukalanga” (the land of the Kalanga), where *Kalanga* customs and language have survived to a greater extent than in most other parts of the Ndebele area. This writing might have been published a long time ago but from the author’s personal experience as an *Ikalanga* cultural insider, it is still valid. This current 2001 *makwaya* type *Ikalanga* song can further prove this fact from Tjehanga village in Bulilima-Mangwe District:

SONG TITLE: BANHU BE BUKALANGA

Call: *Banhu be Bukalanga* – People of *Bukalanga*

Response: *be Bukalanga* – of *Bukalanga*

Call: *Batanani maboko* – Join each other’s hands

Response: *nani maboko* – each other’s hands

Call: *Hango yedu ya buda mu halima* – Our land is out of darkness

Response: *yedu ya buda mu halima* – ours is out of darkness

Call: *Tjebukani mu bone* – look back and see

Response: *kani mu bone* – back and see

Call: *Etjiya tjedza tja swika* – there comes light

Response: *tjedza tja swika* – light is coming

Call: *Hango yedu ya buda mu halima* – Our land is out of darkness

Response: *yedu ya buda mu halima* – ours is out of darkness.

3.1 THE INTERFACE OF BAKALANGA TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN BOTSWANA AND ZIMBABWE

Most of the *Bakalanga* traditional music types practised in Botswana are the same as those practised in Zimbabwe. In this chapter the author discusses school and community musical activities of the *Bakalanga* of both Botswana and Zimbabwe. *Bakalanga* of Botswana occupy the North Eastern part of the country while those of Zimbabwe are found in the Bulilima-Mangwe District in Matebeleland Province.

3.1.1 FIELD TRIP TO TJEHANGA VILLAGE

Having no opportunity of going to conduct his research at Njelele in the Matopo Hills in Zimbabwe, the author of this document found an alternative route to Tjehanga village. This village is found in Bulilima-Mangwe District in Matebeleland Province (Zimbabwe). It was also interesting to learn from Mr. Dupute, the headmaster of Thekwane High School, that the village Tjehanga was named after a river rich in reeds. This river passes through this village and joins the Thekwane River in the process.

Njelele is considered a sacred place because *Mwali* has manifested himself through his voice at this place. The sanctuary is an enclave within the Njelele hill. However, the whole area surrounding the hill, including the priest's homestead, is considered part of the sacred area. The Njelele hill is the "headquarters" of the *wosana* where *Mwali's* voice is heard. Due to reasons such as financial constraints and inaccessibility to the hills without prior arrangements, the researcher went to Tjehanga village where the Manyangwa sacred place is. In addition the researcher also visited the Thekwane village and Plumtree town. Through this process, he covered a wide range of informants representing different areas of Zimbabwe *Bukalanga*.

The trip to Tjehanga village was a success through the help of Mr. J. N. T. Dupute. He is the headmaster of a Methodist Mission High School

called Thekwane situated about eight kilometres West of Plumtree town. Mr. Dupute, a renowned Zimbabwean composer and *Isindebele* teacher, initiated the organisation of a *Bakalanga* traditional singing group at Tjehanga village for this researcher's visit. The aim of this gathering was to assist the author in learning about Zimbabwean *Bakalanga* musical styles through observing the group singing, dancing and also through conducting oral interviews. The researcher also had questionnaires to be completed.

Since nowadays it is very difficult to travel from one village to the next using public transport in Zimbabwe, Mr. Dupute arranged transport to Tjehanga with Mr. Nleya, the headteacher of Thekwane Primary School from the same Methodist Mission. The two accompanied the researcher to Tjehanga Primary School where the singing group had agreed to meet. It should also be noted that no arrangements were made to visit the Manyangwa sacred place whose owners were said by Ms. Mavis Mlilo of Dingumuzi Primary School in Plumtree to be in an interregnum period. Despite this fact, most of Tjehanga village parents are also involved in the Manyangwa sacred place activities.

The researcher and his two travel companions received a very warm welcome by the Tjehanga Primary School headteacher, Mr. Ngwenya, in his office. A short introductory meeting took place, which led to the transference of the trio to Ms. Mutandabari, the deputy head who was directly communicating with the host *Bakalanga* singing group. Ms. Mutandabari in turn handed the group to Ms. Sponono Tshuma, the traditional singing group leader. During these performances, Ms. Soneni Ndlovu offered to be responsible for photographic shooting on behalf of the researcher. This was meant to give the researcher a chance to participate in the performances.

Plate 3



Tjehanga village group with researcher second from right in performance

Photographed by Soneni Ndlovu at Tjehanga Primary School in Zimbabwe at an interview session organised to meet the author in June 2001

When watching the performance, Mr. Dupute was mesmerized by the music and joined in the dancing. He became a motivational factor to the group when he joined the performance since he is regarded as a senior person in this community because he heads Thekwane High School. Mr. Dupute performed *ndazula* music with his walking stick, to enhance the dance.

Plate 4



Mr. Dupute of Thekwane High School Performing *ndazula* dance

Photographed by Soneni Ndlovu at Tjehanga Primary School in Zimbabwe at an interview session organised to meet the author in June 2001

Since the Manyangwa sacred place is found in Tjehanga village, its importance cannot be underestimated when discussing *Bakalanga* traditional music, especially *wosana*. This should be the case because most local parents take part in the annual rain praying ceremonies as well as other activities occurring at the sacred place. The Manyangwa sacred place is situated about three kilometres from the village Primary school.

According to Ms. Sponono Tshuma, who was appointed as the leader for the Tjehanga traditional songs group, their group is not a permanent one. It only comes together when there is a performance needed. So in this case, the group came through the request of the researcher. In confirming this point, instead of using three drums, as is the case in most performances of *Bakalanga* traditional music, Ms. Tshuma's

group managed to secure only two for this event. Ms. Esnath Sabeni and Ms. Jabulani Dube played these two drums respectively. Ms. Soneni Ndlovu was blowing the whistle.

When interviewing her, the author discovered that Ms. Tshuma was an *Ikalanga* speaker originally from Mapoka village in Botswana along the Zimbabwean border. She is now a Zimbabwean through marriage. With the knowledge of the two country's *Bakalanga* musical repertoire, Ms. Tshuma and her group members confirmed the likeness of Botswana and Zimbabwe *Bakalanga* music types. This was with the exception of the San *bhoro* music, which is said to be obsolete in Zimbabwe. During these musical activities, Ms. Tshuma also displayed her knowledge of *bhoro* music, which she acquired in her country of birth (Botswana) during her youth through dancing. During this performance, Mr. Nleya, the headteacher of Thekwane Primary School, submitted that in the olden days, Zimbabwean *Bakalanga* traditional dancers used to dress in baboons' tail skins known as *misisi*.

The musical types found amongst the Zimbabwe *Bakalanga* can according to this author be categorized and listed as follows:

- Rain Praying music; *Wosana* and *Mayile*
- Entertainment or happy occasions' music; *Ndazula*, *Mukomoto*, *Woso*, *Iperu*, *Tshikitsha*, *bhoro* and *Ncuzu/Muskhukhu*
- Traditional music for healing purposes; *Mazenge* (*Shumba*), *Sangoma* and *Mantshomane*.

In addition to these traditional *Bakalanga* music types, *Bakalanga* of Zimbabwe also have another type without drumming or hand clapping called *makwaya*. These songs are sung with a different choreography from the traditional ones. The discovery of the researcher is that, most of the *makwaya* tunes were adopted from the Zimbabwe liberation struggle songs.

During the performance at Tjehanga School, a positive atmosphere emerged for the completion of the researcher's questionnaires by both teachers and parents present at this event. After watching this performance, Tjehanga Primary School pupils were enthused and showed this through crowding at the drums all wanting to beat at the same time. This showed how interested these pupils were in this traditional music although no one offered it to them.

3.1.2 BULILIMA - MANGWE DISTRICT SCHOOLS (ZIMBABWE)

In 1985, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Education National Committee for Minority Languages produced reading books for use in schools for the *Ikalanga* speaking areas of the country. This orthography was the first to be officially established for the *Ikalanga* language as spoken in Zimbabwe (Chebanne 1995:21). This was a good foundation for teachers to have people who are knowledgeable in teaching *Ikalanga* songs to school children as well.

Although *Ikalanga* is supposed to be taught from grade one to three, most of the knowledgeable teachers have retired, so most schools do not have anyone to handle the subject. This fact was expressed by the headteacher of Tjehanga Primary School, Mr. Ngwenya. Nevertheless, information gathered at Tjehanga and Dingumuzi Primary School in Plumtree revealed that, in Zimbabwean schools, *Bakalanga* traditional music is not practised. This is despite the presence of wellknown resources such as the Manyangwa and Njelele sacred places that specialise in practising *wosana* music.

Ms. Mavis Mlilo who was the deputy headteacher of Dingumuzi Primary School, although on transfer to Hillside in Bulawayo City, gave a possible cause for this weakness. Among other causes of *Ikalanga* traditional music not being practised in schools, Ms. Mlilo observed that the sacred places of Manyangwa and Njelele were regarded by the local people and sacred place priests as holy places, not allowing frequent visits by non-suplicants. Ms. Mlilo pointed out

that this factor is a traditional music learning barrier to the non-suplicants. The researcher found this to be unlike the Botswana *Bakalanga*, amongst whom schools and communities carry out annual cultural festivals. Zimbabwean *Bakalanga* parents mostly practise *Ikalanga* music (*wosana*) at the sacred places. Another fact that Ms. Mlilo pointed out was the lack of interest or persuasion of teachers and parents by individual headteachers to teach children *Ikalanga* traditional songs. Some of the reasons Ms. Ndebele also pointed out as contributory factors to the negligence of *Bakalanga* music are: schools, television sets, newspapers, radios, and churches mostly use *Isindebele* and English, not *Ikalanga*. Schools are not an exception to this influence.

At Dingumuzi Primary School in Plumtree town, the author of this document was greeted by the sound of a *Bakalanga* traditional drum used for assembly marching. This raised the researcher's wish of hoping to find this music practised on a large scale in this school. This turned out not to be the case since Ms. Mlilo earlier confirmed that in classroom teaching, teachers only use songs from any language to facilitate teaching other subjects. This fact was also supported by Ms. Selinah Ndebele who was regarded to be a *Bakalanga* cultural expert at Dingumuzi School by Ms. Mlilo. She kept on referring to her as "gogo", which is a *Sindebele* term for grandmother, to emphasise her expertise in this field. Ms. Ndebele completed both the researcher's questionnaire and at the same time answered oral questions.

Schools in Bulilima – Mangwe District hold annual music and drama competitions every third term, sponsored by the private company Colgate Palmolive. If there is any assistance from the Zimbabwean Government, the informants had no knowledge of it. This is unlike the Botswana situation where the schools festivals are sponsored by the Botswana Teachers Union (BTU) and in most cases with Government subsidy. Zimbabwe Schools' music and drama annual competitions

are held at three levels namely: District, Province and Inter-Provincial (National).

Mr. Nleya, the headteacher of Thekwane Primary School, stated examples of themes given to schools for these annual music and drama competitions. For the year 2000, as Mr. Nleya stated, the theme was *Ingoma ze zulu* meaning rain songs. In the year 2001, the theme was *Ingoma zoku sebenza* meaning working songs. Both themes are in *Isindebele* language. This theme is meant to be developed by the teachers with songs and drama. As the language indicates, the tendency is that most of the themes are finally presented in *Isindebele*.

Information received from Ms. Mlilo proved that Matjinge Primary School was dominating the winning of Music and Drama annual competitions in Bulilima-Mangwe District. This group excels under the leadership of Mr. Lucious Ncube, a *Ndebele* speaking teacher originally from Kezi district. Mr. Dupute also submitted an addition of Matjinge Secondary School, which is still under the leadership of the same teacher, Mr. Ncube.

Even though the Manyangwa sacred place is in Tjehanga village, there is conflict of interest among the villagers. These interests are the Methodist Church religion and that of the Manyangwa sacred place. Some of the Tjehanga villagers belong to the Methodist Church, which conducts its services at the local Tjehanga Primary School. The author of this document witnessed this during his research visit at Tjehanga Primary School. Whilst the village traditional music group was performing its songs on this day, a Methodist Church service was also going on within the same school. An oral interview held with Dr. Leslie Nthoi of the University of Botswana also portrayed the same state of affairs to be taking place at the Njelele sacred place. Dr. Nthoi confirmed that the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) is responsible for running Njelele Primary School.

The observation is that the Methodist Church also has a large following in the Tjehanga area, which competes with the cultural norms of the Manyangwa sacred place. The Methodist Church runs a large mission in this area, which also owns Thekwane High School. This shows a strong counteraction to the possible success and prosperity of the sacred place activities.

3.2 BOTSWANA IKALANGA COMMUNITY MUSIC

Bakalanga of Botswana practise traditional music in three forms that are the same as those of Zimbabwe. These are:

- Rain Making/Praying Music;

Wosana and Mayile

- Traditional Music for Happy Occasions and Entertainment;

Ndazula, Mukomoto, Woso, Iperu, Tshikitsha, Bhoru and Ncuzu/Maskhukhu

- Traditional Music for Healing Purposes;

Mazenge (Shumba), Sangoma and Mantshomane.

All *Bakalanga* traditional music listed above is practised within Botswana *Bukalanga* communities publicly, with the exception of *mazenge*, which is regarded as sacred and private. *Ncuzu/maskhukhu* music is also not practised because of lack of interested men who are supposed to take the lead in its performances. However, at Jakalasi No. 2 Village there is Mr. Caiphus Thusani practising *ncuzu/maskhukhu* music. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (under section 6.1.7, *ncuzu/maskhukhu* music).

Bakalanga of North Eastern Botswana have annual traditional competitive festivals that take place on the 21st of May. The Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, through the Department of Culture and

Youth of the North East District Council, sponsor these festivals. During these traditional music festivals, all participating groups are provided with free return transportation to the venue, accommodation and food. First, second and third prizes are awarded to the winning groups for every type of *Bakalanga* traditional music competed in. In addition to the annual festivals, there are also musical rituals that take place during the course of the year such as those of rain praying. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5 (under section 5.3 and 5.4, Rain Praying music).

Bakalanga traditional music is mainly practised in the North East District and some parts of the Central District in Botswana. This is because this is a predominantly *Ikalanga* speaking area. It is difficult to bring *Bakalanga* music into schools for teaching. This is due to problems such as lack of *Bakalanga* music knowledge from the young teachers. Another problem is the Botswana constitutional barrier that discourages the use of the so-called minority languages at the expense of major languages in schools.

Some schools in this region practise traditional music as an extracurricular activity. These are mainly schools found around the Tebgwe sacred place in Ramokgwebana where *wosana* music is being practised. Examples of these schools are Ramokgwebana Primary, Jakalasi No. 1 Primary and Ramoja Community Junior Secondary School. Most children in these schools come from *wosana* families where *wosana* music is being practised. *Wosana* children are more advantaged than children who come from families not practising this type of music. This is because they are also involved in performances at home with their parents.

Nowadays schools invite parents to coach children in *Bakalanga* traditional music. Examples of schools observed by the author of this document being coached by local parents are: Jakalasi No. 2 school under Ms. Basetse Mamu, Mabudzaani Primary School under Ms.

Margaret Tibone, Ramokgwebana Primary under Ms. Ellen Matopote and Jakalasi No. 1 School under Ms. Christinah Nzula. These parents do teach *Bakalanga* traditional songs to school going children as well and the teacher in charge of the traditional troupe also learns through the process. North Eastern Botswana Schools take part in annual traditional music competitions. In 2001 the North East regional music committee for their schools' competitions prescribed *wosana* music for competitions.

3.3 BOTSWANA AND ZIMBABWE IKALANGA TRADITIONAL MUSIC TOGETHER

Of all the music types that are common in Botswana and Zimbabwe, *wosana* is the main one that the *Bakalanga* of these two countries annually meet to perform together. This is because of the September annual rain ceremonies and the April thanksgiving held at the *Mwali* "headquarters" at Njelele in the Matopo Hills. During these annual gatherings, *wosana* of Botswana and Zimbabwe sing their songs and those of other spirit mediums present at the oracle.

Evidence suggests that the *Bakalanga* of Northern Botswana did not establish any permanent sacred place before the break-down of the *Ndebele* hegemony. It can then safely be suggested that the establishment of permanent sacred places in Botswana dates from 1896. Before this date, the Mangwe sacred place seems to have controlled all the other *wosana* in the area South-West and West of the Gwai River but North of the Shashe River (Mtutuki 1976: 7).

Because oral tradition has it that the *Bakalanga* brought their religion from Great Zimbabwe via Matonjeni or Dula, it is necessary that this study should constantly refer to the main sacred places in Zimbabwe which will have links with the Ntogwa sacred place (Mtutuki 1976: 1).

In other words, Ntogwa consulted with Manyangwa on matters of common interest or concern. Ntogwa's consultants occasionally

traveled to Manyangwa on private missions. In fact, the *Bakalanga* who live along the Botswana side of the Zimbabwean border do not consider themselves different from the people who live on the other side in Zimbabwe. They have kept their cultural history intact. This cultural link becomes more pronounced religiously after the death of Ntogwa. *Bakalanga* of Botswana turned more and more to Manyangwa, even on national matters. This was due to the fact that during the interregnum period the Ntogwa sacred place was inactive (Mtutuki 1976: 8).

3.3.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF NJELELE

According to Nthoi (1995: 137–8), Njelele is the most important religious centre in the religion's domain. It is referred to (in the press, by religious staff at Njelele; some supplicants who visited the centre and by some prominent people in Matabeleland South Province) as either the “father” or “mother” of all centres. It has fondly been referred to as the “fontanelle of the nation” by some important politicians in Zimbabwe, and also as “the nation's umbilical cord”. Nthoi (1995: 140) continues to say, Njelele became well-known and acclaimed *umthombo we lizwe (Isindebele)* “the fountain of the world”, owing to its association with *Mwali* as the giver of rain, or as the *Kalanga* put it, *Ka Mwali*.

Although the Njelele sacred place remains the most important sacred place in the religion's domain, there is no conception among either the pilgrims or the religion's leadership of a hierarchic religious organisation. Religious centres are viewed by many people as being owned and run by particular families, and as operating fairly independently of each other (Mwanza 1973). For example, the old sacred place at Dula is commonly referred to as *Ko Maswabi*, “at the Maswabis” (the Maswabi's sacred place which has been run by the Maswabi family since its inception); *Ko Manyangwa* (Manyangwa's sacred place); *Ka Ntogwa* (Ntogwa's sacred place). There is no meeting

of priests at which general policy is discussed. Pilgrims rank sacred places differently, so that no universally acceptable pecking order emerges.

Most people in Zimbabwe, including the priests, still see Njelele as belonging to Zimbabweans, although other people are free to consult the oracle there. This is indicated, for example, in the manner in which the priest to the sacred place is appointed. There are numerous other such examples, which show that to a large extent, some major sacred places in Zimbabwe are viewed as belonging to small communities around them, and in some cases as belonging to the “nation” (Nthoi 1995: 89).

In each region there are numerous sacred places of varying sizes. Each region has an oracle where *Mwali* can be talked to directly, and where his voice can be heard. Both individuals and congregational supplicants throughout the year visit any sacred place of their choice both within and beyond their regions.

3.3.2 USE OF THE NJELELE SACRED PLACE BY WOSANA

In the past, *Wosana* from all over the religion’s domain also visited the sacred place, particularly during the rain ceremony in September. They often, but not always, accompanied the religion’s messengers to the religious centre to ask for rain from *Mwali* (Werbner 1989: 255). *Wosana* are dedicated to *Mwali*. Amongst the *Kalanga*, they are also referred to as *bathumbi be vula* “rain seekers”. They dance for rain both at minor regional centres and at the Njelele sacred place in September. During this public ceremony, only the messengers, the adepts and elderly people (past childbearing age), who were expected to observe a state of sexual abstinence or avoidance, were allowed to enter the sacred place. This requirement expressed an understanding of sacred centrality that sacred space must be entered only by the ritually clean (Nthoi 1995: 167).

The Njelele sacred place is also visited in April for the harvest ceremony. During this ceremony, messengers and adepts accompanied by other villagers went to Njelele to make offerings to *Mwali* as thanksgiving for the past harvest. They carried with them small amounts of whatever food they produced in their fields. This entire foodstuff was collected and stored in a public granary at the sacred place for using during ceremonies at the sacred place. Part of the foodstuff was consumed during the harvest ceremony itself. People were not allowed to eat *zhizha* (fresh food/first fruits) from their fields before the fruits ceremony (*inxwala – Isindebele*).

The sacred place was normally opened for sweeping in August, and remained open until November. During this period elderly people consulted the oracle about problems of fertility, on behalf of their children. Youths were not allowed to visit any sacred place. The sacred place was also opened for the harvest ceremony in May. During all other times, it remained closed and no one consulted the oracle there. The Njelele sacred place was associated neither with healing nor *abantu ba madlozi* (*Sindebele*) “the people of the spirits”, i.e. any type of spirit mediums. Not even *wosana* were allowed to undergo their initiation at Njelele.

Today both young and old people visit the Njelele sacred place. Owing to the high demand of its diversified services throughout the year, the oracle now remains open all year round, and offers ritual services for healing and the alleviation of different types of afflictions. Most of the supplicants who visit the sacred place are spirit mediums, mainly women who consult the oracle on problems of fertility and health. Some are spirit mediums and healers who accompany their patients and novices as part of their initiation and healing. Male supplicants mainly consult the oracle to make requests about business and promotions at work; to solve problems of unemployment, their relations with colleagues at work, and lost livestock. They also

accompany their wives who come to consult the oracle on a variety of personal problems.

Controversy has grown about the way in which the sacred place at Njelele is currently being used. It is a debate, mainly between the sacred place keepers and "traditionalists". The traditionalists, who include chiefs and other village elders, insist that the sacred place should be closed after the rain ceremony, and that it should not be involved in healing. They are totally against the presence of other spirit mediums apart from the *wosana*. They believe that the presence of the "people with spirits" (*abantu ba madlozi*) is objectionable to the High-God.

On the other side are sacred place keepers and supplicants who believe that *Mwali* is associated with healing and ancestral spirits and who see nothing wrong with the present usage of the sacred place. Since they consider Njelele to be the major and most powerful sacred place, it is only reasonable and proper, they insist, that all serious problems should be brought here. The priest, who has very little control over the supplicants' use of the sacred place, finds himself caught up in this conflict. In practice, he accepts all supplicants and all their problems.

3.3.3 JOURNEY AND RECEPTION AT NJELELE

Pilgrimage to Njelele involves a journey from home to the sacred place in the Matopo Hills. The length and nature of the journey depends on the mode of travel chosen. There is no specified mode of transport recommended for all pilgrims. For the most part, the journey from home to Njelele does not involve any ritual activity. Of course, pilgrims know that they should abstain from sexual activity when they prepare to undertake pilgrimage to Njelele. In the past, pilgrims were required to spend a night at the priest's centre before approaching the sacred place to consult the oracle. This ensured that all supplicants were ritually clean when they eventually entered the sanctuary. While some

pilgrims prefer to walk the last kilometre of their journey to Njelele, others do not mind driving all the way into the priest's homestead. In fact, pilgrims do so many different things that it is impossible to characterise a single mode as the proper conduct for the journey to Njelele.

Pilgrims travel to the sacred place as individuals or in the company of friends and relatives and in small groups of people who know each other very closely. There is a general requirement that either their in-laws or husbands should accompany women supplicants when visiting Njelele. Spirit mediums are also expected to visit the sacred place in the company of close relatives or close associates. During possession, the spirit medium is believed to be unaware of what *izinyoka* say. Therefore, the person accompanying the spirit medium has the responsibility of listening carefully to the instructions of *izinyoka*, and later repeating them to the medium after the séance.

According to Nthoi (1995: 152), a group of four or five people carrying bags and knob-kerries and sometimes small drums under their armpits or on their heads, was a usual sight most afternoons at Dewe. Their last stop before arriving was at a local shop, two kilometres away and conveniently stocked with pilgrimage supplies. Here they bought snuff, tobacco and black cloths for offering when consulting the oracle, and, for consumption at the sacred place, drinks and food (Nthoi 1995: 152).

When about three hundred metres away from the homestead, most supplicants, particularly spirit mediums (*wosana*, *jukwa*, *mhondoro* and *sangoma*) normally pause, wrap themselves with distinctive cloths, indicating their possessing spirits, and take off their shoes, although some do so only upon reaching the gate. They sing, ululate, play drums and wield their ritual knob-kerries on their way into the homestead. All of this announces their arrival (Nthoi 1995: 152).

On hearing the drumming, singing and ululations, women (including other supplicants) in the homestead start running towards the entrance also ululating and shouting “Thobela”, “Shoko”, to meet the new arrivals. They are led to a reception hut, which is near the gate. On reaching the door of this hut, they all kneel, bow their heads and clap their hands, also chanting “*Thobela*”. They then crawl into the hut, where they are later served with refreshments (Nthoi 1995: 152).

Plate 5



Wosana group kneeling down in the same manner they would when crawling in the hut

Photographed by the author at the annual *Gumbu* Rain Praying Ceremony in Mapoka village September 1995

The wives of the religion’s priests play a very important role at the centre. Their responsibilities include receiving and playing hostesses to all supplicants who visit the sacred place. They also ensure that all

visitors are well catered for during the whole period of their stay at Njelele. The wives are also responsible for cleaning the hut, which is used as the sacred place. They are always present at the evening dances where they keep an eye on possessed spirit mediums. (See song *Uboni Njelele* 1.1.2 in video accompanying thesis.)

On most occasions, spirit mediums get possessed on entering the homestead. When this happens, the host is called to talk to the spirit that has just “arrived”. At this stage, the ancestral spirits normally have very little to say apart from greeting the priest and all those present, and express gratitude for the safe journey of the supplicants. Otherwise the sacred place keeper normally meets the supplicants (*ama Thobela*) after they have had their refreshments. This is an informal meeting to exchange greetings and find out how they travelled from home to the sacred place. The priest takes this opportunity to find out whether there are any supplicants who are visiting the sacred place for the first time. If so, as often is the case, they are told of the procedures followed for consulting the oracle in the early hours of the morning before dawn. In his discussion with the supplicants, he constantly refers to them as *amaThobela*, and they clap their hands and bow submissively throughout the discussion (Nthoi 1995: 156).

3.3.4 THE EVENING DANCES

In the early evening, at about seven o'clock, when supper is prepared by female supplicants, the men are summoned to the communal kitchen where it is served. Before they start eating, they all bow their heads and shout “Thobela” and the women ululate. In the communal kitchen, the men sit on one side of the hut (the North) while the women sit on the other (Southern side). This seating order is always maintained. After the meal, comes the usual ululating, clapping of hands and shouting of “Thobela” (Nthoi 1995: 156).

After supper, when the kitchen utensils have been washed and stored away, the supplicants start dancing in the communal kitchen. They

dance to *wosana*, *jukwa*, *mhondoro* and *sangoma* songs and drums, each with a distinctive choreography. Everyone is invited and local villagers occasionally come to join these nocturnal dances, during which several spirit mediums may get possessed. By putting participants in a mood of fervour and ecstasy, the dancing prepares the supplicants for the special communication in consulting the oracle early the following morning (Nthoi 1995: 156-7).

Many mediums can be possessed at once during these dances. Whenever a spirit medium is possessed, all singing and dancing stops. The medium becomes the centre of attention: the spirit, gracing this human gathering with its presence, is given audience and respect (Nthoi 1995: 157). When the spirit is ready to leave, it asks for water to drink, from the calabash, after which it washes its hands and faces, or spills it on the floor and drinks it like a wild animal. Others wash their hands and faces after drinking from the calabashes. Afterwards elders lead the medium out, holding onto their ritual knob-kerries, somewhat like a blind person, out of the hut. Outside, the medium falls on his/her back, signaling that the spirit is gone. Of course, variations on this description occur (Nthoi 1995: 158).

3.3.5 CONSULTING THE ORACLE

The climax of every pilgrimage is reached when the individual supplicant consults the oracle. In the early hours of the morning, around four o'clock, the priest wakes the supplicants up, wearing a black cloth and black headgear (*ndlukulu/tshala* – *Ndebele*) similar to that used by *sangoma* and ancient *Zulu* and *Ndebele* warriors.

The spirit mediums among them wear their distinctive cloths and headgear, and carry their knob-kerries to the hut used for consulting the Deity. They take along with them all the goods needed for the offerings to God Above. Usually included are a piece of black cloth and tobacco. Supplicants are not allowed to wear shoes, jewellery or carry

any money into the sacred place. No lighting is allowed in the hut, and all consultation must finish before the sun rises (Nthoi 1995: 158-60).

3.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the author discusses music activities shared by Botswana and Zimbabwe. *Bakalanga* music is practised in the North Eastern District of Botswana and the Bulilima-Mangwe District of Zimbabwe. The annual rain praying ceremonies that take place at the Njelele “headquarters” in Zimbabwe where *Mwali’s* voice is heard strengthens music activities of these two areas. This ceremony is held two times annually in the months of April and September. In addition, *Bakalanga* of Botswana have annual cultural festivals held on the 21st of May for cultural preservation.

Having had no opportunity of going to Njelele to find out about the music activities taking place there, the author of this document went to Tjehanga village. Similar activities take place at the Manyangwa sacred place in Tjehanga village. Interviews conducted at Tjehanga village revealed that *Bakalanga* music types practised in Zimbabwe are the same as those practised in Botswana. This information was obtained from the Tjehanga *Bakalanga* traditional singing group led by Ms. Sponono Tshuma.

Ms. Mavis Mlilo of Dingumuzi Primary School displayed her knowledge of the past existence of *bhoro* music, which is now obsolete in Zimbabwe, in Plumtree town. Ms. Sponono Tshuma also displayed her knowledge of *bhoro* music through dance. She acquired this knowledge from her country of birth, which is Botswana.

Bakalanga of Zimbabwe have another type of music called *Makwaya*. This type of music is different from the *Bakalanga* traditional music. Most of the *Makwaya* tunes were adopted from the Zimbabwe liberation struggle songs.

The author of this document also looked at the *Bakalanga* music activities taking place in Zimbabwe and Botswana. Zimbabwean Primary Schools have a provision for *Ikalanga* to be taught from grade one to three whereas Botswana has no such provision. When coming to *Bakalanga* music activities practising in schools, Botswana has more whereas Zimbabwe has only *Isindebele* activities.

This chapter finally examines the activities taking place at Njelele and how both *Bakalanga* of Botswana and Zimbabwe inculcate the music into them.

CHAPTER 4

BAKALANGA TRADITIONAL MUSIC INSTRUMENTS (ZWILIDZO)

Several types of traditional instruments are used in performing *Bakalanga* music. Among these are percussion, rattles, wind instruments and musical bows. Of these instrumental groups, some are still used by the *Bakalanga* and some are not.

4.1 MEMBRANOPHONES

According to Barker (1992:124), rhythms are beginning to appear in Western music, which are directly borrowed from Africa and have not been developed within Western culture. Like language, music can be enriched by borrowing from other cultures.

4.1.1 TRADITIONAL BAKALANGA DRUMS/MATUMBA

Drums are considered by many people to be the most representative African instruments. Drums have been known for thousands of years. References to them go back almost to the beginning of recorded history (Scholes 1989:120). Almost all African societies possess drums. With a few exceptions, the drum is the most popular instrument south of the Sahara (Kebede 1982:64). In Africa drums may be played singly, in pairs, in large ensembles or as part of an orchestra. Many drums can only be played on specific occasions such as at weddings, various religious rites, cultural festivals and rituals. After use they will be stored carefully away, often in a room or small houses that have been specially built for them. Others, as with many African musical instruments, are played purely for pleasure.

Despite the huge variety of drums available, each society tends to specialise in only a small number and the instruments that are used and their playing techniques differ from region to region. Drums come

in all shapes and sizes, but they all have one thing in common: a skin or membrane that is stretched tightly over some kind of hollow vessel. This is beaten with a stick, or with hands. The skin vibrates, and the hollow vessel beneath amplifies its vibrations.

Bakalanga traditional music uses a maximum of three drums. These drums have special *Ikalanga* names. The first and largest drum having the lowest pitch in the ensemble is called *tjamabhika* - literally meaning "what you have cooked". The second drum, medium in size and pitch among the three, is called *shangana ne shumba* - literally meaning "meeting with a lion". The third and smallest drum having the highest pitch is called *dukunu* - meaning "small one" or just "small". The names have no special significance and are only meant to differentiate the three drums.

Plate 6



Ramokgwebana *wosana* drum players from left to right: Basiti Lidzembo Playing small drum (*dukunu*), Nelly Timothy playing the large drum (*tjamabhika*), and Thenjiwe Ntogwa playing the medium drum (*shangana ne shumba*)

Photographed by Moleti Selete with the author on a field trip at the North East District Council Annual Cultural Festival held at Nlapkhwane village in May 2001

Nguni dancing often used the ox-hide shields of the warriors (*isihlangu Isindebele*) as drums, hitting them against the ground or striking them with knobkerries. Today the *Amandebele* resident in Matabeleland use some of the musical instruments of indigenous *Bakalanga* and *Tsonga* peoples. Some dances performed by *Amandebele* as well as *Bakalanga* people use an ensemble of three drums, small, medium and large in size (Jones 1992:149).

In *Bakalanga* culture, there are no specific drums for different ceremonies. For example, the same drum can be used for rainmaking and for weddings.

In the wooded Northeast District of Botswana lives Botswana's second largest tribe, the *Bakalanga*, who are locally famous for their drumming. It is very similar to the drumming of their cousins, the *Karanga* of Zimbabwe. Both of these tribes were historically part of the *Shona* kingdom, which was spread across Southern Africa in the days before European colonization (Waters 2000:32).

There are two distinct types of drums. The first has only one skin membrane and is open at the bottom (single membrane drum). This is the type used for *Bakalanga* traditional music. Skin membranes at both ends (double membrane drum) cover the second type. The skin may be attached by glueing, nailing with thorns (pegs) or nails or laced down with leather, gut or string thongs to a tension ring at the bottom or, in the case of a double membrane drum, to the skin at the opposite end.

Not all drums are beaten. There are also friction drums played by rubbing the drum-head, with a stick on which powder or wood ash has been sprinkled. When the stick is rubbed or pulled, the vibrations communicate with the skin and are in turn amplified by the vessel over which it is stretched. *Bakalanga* use this type of drumming in playing *woso*, *ndazula* and *mukomoto* music.

4.1.1.1 HOW TO MAKE A TRADITIONAL BAKALANGA DRUM

The traditional *Bakalanga* drum (*dumba*) has a wooden resonating shell about two centimetres in thickness. It is basically shaped on the pattern of a Greek vase with a wide upper opening narrowing towards the base, closed only at the upper end with a skin drum-head held in position by wooden pegs and thonging. During her research in the Northeast and Central districts of Botswana, Waters (2000:34) discovered a goblet-shaped drum at Tati Siding village and a barrel-shaped one with a small extension at the bottom that is open at Senete village constructed by Kaisara Gambo. Another *Bakalanga* music drum constructor (Mr. Mpakila Ndabambi-Ta Libala) can be found at Nlapkhwane village in the North Eastern District of Botswana.

While women are players of the *Bakalanga* traditional drum, it is the men who make it. The wood used is soft, preferably from *ngoma* (*schinziophyton rantanellii*), *nliidza dumba* (*erythrina abyssinica*) and *nthula* (*marula* – *sclerocarya caffra*) trees. This type of wood was used for making chairs (stools), weapons, plates and cups in previous eras. Wood from any of these trees is cut and left for a few days to half dry for easy carving. A section of a tree trunk is cut to a desired height and then hollowed out. The drum makers use wooden pegs, preferably from a *mopane* tree because it has hard wood. The skin placed over the upper end to form a drum-head is usually of ox-hide. Wild animal hides are sometimes used. Jones (1992:150) gives the information that zebra skin was once considered the very best in Zimbabwe. This fact was also supported by Van Waarden (1991:104) when she wrote that *Bakalanga* drum-heads were always made of zebra skin in the olden days. According to Waters (2000:35), the drum-head at Senete village in the Central District of Botswana was said to be made of cow or donkey hide. She also got the information that before the Botswana Government prohibited the killing of wild animals, antelope skins were also used.

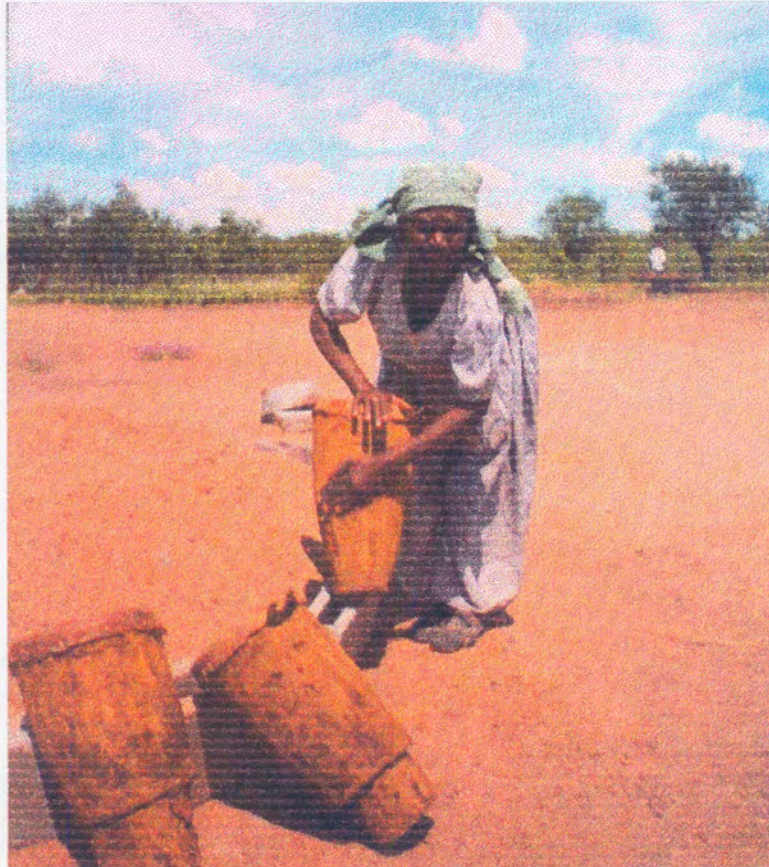
4.1.1.2 EQUIPMENT REQUIRED FOR MAKING A *BAKALANGA* TRADITIONAL DRUM

The following equipment is required for making a *Bakalanga* traditional drum:

- Adze (*mbezhwana*) (an axe-like tool with an arched blade, for trimming large pieces of wood), chisel and mallet, or heavy blade mounted on a long piece of wood
- Rasp (a coarse kind of file having separate teeth)
- Sandpaper
- Drill (*boro*) and large bit, or rod to burn holes
- Sharp knife
- Pencil.

The skin is drawn over the top of the drum while still wet, pegged into position and then strained taut by means of the heat of either the sun or a fire. When the drum yields the required tone, it will be delivered to the person for whom it has been made. As many craftsmen are now away doing some work for a living either in the villages or in towns, the art of drum-making seems to be very slow and almost dying out. The advantage *Bakalanga* have is that there are almost enough trees for the construction of their traditional drum. During his field research, the author of this document requested Mr. Ndabambi Mpakila, popularly known as Ta-Libala of Nlapkhwane village in North Eastern Botswana, to construct three drums for him. Ms. Elina Chabale is seen smearing cowdung on the wooden part of the drums with the belief that they could not crack or be destroyed by wood eating pests.

Plate 7



Ms. Elina Chabale treating new drums with cowdung

Photographed by the author at his home in Mabudzaani village in March 2002

When the cowdung is dry, a traditional grass broom is used to remove, through sweeping, the rough cowdung remains.

Plate 8



Ms. Elina Chabale (the author's mother's elder sister) clearing cowdung from the author's newly purchased drums

Photographed by the author at his home in Mabudzaani village in March 2002

4.1.1.3 METHOD OF PLAYING THE *BAKALANGA* DRUM

The players adopt an astride sitting position with the drums placed between and held by the legs, drum-head uppermost, usually beating them with the hands.

Plate 9



The researcher in the middle is seen drumming with Basetse on the left and Fikile on the right with the Jakalasi No. 2 Primary school *wosana* group

Photographed by Moleti Selete with the author on a field trip at Jakalasi No. 2 Primary school in May 2001

These players normally sit on traditionally carved stools. The pressure exerted by the fingers on the drum-head is altered, at will, to vary the tone quality (i.e. heavy or light) of the sounds produced. There are numerous drum-beats and those women (and even men) who are knowledgeable on the subject immediately recognise the beats associated with the various dances. It is seldom that fewer than two drums will be playing at the same time (the number is usually three), and their beats, each distinct from the other, fuse into a complex inter-rhythmic whole. It is so perfectly blended and dovetailed that it is often difficult to accurately ascertain, when listening, which beats belong to a particular drum.

When the drum-head becomes slack, due to moisture in the air, the drum cannot be played until the skin is dry, causing tightening and a return of the desired tone. The drum is held, with its head turned towards the heat (fire), given an occasional bang to see how the skin is progressing, and finally pronounced fit to play.

4.1.2 SPECIAL TYPE OF DRUM USED ON A SPECIFIC OCCASION (MANTSHOMANE TSONGA DRUM)

In addition to the *Bakalanga* drums described previously, there is one drum of distinctive character. It is used during the exorcising of evil spirits.

The *mantshomane* traditional music does not originate from the *Amandebele*, as most of the *Bakalanga* informants have indicated. It is a culture of the *Tsonga* people. According to Kirby (1968:16), the *Tsonga* have a drum of a very different nature, which is associated with chasing away of evil spirits, and is, moreover, characteristic of their race.

Bakalanga therefore play *mantshomane* music as an intrusive culture to them. In playing this music, certain aspects are omitted without proper knowledge and guidance. *Bakalanga* use their three different sized drums for *mantshomane* music when in actual fact they are also supposed to have *ntshomane* drums. These people's *mantshomane* music and dance is very close to *sangoma*. Some dancing groups sometimes confuse the two music types.

4.1.2.1 METHOD OF MAKING MANTSHOMANE DRUMS

The *mantshomane* is shaped like a European tambourine. The hoop is made from some pliable wood like *ntewa (grewia flava)*, bent into position while wet. The ends are skived away, lapped and joined by iron wire in a hoop. The shaping of this hoop is done with the usual African adze (*mbezswana*). The single head is usually of ox-hide, goat or buckskin with the hair removed, the outer side of the skin being uppermost. The pegs, varying in number with the specimens, are driven

through the hoop, holding the skin of the drum-head taut and firm. Thongs, made from the hide, secure the edges of the overlapping drumhead skin and meet like the spokes of a wheel in the centre.

The skin, too, is put on while wet and left to dry. The overlapping portions are cut into strips which are twisted into cords and laced over the under side to hold the head firmly in its place as well as to afford a grip for the hand. In addition to this, lacing pegs are driven through the skin into holes that have been made round the rim of the hoop. Should it become slack, in wet weather, it has to be heated to contract back to firmness and consequently produce the desired tone quality. The sizes vary considerably but are generally those of a dinner plate, larger and smaller specimens being found.

4.1.2.2 METHOD OF PLAYING *MANTSHOMANE* DRUMS

According to Huskisson (1958:16), the *mantshomane* drums are struck with either the palm or the fingers of the hand, or with a short stick not capable of breaking the drum-head. The players hold their instruments, according to whether they are left or right-handed. The right-handed player will hold his/her *mantshomane* by the thongs with the left hand and beat with the right, sometimes pressing the fingers of the left hand against the drum-head to alter the pitch slightly.

These *mantshomane* are to be seen and heard, at a 'dance of the possessed', the players squatting on their haunches, in a semi-circle, beating their instruments, in company with hand rattles and traditional drums.

4.2 IDIOPHONES

Rattles fall under musical instruments in which the source of sound is produced within itself (i.e. idiophones). They may be of indefinite or definite pitch (these may or may not be tuned to a chosen pitch), and may be classified as shaken, struck or rubbed.

Rattles are the most common and widely used rhythm instruments and vary considerably in form, size and the way they are played. *Bakalanga* music uses two types of rattles. These are leg rattles (*mishwayo*) and hand-held rattles (*woso*). Additionally, *Bakalanga* dancers sometimes use several sorts of both rattle types to bring out the rhythm of their steps.

4.2.1 LEG RATTLES (MISHWAYO)

Like many traditional African instruments, leg rattles are made entirely of natural materials.

The Northern highveld zone is predominantly covered in mopane tree savanna, while the area from Francistown southward is middleveld with mixed mopane acacia tree savanna (Van Waarden 1999:3). This is the vegetation on which caterpillars feed and the *Bakalanga* get the cocoons of these caterpillars within their vicinity to make leg rattles. These cocoons are collected from mopane tree branch stems using protective material, such as gloves, to prevent the cocoon collector from being injured by small brittle thorns protecting the cocoon cover. To remove these thorns, the cocoons are then put and shaken in a sack for some time. During this shaking, the friction between the cocoons removes all the thorns. One end of each cocoon is cut open to remove the pupa.

Each dried cocoon (*tjigogoro*) is filled with pebbles or small stones. A pair of cocoons is sewn to a long cord of plaited fibre or strung on strips of leather. A great number of them are threaded together and wound around the ankles of each performer and securely tied in position. Girls normally gather these cocoons and then women make the leg rattles.

Plate 10



Ramoja Secondary School *wosana* group putting on *Bakalanga* leg rattles

Photographed by Moleti Selete with the author on a field trip at Ramoja Secondary School in Ramokgwebana village in June 2001

Musicians wearing leg rattles dance with synchronized movements in a circle, repeating an embellishing rhythmic theme. They are free to improvise their dance steps, but they dance at the same tempo as the drums and hand-clappers.

4.2.2 A HAND HELD RATTLE (WOSO)

A hand-held rattle (*woso*) is made from small gourds *makavu* (squash) with naturally curved stems which are used as the handles. Some are traditionally made of a hollowed gourd or fruit shell with hard seeds or stones inside. The pulp (*malovu*) is removed and the hard seeds or pebbles placed inside. This is to create their characteristic sound (*tjaka-tjaka*) that serves for step-emphasis during intricate movements. Hollowed fruits mounted on sticks are also used. At each end of the

calabash is a circular hole, through which a stick is passed. This projects from the lower end and serves as a handle.

Rattles are never played alone, but always as an accompaniment to other instruments and singing. Their musical role within an ensemble will differ, according to the type of music or dance. In many traditional dances, each player has a rattle with which he or she sounds a basic rhythm while singing or dancing (Jones 1992:78).

Some musicians say that physical movement is important while playing. Frequently players, particularly the older musicians, tilt their heads slightly and nod them subtly up and down to the main beat of *woso* accompaniment. Others occasionally sway to the music. Moving one's body while playing *woso* is said to increase the player's interest in the music. How a musician expresses this movement, however, is a matter of personal style.

4.3 AEROPHONES

There are three types of wind instruments that are found amongst the *Bakalanga*. These are *nyele* (transverse reed-flute), *pemba* (river reed-flute) and *pemba* (referee's whistle).

4.3.1 NYELE (TRANSVERSE REED-FLUTE)

This flute, held transversely across the face in line with the mouth, consists of naturally stopped reed pipes with an embouchure hole through which the flute is blown at the one end, and three finger-holes, spaced to suit the player's fingers, at the other. The name given to this type of flute by the *Bakalanga* is *nyele*. The *Bakalanga* boys used to play these flutes whilst herding cattle.

Plate 11



A Shona boy playing his *nyere* (Shona) or *nyele* (Ikalanga)

(From: Tracey 1961: 52)

In the olden days, *nyele* used to be a common instrument, yet today they are hardly ever seen, let alone heard. Younger boys growing up seem to have no knowledge of what a *nyele* is or even how it looks.

4.3.1.1 HOW TO MAKE NYELE

These *nyele* transverse flutes are made from river reeds, which must be ripe before cutting. River reed forms a closed pipe, naturally stopped by a node at either end. Larger reeds are always chosen, as the players believe that they have a better and more satisfying tone quality than the thinner reeds. Other materials used by the *Bakalanga* in making *nyele* are an old bicycle pump, *nfute* (*dutura spp*) plant stem and *gonde* (*aloe marlothii*) plant stem. In cases where a plant does not have naturally

stopping nodes at the ends, a sticky substance is used to block these ends. *Bakalanga* use a sticky substance called *phola ye monga*. In the absence of this, other sticky substances such as bostik glue can also be used.

Near the one end, the *nyele* players bore the mouth (embouchure) hole and at the other end, spaced to suit the player's fingers, are three finger holes, all bored similarly by means of a red-hot piece of wire. The embouchure hole is larger than the finger holes. In making the pipe, the tone is tested in the 'open' position (i.e. without stopping any of the holes), with a stream of compressed air being directed from the player's lips against the edge of the mouth hole. The holes are made gradually larger, until the tone produced is in accordance with the taste and wishes of the maker. If, through an error of judgement, the holes have been accidentally made too large, and the tone goes "wrong", then the maker will throw away the pipe and start from scratch, using a new piece of reed.

As there is no set spacing for the finger holes or number bored and no specified or uniform thickness of reed chosen, there must be as many scales produced by these *nyele* flutes as there are flutes made.

4.3.1.2 HOW TO PLAY NYELE

The player holds the *nyele* horizontally, level with the mouth, with the finger holes facing towards the left or right shoulder, according to the player's preference. The one hand automatically supports the end with the embouchure hole, while the fingers not needed for stopping the finger holes steady the other end. It is usually the second, third and fourth fingers which are used for stopping, although this is a matter of flexibility.

According to Huskisson (1958), with her research experience among the *Pedi*, transverse flutes were formerly played in bands of six, whose

flutes were made as uniform as possible as regards thickness of reed and positioning of holes.

4.3.2 PEMBA

This instrument is made from three river reeds of different sizes. These river reeds are nicely cut so that they can fit into each other. The sticky substance called *phola ye monga* is used to block the ends of the reeds.

The instrument is laid on the hollowed tongue and blown. A blast of air strikes the open end at an angle, causing it to sound.

The shortage of reeds caused *Bakalanga* to make a departure from using a river reed to using the referee's whistle. *Bakalanga* call the referee's whistle *pemba*. The referee's whistle is used in some types of *Bakalanga* traditional music such as *mukomoto* and *iperu*. This whistle is blown rhythmically with the dancing by the lead singer. When blowing the referee's whistle, the dancer is normally expressing the climax of his/her dancing capacity.

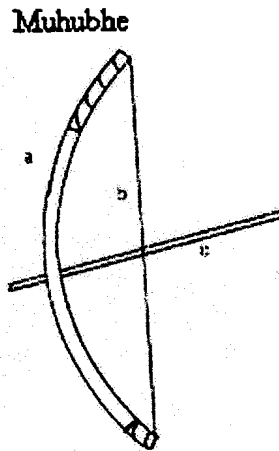
4.4 CHORDOPHONES

There are two musical bows found among the *Bakalanga* people. These are *muhubhe* and *dende*.

4.4.1 MUHUBHE

Muhubhe is one of the traditional *Bakalanga* musical bows. It is a mouth resonated friction bow.

Plate 12



(From: Dargie 1988: 47)

4.4.1.1 DESCRIPTION AND ORIGIN OF MUHUBHE

As with all other traditional African musical bows, it is not clear where *mhubhe* originated. What has been established is that *mhubhe* is found among the *Bakalanga* of Botswana and Zimbabwe, the *Xhosas* of South Africa and the *Amandebele* and *Shonas* of Zimbabwe.

4.4.1.2 HOW TO MAKE MUHUBHE

Mhubhe is one of the traditional *Bakalanga* musical bows. Elderly people who used to make and play it are able to provide all the information about *mhubhe*. *Mhubhe* is also found among the *Xhosa* people of South Africa and they call it *umrhubhe*. It is also found among the *Amandebele* of Zimbabwe who call it *umhubhe*.

Mhubhe is a mouth-resonated friction bow. The stick or bow (*dati*) is of flexible *ntewa* (*grewia flava*) wood or river reeds. These are bent whilst wet so as to dry with the desired bow shape. The string called *lutshinga gwe ngombe gwaka koshiwa* is of twisted sinew from the back of the ox. It is bowed with a twig.

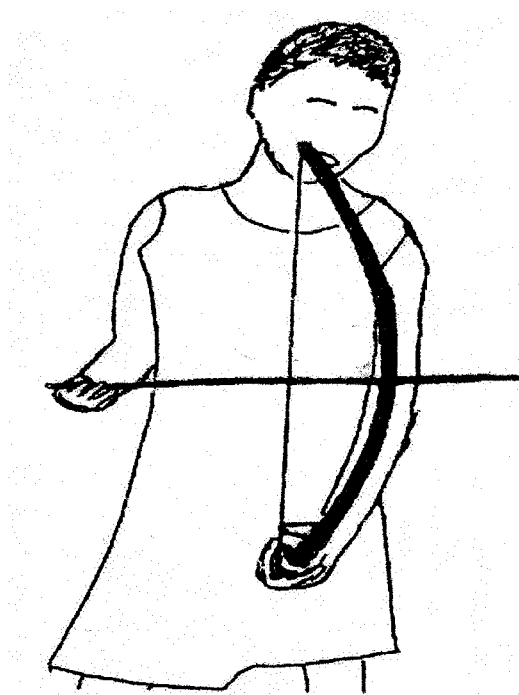
According to Dargie (1988:48), there is another method of constructing the *umrhubhe*, described by Kirby. In this form, a short bent stick is inserted into a hole in one end of a thicker, straight stick and the string

is attached from the end of the straight stick to the end of the bent stick. Both instruments produce musically identical results. Kirby regards this as “undoubtedly” the “earlier form” of the instrument.

4.4.1.3 HOW TO PLAY MUHUBHE

According to oral tradition, as also confirmed by Dargie (1988:53), one hand holds the bow at its further end, holding the near end against the side of the mouth. The string is stopped with either the thumb-nail or the middle finger of the hand holding the bow. The other hand holds the twig, bowing it against the string, usually passing over the string and under the bow stick. The player amplifies the melody overtones by shaping the mouth, the bow stick pressing firmly through the cheek against the teeth. In order to produce good tone, the player may scrape the bowing twig or rub it in the dust. See picture below.

Plate 13



The method of holding and playing the muhubhe

(From: Dargie 1988: 53)

The player may also whistle out of the side of the mouth, while continuing to bow the string. The technique then is to play the leader part using overtones, and play the follower parts using both overtones and whistling.

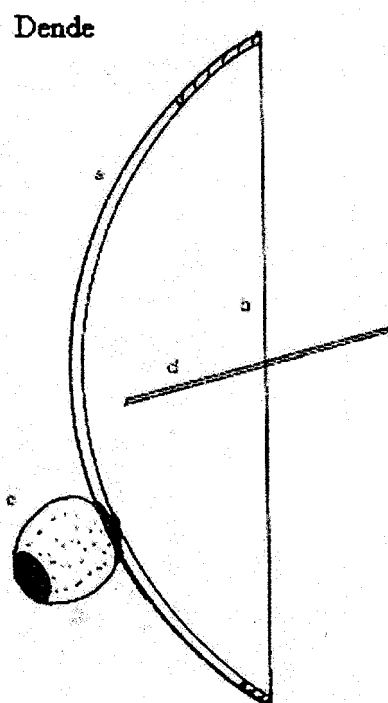
The *dende* player suppresses the unwanted upper overtones; the *muhubhe* player amplifies the selected overtone. Dargie goes on to say the *muhubhe* produces not only melody and fundamental tones, but in fact six tone chords may be heard almost constantly at times. Even when the *muhubhe* player changes mouth shape to whistle, the overtone chords are as a rule audible.

According to the information gathered from some *Bakalanga* informants, *muhubhe* was played by boys and men whilst herding cattle. Whereas in solo *dende* performance the player sings, the solo *muhubhe* performer does not sing, and does not break to sing. Like the *dende*, the *muhubhe* may be used to lead group singing, a good player producing a penetrating tone.

4.4.2 DENDE

Dende is another musical bow found among the *Bakalanga*. It is also found among the *Tswana* (*segwana*), *Tsonga* (*tshitendje* or *dende*), *Sotho* (*thomo*), *Swazi* (*ligubu*), *Zulu* (*ugubu*, *ugumbu*, *gubuolukhulu*, or *inkohlisa*) and the *Xhosa* (*uhadi*).

Plate 14



(From: Dargie 1988: 47)

4.4.2.1 DESCRIPTION AND ORIGIN OF *DENDE*

Some *Bakalanga* informants believe that *dende* came to them with the people called *Badeti*. These people are presently found in the *Chobe* and *Boteti* Districts of Botswana. The *Badeti* are believed to be of one *Ikalanga* dialect known as *Banambdzwa* originating from *Hwange* in Zimbabwe. *Dende* is one of those *Bakalanga* traditional instruments that are no longer available. Despite this fact, elderly people still have a lot of information to offer about the construction and use of *dende*.

Kirby (1968:193) believes that these stringed instruments would appear to have originated, directly or indirectly, from the bow of the hunter. According to Kirby, this practice has been observed among the Kalahari Bushmen. A hunter, after having made a kill, would, to pass the time while waiting for his companions to come up to him, lightly tap his bow-string with an arrow. Rycroft in Papers presented at the Second Symposium on Ethnomusicology (1981:70) argues that a note of

caution is needed regarding Kirby's consequent assumption that all types of musical bow found in Southern Africa must therefore have evolved from this source. One should note that, apart from the San, many of the other peoples in this area play bows which bear little or no resemblance to a shooting bow, and furthermore have no history of ever using bows and arrows for hunting.

The *Tswana* term, *segwana*, means a calabash, and so also does the word used by the *Sotho* of the Transvaal, *sekgapa*. The term used by the *Sotho* of Lesotho, *thomo*, suggests the Bushman *tomo*, which means, among the Tati Bushmen, the voice. The *Swazi* and some of the *Zulu* names enshrine the root *gubo* which conveys the idea of hollowness, the *Zulu* word *isigubu*, previously noted as the name of a drum, being actually the word for a calabash used in drinking beer. Though the *Xhosa* also used the word *igubu* for the calabash resonator, the instrument itself is called *uhadi*, with which may be compared with *umhadi*, a deep pit.

The *dende* is a much larger bow, calabash-resonated, stick-struck, and has its cord divided unequally so as to produce two tones a minor third apart. The performer may vary tone quality by raising and lowering the calabash opening against his/her chest, all the while singing and dancing to his/her own accompaniment. There is yet another *Bakalanga* instrument called *itinkani*, similar to *dende*, but without a resonator.

4.4.2.2 HOW TO MAKE DENDE

The *Bakalanga dende* is made from a branch of flexible wood such as *ntewa* (*grewia flava salix* species) or other suitable wood. The string *lutshinga gwe ngombe gwaka koshiwa* is of twisted sinew from the back of the ox. Other suggested materials for making *dende* are twisted strands of hair from a cow's tail or even brass wire. Honey or saliva is used to lubricate the string. The open calabash is secured to the bow by a piece of sinew which is looped round a small piece of twig, passed

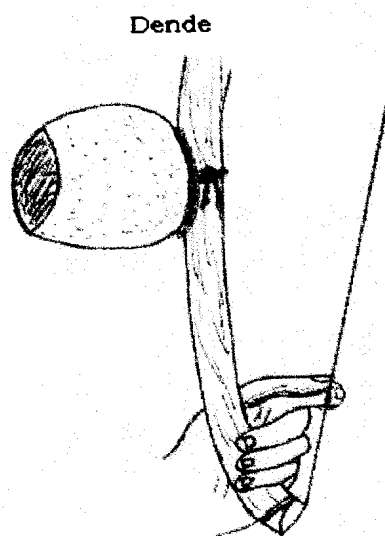
through a tiny hole in the closed end of the calabash, and tied round the wood of the bow. Between the bow and calabash is a small circular insulating pad like a quoit (a ring thrown at a mark to encircle a peg), woven from tender twigs. Other insulating materials suggested are a pad of bark, grass, coarse cloth, or similar materials.

Bakalanga had an earlier form of *dende* which they called *itinkani*. This is merely a bow of wood with a string of sinew but without a resonator. It is held to the shoulder exactly as the *dende* is held. It is played only by the young boys, requiring little skill, and is regarded more as a toy than as a real musical instrument.

4.4.2.3 HOW TO PLAY DENDE

The instrument is held upright with the opening of the resonator close to the left breast. The second, third, and fourth fingers of the left hand grasp the lower end of the bow in such a manner as to leave the first finger and thumb free to pinch the string, and so raise its pitch. The string is struck near the lower end of the bow with a thin twig, grass or reed held in the right hand. The action of striking is staccato, for good tone depends upon the reed quitting the string with the utmost rapidity.

Plate 15



(From: Dargie 1988: 52)

Dende is always used singly, as an accompaniment to the voice, and it is played by males only, either men or boys of about sixteen years of age or over. It is made by the player himself, who learns how to do so and also how to play it from the older men. The *Bakalanga* recognise that, in playing *dende*, different players may produce different results from the same instrument. This actually means that different “touches” give different tones. Tightening or loosening can vary the pitch of the string. It is adjusted to suit the voice of the performer, as this is a typical instrument of accompaniment.

4.5 SUMMARY

The focus of this chapter is on the *Bakalanga* music instruments. There are three types of music instruments used by *Bakalanga*.

These are:

Percussion instruments under which there are traditional *Bakalanga* drums (*matumba*), hand rattles (*woso*) and leg rattles (*mishwayo*).

The second type of music instruments found among the *Bakalanga* is wind instruments comprising:

Nyele (transverse flute), *pemba* (river reed-flute) and the referee’s whistle (*pemba*).

The third type of music instruments found amongst the *Bakalanga* is the *Bakalanga* traditional musical bows. These are:

Muhubhe and *dende*.

Bakalanga music instruments are used as accompaniments to the singing and dancing.

CHAPTER 5

THE *MWALI* CONCEPT IN RELATION TO *WOSANA* AND THE RAIN PRAYING ACTIVITIES

African culture reflects traditional religions in ancient folklore, dances, art, and other cultural expressions, which show a rich background in religious beliefs. These indigenous religions do not conduct regular services nor construct special buildings as other religions do, but they express their beliefs in ceremonies, traditions, legends and art forms. They do not send missionaries nor make proselytes. Their strength lies in being fully integrated in all areas of life. Each Bantu language expresses definite concepts of God, understood for centuries (Rader 1991: 25).

For generations the African people have believed in some form of higher being. All African people believe in God. It is the centre of African religion and dominates all its other beliefs. While it is not known how this belief came into existence, it is unquestionably ancient. Many African people call upon the Supreme Being in times of sickness or crisis (Rader 1991: 24). In the case of *Bakalanga*, their Supreme Being is *Mwali* who is known as *Mlimo* among the *Amandebele*. *Mlimo* is accepted as existing at Njelele Hill in the Matopos many years before Mzilikazi arrived in the country. One never saw *Mlimo*, for, he would not allow himself to be seen, but tobacco and beer were permitted to be placed at the foot of the hill, from where they disappeared during the night (Gelfand 1962: 142).

5.1 THE *MWALI* RELIGION

This chapter is largely a review of the literature on the *Mwali* religion. It provides background information, largely on the organisation of the *Mwali* religion, which is needed for an understanding of *wosana* music

and its activities. It also highlights some of the long-standing debates in the literature, about the nature and organisation of the religion.

The evidence found suggests that the *Bakalanga* of Northern Botswana did not establish any permanent sacred place before the break down of the *Ndebele* hegemony. It can then safely be suggested that the establishment of permanent sacred places in Botswana dates from 1896. Before this date, the Mangwe sacred place seems to have controlled all the other *wosana* in the area south-west and west of the Gwai river but north of the Shashe river.

5.1.1 TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE OF MWALI

As one commentator on African concepts of god suggests, God is far (transcendent) and men cannot reach him; but god is also near (imminent), and he comes close to men” (Latham 1986: 85).

In the literature by recent scholars, no less than by early travelers, the Supreme Deity emerges as *Mwali/Mwari/Ngwali/Nwali/Muali/Mulimo* or *Mlimo*. But the nature of the interaction between people, having different cultures or origins, remains largely unexamined.

In his doctoral thesis, Nthoi (1995:38) observed that various sources represent *Mwali*, as the creator or originator of the universe and all its creatures (Werbner 1989:247; Ranger 1967:21). He is believed to be concerned with peace, the fertility of the land and its people. As the giver of rain (Nobbs 1924:55 cited by Ranger 1967:22), *Mwali* is referred to as *Dzivaguru* (*Shona*) “the great pool” (see Daneel 1970:16) and *dziba le vula* (*Kalanga*) “a pool of water” (fountain or source of rain/water). From this concept, it can be concluded that the following *wosana* song was composed in connection with this concept:

SONG TITLE: DZIBA LE VULA

Call: *Eliya dziba le vula* - there is a pool of water/rain

Response: *Woya eliya dziba le vula wole* – *Woya* that's a pool of rain *wole*

Call: *Ka Ntogwa dziba le vula* - At Ntogwa's place there is a pool of water/rain

Response: *Woya ka Ntogwa dziba le vula wole* – *Woya* at Ntogwa's place there is a pool of water/rain *wole*

Call: *Tol'bona dziba le vula* - We see a pool of water/rain

Response: *Woya tol'bona dziba le vula wole* – *Woya* we see a pool of water/rain *wole*. (*Woya* and *wole* have no English equivalent translations. The effect of these words would be cheering expressing happiness).

Mwali has been understood by many writers and scholars as more especially the God of the seasons and crops, who was propitiated by offerings of cattle, traditional beer and other products and food (Ranger 1967:22). *Mwari* is the spiritual owner of the earth and creator of mankind; he intervenes actively in human affairs and has an established and powerful human priesthood. He punishes acts, such as incest, which are considered contrary to nature and the perpetuation of the tribe, with pestilence and famine. He manifests his power in such great natural phenomena as volcanic eruptions and lightning. *Mwari* was probably of *Kalanga* origin, but the religion spread to other *Shona* and to the *Ndebele* (Kuper 1954: 32).

Mwali was believed to be a spirit who is “invisible to the human eye, who sometimes elected to speak from trees (preferably hollowed baobab), stones and caves”. Fry (1976:19) argues that *Mwali* is far removed from the day to day life of the people, and that among the *ZeZuru* of Chiota, his supremacy is more theoretical than practical. Therefore, *Mwali* is believed to be both transcendent and immanent (Werbner 1989:248; Ranger 1967:21). While *Mwali* is ever present in his creation, he is also a God above; only accessible through the mediation

of senior spirit mediums and religion's priests (Daneel 1970:17). His priesthood is composed of men and women believed to be emanations of his spirit, who act as his mouthpiece. These "children of *Mwari*" live in the Matopos hills in the heart of Matabeleland and their oracular voices emerge from the caves. Male and female priests have women consecrated to them normally as wives of *Mwari*, and they are subject to various religion's regulations (Kuper 1954: 320). Nobbs (1924:57) argues that *Mwali* is worshipped under various names, and that in fact there is a mystical trinity.

Although *Mwali* is known to be a benevolent provider and sustainer of life in the universe, he is an ambivalent God, capable of showing both great kindness, and anger when offended. He is, therefore, both feared and respected. To the *Bakalanga*, the concept of *Mwali* is no different from the Christian concept of God beyond the politics of race, intelligence, culture and religion. This Deity is believed to have three manifestations. The male manifestation of *Mwali*, *Shologulu (Kalanga)* "the big-headed one", is believed to be associated with the creation of the universe. He is the powerful and transcendent manifestation, who is feared and respected. He manifests himself through natural phenomena like thunderclap and meteorite. When a thunderstorm passes, *Kalanga* women normally crepitate/ululate, and men appeal to *Mwali*, and ask him to restrain his anger, and mind the children. A thunderstorm is believed to be a manifestation of *Mwali*, moving across the land. The power of the thunderstorm is symptomatic of *Mwali's* power.

Banyantjaba (Kalanga) "the woman who defecates the nation" which is a metaphor for mother of tribes/nations, or in Werbner's terms, "the mistress of tribes" (Werbner 1989:248), is the female manifestation of *Mwali*, associated with the sustenance of the universe. She is the goddess of fecundity, responsible for providing rain and sustenance of the universe, its creatures and the general welfare of the people.

The third manifestation is *Lunji (Kalanga)*, “The Big Needle”, the Son of the High-God, who, as the shooting star, runs errands between *Shologulu* and *Byantjaba*. When *Kalanga* women see the shooting star they crepitate/ululate, bow their heads in respect and either offer a short prayer to *Mwali*, or call out one of his numerous praise names. It should be noted that *Kalanga* bury a corpse with its orientation in accord with The Trinity: its face towards the South, its head to the East, and feet to the West, along the sun’s path (Werbner 1977a: 190).

5.1.2 *HWI (THE VOICE): ORACULAR CENTRES*

While there is general belief in the transcendence of *Mwali*, the *Mwali* religion is founded on the belief that there are certain places, normally at caves in mountains, and at any other place of his choice, where *Mwali* has chosen to avail himself and speak to his people (Werbner 1989:248). The people consider such places sacred because of the manifestation of the Deity there.

An almost similar view emerges from Daneel’s work (1970). His concept of a *mbonga* is a very interesting one. The youth is “dedicated” to the service of *Mwali* on the basis of the parent having had an “inspiration” from *Mwari* himself. Through this dedication, the youth becomes the “child of *Mwari*”. A *mhandara* – *Shona*; *phandala* – *Kalanga* (girl of marriageable age) becomes the “wife of *Mwari*”; as an adult, and after receiving training at the *Mwali* religion’s sacred place, the *mbonga* becomes the medium (*svikiro*) of a senior tribal spirit of her home District, or of one of the numerous Matonjeni *midzimu*. During performance at rain ceremonies, the *mbonga* “become possessed and speak on behalf of the group’s *mhondoro* or lesser ancestral spirits (*midzimu*)” (Daneel 1970: 49–50). Later on, after reaching the postmenopausal stage, the *mbonga* (if married to the high priest) becomes the “voice of *Mwali*”.

In the past, *Mwali*’s voice was the most important manifestation associated with pilgrimage to major religious centres. Consulting the

oracle at these centres was the only way in which supplicants had direct communication with the High-God. The religion's officials only visited such places and supplicants who seek contact with the sacred soil or wish to consult the oracle itself. At these places, the terms *Hwi (Ikalanga)* or *Ilizwi (Isindebele)* "voice" and *Mwali* or *Mlimo* are used interchangeably. The sacred places are not used for any other purposes than for religious rituals.

Among the *Bakalanga*, there is a concept of spirit possession, in which the ancestral spirits come to inhere in an individual, who becomes a medium and their mouthpiece. Apart from belief in the High-God, there is belief in the existence of lesser divinities, mainly territorial and ancestral spirits, on whom man relies for his daily existence. These divinities are believed to care for and provide for the needs of their descendents very much like they did when they were still alive. Consequently, they are accorded great respect and love.

5.1.3 THE MWALI RELIGION/CONCEPT

According to *Kalanga* tradition, following human movement, the oracle of *Mwali* came from: 1) Lutombo lutema to 2) Bambudzi, 3) Zhomba, 4) Chizeze, 5) Mavula Majena, 6) Njelele, 7) Dula, 8) Manyangwa, 9) Njenjema, 10) Ntogwa (Werbner 1977a: 184).

The *Mwali* religion is a non-textual traditional religion, which in Werbner's terms, is a regional religion of the middle range; one which is never global and is more limited than a world religion even in its most limited form (Werbner 1977a:IX; 1989:247). The religion's domain extends across international boundaries from Zimbabwe into Botswana, the Republic of South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and possibly into Tanzania. Consequently, its domain encompasses people of different nationalities and tribal identities. Some tribal groups such as the *Venda* (Cobbing 1976:247; Werbner 1989:282), *Kalanga* (Hole 1929:67; Ralushai 1994:20), *Shona*, *Karanga* and *Rozvi* (Daneel 1970:15), claim special privileges and religion's offices on the basis of ancient history

and long association with the religion. Others such as the *Khurutshe*, *Ndau*, and *Ndebele* are newcomers, but at least one of these, the *Ndebele* (in the narrow sense of the term), claim a distinct leadership role in wartime.

Werbner's idea of describing *Mwali* as a non-textual traditional religion is negated by Phambuka in Mpaphadzi through the following quotation:

Mr. Moilwa Phambuka (80), one time advisor to the former sect's priest, Vumbu Ntogwa, says *Mwali* is the same as God to the Christian, and Allah to the Moslems. The only difference, he added, is that *Mwali* is worshipped in the African context (Mpaphadzi 1995: 13).

The "headquarters" of the religion are in the Matopo Hills and Matobo District of the Matabeleland South Province (Zimbabwe). The following description of the Matopo hills by Hole would give the reader a picture of the hills, bearing in mind the issue of *Mwali's* residence. The Matopo hills stretch for fifty miles (about eighty kilometres) from east to west like a vast jagged scar across the face of the country. No pen-picture can do justice to the riotous grandeur of this extraordinary range, which nature has constructed in one of its most freakish moods.

Huge boulders are balanced in grotesque positions which seem to defy the laws of gravity; grey domes and peaks emerge naked out of a disorder of granite and tangled vegetation through which trickle streams, rising from nowhere and losing themselves in treacherous swamps. On every side are dark and forbidding caverns, half-hidden by the growth of centuries-strumous boabab trees and prickly cactuses with roots straggling down the walls of granite like gouty fingers clutching for support. The whole effect is of some monstrous rock-garden, built by a forgotten race of giants, whose faces and forms seem to be reproduced in colossal outline in the surrounding cliffs, as though they were still there brooding over their handiwork (Hole 1929: 65–66).

The Njelele hill lies between the villages of Dewe and Halale, about eighty kilometres south of Bulawayo, the Provincial City of Matabeleland South, and forty kilometres north of Kezi, the administrative centre of the Matobo District. The accepted centre of

Mwari worship is the Matopos. This does not distract from the general access to or presence of *Mwari* throughout the plateau. *Mwari* is appealed to as the ultimate authority, a being supreme over all the spirit world, whose influence is manifested in all things, but who is more concerned with national matters than the problems of individuals (Latham 1986: 92).

The *Mwali* religion has a diverse staff. Among the religion's officials are: priests, who are chosen from specific lineages of a particular tribal group (especially *Kalanga* and *Venda*); adepts and other lesser religion's officials who may be chosen from any tribal group. The religion's organisation is relatively independent of any political system (Werbner 1977a). There is someone who, covertly, acts as the medium (voice) of *Mwari*. This person is usually a woman (Latham 1986: 95). Werbner (1977a; 1989) also stated that the religion's organisation is hierarchical, so that seniority of religious centres and regions declines as one moves away from the centre. In each region there are numerous sacred places of varying sizes. Each region also has an oracle where *Mwali* can be talked to directly, and where his voice can be heard (Nthoi 1995:1). Around these centres flow the movement of people, goods and services, directed, within a recognisable catchment area, to and from one or more hinterland peripheries. This movement or traffic is itself based on, and controlled by, the people's conceptualisation of sacred centrality (Nthoi 1995:4). The major sacred places are at Njelele, Dula (*lembu libomvu/hloka li bomvu*), Zhilo in Tjokodo, Bembe Ntaba-Zika-Mambo, Pupu and Manyangwa in Tjehanga village near Plumtree (in Bulilima-Mangwe District) in Zimbabwe. In Botswana the major sacred place is Tebgwe, popularly known as *ka Ntogwa* near Ramokgwebana village in the North Eastern District.

Although reports and comments about the constant traffic between villages and the central sacred place at Njelele are abundant in the literature on the *Mwali* religion, no musical study has ever been carried out in this religion. However, researchers who have had an opportunity

to stay for some years at Njelele, such as Nthoi in 1995, have made some comments in passing on the musical activities taking place there.

5.1.4 ORIGIN OF THE RELIGION

A substantial part of the literature of the religion is devoted to the question of origins. In part this is because the claim to be a part of the past of the religion is indeed a contested reality of the present day religion. It is also a basis for claim for one's further involvement in the religion's affairs restricted to the original group. The cultural debate about origins is linked to the changing tribal composition of the religion and the differential contribution of tribal groups to religious change. Different writers (as cited by Nthoi 1995:63) have attributed the roots of the religion to either *Rozwi/Shona*, *Venda*, or *Kalanga* origin.

While it may be possible to attribute the origin of the *Mwali* religion to one tribal group or the other, the usefulness of such an endeavour is very limited, because of the linkages and inter-connections, not only of the tribal groups themselves, but also of the various traditional religions historically associated with the individual groups.

Nthoi (1995:64) has argued that an analysis of succession disputes at Njelele reveals the holding of the priesthood of the centre by priests of different tribal identities. Consequently, it is not possible to convincingly attribute the origin of the religion to a particular tribal group from among a number of other tribal groups, which are known to have a long history of association with the religion. Secondly, is the difficulty of accurately differentiating the various tribal groups, which are known to have had a long-standing association with the *Mwali* religion. The on-going process of re-creation of tribalism renders useless any such attempts to establish the origin of the religion.

5.1.5 KALANGA ORIGIN

Available sources agree that the origin of *Mwali* is *Kalanga* in Southern Zimbabwe. At the time of *Nguni* invasion, the worship of

Mwali was already in practice among the *Makalanga*. Hole (1929: 43-45) also argues that the *Mwali* religion was associated with the *Bakalanga*, and was already in existence when the *Amandebele* first arrived in what later became Southern Rhodesia. The *Kalanga* tribes had been worshipping *Mwali* "from time immemorial" (Nthoi 1995: 67). Nobbs (1924) expressed the same sentiments as Thomas and Hole by saying that, although the word *Mlimo* is the *Matabele* form of the *Sesotho Morimo*, signifying a spirit, the *Mlimo* (*Mwali* or *Ngwali*) religion is not of *Ndebele* origin. The term was applied to the Deity known to the original inhabitants as *Ngwali* (*Mwali*), who was the Supreme Deity of the *Bakalanga*. Though new to the *Matabele*, *Mwali* was the ancient God of the *Makalaka*, whose personal presence was manifested by his voice which was made to emanate from caves, rocks, trees (preferably large hollowed baobabs), or even the bowels of the earth. The belief in *Mwali* (*Mlimo*) was widespread and long standing. Historic reference to the worship of *Mwali* dates back to 1500 (Nobbs 1924:54-57).

Ralushai (1994: 11), a scholar of *Venda* history in South Africa, also attributes the origin of the *Mwali* religion to the *Bakalanga* of Southern Zimbabwe. This is despite the fact that the *Venda* of the Limpopo Province have a long history of association with the religion of *Mwali*. *Venda* rulers like Modjadje and Luvhimbi established contact with *Mwali* by sending their messages to the *Mabvumela* sacred place in Matopo Hills. According to one of my *Venda* informants, Thelma Marole, Modjadji died at the beginning of the year 2001 so her people are still in the interregnum period. *Mwali* is also believed to have visited the Tshivhadinda cave in Venda, from Malungudzi in Southern Zimbabwe (Nthoi 1995:19).

5.1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE RELIGION

The religion's organisation is hierarchical, so that the formal or official seniority of the religious centres and regions declines as one moves away from Njelele, the "headquarters" of the religion in the Matopo hills of Southern Zimbabwe (Werbner 1977a:180-181). There is a fairly strict

and well defined hierarchy and line of communication from the periphery to the centre, i.e. from Ntogwa (in Botswana) to Manyangwa through Dula to Njelele (in Zimbabwe). *Wosana* and priests observed this line of communication (Werbner 1989: 286-7), although individual pilgrims visit a sacred place of their own choice.

Although the departure of the voice does not affect the sacredness of the centre, it does, however, affect the virtual services rendered by the centre, and accordingly, its ranking. Above all, the presence of the voice at two or three “junior” centres within the Matopo District; and at Manyangwa and Tebgwe sacred places in Western Zimbabwe and North Eastern Botswana, makes the current hierarchic ranking of such centres problematic, at least, on the basis of the central place theory only. This is because the central place theory is a model for explaining the relationship between the periphery and the centre.

This means that the existing order of movement from one centre to another, observed by religious adepts, messengers, and priests themselves, may differ from that used by individual supplicants on the basis of their personal preferences (Werbner 1977a: 180; 1989: 279). The model of the ordering of sacred centres arrived at through the use of the central place theory is turned on its head by the impermanence of the voice at major religious centres, a fact that constantly necessitates re-ordering (Nthoi 1995:81).

While this hierarchy and line of communication may be observed by a fraction of religion’s participants, especially officials such as priests, and messengers, it is no longer accepted, if it ever was, by a majority of pilgrims who frequent sacred places in Zimbabwe. This basically stems from the nature of the religion, which Werbner himself correctly spells out. The very fact that the religion encompasses a variety of tribal groups, and its centres draw a clientele from a wide hinterland—a clientele that holds different conceptions of sacred centrality—means that such an organisational conception is contested. Any attempt to

rank sacred places by pilgrims is futile. Since pilgrims hold divergent views on all these issues, the ranking of pilgrimage centres by pilgrims is a daunting task. What Werbner presents, as the model of the *Mwali* religion, is only one of the numerous possible conceptions of the ranking of sacred places (Nthoi 1995: 81-83).

As part of an on-going struggle for power and control, priests at various sacred places also rank religious places differently. Seldom can any priest be found who does not claim the primacy of his own sacred place over others. Historical narratives and claims of possession of some mystical powers by the religion's priest are often basis for the priest's claims of primacy of his particular sacred place.

Although the Njelele sacred place remains the most important sacred place in the religious domain, there is no conception among either the pilgrims or the religion's leadership of a hierarchic religion's organisation. Religious centres are viewed by many people as being owned and run by particular families, and as operating fairly independently of each other. For example, the old sacred place at Dula is commonly referred to as *Ko Maswabi*, "at the Maswabis" (the Maswabi's sacred place which has been run by the Maswabi family since its inception); *Ko Manyangwa* (Manyangwa's sacred place); *Ka Ntogwa* (Ntogwa's sacred place). "*Ko*" is an *Isindebele* word for "at" and "*ka*" is an *Ikalanga* word for "at". There is no meeting of priests at which general policy is discussed. Pilgrims rank sacred places differently, so that no universally acceptable priority order emerges.

Most people in Zimbabwe, including the priests, still see Njelele as belonging to Zimbabweans, although other people are free to consult the oracle there. This is indicated, for example, in the manner in which the priest to the sacred place is appointed. There are numerous other such examples, which show that to a large extent, some major sacred places in Zimbabwe are viewed as belonging to small communities

around them, and in some cases as belonging to the “nation” (Nthoi 1995: 89).

Among the religion’s officials are the *umkhwezi* (priest) and *umthanyeli* (keeper or caretaker). Holders of these two offices are chosen from specific priestly houses of a particular tribal group (*Bakalanga* and *BaVenda*). Other religion’s officials are; *umphathi we nkezo* (messengers) *wosana* (adepts) and *umlisa* (keeper of the sacred cattle/herd, in the singular form). In ancient times, it is said that Mzilikazi and Mambo donated twenty herd of cattle annually for the rain ceremony. The religion always had a standing herd of cattle, which were left in the custody of *abalisa* – plural for *umlisa*. The herd represented a communal aspect of the sacred place. Pilgrims and other people in the vicinity of the sacred place for both the annual rain and harvest ceremonies donated some of these cattle, goats and sheep (Nthoi 1995: 148).

In each region there are numerous sacred places of varying sizes. Each region has an oracle where *Mwali* can be talked to directly, and where his voice can be heard. Both individuals and congregational supplicants throughout the year visit these sacred places. Individual supplicants visit any sacred place of their choice, both within and beyond their regions.

5.1.7 USE OF THE NJELELE SACRED PLACE IN THE PAST

In the legendary or long remembered past the Njelele sacred place is said to have been mainly concerned with rain. It was therefore visited by *abaphathi be nkezo* (*Isindebele*) messengers and *wosana* (*Ikalanga*) adepts who came twice a year. In *Isindebele* the word *nkezo* means a water calabash. So the messengers are “the holders of the water calabashes”, and it was their duty mainly to ask for rain from *Mwali* who is referred to as *dziba le vula* (*Ikalanga*), “the pool of water/rain”. There is a fountain or pool on top of the Njelele hill itself, from which the priest was expected to draw water, which he later would pass on to

messengers at the rain ceremony normally held in September. The messengers, who were essentially representatives of different local communities, neighbourhoods or chiefdoms, came from all over the religion's domain to ask for rain. They also consulted the oracle in connection with natural calamities like drought and pestilence.

Wosana from all over the religion's domain also visited the sacred place, particularly during the rain ceremony in September. They often, but not always, accompanied religious messengers to the religious centre to ask for rain from *Mwali* (Werbner 1989: 255). *Wosana* are dedicated to *Mwali*. Amongst the *Kalanga*, they are also referred to as *bathumbi be vula*, "rain seekers". They dance for rain both at minor regional centres and at the Njelele sacred place in September. During this public ceremony, only the messengers, the adepts and elderly people (past childbearing age), who were expected to observe a state of sexual abstinence or avoidance, were allowed to enter the sacred place. This requirement expressed an understanding of sacred centrality that sacred space must be entered only by the ritually clean (Nthoi 1995: 167).

The Njelele sacred place was also visited in early April for the harvest ceremony. During this ceremony, messengers and adepts accompanied by other villagers went to Njelele to make offerings to *Mwali* as thanksgiving for the past harvest. They carried with them small amounts of whatever food they produced in their fields. This entire foodstuff was collected and stored in a public granary at the sacred place for use during ceremonies at the sacred place. Part of the foodstuff was consumed during the harvest ceremony itself. People were not allowed to eat *zhizha* (fresh food/first fruits) from their fields before the first fruits ceremony (*inxwala* – *Isindebele*).

The sacred place was normally opened for sweeping in August, and remained open until November. During this period elderly people consulted the oracle about problems of fertility, on behalf of their

children. Youths were not allowed to visit any sacred place. The sacred place was also opened for the harvest ceremony in April. During all other times, it remained closed and no one consulted the oracle there. The Njelele sacred place was associated neither with healing nor with *abantu ba madlozi (Isindebele)*, “the people of the ancestral spirits” - any type of spirit mediums. Not even *wosana* were allowed to undergo their initiation at Njelele.

What is prohibited at Njelele could be done at other lesser sacred places, particularly at Dula. Personal problems like afflictions and misfortunes, and other national problems were reported by individuals and religious messengers at Dula. The sacred place at Dula was associated with healing, and all *shave/shavi* spirits (these are alien spirits associated with activities such as healing, hunting and dancing). It was to Dula rather than Njelele that *n’ganga* and other traditional spirit mediums went. Daneel (1971:83) reports that religion’s messengers brought all issues of national importance, including tribal and village political issues, to the attention of the sacred place at Wirirani.

5.1.8 CURRENT USE OF THE SACRED PLACE

Today both young and old people visit the Njelele sacred place. Owing to the high demand of its diversified services throughout the year, the sacred place now remains open all the year round, and offers ritual services for healing and the alleviation of different types of afflictions. Most of the supplicants who visit the sacred place are spirit mediums, mainly women who consult the oracle on problems of fertility and health. Some are spirit mediums and healers who accompany their patients and novices as part of their initiation and healing. Male supplicants mainly consult the oracle to make requests about business and promotions at work; to solve problems of unemployment, their relations with colleagues at work, and lost livestock. They also

accompany their wives who come to consult the oracle on a variety of personal problems.

Controversy has grown about the way in which the sacred place at Njelele is currently being used. It is a debate, mainly between the sacred place keepers and “traditionalists”. The traditionalists, who include chiefs and other village elders, insist that the sacred place should be closed after the rain ceremony, and that it should not be involved in healing. They are totally against the presence of any other spirit mediums apart from the *wosana*. They believe that the presence of the “people with spirits” (*abantu ba madlozi*) is objectionable to the High-God.

On the other side are the sacred place keepers and supplicants who believe that *Mwali* is associated with healing and ancestral spirits and who see nothing wrong with the present usage of the sacred place. Since they consider Njelele to be the major and most powerful sacred place, it is only reasonable and proper, they insist, that all serious problems should be brought here. The priest, who has very little control over the supplicants’ use of the sacred place, finds himself caught up in this conflict. In practice, he accepts all supplicants and all their problems.

5.1.9 ECONOMIC ASPECT OF THE PILGRIMAGE TO NJELELE

Traditionally, supplicants are expected to bring with them tobacco or snuff and one or more pieces of black cloth as *izithethelo* (*Isindebele*) “what one prays with” (offerings to *Mwali*), known in *Kalanga* as *lunamoto*. The term “tribute” can be applied to such offerings. In the past, some pilgrims used to offer hoes and cattle to *Mwali*, when they came to consult the oracle. The priest as a broker in sacred exchange, played an important redistributive role (Ranger 1967: 22). Each year, he was expected to reallocate to visiting supplicants the cloths, hoes and snuff/tobacco brought to his centre as *lunamoto*. Some of the items offered to praise *Mwali* were listed by Wentzel (1983a: 45) as; *busukwa*

– beer, *shogwana* – crushed sorghum or millet, *shomu* – nuts of the marula tree and *shanganya ngubo dze zwibanda* – the decorated blankets made of animal skins by mixing different kinds of skins (karosses).

In this way, as a broker in sacred exchange, he put the otherwise independent or hostile persons and communities in direct, metonymic communion with each other and under the shared protection of the sacred place. However, the priest is not expected to levy any charge on pilgrims for consulting the oracle. It is nevertheless understood that the priest has to eat and send his children to school. Therefore, the priest is allowed to receive donations and gifts from supplicants, in kind or cash.

Concern with the economic aspect of pilgrimage in the *Mwali* religion should not lead to overlooking an important aspect of this giving to the priest and *Mwali*; i.e. the redistributive role of the priest. Redistribution of objects turned into accomplishments in sacred exchange is an act of protective generosity, well beyond mere reciprocity. These donations to the priest have enhanced value in moral no less than transactional or commodity terms; and the moral and economic are deliberately merged. The priest is involved in far more than mere accumulation of income. Storing and allocating it, he keeps and creates trust. The very fact that the sums are large is a matter of trust and symbolic capital.

5.2 ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The *Mwali* religion is concerned with ecological matters such as drought, floods, blights, pests and epidemic diseases affecting both cattle and people. In fact, cult policy concerning ecological issues has remained conservative (Werbner 1977a; 1989). The *Mwali* religion still remains a fertility religion that emphasises keeping peace with the land and among people (Werbner 1977b: 214; Mwanza 1973). If this peace is destroyed, calamities befall the individual offender, the whole community, or the whole religion's domain. In order for normality to be

restored, certain rituals are performed to cleanse *zwamwi* (standstill) (unsightly objects which make the land ritually unclean).

Bakalanga elders often spoke of *Mwali* having ordered men to go out and remove from trees and the ground itself *zwamwi* or any unsightly objects which made the land ritually unclean, thereby causing rain not to fall. Men moved around the village in a large group to remove objects from treetops such as bird's nests, stones, sticks and any hanging papers. This collective hunting is called *itethela*. It has to be understood that a similar hunt used to take place any other time for the purposes of relish for food such as porridge.

In this hunting, men also cut down all trees that have been struck by lightning. Ruins were also destroyed since they were believed to accommodate evil spirits that interfere with the falling of rain. The trees struck by lightning were cut down and heaped together with all objects collected from the environment to be burnt. Among these objects, there were also animal carcasses. When burning this heap, wet *nzeze* trees were cut and added to the heap. A small *bhepe* (calabash) full of water was broken on top of the heap. The pile was finally burnt to produce large clouds of smoke. The belief was that this smoke would purify or cleanse the polluted air and after this process, rain was expected to fall. According to one of my informants, Ms. Selinah Ndebele, a teacher at Dingumuzi Primary School in Plumtree, originally from Matjinge village (Zimbabwe), a certain ritual was performed. This ritual is in connection with dead elderly men whose *galufu* (property not yet ready for the distribution to the living relatives) had not yet taken place as it was customarily done in *Ikalanga* after somebody's death. The rooftop of such a hut was partly unthatched to allow rain to fall. The writer of this document has neither seen nor heard about this happening with the Botswana *Bakalanga*.

Whilst men were out at the *zwamwi* hunt, women gathered at the *khuta/lubazhe gwa she* (chief's court) to *loba mayile* (sing and dance to

the Supreme Deity, *Mwali*) in supplication for rain. On their way home, to where women were left performing the *mayile* rain dance, men killed wild animals they came across.

During this hunting expedition, men avoided killing dangerous animals like leopards and lions. They only managed to kill animals that could be caught by dogs and those that could be killed by the use of knobkerries and spears. Other small animals killed during this ritual hunt were brought to the chief's court. All men gathered there for a celebration, roasting the flesh of the animals they slaughtered for consumption. This was some sort of purification ritual. However, since the enforcement of the law that forbids the illegal killing of wild animals, this part of the event has had to be omitted.

5.3 MIDZIMU/BADZIMU (ANCESTRAL SPIRITS)

In addition to belief in a Supreme Being and spirits, Bantu people also believe that the spirits of departed ancestors have considerable power both for good and evil. Spirits of departed ancestors may cause all kinds of misfortunes if they are offended by some action of a living relative. In such a case, the offender must make a sacrificial offering to appease the ancestral spirit. It is not unusual at a burial ceremony for an individual to talk to the corpse, to persuade the spirit not to trouble the family or village (Rader 1991: 25). These days, such messages are normally conveyed through sympathy cards.

Ancestor veneration/worship is a widespread phenomenon among the *Bakalanga* of Botswana and Zimbabwe. The *badzimu* (*Ikalanga*) *midzimu*; *amadlozi* (*Isindebele*) (ancestral spirits) play an important role in the lives of many people. Ancestral spirits are generally believed to be benevolent and concerned about the welfare of their descendents. However, when offended, they can kill and maim their own proteges. Therefore, people always seek to maintain the closest possible relationship with these divinities. This includes heeding their requests and instructions.

Ancestral and territorial spirits communicate with the living in two ways, through dreams and visions, and through possession. Dreams (particularly unnatural and persistent ones) are considered very important among *Bakalanga*. It is believed that during one's sleep, two things can happen. Through dreams one travels to the land of the dead to have contacts with ancestral spirits, or the ancestral spirits themselves visit the living and communicate with them. Consequently dreams play an important role in divination, and in the revelation of divine selection to office. Apart from their different divining tablets, spirit mediums and other traditional healers/diviners depend on their own, and on their patients' dreams.

In fact, while ordinary people consult their elders, traditional healers and spirit mediums about the meaning of their dreams, traditional healers/diviners themselves consult the oracle at major *Mwali* religious centres on why they no longer have dreams and visions. Often a novice or patient is asked by the initiator to pay particular attention to his/her dreams. In some cases, people even cancel appointments or postpone planned journeys on account of their dreams, which are often interpreted as a message from *amadlozi* of the dangers that lie ahead (Nthoi 1995: 48).

5.4 TRADITIONAL HEALERS/DIVINERS

Normally people use a traditional healer who has been recommended to them by relatives, friends and close acquaintances. Personal networks of relations existing between the two healers determine referral of clients by one traditional healer to another. Individual members of these traditional healing associations often refer serious problems to *Mwali* sacred places. It is also common for afflicted supplicants to be referred to some known traditional healers by the *Hwi* (voice) (see Masendu 1979:20; Mtutuki 1976:22 and Werbner 1989: 274). This backward and forward referral of patients between traditional healers and *Mwali* religious centres requires a close relation between traditional healers

and religious officials (on Ntlogwa's relationship with traditional healers and other important people in northern Botswana, see Werbner 1989).

This suggests and underlies the importance of personal linkages between senior religious officials and members of traditional healing associations. The voice refers afflicted supplicants to traditional healers who are known to, or are associates of, senior religious officials. In this way, healers' associations and their individual members are very important in directing and maintaining a flow of people, goods and ideas from the periphery to the central places of the religion, and for drawing some flow from the centre to the periphery (Nthoi 1995: 53).

5.5 SUMMARY

Bakalanga traditional music performance is based on cultural and traditional religious activities. This chapter provides background information, largely on the organisation of the *Mwali* religion. This information is needed for an understanding of *wosana* music and its activities.

Bakalanga understand *Mwali* as the creator or originator of the universe and all its creatures. Although *Mwali* is known to be a benevolent provider and sustainer of life in the universe, he is an ambivalent God, capable of showing both great kindness, and anger when offended. He is, therefore, both feared and respected.

Mwali is believed to have three manifestations. The male manifestation is *Shologulu*, believed to be associated with the creation of the universe. *Banyantjaba* is the female manifestation of *Mwali*, associated with the sustenance of the universe. The third manifestation is *Lunji*, the son of the High-God, who runs errands between *Shologulu* and *Banyantjaba*.

There are places from which *Mwali* chooses to speak to his people. Examples of such places are caves in mountains. *Bakalanga* consider such places sacred because of the manifestation of the Deity there.

The *Mwali* religion is believed to be extending across international boundaries from Zimbabwe into Botswana, the Republic of South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and possibly into Tanzania. The “headquarters” of the *Mwali* religion are in the Matopo hills and Matobo District of the Matabeleland South Province (Zimbabwe).

The origin of the *Mwali* religion is attributed to either the *Rozwi/Shona*, *Venda* or *Kalanga*. Hole (1929: 43-45) argues that the *Mwali* religion was associated with the *Bakalanga*, and was already in existence when the *Amandebele* first arrived in what later became Southern Rhodesia.

The seniority of the *Mwali* religious centres declines as one moves away from Njelele. *Wosana* observe a defined hierarchy and line of communication from the periphery to the centre; i.e. from Ntogwa (in Botswana) to Manyangwa through Dula to Njelele (in Zimbabwe).

Among the *Mwali* religion’s officials are the *umkhwezi* (priest and *umthanyeli/* keeper or caretaker) chosen from either *Kalanga* or *Venda*. Other religious officials are: *umphathi we nkezo* (messengers), *wosana* (adepts) and *umlisa* - for one (keeper of the sacred cattle/herd).

Since the Njelele sacred place is mainly concerned with rain, it is therefore visited by *abaphathi be nkezo (Isindebele)* messengers and *wosana (Ikalanga)* adepts who come twice a year. They visit Njelele hill during the rain ceremony in September and early April for the harvest ceremony. The oracle is also visited in connection with natural calamities like drought and pestilence.

Traditionally, supplicants are expected to bring with them tobacco or snuff and one or more pieces of black cloth as offerings to *Mwali*. Each year the priest was expected to reallocate to visiting supplicants offerings brought to his centre.

Ancestor veneration is a widespread phenomenon among the *Bakalanga* of Botswana and Zimbabwe. *Bakalanga* always seek to maintain the closest possible relationship with the ancestors. Some traditional

healers often refer serious problems to *Mwali*. It is also common for afflicted supplicants to be referred to some known traditional healers by *Mwali's* voice.

Wosana have composed songs that praise *Mwali* using different names such as *dziba le vula* which means a pool of rain/water. When visiting all sacred places and some traditional healers, relevant musical types are performed.

CHAPTER 6

THE MWALI INTERMEDIARIES AND THE TEBGWE SACRED PLACE ACTIVITIES

The transcendence and inaccessibility of the High-God obviously necessitates powerful intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Deity. Through the mediatory roles of both the religion's messenger and the *wosana*, congregations in the hinterland maintain communion with the High-God. In Botswana, such communion is carried out through the messenger Robert Vumbu of the Tebgwe sacred place in Ramokgwebana village (North Eastern Botswana).

6.1 INTERMEDIARIES: WOSANA AND THE MWALI

RELIGION MESSENGERS

Mwari is everywhere and is in everything. He is thus party to, and in an indefinable way, part of all the spirits throughout their hierarchical structure. The most senior spirits thus become merged with *Mwari* and in this sense make him/her a syncretic God. As one commentator on African concepts of god suggests, "God is far (transcendent) and men cannot reach him; but God is also near (imminent), and he comes close to men" (Latham 1986: 85 quoting Mbiti 1970: 12).

The transcendence and inaccessibility of the High-God obviously necessitates powerful intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Deity. These intermediaries facilitate communion with *Mwali* or are themselves routes of worship, to the High-God himself. This is due to the dialectical nature of the religion itself; i.e. its macrocosmic (inclusiveness) and microcosmic (exclusiveness) tendencies. The conception of *Mwali's* transcendence (macrocosmic) allows no restriction in terms of affliction and supplication to the High-God (Werbner 1989: 246-257). The microcosmic nature of the religion limits its control to an elite leadership chosen from a specific priestly house within a particular tribal group (Werbner 1989: 257).

Through the mediatory roles of both the religion's messenger and the *wosana*, congregations in the hinterland maintain communion with the High-God. The religion's messenger is the main link between the communities in the periphery, the religion's priesthood, and *Mwali* at the oracular religious centres. Congregations send their tribute (*lunamoto* or *zvipo*) to *Mwali* through the religion's messenger (Werbner 1977a and 1989; Daneel 1970: 53 and 1971; Ranger 1967: 220). From the communities they represent, the messengers carry *Mwali's* response and his comments on the moral condition within these communities to the petitioners in the home communities and his comments on the moral condition within these communities.

Apart from these regular ritual festivals the spirits may be consulted in the event of some misfortune affecting the whole community, the most common being late or insufficient rainfall (Bourdillon 1976:304).

Werbner's view (1989: 261) of the *wosana* as a sacred go-between underlies the transcendence of the High-God. Through the female klipspringer (symbolic of the ritual role of the religion's adept) caught in a ritual, the congregation establishes communion with the transcendent High-God, even at places where there is no oracle. The fullest communication between mankind and *Mwali* depends on communion rather with an immanation. The klipspringer (*wosana*) as a mountain creature is believed to mediate through communion, between mankind and *Mwali*. Through pilgrimage to major religious centres, local communities establish communion with *Mwali* without necessarily communicating with him. The *wosana* brings the sacred soil on his/her body, collected during ritual participation and possibly by rolling on the ground in a trance, back to local communities. The sacredness of such soil is believed to cool the land and bring the much-needed rainfall. In so far as the local communities at the periphery are concerned, *Mwali* still lives far away *ka-Mwali (Ikalanga)* "at *Mwali's*" (place of abode) i.e. at distant sacred centres. Despite the spatial proximity of the sacred centre, *Mwali* is still removed from local communities and communion

with him is through the mediation of a sacred-go-between (Werbner 1989:2).

At the numerous local religious centres, rain ceremonies are conducted, at which the *wosana* sing to *Mwali* in supplication for rain.

The spirit, through its possessed medium may announce the cause of the trouble. It might simply say that the people have been forgetting their ancestors and should honour the guardian spirits of the country with sorghum beer. It may name some offence as the cause of the trouble, particularly a violation of any tradition that is particularly associated with the greater tribal spirits such as incest, ploughing on their holy days, any violation of the medium or his sacred place property and quarreling at the sacred place. When such an offense is cited as the cause of the trouble, some punishment or fine is demanded from the guilty party (Bourdillon 1976:304).

In Botswana, for example, during periods of drought, women gather either at local religious centres or at the *khuta/lubazhe gwa she* (chief's court) to *loba mayile* (sing and dance to the High-God) in supplication for rain. An example of a very popular *Ikalanga mayile* song is written below:

SONG TITLE: SHANGO YA PALALA/ TJEMA YEU

Dalaunde, *Mapothoko hawo* – Dalaunde, there are the *Matebele*

Kene wa tizha – Although you run away

Shango ya palala – The country is taken

Dalaunde, *a! wole*, - Dalaunde, alright: go,

Kene u tizha, - although you run,

Shango ya palala. – The country is taken

Call: *Tjemayeu*

Response: *Yeu*

(James Kagiso Habangana, 15 December 1983 in Van Waarden 1988: 17). See song 1.2.3 on video.

This *mayile* song is a medley. The first part of the song is explained. The second part has its call *Tjemayeu*, and response as *Yeu*. One of my informants, Basetse Mamu, explained that these lyrics resemble a give and take type of play for the two groups involved in communion. In this song, the dancers also resemble the *njelele* bird dance, which is associated with the falling of rain. Attendance at both *wosana* and *mayile* dances is open to all women. Through participation at these local level rituals, contact is established between communities and the High-God.

Other people visit the sacred place as religious messengers or representatives of communities and chiefdoms. This category of pilgrims is associated with the two main annual ceremonies of the religion; the annual rain and the harvest (thanksgiving) ceremonies, which take place at Njelele.

The religion is essentially concerned with propitiation of *Mwali*, the High-God, for rain and fertility of the land. Every year, a rain ceremony or festival is held at Njelele, attended by many people. This festival is normally held in either September or October. Before this festival, between July and August, the sacred place is opened for *abaphathi be nkezo*, “the holders of the calabashes” (messengers). These messengers are expected to come on behalf of their congregations, communities or chiefdoms, to ask for rain from *Mwali*. After consulting the oracle, they would normally be told of the date of the forthcoming annual rain festival at Njelele, at which they would be invited to attend with *wosana* from their areas. They would then pay money to the *umkhwezi (Isindebele)*, “the one who makes people climb” (the mountain) (the religion’s priest). Since they come on behalf of communities, they would usually be expected to pay more money than individual pilgrims do.

After a day or so, they would return home. It is not unusual for these messengers to consult the oracle on their individual and personal problems as well, although this is not the main reason for their visit to the sacred place.

Each group has its leader, who is responsible for making travelling arrangements to and from the sacred place. He therefore has to know the way to the sacred place. In the past, when there was no public transport to Njelele, it was important that the group leader should know the short cuts to the sacred place. As a spokesperson of the group, he is also responsible for *uku bika* or *ukukhuleka* (*Isindebele*) “to report” or “to pray” (to make their request) at the sacred place, and pay for consulting the oracle. On arriving back home, the leader is responsible for reporting to the chief. If necessary, the chief calls a public meeting to inform the people of the demands of the oracle, or of the date of the annual rain ceremony. The chief messenger often addresses this meeting to give a report of his visit to the sacred place. It is common for an old messenger to recommend a younger man as his successor. The person recommended as messenger must also enjoy the favour and support of the community.

The responsibility of the head messenger does not end with his pilgrimage to the sacred place. He, together with other community leaders, mobilises people in their respective wards to prepare for the annual rain ceremony. Sorghum is contributed by each homestead within the local community (see Werbner 1989: 279), and traditional beer is brewed at a given place.

As in family rituals the whole kinship group gathers for the good of the larger community. In these ceremonies the larger community, whether it be a small neighbourhood associated with a particular spirit or the whole chiefdom, must co-operate to obtain from the local spirit guardians what is necessary for the good of all. The chief or senior man of the spirit domain makes the arrangements for the ceremony and

often decides (possibly with the prompting of the possessed senior mediums) if and when the ceremony is to be held. All heads of families in the domain must provide grain for the sorghum beer. If the whole chiefdom is involved, this is done through the village headmen. Long standing families in the domain have tasks to perform appropriate to their traditional relationship with the spirits. All in the domain should attend (or at least be represented) in honour of the spirit. So ancestral spirit guardians help to bring and keep local communities together (Bourdillon 1976: 303).

On the given day or a day before, depending on the distances involved, women carry this beer to the sacred place.

Plate 16



Ms. Siwani (right) and Violet Makhala (left) arriving at the annual *Gumbu* carrying calabashes of *Bakalanga* traditional beer

Photographed by the author at the Annual *Gumbu* Rain Praying Ceremony in Mapoka Village in September 1995

A band of dancing *wosana*, and messengers, with the head messenger leading the way, should accompany the women carrying the beer. The

different pilgrim groups, with their calabashes of beer, converge at the priest's centre, where other groups driving black oxen from the district chiefs join them. Every chief affiliated to the particular major sacred place is expected to donate at least one black beast for this occasion. Those who cannot afford to contribute a beast, often donate money, which is used to buy whatever is required for the feast.

The beasts should be slaughtered near the Njelele hill, where much feasting is expected to take place the whole day. All the food and beer ought to be consumed at a special courtyard at the foothill of Njelele. Porridge is not served at this ceremony. People feast on meat and beer alone. This is not ordinary feasting. It is a communion offering to seal contractual obligations. Members of the public are also invited and partake of the feasting. Young girls carry the beer, and young men carry drums to the foothill, where they also participate in the eating, singing, drumming, hand clapping and dancing. However, they are not allowed to proceed beyond this place. Only older people (possessed senior mediums) are allowed to enter the sacred place during the rain ceremony. Abstinence from sexual contact is emphasized for all those who intend visiting the sacred place. This is because everybody who comes to this place is expected to be ritually clean.

Leftovers should not be carried home, although the priest may order that some meat portions be given out to honour some people. Any meat or beer that has not been consumed is left there to feed the wild animals and vultures. This emphasizes the redistributive aspect of the religion of the High-God, in which religious officials return to the attendants, a portion of what has been offered to the High-God. The sacred centre is thus a place of sacred exchange, where supplicants give unto God and, in turn, expect to receive from him.

Just before midnight, the feasting stops. The *umkhwezi* then leads *abaphathi be nkezo* to the mountain where they are allowed to draw water from a little pool near the sacred place, to carry home. In fact, in

Ikalanga the conventional formula for asking for rain from the High God is *ku kumbila khawa*, “to beg for dew” or “*ku kumbila nkombe we vula*”, “to beg for a gourd of water”. Therefore, the water, which the messengers carry home, is a metonym or synecdochy for the rain, which they have come to ask for from *Mwali*: a part given in anticipation of the whole. The seeds, which they have brought from home to Njelele hill, are blessed, treated with *zhambuko* (*Isindebele/Ikalanga*) and given back to them to take back home. These are meant to guarantee a bountiful harvest, since it is believed that ants and other pests cannot eat such seeds. According to Basetse Mamu, water from Njelele is customarily sprinkled on seeds back home for a blessing. If the dancing ground is too dry and there are no clouds, some of this water is sprinkled on the ground before rain dancing commences. The belief is that after dancing on the ground sprinkled with water from Njelele, clouds will gather and rain will fall.

The climax of the rain ceremony is reached when the messengers draw water from the little pool and the seeds are blessed. In the past, when the Voice spoke during people’s gathering at the bottom of the hill in the early morning, it would admonish people on the fulfilment of their obligation in the forthcoming season. The messengers return to the priest’s centre where they assemble in the morning to thank him in cash or kind, and then return home.

6.2 BOTSWANA WOSANA AND THE NTOGWA (TEBGWE) SACRED PLACE

During Werbner’s research period, he spent lots of times staying and travelling with Ntogwa who was the *Bakalanga*’s messenger to *Mwali* at the time. So, most of the information Werbner gave was actually obtained from Ntogwa. In the region that Werbner knew best, the priest Ntogwa succeeded his mother’s sister’s son, Fulele. He also claimed that Njenje was his maternal grandfather. Ntogwa claimed *Venda* origin for his patriline in a zebra clan (Dube or Ntembo). Njenjema, a priest of the Northwest, was of Njenje’s clan, a monkey (Shoko or Ncube, praise

name Luvimbi). Manyangwa, the northern priest, is a Leya (Werbner 1977a:184).

6.2.1 NTOGWA'S CAREER AND HIS REGION'S DEVELOPMENT

During Ntogwa's long career as a priest, high rates of individual mobility (Werbner 1975: 99) have swelled into great tides of emigration towards the West and South. Partly, this has been due to a high rate of human and animal population increase with resulting greater pressure on land and, in places, severe scarcity of land. Fundamentally, it has been due to the expropriation of the central highlands of Botswana and Zimbabwe for European ranches. These divided or displaced numerous chiefdoms and led to the founding of others, such as Habangana and Musojane. Most importantly, the land available to the people was restricted, both in Zimbabwe and in Botswana (Werbner 1977a: 198).

Expansion from one chiefdom, Habangana in North Eastern Botswana, and migration from it to various others as much as a hundred miles away provided a main stem around which the South Western region developed. As a youth, the priest himself, Ntogwa, had been an immigrant from Zimbabwe, though after settling in Habangana chiefdom he came to be known as "a man of Habangana". Between 1914 and 1940, the Bechuanaland Protectorate administration repeatedly had to allow this chiefdom to take over territory along with people from its weaker neighbour, Musojane chiefdom.

The region's staff and oracle were thus drawn along with the chiefdom into problems of territorial encroachment and expansion. The expansion and emigration enabled Ntogwa to extend his religion's connections widely yet retain some control over them through the selection of adepts with close kin or origins in his home chiefdom. However, a halt to Habangana's expansion, for various reasons, became a threat to the further development of Ntogwa's region.

Ntogwa tried to overcome this late in his career, somewhat unsuccessfully, through a more direct commitment to other areas of the region. What he did not do, though his children did, was marry anyone from the chiefdoms in the region's heartland other than Habangana. In his old age he took his other wives from the periphery of the region in the west (from Tonota, Chadibe and Mathangwane in the central district, where he also established a hamlet) just as earlier he had married eastern wives (from the areas of his youth in Zimbabwe).

Throughout the region's heartland, he spread his points of access strategically, in two ways. First, he distributed his wives and children in hamlets at frontiers of each of the heartland's chiefdoms, and his oracle at a site accessible to a railway station. Second, he established an alternative oracle with its own regional sacred place in the only chiefdom that had much room for immigration or more livestock, i.e. Habangana's greatest rival, Ramokate chiefdom. However, this strategic placement and wide division of his family brought its own pressing problems, mainly due to local instability and succession disputes. After less than a decade, he retreated to Habangana, with his entire family except for his Far Western wives and children. Until his death, four or five years later, he continued to devote himself much more to the Western areas than any others, and admitted new adepts from there almost exclusively (Werbner 1977a: 198-9). Much of Ntogwa's region was defined relatively in a competition for congregations between his region and at least one other, mainly the north region of Manyangwa II. Significantly this competition was absent in the far South West, which may have been a further reason for Ntogwa's preoccupation with this area late in his life. He largely withdrew from the main areas of established competition. Yet it was Ntogwa himself who perceived quite early in his career that there had to be another region besides his in the whole of the West. Within his region alone he could not manage the total area covered by several regions now.

Using a customary formula, Ntogwa reported to the cardinal oracle at Njelele that “all these people are too heavy for me”. He requested another priest, “Give me another to help me”. Ntogwa then ensured that this other was a protege of his own and closely bound to him. He trained his protege, apparently a son of Manyangwa I. He brought him for confirmation at Njelele; installed him in the north; took Manyangwa II’s sister and gave his own daughter in marriage and continued to visit and help him for long periods (Werbner 1977a: 199).

Bakalanga themselves spread far and wide among tribally different people and beyond the religion’s domain into the borderland’s nucleated villages. Moreover, they have done so for at least one century and perhaps several. However, *Bakalanga* have not managed to establish religious congregations in the borderlands, with perhaps one peripheral exception, although as individual supplicants they come to the oracles even from Serowe, the central district’s sprawling capital (Werbner 1977a: 199-200).

There is an apparent exception on the periphery of the South Western region at Tonota, the Northern most of the large nucleated villages. The messenger there, Radipitsi, holds the most senior title amongst the *Khurutshe*, who are *Tswana*-speaking. He is currently the chief of Tonota village. Radipitsi claims direct descent from a chief Rauwe who sent religious messengers to an oracle, while he lived among *Bakalanga*. Under the colonial Tati Company this chief (Rauwe) was paramount over *Bakalanga* in the region’s heartland from about 1898 until he and other *Khurutshe* were compelled to withdraw south to Tonota in 1913 (Werbner 1971a: 33).

However, Radipitsi’s interest in the North is not a matter of past history only. He approached his *Khurutshe* cousin chief Ramokate during his term as head of the Tati Land Board, which is now responsible for much of the company’s former land in the North. Radipitsi expressed

his desire to return North soon in order to settle in state lands near Ntogwa's daughter, the late Galani, at Themashanga village. In the meantime, as messenger, Radipitsi continues to assert a political claim, seniority, and a connection with the North and the region's heartland. He acts as messenger, however, on behalf of villagers from his own immediate locality. It is a distinct, and somewhat independent part, rather than the big village as a whole, which participates in the South Western region. In Radipitsi's small and exceptional congregation the South Western region has reached an outer limit of the religion's domain (Werbner 1977a: 200).

One further point about expansion must be made here. Just as tribal and historic ties are inadequate as a basis for the extension of a region, so, too, in the religion's history tribal differences in themselves have not been a barrier to expansion. At a moment of time, however, certain enclaves may be defined tribally, but this may not be permanent. An example of such an enclave is in the heartland of the South Western region. It is the whole chiefdom of Moroka which has no adepts or sacred place, though the regional sacred place in Habangana is virtually on its borders.

The founders of Moroka chiefdom and their descendents along with a main body of *Barolong* immigrants who arrived in 1915 have largely remained tribally separate from and, in some respects, opposed to *Bakalanga* amongst whom they live. The tribal separation is modified through marriage, the more likely is the incorporation (or re-incorporation) of this area into the religion, a process already well advanced, as shown by the marriage of the priest's late son Vumbu to a *Barolong* wife (Werbner 1977a: 200 – 1).

Ntogwa kept ten wives and their children, for whom he paid heavily in bridewealth, a personal man-servant, and many retainers as herdsmen. At the time of his death in his eighties in 1972, he left an estate of

hundreds of head of cattle, numerous two – hundred pound sacks of grain, a substantial bank account and large sums in small change, a donkey cart, a ruined tractor, and a greater assortment of consumer goods than most *Bakalanga* could afford (Werbner 1977a: 202).

Even in very old age, Ntogwa visited most of his congregations at least once a year, and annually danced, for payment, at places hundreds of miles apart, from Botswana's capital (Gaborone) to Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. Ntogwa's case illustrates the opposition between inheritance and personal achievement, and its consequences (Werbner 1977a: 204).

6.2.2 NTOGWA'S RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT WITH LAHLIWE, GALANI (DAUGHTERS) AND VUMBU (SON)

For various reasons, Ntogwa relied more heavily, for religious purposes, on two of his daughters, Lahliwe and Galani, than on his senior son and main heir, Vumbu. Lahliwe was his first wife's first born who married and then separated from the Northern region's priest. She went with her father on trips to the oracles. Galani was his third wife's first born, and she accompanied and helped her father on most of his other trips. She regularly took charge, on his behalf, of performances at sacred places, and she became, after him, the region's most famous dancer. Indeed, her father often sang, at sacred places, "*Galani i wola*" (Galani is the senior) (i.e. of the *hosana* adepts). For the late Galani's example of performance, see song 2.1.2 on video accompanying thesis. In contrast, Vumbu, an accomplished dancer though not an *hosana*, almost never accompanied his father. He knew little about his father's traditional medicines, and he kept away working on the railway in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe), except for brief visits to his wife and children in his father's hamlet. According to Mtutuki (1976: 27), Vumbu came back from Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia) in August 1974 to succeed his late father.

After Ntogwa's death Vumbu was chosen to succeed his father by consensus of the region's messengers and their rulers, led by chief Habangana from Ntogwa's home chiefdom. However, some important messengers and rulers did not go to the selection meeting, notably chief Ramokate from the chiefdom that rivals the Habangana territory in size and other respects. For confirmation and installation, Vumbu was sent, along with Habangana's messenger and porters, to the cardinal oracle at Dula in Zimbabwe. He returned triumphantly with *mpakatilo ntema* (a black sash), given by the cardinal oracle as a badge of recognition. When he addressed his own region's oracle at Habangana chiefdom, in the presence of a great assembly of messengers, he failed to get a response from *Mwali's* voice. On his visit to Dula to establish himself as the next people's messenger, neither of his prominent sisters, Lahliwe and Galani, accompanied him. A quarrel and bitter recriminations between him and Galani had already become public knowledge. Despite having not qualified by being answered by *Mwali's* voice, since Vumbu was the senior son and main heir, he was kept as *Mwali's* messenger.

In the meantime, Galani had been increasing her prominence in the region through her continued circuits around it and by establishing a new, personal base of her own. After a year's pause to mark her father's death, she resumed charge of performances at the *Bakalanga* and *Bakhurutshé* sacred places (Mathangwane, Tonota, Mmadinare) to the South West, in the central district. To the South East, she chose a site suitable for a new oracle. She left her father's hamlet in Habangana chiefdom, and moved South to an area of growing settlement - indeed, the region's area of greatest growth in settlement where she built her own hamlet at Themashanga. This site is next to a rocky kopje (a granite knoll) with Bushmen cave paintings and thus, as she told a confidante, especially suited to impress supplicants with its ancient significance.

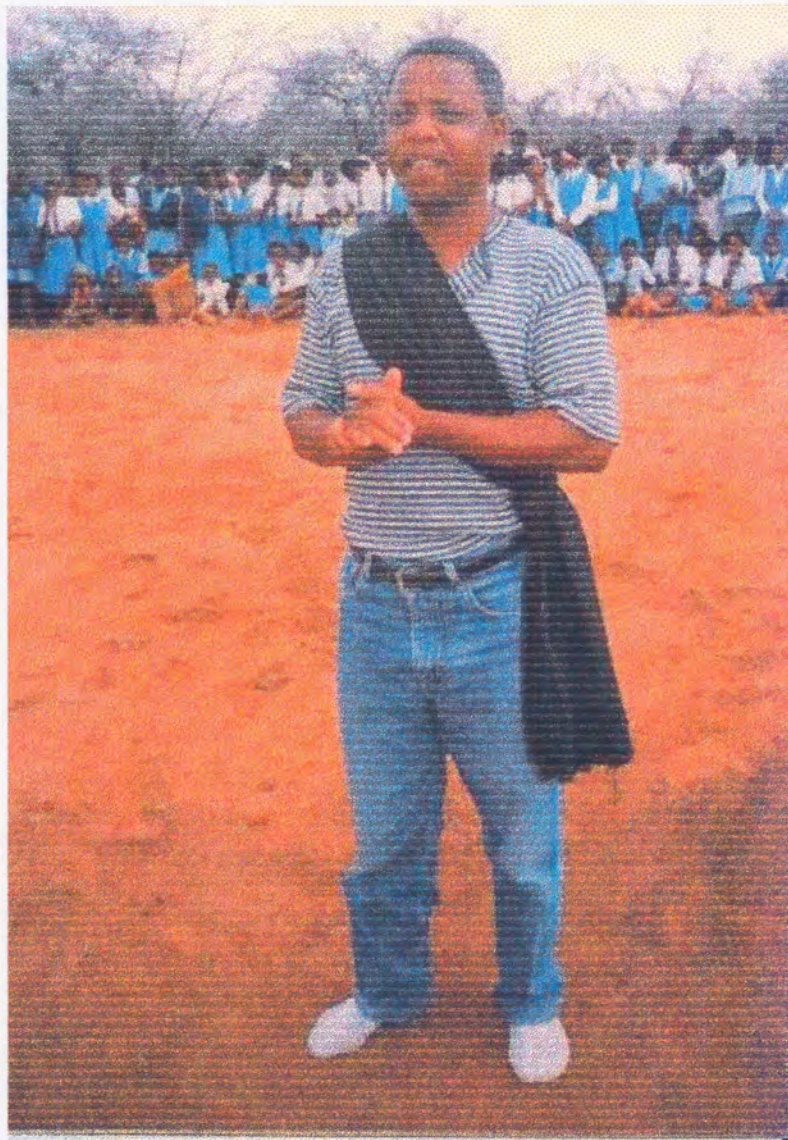
Besides her great organisational expertise, she had an important advantage due to her widespread reputation for mastery of her father's traditional medicine, which she is said to have taken in great sacks to her own hamlet. So far she was able to attract to her for treatment not only supplicants but would-be adepts also. Since her father's death, she continued to initiate some acolytes from the region's periphery in the central district, though not from its old heartland to the east in the former Tati Reserve.

Priests related to the *Mwali* religion have been known to charge pilgrims exorbitantly. The late Vumbu Ntogwa, priest of Tebgwe sacred place in Botswana, used to charge each supplicant a sum of seventy pula (P70.00) for the first visit, and two hundred pula (P200.00) on any subsequent visit. Vumbu, like his father, was indeed a rich man by the time he died. He owned more than two mini buses operating as public transport between Ramokgwebana and Francistown; two tractors; a small general dealer's shop in Ramokgwebana; a big and beautiful home for one of his wives in Ramokgwebana; and had built himself a second house for another wife in Francistown (Nthoi 1995: 209). The people regard these charges as exploitation because customarily, priests are not supposed to charge.

6.2.3 ROBERT VUMBU NTOGWA

Robert Vumbu, Ntogwa's grandson, is currently the priest of the Tebgwe sacred place based in Ramokgwebana village in the North East District of Botswana, which he inherited from his father. Though not yet formally installed, a gathering of *wosana* from all over North East and Central Districts took place to permit him to resume carrying out his duties as the people's messenger to the *Bakalanga* Supreme Deity *Mwali* on the 14th of October 1995. Dressing Robert with a black sash across the shoulders marked this occasion as can be seen below:

Plate 17



Robert Vumbu Ntogwa: The *Bakalanga* messenger to *Mwali*

Photographed by the author at the Ntogwa family's home in Ramokgwebana during the late Vumbu Ntogwa's a hut opening ceremony (For Robert to resume the duty of the people's messenger) after the death of Vumbu Ntogwa his father in October 1995

Robert Vumbu Ntogwa, the *Bakalanga* messenger (priest) to the *Bakalanga* Supreme Deity *Mwali*, is also responsible for the observance of *Nsi* (a ceremonial day), a day set aside as a holiday for the whole community. In the past, it was sacriligious to plough, weed or cut down trees from the fields on this day, which is normally a Friday. But, nowadays, different religious denominations have introduced different holy days according to their interpretations of the bible. This has

caused difficulties in getting the people to observe one and the same day in every region. The result is that most *Bakalanga* (adherents of Tebgwe sacred place) in the Central District observe Wednesday as their *Nsi* whilst in North East a Friday is observed.

The first person to become a *wosana* amongst the *Bakalanga* of Botswana was called Ntogwa Sekani Kavimba. According to his grand daughter Margaret Tibone, Ntogwa was her grandfather's *Ikalanga* nickname meaning "a person who is taken". Ntogwa was always taken to go and dance in different places. Nobody has any information about Ntogwa's ancestors. However, Margaret claimed that her grandfather's origins are believed to be *Venda* in the Limpopo Province of South Africa opposite the Beitbridge area of Zimbabwe from the Kavimba family. When coming to Botswana, Ntogwa left some of his relatives in Zimbabwe where he also had some connections with the Njelele sacred place.

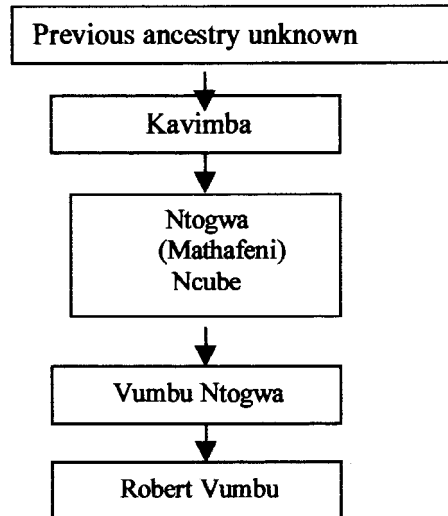
According to Mtutuki (1976:10), Ntogwa arrived from Bango's area, South-Western part of modern Matabeleland. Ntogwa Ncube was still a young man and was mistaken for a young girl because of his height, small stature and thin voice. One of my informants, Reverend Mothibi, also added that Ntogwa used to dress in skirts. One can also conclude that perhaps this is why the present male *wosana* dancers still dress in black skirts today.

During this time, Ntogwa was not yet a *wosana*. He was a *lombe* or an ordinary entertaining dancer. Suffice it to say that Ntogwa wandered in the area of this study without settling permanently in one place for a long time. Mtutuki goes on to say that Ntogwa settled at Masunga, Musojane and Mapoka villages successively as a *lombe*. As a *lombe*, Ntogwa attracted a large following from among women. They followed him from homestead to homestead in his dancing itinerary to sing, drum and clap hands for him when dancing. Ntogwa used to share the same room as these young women because everybody thought he was a girl or young woman.

Ntogwa, by virtue of his daily contact with the people, became an authority on *Bakalanga* mores, norms, and customs. He remained the embodiment of the conservation of the *Bakalanga* Society. Ntogwa himself remained in his traditional regalia till he died in 1972. His eyesight was then poor, so he wore pince-nez. This was the only thing which was not traditional in his dressing habit (Mtutuki 1976: 22).

Ntogwa resided at the present day *Jakalasi No. 1* village in North Eastern Botswana. This village is situated on the borders of Botswana and Zimbabwe. He later moved to *Jakalasi No. 2* village and resided at a hilly place called *Mambindi*. This is still in the same district and border of Botswana and Zimbabwe. Ntogwa next moved to *Mbalambi* village, still in the same district. He built *liswingo* at a place called *Tumbapalale* next to a tree called *nkukubuyu* (boabab). This was his place of prayer where he took everybody who came in connection with *Mwali*. The *Tumbapalale* prayer place was built of rocks. The rock building was attached to the tree and *mwali's Hwi* (voice) could be heard from this place. One boy purposely cut the *nkukubuyu* tree down to see what would happen. It is said that *Mwali's* voice came from the hill to say this boy would suffer to death and so it happened (Mothibi 1999: 34). *Mwali's* voice was never heard at *Tumbapalale* anymore.

Ntogwa finally settled at *Ramokgwebana* village at a place called *Tebgwe*, still in the North East district. This place was once part of *Mapoka* where Ntogwa, in agreement with chief *Habangana*, established the *nzeze* rain-praying place. Ntogwa's family still resides at this place and the rain-praying hillock is located just behind the home. Robert Vumbu, Ntogwa's grandson, is currently the priest of the *Tebgwe* sacred place in Botswana. His sister *Margaret*, who is one of the *wosana* leaders, has settled in *Mabudzaani* village where the author of this document also lives. This is still in the same district. Ntogwa's male lineage family tree is as follows:



According to Basetse Mamu, Ntogwa's children became *wosana* through possession (*sungwa*) in this order:

Lahliwe, Galani, Vumbu, Siyangaphi, Palalani and Ndziili. Siyangaphi decided to leave this vocation along the way and she is now currently mentally sick. Basetse Mamu was the first *wosana* in Mapoka village from outside the Ntogwa family. Other Ntogwa's daughters who dance and are not mentioned in this list have not yet been possessed and are not allowed to do certain things such as going to Njelele unless they are virgins.

6.3 KU DUSIWA KWE MBEWU (SEED BLESSING)

Prior to the seed blessing, a *njelele* bird (eagle) squeaks, passing through the villages. When this happens, *Bakalanga* believe that this bird has come to *tola lushanga gwe thunde* (collect a sorghum reed) to send to the Supreme Deity *Mwali* for the next season's rain to fall. About this rain concept, Vaughan has this to say:

Every year between September and January there takes place that most important of rituals, the rain making ceremony. The ceremony has roots in the distant past but is still performed today in many rural villages. As soon as the slightest sign of rain promises to punctuate the long dry spell, beer is brewed and everyone is summoned to a sacred place, usually on a nearby hill.

Traditional dances are then performed, generating a hysteria which can be quite literally entrancing for the participants, and the sweet, innocuous brew is consumed in large quantities (Vaughan 1991: 148).

This is followed by an annual ritual conducted in the form of a *wosana* procession, which lasts for seven days sometime in mid-September. Day one is normally a Wednesday, running through to a Tuesday. Days one and two are meant for rain prayers held at the hillock situated behind Robert Vumbu Ntogwa's home (home of the *wosana* leader/priest) in Ramokgwebana village in North East District Council. On day three, the *wosana* go for their rain prayers at the village court called *khuta or lubazhe gwa she*. All people from surrounding villages go to the Mapoka *Khuta* for this occasion.

All village churches are represented at this ceremony which is held at the village court in their uniforms for prayers. These churches pray together with the *wosana*. Songs from all present religious denominations are sung, e.g. United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), Roman Catholic Church and Zion Christian Church (ZCC).

Plate 18



Ms Tiny Gunda leading a multi-denominational congregation

Photographed by Ms Maggy Tema at the annual seed blessing ceremony held at the Mapoka village *kgotla* in September 1995

Mwali's praise poem related to rain praying is recited by a selected good poet. *Mwali's* praise poem below shows a general understanding and appreciation of the Trinitarian view of this High-God by *Bakalanga*. This Trinitarian is believed to be found in the hills with *Mwali's* voice: to the South is the Father *Shologulu*; to the North the Mother *Banyantjaba*; and to the East the son *Lunji*. The praise poem is as follows:

MWALI'S PRAISE POEM

Mazebuta, Mbedzi, Thobela – Praise names

Gabi laka pomba nyika – the string that surrounds the earth

Mbumbi we butale – Creator of the universe

Baka - lunji gusi thume ngubo – mother of *Lunji* (big needle) that does not sew a blanket

Guno tshindila thuma pasi – but prefers to sew the ground/down

Nkadzi we zhamu lingompela – the woman with a single breast

Uno mwisa bana baka wanda – who is able to satisfactorily breast-feed all her children (Nthoi 1995: 59).

After the praise poem, different church groups and *wosana* sing a few songs and hymns. The chief of Mapoka village, passes a word to the audience to declare the ploughing season officially opened. This declaration is called *ku dusiwa kwe mbewu* (seed blessing) and permits the villagers to start ploughing after the rains. It is taboo among the *Bakalanga* people to plough before the chief gives permission. This is strictly adhered to, because the consequences of disobeying would befall not only that particular individual, but also the whole innocent community. This is a fairly universal pre-planting ceremony in agricultural societies.

6.4 **KU NZEZE/KU GUMBU/KU DAKA (THE RAIN PRAYING RITUAL)**

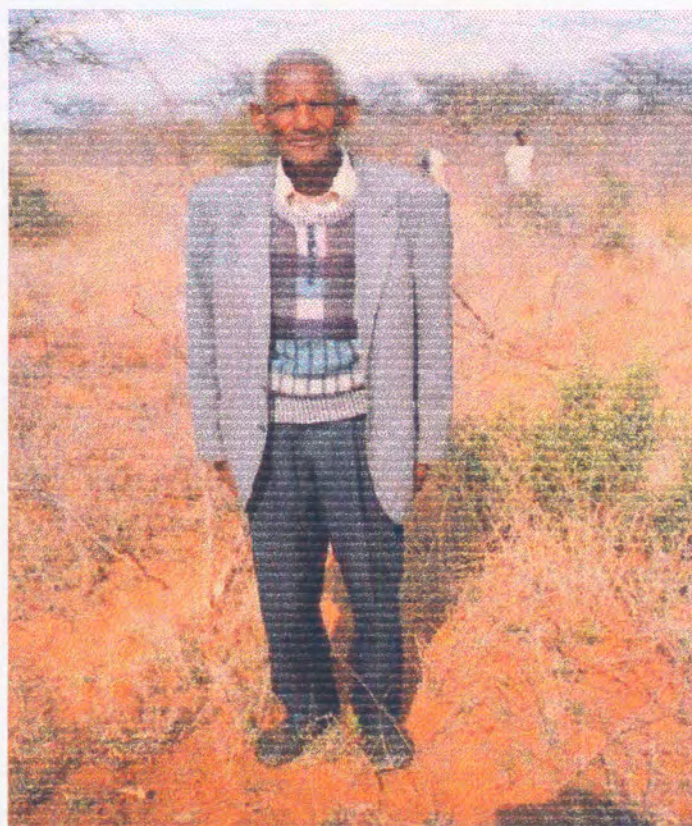
After seed blessing on day three when everybody disperses, this rain prayer dancing group leaves the *lubazhe gwa she* (chief's court), walking to their special dancing area called *ku nzeze*. This place is a few kilometres South-West of Mapoka Primary School. It is situated near a big *nzeze* (*Peltophorum Africanum*) tree. According to the village elders and the *wosana*, this tree was selected for the purpose because of its shady leaves to protect the dancers from the sun's heat.

Ms. Selinah Ndebele of Dingumuzi Primary School in Plumtree (Zimbabwe) submitted an addition of *Nhahanyama* – (Zimbabwe *Ikalanga*) and *Nsasanyama* – (Botswana *Ikalanga*) tree to be serving the same purpose in Zimbabwe. This tree is also used as traditional medicine for blood purification. Certainly one of my most venerable old informants was quite clear on this point. She was Ms. Basetse Mamu, born in 1937, and is a *wosana* music performer. She grew up at Ntogwa's home as a *wosana* since the age of ten. Where the *nzeze* tree is situated was chief Habangana's (kgosietsile Habangana's or *Ta-Bakwali's*) field. Chief Habangana of Mapoka village received instructions from *Mwali*, together with Ntogwa, that the field should be used for annual *wosana* rain prayers. There was a granary that fed the village population during years of poor harvest. This granary had a special name: *zhunde*. In those days, the chief's field used to be ploughed by his people. A special day for this kind of ploughing was set aside by the villagers and also named *zhunde*. The word *zhunde* was also used in a different context, saying *she wa baha zhunde*, meaning that the chief has given his people some harvest shares from the village communal granary *zhunde*. According to one of my Venda informants, a music lecturer at the University of Venda, Takalani Tjivhango, the same occasion of ploughing the chief's communal field used to take place in the past amongst the *Venda* people of South Africa and it is called *dzunde* in *Tshivenda*.

Every family ploughed, weeded and harvested the *zhunde* communal field. The proceeds were used to brew communal traditional beer, which was given to the people who attended the *nzeze* ceremony (Mtutuki 1976:20).

Anybody offering the *wosana* transport is allowed only to carry their luggage, since traditionally the group has strictly to walk to this place. Gifts in the form of food are allowed to enable the *wosana* to sustain their long stay at *ku nzeze*. The rain-praying group strictly reserves this place for use in mid-September. It has to be cleared like any other residential place under the supervision of *Umthanyeli (Isindebele)* (keeper or caretaker) who in this case is Setlhare Mmopi (Ta-Masikati).

Plate 19



Setlhare Mmopi Ta-Masikati one of the sacred place caretakers at Mapoka

Photographed by the author at the Annual *Gumbu* Rain Praying Ceremony in Mapoka village in September 1995

Other volunteering elderly village men and women using *nshangule* (*euclea undulata*) tree branches carry out the clearing. *Wosana* cook for themselves, in their respective residential temporary shelters, built by men from different village wards. Since the *wosana* come from different villages, they are grouped according to their respective troupes. People from different village wards bring with them some animals such as goats and cattle to slaughter for relish during this rain prayer week.

On day four, which is normally a Saturday, villagers carry *Bakalanga* brewed beer in very big *mikabo* (calabashes) to the *nzeze* tree (*wosana*-dancing place).

Plate 20



Ms. Ndibali in the middle carrying a calabash with *Bakalanga* traditional beer. She is with Unami Gazi (right) and Sylvia Peter (left)

Photographed by the author at the Annual *Gumbu* Rain Praying Ceremony in Mapoka Village in September 1995

Every family is expected to bring with it a calabash of beer to this rain praying ritual. This beer is meant for the village elders and the *wosana* present at the ritual to drink happily, marking the success of the occasion. Other elderly women who arrive earlier at the dancing place welcome women carrying *mikabo* (calabashes) in a rejoicing manner through *mipululu* (ululations). When reaching this place, everybody is expected to take off shoes since all activities at this ritual are carried out barefoot to mark the holiness of the place.

Plate 21



Mr. Mbutjili Clement Jorosi (the retired headmaster of Selibe Phikwe Senior Secondary School) taking part in *wosana* music performance. At the time of this performance, Mr Jorosi was the headmaster of Masunga Senior Secondary School

Photographed by Maggy Tema at the annual Gumbu Rain Praying Ceremony held at Mapoka village in September 1995

Mu thanga (in the dancing arena) it is the *wosana* only who are allowed, whilst the audience surrounds them, to assist with singing and hand clapping. However, nowadays some people just join the *wosana* in dancing as can be seen with Mr. Jorosi in the photo. The rules are more

strict at the Njelele hill at a holy place where only the possessed are allowed to dance. For loud and effective clapping, sometimes *zwikei* (cattle yokes) and *zwingwango* (concussion plaques of iron) are struck together to produce a louder sound. While *wosana* dance rhythmically in turns, in small groups of about five to six, they become thirsty. Water is provided in buckets for them to drink. If they want to drink, they do it from small *ndilo ye lukuni* (wooden basins) constructed from *nthula* (*marula*) tree trunks.

The music sung at this ceremony is not notated but perpetuated through oral tradition. It has cyclical lyrics, which are easily learnt by rote. Some people watching the dancing would throw any amount of money to show *ku fupa* (appreciation).

Plate 22



One of the *wosana* participants picking up the gifts from the audience in the form of money

Photographed by Maggy Tema at the annual *Gumbu* Rain Praying Ceremony held at Mapoka village in September 1995

Day five, which is normally Sunday, is partly spent at the *nzeze* tree and partly at Robert Vumbu Ntoga's home in Ramokgwebana village where the hillock is for the final rain prayers before dismissal. On day six, which is normally a Monday, *wosana* hold their last rain prayers for

the week at this place. The seventh and last day (Tuesday) of these prayers is meant for the *wosana* to disperse and travel back to their homes and villages.

There is yet another date set later for the journey to *Mwali's* bigger hill Njelele in Zimbabwe. The Njelele sacred place is visited in early April for the harvest ceremony.

In most places a similar ritual takes place in thanksgiving after harvest, a very festive occasion, especially if the harvest has been a good one. In some chiefdoms the thanksgiving ceremony occurs only after a particularly good harvest and includes feasting on the meat of oxen killed by the chief for the occasion. At a particularly large festival, people may be asked to brew the sorghum beer in their homes and contribute beer on the day of the festival instead of grain before it.

If the spirit guardians failed to provide a good harvest the previous year, they are not so lavishly honoured and the celebrations cease when the attendants have consumed what little beer they could afford to brew (Bourdillon 1976: 303).

During this ceremony, messengers and *wosana* (adepts) accompanied by other villagers, go to Njelele to make offerings to *Mwali* as thanksgiving for the past harvest. They carry with them small amounts of whatever food they produced in their fields. This entire foodstuff is collected and stored in a public granary at the sacred place for use during ceremonies at the sacred place. Part of the foodstuff is consumed during the harvest ceremony itself. People are not allowed to eat *zhizha* (fresh fruits) from their fields before this ceremony. The trip to Njelele is taken by a special group of selected *wosana* who are normally old members of the sect. These people accompany *Mwali's* messenger, Robert Vumbu Ntogwa. This is the time the *wosana* go to communicate the people's problems, pleas and requests to *Mwali*.

According to Basetse Mamu, virgins accompany the old women. They are sent to move around the village looking for muddy water. When found, this water is put in a small calabash covered with *nzeze* tree

leaves. This is because *nzeze* is used as a flywhisk (*tshoba*) to pray for rain. The calabash with muddy water is brought and broken onto the dancing ground with the belief that people dancing on this ground will make rain fall when returning to their respective villages.

Basetse also explained the music activities taking place at Njelele. The Njelele sacred place is divided into two categories. The first place is called *Ku thanga* (the dancing arena). At this place, *ndazula*, *woso* and *mukomoto* music are performed by all people including *wosana*. *Wosana* music is performed by possessed *wosana* only (*baka sungwa*). The second place is called *Kuno butjiligwa* (hand clapping to show respect area). This place is only attended by *wosana dzaka sungwa* (possessed *wosana* only). Songs sung at this place are called *madumilano* (singing in agreement). In the *madumilano* songs, the lead singer sings different lyrics whereas the respondents' answer is always *iye iye*.

Following the author's interview with Robert Vumbu Ntogwa, who is the present *Mwali's* messenger (priest), these responses were established. It is not everybody from the *wosana* group or Ntogwa's family who receive the vocation of being the people's messenger to *Mwali*. Women are not allowed for several reasons. One of these reasons is that, when a woman gets married, she adopts the husband's surname. This could result in the disappearance of the family name. The other reason is that women are not allowed to go to the hill during days of menstruation. Women are also not allowed to go to the hill when they have small toothless babies since it is believed that they might die. These obstacles could also be detrimental to the female messenger's duties in times of urgency.

Despite Robert Vumbu's description of the succession of the *Mwali* priests, ambiguities in rules and practices of succession have been a factor in the endemic leadership disputes in the religion of *Mwali*. In North Eastern Botswana, the leadership dispute between Vumbu Ntogwa and his sister Galani Ntogwa lasted more than twenty years

(Monyatsi 1984: 28; Mtutuki 1976: 27; and Werbner 1977a: 188 and 1989: 275-9). In the course of this dispute, Galani opened her own rival sacred place in Themashanga village, still in North Eastern Botswana. Leadership disputes are known to have existed at Njelele, Dula, Zhilo and Ntunjambili.

Ku dombo (at the hill), *Mwali's* voice is heard by all *wosana* at the scene. However, it is difficult to understand the message because it sounds like a mixture of three languages: *Ikalanga*, *Tjizezuru* and *Tshivenda*. *Mwali's* messenger is the only person from this group who is able to get the message clearly. All the *wosana* have to face the West, turning their backs to the hill. During their stay there, the group has to visit the hill two times a day, in the mornings and in the evenings before sunset. According to Robert Vumbu Ntogwa, *Mwali's* voice becomes very clear in the mornings. Sunday is a resting day, so nobody goes to the hill. *Wosana* are not allowed to go to the hill when it is cloudy and when there is no moonlight. One big *nkabo* (calabash) full of *Bakalanga* traditional beer has to be taken to the hill for drinking by this group of *wosana*.

6.5 NSI

Nsi is a holy day on which *Bakalanga* should rest and not do any work associated with ploughing or rainfall. This day is also meant to ask for forgiveness from the High-God *Mwali* for whatever wrongs have been done. If a strong wind, lightning or hail occurs in the village, people take it that *Mwali* was checking on his people and no work is done on that day as well. In the past, this was signaled through a *wosana's* drum.

If somebody ploughed during such times, he/she was reported to *Mwali* and made to pay either a black goat or a cow. These black animals are associated with the ancestors. *Mwali* would invite such a person for a warning through the *Bakalanga* messenger. If this person refused, birds or any pests that destroyed all crops would attack his/her field. Other

people in the area would be attacked. *Nsi* is observed either on Wednesday or Friday in different parts of *Bukalanga*.

6.6 SUMMARY

The transcendence and inaccessibility of the High-God obviously necessitates powerful intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Deity. These intermediaries facilitate communion with *Mwali* or are themselves routes of worship, to the High-God himself. The religion's messenger is the main link between the communities in the periphery, the religion's priesthood, and *Mwali* at the oracular religious centres.

The *wosana* is believed to mediate through communion, between mankind and *Mwali*. In so far as the local communities at the periphery are concerned, *Mwali* still lives far away at distant sacred centres. Despite the spatial proximity of the sacred centre, *Mwali* is still removed from local communities and communion with him is through the mediation of sacred-go-between.

The *Bakalanga* of Botswana's first messenger to *Mwali* was Ntogwa Mathafeni Ncube. After his death, his son Vumbu Ntogwa inherited the post of *Mwali*'s messenger. Vumbu died and his son Robert Vumbu also inherited the post of *Mwali*'s messenger. So, Robert Vumbu is the current *Bakalanga* of Botswana's messenger to *Mwali*. Among the *Mwali* related activities, Robert Vumbu is also responsible for the supervision of the annual seed blessing, praying of rain and the observance of *Nsi*, the holy day for *Bakalanga*.