

## CHAPTER FIVE

**Sketching briefly the contours of what might be called the symbolic universe of Africa.**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Most scholars who have entered the African scene for research have done so wearing Western spectacles for viewing reality. Much as they tried to be open to this world, they were hampered by their basic scientific theories, which constitute their psychological assumption that the world is as accurate as their scientific theories have described it. Westerners perceive the African reality in terms of their preferences, focuses, biases and other preconditioning their world might have brought to bear upon them.

All of us are members of particular communities and therefore, beneficiaries of their symbolic universes. The manner we conceive reality is in terms of our universes. It is important that those seeking to research the African world coming from outside it, approach it with an open mind. Also there needs to be some kind of paradigm shift or a transformation of the way they perceive reality. This does not mean abandoning the tools they gathered from their world but is a call to openness and a willingness to learn from the other world.

Having endeavoured to paint the symbolic universe of 1 John in the above chapter, it is necessary to attempt to draw the symbolic universe of Africa. The topic for this chapter is therefore, in a sense misleading in that it talks about an African symbolic universe as though there is a single universe. Pato

(1997:54) rightly points out that cultural diversities (in Africa) preclude any generalisation regarding an African perspective, let alone a symbolic universe.

Even though there are various sub-universes of meaning, of which the sub-universe of Zulu people is but one, it is our contention that there is much that is common among African people. This chapter will attempt to paint a broad and general African scenario, making references where necessary to specific aspects of the Zulu symbolic universe.

Anthropologists find that contemporary primitive cultures also have worldviews that interpret their experiences and guide their activities (Holmes 1983:3). Any discussion of the world of Africa must begin by offering a definition of culture since the symbolic universe operates within the sphere called culture. It is essential therefore that we offer definitions of what we mean by culture. Culture has become a buzzword for many Africans hence the importance of commencing any discussion on the African universe, including Traditional Religious beliefs, with some definitions of culture.

## **5.2 What is culture?**

### **5.2.1 Definitions of culture**

According to Vatican Council 2, the word 'culture' in the general sense refers to all those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical endowments. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and his labour; he humanises social life both in the family

and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; he expresses through his works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of men throughout the ages; he communicates and preserves them to be an inspiration for the progress of any, even of all mankind (Flannery 1975:957).

Hiebert defines culture as the integrated system of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas and products characteristic of a society (in Gibbs 1981:73). According to Hiebert, culture has to do with everything that human beings learn in the society within which they are born.

Niebuhr (1951:33) defines culture as a human achievement. He further states that it is the work of men's minds and hands, it is that portion of men's heritage in any place or time, which has been given us designedly and laboriously by other men.

For Nida, culture is the non-material traits, which are passed on from one generation to another (in Gibbs 1981:83). Nida's definition displays a narrow view, which regards the material as not part of culture. An African definition that excludes the material would not be dealing with culture as understood by Africans.

Paul Tillich sees culture as a meaning system, a mechanism expressed through symbols by the human spirit, which emerges in the creativity of person's quest to interpret his world (in Moila 1987:4).

There is another popular way in which the term culture is becoming more prevalent in the media. This is evident in the use of the phrase 'culture of...' when attempting to describe the process of attitude formation, which is going on in society (Bate 1995:210). For instance, people talk of the need for religions and peoples of various cultures to develop a culture of tolerance and for teachers to instil a culture of learning to pupils.

Apart from the above, many and varied definitions of culture can be given but the above-mentioned will suffice for our study. Culture, it must be noted constitutes one of the most divisive phenomenon ever to be found among the peoples of the world. Its divisiveness arises from the fact that each society feels that its culture is holding something, which is very precious, which perhaps needs to be shared with humankind (Moila 1987:8).

The belief that one's culture has something, which others do not have, has led to the tendency to evaluate other people's cultures through one's own cultural perspective. If other people's culture does not fit within categories drawn by one's own culture, it is dismissed as barbarous and primitive. Kraft (1979:48) calls this tendency ethnocentrism.

When dealing with other cultures other than our own, we need to realise that we are entering a world different from our own. Kraft suggests ways of curbing ethnocentrism. He emphasises that the outsider should be careful to evaluate a culture first in terms of its own values, norms, goals and focuses, before venturing to compare it with any other culture. This he calls cultural validity (Kraft 1979:49).

Ethnocentrism, unless we guard against it, will continue to cause problems among the peoples of various cultures in the world. Examples in our own time include the apartheid philosophy in this country and the situation obtaining in Kosovo where the Serbs have engaged in what is called ethnic cleansing. The driving force behind this dreadful act is the strong belief in the superiority of the Serbs over the Kosovians. Ethnocentrism as Moila (1987:9) points out can lead to the isolation of a group or society, thus impeding cultural interchange and interaction.

In this study cultural validity will be the measuring rod of our work since it places cultures on an equal basis for the simple reason that they are all able to provide meaningful answers and meet the needs of their members.

### **5.3 The Zulu conception of God**

For a description of how Zulu people conceived God, we will make use of documented research. Qualitative research will be done later on, the results of which will be tested against these to show which of these beliefs and ideas are still prevalent and how the symbolic universe has been adapted according to needs of modern people.

The belief in, and worship of, one Supreme deity, as Father Schmidt of Vienna states is universal among all really primitive peoples; that the 'High God' is found everywhere among them sufficiently prominently to make his position indubitable; that he is not a late development or traceable to missionary influences. He goes on further to assert that the belief in God encircles the whole earth like a girdle and is an essential property of

whatever ancient human culture existed in the very earliest times (in Dickson and Ellingworth 1969:18-18).

Many books that were written earlier reflected the ethnocentrism with which Western writers viewed cultures other than their own. The feeling of superiority with which they approached other cultures and religions blinded them to their own ignorance. Primitive cultures have always known of and worshipped God.

Marshall (1982:13-14) argues that every person is born with an insatiable desire to give homage to something or someone greater than him/herself. He goes on further to say that worship is the basic, fundamental instinct within every creature: an instinct more basic and more lasting than our sexual instincts and yet an instinct scarcely heeded in the ordinary daily conversation and concerns of the twentieth century man. He elaborates by saying that like all basic instincts, if it is neglected it does not evaporate or just go away: it wounds, perverts and corrupts, because human beings, if they are made for worship, will demand expression, in one way or another of that compulsive drive.

It is assumed here that this insatiable desire to worship has not by-passed the Zulu people. In the development of their traditional religious systems and practices, like all people, they have felt this human need for a relationship with someone greater than themselves and have expressed their response in a variety of ways. Their responses are contained in their belief systems , rituals and practices, culture being the vehicle and the premise within which

this enduring need is expressed and the symbolic universe intergrating and legitimating them into a meaningful whole.

For traditional rural Zulu people, the reality of their symbolic universe included a universe inhabited by the material as well as spiritual forces (Fleming 1986:24). It is a universe integral with a supernatural dynamic power pervading all aspects of it (Thorpe 1991:34). The way they can make sense of and explain it is through symbols, which they develop and legitimise as expressive of what they are describing. The symbolic names, which they use for the creator God, are diverse and full of meaning.

There is a need to point out that even though language runs bankrupt when it comes to describing the supernatural reality, the names Africans have used and given to describe the 'God reality' are quite revealing for a people who were said to be without any idea of a deity. The Sotho - Tswana, for example, call him Modimo, the Xhosa, uQamatha, uThixo, Mudzimu or uDali, Zulu people used many names such as : uNkulunkulu -the Great, Great One, uMvelinqangi – the First Comer-Out the First Essence of existence (Colenso 1982:xvi; Hexham 1987:188), the Pre-existent one (Fleming 1986:24), uMdali – the Creator, Simakade – the long-lived one, uBaba – Father, Umenzi – Maker (Crafford 1996:13) and uSomandla – the Powerful one. The Venda use, Raluvhimba or Mudzimu (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:xx).

Zulu people understood God in a diversity of ways in which he manifested Himself. Within the stock of symbolic religious terms, they described the symbol they perceived to constitute the ultimate reality as uNkulunkulu 'the Great, Great One' or uMvelinqangi as the maker of the earth and of

everything that is in the world (Vilakazi 1964:87; Colenso 1982:xvi; Maimela 1985:66).

The second name uMvelinqangi is a word with the roots: vela - meaning to appear, to come forth, come into view. The second root: nqangi has a double-fold meaning. The first meaning is that of 'the first' or 'the origin'. The second meaning of 'nqangi' refers to something mysterious and hidden. In the creation of the male sexual organs, there is what is known as 'ikhingqe'. Some call this part 'inqangi'. This part of the body according to the creation plan should stay covered and protected. Damage to this part could have serious consequences, it could mean no offspring. Inqangi therefore refers to the hidden aspect of this part that works in a mysterious way. Therefore, the name 'uMvelinqangi' reveals the mysteriousness in the way God came into being. He is not known where he came from.

Berglund suggests that the former interpretation of nqangi falls short of an essential understanding of the term. He says that nqangi as correctly pointed out by Bryant and Doke Vilakazi, refers to the first born of the twins. He says that the idea of the first one was not just simply the first one but always the first of the two which are twins. Therefore the sky and the earth go together. They are one but the one is above the other. The sky is the first-born of the two, but they are the same kind. That is why the one that lives in the sky is called the first born of the twins. He is the first to come forth then the earth (Berglund 1976:34). We think that Berglund's interpretation of 'nqangi', while it has some merit does not cancel the first, instead it adds to it.



According to some creation myths, it is said that uNkulunkulu broke off (wadabula) the nations from uthlanga. The use of the word 'wadabula' necessarily implies the pre-existence of something from which the division took place (Callaway 1868:2). God as well is said to have broken off. The question is, He broke off from what? In an attempt to answer this, there is a play on words displayed by Zulus. They speak in the case of God as someone who appeared from the reed i.e. 'owavela ohlangeni' or one who 'sprang from a bed of reeds' and who created all wild animals, cattle and game, snakes and birds, water and mountains, as well as the sun and the moon (Magubane 1998:62).

The word uthlanga is of deep mythical significance as it refers not so much to 'royal blood' as to the original stem or stock from which uNkulunkulu (the 'Great Progenitor') emerged, bringing with him mankind and nationhood (Bourquin 1986:5). Observable is a difference exhibited by the usage of the two words. God appeared (wavela) as opposed to human beings that broke off (badabuka). God was not created but he emerged full-blown from the reeds (Vilakazi 1964:87) whereas human beings share God's being by virtue of having broken off from the original reed or stock.

UMvelinqangi is the 'First Appearer or Exister (Thorpe 1991:35). He is the uthlanga from which all men broke off (Callaway 1868:7; Sundermeier 1998:18), so that when black people say uNkulunkulu or uthlanga or the Creator they mean one and the same thing (Hexham 1987:195). The name uMvelinqangi, therefore, reveals the transcendental aspect of God, the one who is mighty- uSomandla, who is above all things- oPhezukonke, the one

who caused all things to come forth - *owenza izinto zonke zaba khona*, including the ancestors (Ndwandwe 1982:5).

The second way in which God was understood is related to the actions of uNomkhubulwana-Inkosazana yeZulu-the Princess of heaven. UNomkhubulwana was regarded as the mouth of God or a type of earth mother associated with agriculture, spring rain and fertility (Thorpe 1991:37). During the season of drought or floods or when worms had eaten mealies, (Berlund 1976:64), uNomkhubulwana was asked for rain, so that when people went for the second time to plant, they spoke of '*ukuyokhubula*'.

During the *ukukhubula*, oxen were taken for sacrificing. These were burnt together with incense, something that was an essential part of *ukukhubula* (Ndwandwe 1982:6).

The third way in which God manifested himself was through the actions of uHlathelinganxanye. Bryant (1949:667) is tempted to regard uHlathelinganxanye as uNomkhubulwana. He speaks of uNomkhubulwana as one who moveth with mist (...rain), on one side a human being, on one side wood, on one side a river, on one side overgrown with grass. It is possible here that the similarity of the tasks confused Bryant into thinking that uNomkhubulwana and uHlathelinganxanye are one and the same.

Zulus conceive of God as far away and remote and playing little part in everyday life (Fleming 1986:24). This conception pertinent among Zulu people, is general among Africans and has exerted some influence on their worship (McVeigh 1974:109). The belief that God in African society is viewed as far and remote has led Crafford (1996:13) into contending that the

Supreme Being in African religion is usually vaguely defined as *Deus otiosus*-uninvolved divinity, which is not directly concerned with everyday life. He further points out that God is also understood as *deus absconditus*-the concealed, remote God who is approached mainly through mediators. From where does this idea of the remoteness of god stem? Let us briefly look at African mythology. Hopefully we may be able to get some helpful hints.

#### **5.4 God in African mythology**

Johnson (1999:13) asserts that a myth does not refer to false stories but to narratives that seek to clothe transcendent realities with language and, by so doing, express the meaning inherent in the structures of shared life. Zulu mythology was such an attempt by primitive Zulus to clothe with language the transcendent reality and why that reality was experienced and perceived as distant and aloof.

Apart from the Zulu myth concerning death, there exist in abundance a variety of myths accounting for, and seeking to provide answers for, every facet of life. Mention is made below of such myths. One African myth has to do with a black 'Eve' at work, who pounding maize raised her pestle so high above her mortar that it touched heaven, exciting the anger and subsequent withdrawal of the deity (Crafford 1996:13).

The Yas myth tells us why God separated himself from human beings and this world and established himself on the sky with the help of the spider's thread over which he climbed: because man was sinful. He always burnt fire,

destroying God's vegetation and burning animals, which were His closest friends.

The Ituri pygmies of Zaire say that when man and woman came every day to feed God, who was living in a clearing in the forest, they were not allowed to stay and see him take the food. Woman was curious and stayed to see God come out of his hut. God was angry and retired from the world (Shorter 1973:65).

These and many other myths show that originally God was a social, free and outgoing person who, however, withdrew from the company of human beings because of their sin. Opoku (1993:73-74) argues that the 'withdrawal' of God from the world or the separation between God and man, as many African myths narrate it, do not tell of a physical separation of God from man, but that they allude to the otherness of God. It is as a result of this withdrawal that a yawning gap was created and human beings have found themselves in a poorer situation.

According to Zulu people, the yawning gap created by the withdrawal of God necessitated the creation of a bridge between God and the living. The ancestors who were seen as part of the reality of African people, but who operated from the world of the ancestors, constituted this bridge. As ancestors began to occupy the centre stage, it was believed that they sustain and nurture the interests of their descendants, and were an important bridge between the physical and the spiritual worlds (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:xx). It is believed that they move between God and the living (Ndwandwe 1982:22-23). In general when prayers are made, the living do not go to God directly.

Only in critical circumstances was God approached in prayer (Crafford 1996:13; McVeigh 1974:111). The reality of the universe of Zulu people included ancestors who occupied centre stage as part of the community.

## **5.5 Community**

### **5.5.1 The basic importance of the family**

Human beings exist within a vast and complex system of interrelationships. At the core of the symbolic universe or worldview, Congdon (1984:37) contends, was the symbiotic relation of each Zulu with the ancestors and the resultant interdependence of all members of the tribe (see also Sundermeier 1998:18). Neither individual, nor all of us together, can exist in isolation, for both individually and collectively we originate and draw sustenance from outside ourselves (Holmes 1983:107-108). Therefore, fullness of life for the individual is not attainable in isolation and apart from one's fellows because life is something communal and is possible only in a network of mutual interdependence (Maimela 1985:66). Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole community to which he belongs, and whatever happens to the community happens to the individual as well.

Sundermeier (1998:17) puts it succinctly that the whole is represented in the individual, and the individual stands for the whole community. For instance a Zulu person would say: '*Nginguzulu*', either meaning 'I am a Zulu', or 'I am the Zulu people', its representative. His life and that of the community is one and cannot be separated for it transcends life and death. Hence he can say: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'. This is the

significant point in the understanding of the African view of personhood. A person's existence is corporate existence (Goba 1974:68). Therefore, any discussion about the community or society cannot be complete without focusing on the family, the reason being that family is the microcosm of society and the arena within which individuals learn something of the symbolic universe.

In the words of Mohammed Hassan, a Muslim, the family is one of the stones of the whole building - indeed, it's the whole building: without these stones of family life, you can't build house - the whole society (in Bowker 1983:184). For Jews there is an equally strong emphasis on the family. It is seen as a chain of continuity that links the living and the dead, and a chain that ensures the continuity of the Jewish way of life and traditions (Bowker 1983:184-185). The African understanding of family can be described in similar terms as the above Jewish description provides. Continuity of this chain is dependent upon the birth of children who have to perpetuate and carry forward family traditions.

### **5.5.2 Birth and belonging**

The original context of birth within any symbolic universe is obviously the most critical one for all of us. We are what we are because we were born these things. I am a Zulu because I was born into a Zulu family and so is the fact that I am a Christian. Choices and decisions in our lives follow later. When we reach adulthood and are confronted by other realities then we make many choices and decisions that determine the direction our lives will follow, but the original context of birth still plays a critical role. The basic reason why people become fully integrated members of society must be

traced back to the strong family background, where they were moulded and shaped to view things as they do.

The family is the arena where all people learn most things in this life. According to Twesigye (1987:111) the family or community is the context and focus of all human activities, as it is thought to be the arena and grounding of human existence, particularly at the family level in its indefinitely extended broad scope. People learn how to behave, how to love and how to be charitable from their families. It is therefore the field within which they are humanised (*benziwa abantu*). As stated above families are a microcosm of society. Strong communities develop from strong families and they constitute a unity of life. Participation within family circles and the community facilitates the integration of individuals and ensures that the reality around them is meaningfully explained.

The perception of life as a unity enhances and strengthens the view that it cannot be terminated even by death. Those who have died are seen as having moved on into another world, which is part of the whole reality. To ensure continuity, various ceremonies, such as '*Ukubuyiswa*' are performed with the view to integrating the newly dead into the hierarchy of family spirits (Ngobese 1981:11).

If the family or community is the arena within which people are humanised, then to be truly human means to belong to a family or community. Muzorewa as cited by Opoku (1993:76) confirms this view by saying that one's humanity is defined by a sense of belonging, for it is not enough to be a human being unless one shows a sense of participation in community.

Undergirding the community is the principle of interdependence since the human individual is not self-sufficient to the extent that all his/her needs could be met single-handedly, one needs the assistance of others in order to realise one's full personality (Opoku 1993:77).

Kalu (1993:112) cites Schapera who in dealing with the subject of social control, contends that life in a primitive community involves every individual in specific obligations to others, who in turn are similarly duty-bound to him. Those obligations he fulfils partly because of early training, and partly because of public opinion and self-interest. It pays him in various ways to do as he should, and if he does not he suffers loss of material benefits and of social esteem. In other words, life for the individual is grasped as it is shared.

What this means is that the member of the tribe, the clan, or family, knows that here he/she does not live for himself or herself, but for the community. He/she knows that apart from the community he or she would no longer have the means of existence. Living for him/her is existence in community, it is participation in the sacred life (and all life is sacred) of the ancestors; it is an extension of the life of one's forefathers, and a preparation for one's own life to be carried on in one's descendants. (Dickson & Ellingworth 1969:139).

The fact of having been born into a particular family, clan or tribe plunges us into a specific vital current. It incorporates us into it, fashions us according to this community, 'ontically' modifies our whole being, and turns it in the



direction of the community's way of life and behaviour (Dickson & Ellingworth 1969:139).

Descartes' dictum '*Cogito ergo sum*' 'I think, therefore I am' (in Pillay and Hofmeyr 1991:176) which seems to be the basis of Western thinking about a person would be alien to Zulu people. Zulu people are deeply influenced by the experience of community. They view themselves as deeply rooted in the community. They are persons because they live and participate in the community. This experience is expressed in the popular African saying: '*Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu*' (Zulu) 'motho ke motho ka batho' (Sotho). An individual cannot be truly human in isolation. One's full humanity is realised in and defined within the bound of community.

The role, which the family and the community play in the formation and moulding of individual behaviour, cannot be underscored. It is the intensity with which this process is carried forward during socialisation that ensures the adherence, respect and execution of one's duties in a manner that benefits not only the individual but the community as well. In other words this is the way the community ensures that the behaviour of its members is well regulated and controlled.

Osthathios (1979:91) rightly points out that the very birth or conception of the person is by participation of the parents in the most intimate manner. Similarly a person can grow as a person only if love is poured into the person by others and by the society of the family, neighbours, the church, the nation and even the world. The very question, which is posed by the individualism of the West as to who is prior, the individual or society does not arise at all in an ideal African home.

Kalu (1993:112) suggests that society controls the behaviour of her members in four different but co-ordinated ways. Firstly, she enunciates and inculcates acceptable values. Secondly, society endeavours to restrict members from flouting those values. Thirdly, the society punishes those who break acceptable norms and values, and fourthly, she congratulates and rewards those who affirm salient norms and values.

Twesigye (1987:111) has put it so aptly that the community being primary over the individual imposes over the individual a system of norms, codes of behaviour and obligations. He further argues that the community acts as the divinely appointed custodian, police and court for human ethics and morality (Twesigye 1987:112). Included into this network of family relationships are a host of ancestors who play a very significant role in African or Zulu society.

## **5.6 Ancestors - the Living dead**

In Zulu society, individuals exist because of the community. The community extends in time beyond the bounds of the present era, backward to the ancestors and forward to the future generations (Sundermeier 1998:17). This point of view is not peculiar to Zulus. Mbiti (1971:129) referring to the wider context, points out that for Africans, death does not mean annihilation but a departure to the spirit world. People used symbols to explain as well as represent what they perceived of the reality of death. Ancestors are a symbol representing continuity of life. Reference to them is an attempt to explain what happens to our loved ones when they die. In fact according to Zulu people, they do not die but move to the world underneath –*baya kwelabaphansi* (Vilakazi 1965:89).

According to one myth, uNkulunkulu sent a Chameleon (*Unwabu*) to say that people should not die. The Chameleon loitered on the way and as it went, it ate *ubukwebezane* –the fruit of a tree. Then uNkulunkulu sent a lizard (*intulo*) to say that people would die and the lizard ran and made great haste and reached the destination before the Chameleon (Hexham 1987:187). This story of creation is a wonderful attempt to try and explain this predicament of death. Incidentally all cultures do have mythological stories about the reality surrounding life, how it came about and how come people die. According to this story, God's original intention was that human beings would live forever here on earth. They would go on existing like rocks only changing their skins like snakes to renew their lives. God sent a chameleon-unwabu to declare that human beings would never die. The chameleon loitered on the way. Meanwhile God sent a lizard-intulo to declare that people would die and the lizard moved swiftly hence people die (Mdletshe 1997:5).

An ancestor as defined by Zahan (1979:49) is first of all, a man who has reached a great age and who has acquired along with longevity a profound experience of people and things. Ancestors are sometimes called 'the Living dead' because it is believed that they are not dead but continue to live in a different state and in another world (Vilakazi 1965:89).

Opoku (1993:75) says that there is an indissoluble union between the living and their dead relatives; the dead continue to be members of their families, communities and societies and to interact with their living relatives. Since their spirits were considered to be ever present within the confines of the family, living members of the family and the spirits constituted the unbroken united family. The death of the father (head of the family) did not therefore

mean the loss of contact with him or loss of guidance and help in family matters (Song 1989:116). In fact, this view was commonly held by the Greeks who also believed that the dead continue engaging in the same activities as on earth (Ferguson 1987:118).

If ancestors are alive, where do they live? The answer to this question has in a sense been alluded to above. It is believed that the world where ancestors are leans upon the divine realm where uMvelinqangi is. As people who have changed their physical mode of being into a spiritual mode, and live in a spiritual domain, they are in close proximity to uMvelinqangi. The fact that the 'living dead' are near God, qualifies them to be mediators between God and the living (Ndwandwe 1982:17).

Mbiti (1971:137) asserts that they can assemble before Him or be sent by Him, which is something that the living do not experience. Van der Watt (1999:144) mentions that even though ancestors are in another world, they continue to be part of the family (the living-living) and are still intimately involved in the lives of their children, both in matters of joy and sorrow, health or disease, prosperity or adversity.

### **5.6.1 Respect in Zulu society**

Respect among Zulus was and still is general; everyone must be respected irrespective of age or sex. But respect was also hierarchical in accord with their social structure. The highest one to be accorded respect being uNkulunkulu/ uMvelinqangi and the next on line, in a retrogressive order being the living dead, especially those who had occupied highest positions

such as kings and leaders of families (Ngobese 1981:2). Sawyerr confirms this in his suggestion that the African's attitude to God is a reflection of the experience of his relationship with his chiefs, influenced in certain respects by his attitude to the ancestral spirits (in Nyirongo 1997:17).

Regarding the king, there is an aura of sacredness that attaches to him, requiring that he only be approached through mediators and that he be regarded with reverence and his authority unquestioningly obeyed (Crafford 1996:17). The mediatory chain was also modelled according to the prevailing social and religious culturally established procedure of observing the seniority of persons (Twesigye 1987:95). Among the Zulus seniority came with age and also if you belonged to the right hand side of the family line (*Iqadi*), you always had more respect than those on the left hand side of the line (*Ikhohlo*) (Ngobese 1981:5).

Kings and Leaders of families also performed priestly functions in their families. These two offices, i.e. leader and priest were not under normal circumstances separated, and they did not terminate when the holders of them died. It is held that in the land of the living dead they re-assumed them. As has been pointed out, the living dead are revered because of their success and power (Ngobese 1981:4).

It should also be noted that respect does not originate from void space, it is born out of a situation of life. The elders are people who were experienced in life. Age in Zulu culture means experience in many areas of life (Ngobese 1981:6). Zahan (1979:12) speaking about the importance of social hierarchy in Africa says that here all men have their determined place in society, each

has a function to perform or a role to play, and they arrange themselves in strata according to the order of their coming into the world.

This hierarchical order was respected and observed very strictly especially during celebrations or the performance of any ritual affecting or involving the living dead. The same order of seniority was observed even among the women. This is so true among the Zulus that in the hut they would arrange themselves according to the hierarchical order on their side of the hut and so likewise the men on their side of the hut (Ngobese 1981:5). Seniority meant a lot in Zulu culture. For instance a young man would not feel able to approach a senior man. Instead he would ask the man next to him to approach the senior man on his behalf. Being a young man he has no reason to approach a senior man directly, let alone call him by his first name (Ngobese 1981:6).

What Zahan (1979:49) states holds true among Zulus that an ancestor is also distinguished from people less advanced in age and whose credulity and inexperience in life classify them with children or youths. He further points out that the latter are never given elaborate funerals and are never the focus of a cult. People lamented for men who died young but for those who died having attained a mature age, a sense of celebration and joy surrounded their funerals. These are people for whom the '*ukubuyiswa*' ceremony was held.

Shorter (1973:60) argues that respect or reverence given to them is not related to their ethical behaviour. Whilst this may be true in other African cultures, among the Zulus, ethical behaviour plays a significant role and is considered seriously. What Mbiti (1971:129) says holds true for Zulu people that personality traits are not affected by death but continue in the spirit world.

This is further confirmed by Zahan (1979:50) who asserts that the whole notion of ancestors seem to rest on two key ideas. (1) The purity of a type of man conceived by the group as a social and religious model to which individuals must conform in order to avoid their destruction; and (2) the concern for the continuity and identity of the group over time and despite the vicissitudes of existence.

What is morally bad is what brings misery, misfortune, and disgrace (Motlhabi 1986:95). For instance, adulterers, murderers, thieves, those who commit incest, witches and wizards and all those who do not contribute anything or whose behaviour is anti-social, or are a danger to the wholeness of society. It is believed that when they die they go to the unfortunate realm of dark spirits. These spirits are a source of all evil like sickness, drought, famine and many other disasters. This realm is outside the community of the living dead because these people can never be integrated into the family spirits because of the potential to be instruments or messengers of disaster to the family.

The point we have made above to the effect that personal traits count, is supported by various scholars, who point out that not everyone (who has died) qualifies to be an ancestral spirit (Crafford 1996:14; Skhakhane 1995:107). People who are polluters, invaders or a threat to the wholeness and purity of the society (Neyrey 1990:108) would never qualify for this role. What this strongly underlines is the fact that life was seen as a continuing phenomenon which even death could not terminate, and that one's behaviour was very significant in determining who could approach

uMvelinqangi. God being king of the universe could not be approach by humans directly hence the need for human intermediaries.

### **5.6.2 A need for an intermediary/mediator**

Two factors exacebated the need for a human intermediary: First, the fact that God, being the king of the universe, could not be approached directly by the living. This was in line with Zulu social structure where the king was not directly accessible to anyone but could only be approached through an *inceku*-a servant. In the case of God, it is believed that the only persons who could perform this function were the ancestors.

Second, the belief that God for reasons mentioned in African mythology moved away from this world and now operates from outside of it has enhanced the desire for human mediation. The fact of dependency upon God for Africans is unquestionable (Ngobese 1981:4). Even though dependent upon God, they however feel (at times) that forces of chaos and non-being or annihilation (Twesigye 1987:95) radically threaten their life.

People experience their powerlessness in the face of the evil in the world as it manifest itself in disease, pain suffering poverty, evil spirits, wars, death, barrenness, and natural disasters (Ngobese 1981:8). Tempels contends that it is when the Bantu are faced with the predicament that they are meaningfully oriented to God the Creator as the source of life (in Twesigye 1987:95).

Twesigye (1987:95) further points out that the problem of divine radical transcendence presents the dialogue between God and the Abantu hence the



need of intermediaries between God and the human beings. The need for an intermediary was developed so as to bridge the great gap between the transcendent God and human beings.

The intermediators between human beings and God are usually many, and vary depending on occasion but in most cases among the Zulus they included heads of families. These are people who after death would be integrated to other family spirits. Twesigye (1987:96) argues however that if mediation did not produce the desired results, then the worshippers and petitioners often petitioned God directly themselves.

### **5.6.3 The creation of the ancestor cult**

The gap of approach that results from the observance of seniority in Zulu culture, which has been discussed above, makes the role of the ancestors necessary. It has already mentioned that the gap is not only between the living and the living dead but it exists also between the living and God. As is also evident in African mythology this gap is due to people's sinfulness. God being the first to appear as well as the custodian of all life, the gap is not in terms of age but of being and nature. God is different from human beings. God does not die like human beings and this marks the line of difference between the living and those who are dead but still living. The living see the latter as being better placed and in a more advantageous position than they are.

It was therefore this yawning gap that necessitated the creation of a bridge between the living and the dead. Zulu people believe that ancestors constitute this bridge. They move between God and the living (Ndwandwe

1982:22-23). The Ashanti believe that they pray to god as well as to the ancestors at the same time (McVeigh 1974:114). The belief that ancestors are mediators between God and the living represents in reality a common conception in Africa (McVeigh 1974:115). It is a symbolic representation of reality that people perceive to be real and needing answers.

Goody sees the ancestor cult as a projection of social relationships in a perfectly concrete and meaningful sense (in Ray 1976:145). Ray (1976:145) holds that what makes this projection possible in some African cultures is the symbolic substitution of the deceased by a physical representation. The word 'cult' suggests worship. The word worship suggests two dimensions of approach to that which is being worshipped. The first dimension is that of giving worth to somebody or something that is being worshipped. This dimension involves praising, or giving recognition to the one being worshipped for who s/he is. The second dimension is that of being docile and fawning before, and asking favours from that which is being worshipped (Ngobese 1981:10).

The former dimension is not limited only to the living dead but to the living as well. The living have praises by which they are known by society. In fact it is society that attributes these praises to them. Actions of valour and wisdom, and powers of right judgement and kindness and prompt actions, and all other virtues, are recognised and then poured out to the person who has got them in praises (Ngobese 1981:10). These praises are sung for kings and for ordinary men as well.

The question that plagues one's mind regarding ancestor worship is who is being worshipped? Is it God or the Ancestors? Crafford (1996:15) believes that it is quite mistaken to speak of ancestor worship since the ancestors are not worshipped as if they were gods, rather they are revered as members of the community having greater status and power. During sacrifices, God may be mentioned and his help invoked explicitly. Sometimes he is not mentioned at all but whether he is mentioned or not, he is generally believed to be the ultimate recipient of offerings to lesser gods, who may be explicitly referred to as intermediaries (Dickson & Ellingworth 1969:37) . Shorter (1973:58) agrees that the Supreme Being was mentioned in prayer to the family spirits as the ultimate addressee of the prayer.

Callaway holds a contrary view to Crafford's. He says that people in fact worship the ancestral spirits because they claim to have been told to by uMvelinqangi (in Vilakazi 1965:89). We would like to concur with Callaway and Vilakazi who says that in his experience as a Zulu, living among the Zulu carriers of the culture, he cannot remember a single instance when he heard a prayer by a traditionalist offered to uMvelinqangi. Prayer is seldom addressed directly to the Supreme Being (Thorpe 1991:36), it is to the ancestral spirits that prayers are made, in cases of sterility in women, in cases of illness or when the cattle are dying unaccountably (Vilakazi 1965:89).

Mbiti (1971:93) says that in cases where sacrifices are being offered, where the object is other than God, the recipient is often regarded as an intermediary through whom man establishes a link with God or with the spiritual realm. If this is what obtained at the beginning, then we think that the practice got corrupted along the way. Instead ancestral mediation has

tended to become a barrier to communication with the Supreme Being (Shorter 1973: 58). Kwenda (1999:4) alluding to the deification of ancestors says that ancestors, far from being seen as needing redemption themselves, have invariably been absolutised as demigods who wield socio-jural authority, which entitles them to demand worshipful obedience from their afflicted descendant. Their role as legitimate mediators required ritualisation of some kind to make it real in the minds of the living. The ceremony of *ukubuyiswa*, which is discussed below served this purpose.

#### **5.6.4 The ‘ukubuyiswa Ceremony’ (The integration of the spirit into the family spirits)**

According to Ray (1976:140), at death, especially the death of a senior member, a significant moral and social gap occurs. Ray further notes that at this time the family and other kinsmen must close the gap and reconstitute itself through a series of ritual and social adjustments, whilst at the same time the soul of the deceased must undergo a series of spiritual adjustments if he or she is to find a secure place in the afterlife and continue to remain in contact with the family left behind. In Ray's statement there is already an allusion to the ceremony, which Zulu people call ‘*Ukubuyiswa*’, that is, ‘bringing back’ (Congdon 1984:25; Vilakazi 1965:89).

Africans believe that the spirit of the dead person does not become an ancestral spirit immediately (Crafford 1996:15) but that the spirit betakes itself to the nearest veld after the death of a person (Vilakazi 1965:89). The Shona people of Zimbabwe hold that the dead are doomed to eternal

wandering unless they are called home to the lineage spirits through a special ceremony (Shorter 1973:60).

Zulus call this special ceremony '*Ukubuyiswa*', that is, when the spirit of the dead person is being integrated with other spirits and made to join the ancestral world (Vilakazi 1965:89; Crafford 1996:15). Magubane (1998:62) sees the *ukubuyisa* ceremony as the bringing home of the spirit of the dead person. Only when he has been *buyiswa'd*, can the dead person re-assume his duties.

The *ukubuyisa* ceremony is performed by a specially appointed person who is trained to do it, being usually an heir or an oldest man in the family. Sometimes the most senior woman in the kraal or family could be appointed to officiate at the sanctuary (*Ofindo*) if there is no capable man available to do so (Ngobese 1981:4). Princess Mkabayi kaJama, a woman, for instance, occupied this office a number of times when her brother king Shaka suddenly died through assassination and during the exile of king Dingane. Princess Mkabayi did not only perform these functions, she also acted as regent.

The views of the church regarding this practice are varied. The Protestant tradition rejects ancestral veneration as idolatry and superstitious, a transgression of the first commandment (Crafford 1996:16). However, the Roman Catholic Church has made a bold attempt towards indigenisation or accommodation. Mngadi (1981:146) who relates his experience in a Roman Catholic Service in Soweto, where an attempt at christianising the *ukubuyiswa* ceremony was being made, corroborates this point.

### **5.6.5 The role of the ancestors**

McVeigh (1974:29) states that the cardinal fact of African life is that the living and the dead form one community whose members are mutually dependent upon each other. The role of ancestors is bound up with the human experience of evil and suffering, of misfortune and well being, of illness and health, in short, it is tied up with the destiny of members of specific lineage group. In a sense, ancestors are nearer and more concerned with the fate of their own family members than the clan and other tribal spirits. The living depend on the 'living dead' because they are both more knowing and more powerful than the living (McVeigh 1974:29). The living therefore, expect help of the departed in their fight against the evil forces that pervade the world and threaten them at every turn.

The role of the departed is seen as more of blessing than cursing. They are concerned about the family and the community and are dedicated basically to its well-being (McVeigh 1974:29). Crafford (1996:15) says that their role is to mediate between God and the tribe, bind the community together, take care of the daily needs of the tribe by sending rain and fertility, preserve the customs and traditions of the family, clan and tribe, and attend the rite de passage of each individual, lending help at times of birth, initiation, marriage and burial.

Ancestors are looked at as the guardians of individuals, families and the community as a whole, hence the centring of so much attention on them in African society (McVeigh 1974:103; Skhakhane 1995:109). They are the official guardians of the social and moral order (Ray 1976:146). While they are generally described as being well disposed towards members of their

own descent group, they are also attributed with inflicting suffering (on the living) either due to their capriciousness or due to wrongdoing or neglect on the part of their descendants.

Zulus also recognise that the ancestors can behave arbitrarily and unpredictably (Crafford 1996:15), or irresponsibly and foolishly, hence they are sometimes called 'Izithutha', that is, 'fools' (Vilakazi 1965:89-90). It is also believed that the ancestors or living dead offer protection to members of their lineage (Hexham 1987:22-23). They may also withdraw their protection and in such a situation they need to be appeased.

#### **5.6.5.1 Ancestors as Mediators**

Mediation is a familiar concept that enhances the importance of the one being addressed (Shorter 1973:57). The African idea that kings and important people cannot be approached directly has enhanced the importance of mediation. Because of the relationship that exists between the living and the dead and the fact that the living dead are near God, they are considered well placed and best suited to be mediators between God and the living. The African belief in the survival of human personality after death (McVeigh 1974:26) cannot be underestimated. Vilakazi (1965:89) states that the idea of mediation, where the ancestral spirits (amathongo or amadlozi) are mediators between uNkulunkulu and men, is very imperfectly developed.

### **5.6.5.2 The significance of blood in the ancestor cult**

Sacrifice to the ancestors continues to be a very common practice among Africans (Tlhagale 1995:53). Sacrifice to the ancestors continues to be done in moments of great sadness such as when someone has died or in moments of great joy such as in the case of marriage. These are not the only occasions when slaughtering is done.

Sometimes, when it is perceived that there is a dark cloud hanging over the family leading to various difficulties for members of the family such as unemployment, or illness, an animal suitable for this purpose would be slaughtered. Also in times of celebration, such as the birth of a child, slaughtering would mark the occasion. The ritual of slaughtering is also prevalent among Christians, which thing may suggest that a dichotomy is not perceived at all.

### **5.6.5.3 The symbolic use of blood as a means of effecting communication**

Zulus believe that the blood of a slaughtered animal also effected communication with the living dead. The blood of the sacrificial animal is offered to the ancestors because blood is the symbol of life. It represents the place where life and death meet. Rees (1986:47) states that because it marks the frontier between life and death, it has often been a pathway of communication between people and God.

Blood symbolises in its fullest extent the life of the individual (Tlhagale 1995:55). He further argues that the ancestor cult is at the heart of an African



religious experience, and that it is time to lift the banning order and welcome them (the ancestors) openly into the Christian family of the living and the dead (1995: 58-59). Tlhagale's point of welcoming ancestors openly into the Christian family requires further discussion, which we will not delve into since at the moment our discussion is centred on the significance of blood.

In dealing with the significance of blood in the ancestor cult, two opposite views are expressed by various scholars. On the one hand, there is a view, which completely denies the fact that Africans ever worshipped ancestors (Mbiti 1971:9; Berglund 1976:43). On the other hand, there is a view that is expressed by Geifand, that, it is safe to assume that Africans who have not yet adopted the Christian or Mohammedan faith believe and pray to their spirit elders or relatives or ancestors (in Mngadi 1982:115). One may take this further and say that some Christians still pray to their living dead. Here are some of the uses of blood among Africans.

#### **5.6.5.4 The Blood of Reconciliation.**

Reconciliation has a central role in African religion and practice (Oduyoye 1979:113). Within Zulu cosmology, the concept of reconciliation is known and was well attested for long before the advent of the Christian message among them. Reconciliation suggests the mending of relationships that have been strained or broken. Broken relations are never allowed to go unhealed (Oduyoye 1979:113).

Within the symbolic universe of Zulu people, anything that disrupted the harmonious co-existence of members of a family or society was taken

seriously. The misunderstanding therefore that suggests that Africans had no conception of sin, needs to be rectified. Africans did have a conception of sin but they did not conceive it the same way as in Western culture (Mnyaka 1995:92).

An important subject such as reconciliation would not be known in a universe where the inhabitants had no conception of sin. Sin within the Zulu symbolic universe represented a threat to the wholeness of family. It could therefore, be described as that which disrupts or destroys the mutual and harmonious co-existence of a family or society. What is clear from this definition is that sin is never defined in isolation. It is defined in terms of community because that is the arena where the interplay of human relationships and behaviour is manifested. The community is also the arena for serious personal and group challenges, tension, conflicts and sin, as well as the context for the human quest for forgiveness and the expiation of the torment or guilt and broken relationships (Twesigye 1987:113).

Sin can also be conceived in terms of breaking the rules of society. Any person who acts contrary to the norms and values of family or society, or who threatens the well being of society, such as a person who practices witchcraft, does not only sin against society but weakens and harms its unity. When one commits sin he/she is actually alienating himself/herself from the community, and if he/she persists, this leads to self-destruction (Mnyaka 1995:93). A sinner also jeopardised the good name of the family, the tribe and nation. Just as sin is viewed with such seriousness, reconciliation within the symbolic universe of Zulu people also plays a fundamental role as a means of restoring broken relationships. The pursuit of

reconciliation requires that at some point it be effected through slaughtering and spilling of blood, which are essential in this process. Without blood there can be no proper reconciliation.

### **5.7 Dealing with sinners**

The seriousness of transgressing or sinning against family or society has already been intimated above. Depending on the nature of the sin, society has devised various options for people who have committed acts of transgression. First, the person would be confronted and made to see how disruptive his actions are to the well being of the family or society. If he or she shows co-operation and humbleness, he or she would be asked to make the necessary reparation aimed at achieving catharsis and reconciliation (Mnyaka 1995:94). There are many ways of effecting this. Either the person would be asked to publicly apologise or to pay a prescribed fine. The aim of the fine, as Mnyaka (1995:95) argues, is not to discredit a person but to uphold community values and restore the dignity of the sinner.

If the person refuses to show penance, he or she is either ostracised or stigmatised. Wilson (1980:75) describes this act as ‘witchcraft accusation’. Witchcraft accusation could lead to the expulsion of the individual concerned. Among the Zulus, people who were accused of witchcraft were expelled ‘*babedingiswa*’ from that particular society.

Because sin is an act against the well being of the collectivity named family or society, reconciliation is never an individual affair. If it was a feud between two individuals or families, it was expected that in order to reconcile, it was incumbent upon them to seek and call for a third party, who

would act as mediator so that the end result would be '*ukuthelelana amanzi*', i.e. 'to pour over water'. Berglund in his *Zulu Thought-Patterns and symbolism* (p, 232 -235, 1976) discusses this rite in detail.

In cases of serious offences, it was necessary that blood be spilled to effect reconciliation. The sacrificing and spilling off of blood is usually performed in some Traditional Religion after due consultation with the diviner and confession of sin (Ubruhe 1996:15). The offering of blood secures reconciliation not only among the living but also with the living dead. Mngadi (1982:144) contends that Africans believed that without the shedding of blood there could be no reconciliation.

### **5.8 The role of Izinyanga and Izangoma**

The symbolic world of Zulus perceives the countryside as filled with supernatural powers, with demons or spirits inhabiting mountains, forests trees, stones, rivers and fountains. Within the framework of such a world-view, the reality of demons, spirits and powers is a phenomenon that needs to be taken seriously. It has to be taken seriously as well as life directing forces in the first century world-view (Botha & Craffert: 17).

All the above play an important role in legitimating reality in the life of people in African villages and communities. In Africa sorcery and witchcraft are stamped out as an anti-social evil because they are a threat to people's health and well-being and disrupt social relations, especially within the extended family (Lagerwerf 1987:18).

In traditional African communities, a variety of traditional healers (Crafford 1996:16) exist for the purpose protecting society against these forces. There are medicine men i.e. traditional doctors 'Izinyanga', diviners 'Izangoma', and mediums. These perform functions according to their categories. There are some nyangas and zangomas who function both as healers and diviners. All of them rely on the counsel, wisdom and power of the ancestral spirits to reveal to them the secrets of what they have to do. Izinyanga specialise in the use of medicines extracted from plants and animal products for the treatment of illness and protection against sorcery and disaster (Crafford 1996:17).

Vilakazi et al (1986:15) contends that divination is part of Zulu religion (in Kitshoff 1996:27). The diviners 'izangoma' stand between the living and the dead. Through them messages are received from the land of the departed and they are able to tell of the difficulties that are to befall the living. According to Mnyandu (1993:107) the duties of the diviners include the following:

- to diagnose illness in his or her clients
- to prescribe methods to heal them
- to establish cause of misfortunes
- to settle conflict
- to predict future events
- to warn clients/community about problems to come
- to mediate between community members and their ancestors
- to intercede for the community to the ancestors
- to give counsel to the chief of the area.

The diviners in most cases are able to function in this role only when the spirit possesses them. In the case of sickness, the diviners are able to give information regarding the disease, the nature and also prescribe the treatment for it. In cases of theft, they are able to direct people to where the stolen article is. In matters affecting the tribe, they act as priests for the tribe. They officiate at official ceremonies and give direction as to how sacrifices are to be offered.

There is another view, which sees izangoma as vehicles of ancestral spirits whose power is perceived to be in opposition to or in competition with the power of Christ, or alternatively they are seen as the only interpreters of the wishes of the ancestors (Tlhagale 1997:1). According to Crafford (1996:16), mediums are usually women who specialise in contacting and calling up ancestral spirits, enabling communication with them (cf. 1 Sam 28:8-25). Crafford (1996:17) states that through their contact with the spirits and their supernatural skills, their ability to ensure health, wealth and fertility, their reconciling and protecting work, traditional healers wield great influence in the community. The perception of reality in Zulu society is not complete without giving due attention to spiritual forces and the role Izinyanga and izangoma play in stabilising and creating equilibrium in Zulu symbolic universe.

## 5.9 Summary

We mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that having endeavoured to draw the contours of the symbolic universe of 1 John, an attempt to paint an African scenario or symbolic universe even though difficult is necessary. In the context of Africa it is difficult to speak of an African perspective or symbolic universe because of its many and varied cultures. Our contention and conviction, however, is that on a higher level of abstraction, there exist enough similarities among cultures that obtain in Africa to enable an undertaking of such a venture. There is an abundance of literature which disputes the old idea that African people had no conception of God hence our beginning with the conception of God in Africa to show how clear their view of God was.

Africa also exhibits a strong sense of communality, a factor, which operates on the triad footings of the family, the clan (or extended family), and the total community, the family being the microcosm of the bigger whole. Within the symbolic universe of Zulus as that of Africa individualism has no place since identity and self-worth depends on being in tune with one's family and community. The family is central within it individuals are socialised and discover the meaning of true humanity. The family therefore acts as the legitimating institution in the life of each individual. Individuals have to be obedient and in their lives exhibit all the good values that the family stands for. Any action, which is contrary to *ubuntu*, i.e. socially validated norms and values, threatens the well being of the family/community. Such an action could have serious consequences for the family/community as well as the offending individual. If it is not quickly

attended to and remedied, could spark the wrath of the ancestors, whose role is seen as that of being custodians and protectors of the family as well as the go-between God and the living. Even though ancestors are departed the network of family relationships is never broken by death. Any offence against family is offence against them. This means that reconciliation to be achieved and properly validated, the ancestors have somehow to be involved.

The structural dynamics of traditional social organisation are also evident within Zulu cosmology, with ultimate authority being attributed to God, and then followed in subsequent order by ancestors, leaders or heads of families and the rest of the membership of the family. This order is in accord with Zulu hierarchical system, which is based on respect. God is viewed along the same lines as kings and therefore accorded the same respect resulting in the need for a go-between. The living dead who perform this function, even though they occupy their own world, are believed to be involved and continue to exert enormous influence over members of their families. The belief in the influential role played by ancestors is so strong among Zulus that even some of the people who profess to be Christian still cling tenaciously to this belief.

In terms of Zulu symbolic universe the world is full of supernatural powers. Their reality has to take into serious consideration the presence of evil spirits and demons that make life in the human world extremely precarious. The precariousness of life has forced African societies to have a tightly organised cosmology. The precarious spiritual elements compel people to find ways of combating their threatening presence. Consequently, they have come up with elaborate manipulative rituals designed to harness the good favours of the



ancestors as well as ward off or placate evil spirits. Ritualisation is effected in a variety of ways designed to help people come to terms with what has happened or to re enact their beliefs. The Nyangas and Zangomas occupy a very important place in Zulu society and play a significant role in helping people cope with threatening forces and offer explanation designed for the lessening and integration of the impact of these upon the established reality.