

PEEPS INTO THE VHAVENḌA'S MYTHOLOGICAL WOMB: REFLECTIONS ON LAKE FUNDUDZI IN SOME TSHIVENḌA POEMS

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Abstract: This article is a textual analysis of some aspects of the VhavenḌa's mythologies that are largely linked to Lake Fundudzi. The article shows that the VhavenḌa like most African societies either trace or connect their life from or with water. Various forms of initiations and rituals in TshivenḌa culture thematically employ representations of Lake Fundudzi as both the place of the VhavenḌa's origin and cosmic reunion with their livingdead. Although Lake Fundudzi is a closely guarded arena, which makes it difficult for one to gain wholesome knowledge about the myths and philosophies that surround it, two VhavenḌa poets, Daniel Malivhadza Ngwana and Azwifaneli Fanie Ntshivhuyu, have nevertheless provided glimpses into the VhavenḌa's mythological perceptions and metanarratives of and about the Lake. Ngwana's (1958) poems, *Dzivha Fundudzi* and *Fundudzi* and Ntshivhuyu's poem, *Dongodzivhe* framed this article's discussion of the mytho-aesthetic aspects that inform the VhavenḌa's perception of Lake Fundudzi. This article is a self-reflexive interrogation of TshivenḌa lore, and mythology with particular reference to Lake Fundudzi as thematised in some TshivenḌa poems. Although the selected poems were insightful in their commentary on Lake Fundudzi, this article, however, still has limitations in that it did not consider face-to-face engagements with the VhavenḌa who are well-versed in the mythology and mysteries that surround the Lake. It is hoped that this article will serve as a springboard for further research on the subject in question.

Keywords: Cosmology, Culture, Dzivha Fundudzi, Mythology, Poetry, TshivenḌa

INTRODUCTION

Much of the VhavenḌa's mythological content thematises Lake Fundudzi as a metaphorical womb. Poetry is used as one of the modes in which Lake Fundudzi is foregrounded as a literary theme and a cultural myth by some VhavenḌa poets. This is unsurprising, given that the image of the Lake generally recurs throughout the VhavenḌa's thinking about social issues and relationships – set aside for some, safeguarded from others, and restricted to the most powerful. Restrictions surrounding Lake Fundudzi in the traditions and customs of the VhavenḌa are deliberately rooted and shrouded in mystery, exacerbated by the fact that the Lake has long been hung about with old mythologies and inscrutabilities. Myths and mysteries are cited mainly to prohibit and restrain access to the Lake. Unless one is a priest of the Ntshiavha clan, accessing the Lake and even to see the stone-throwing *zwiḑuḑwane* (half-human and half-spirit beings) means certain death (Mashau, 2004; Munyai, 2016). In fact, among the VhavenḌa, Lake Fundudzi is

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reputedly purported to be full of *spirits* that only a few human beings will dare to wander through the Lake (Munyai, 2016). Despite the prohibitions, some Vhavenda people still provide glimpses into the Lake in the form of poetry. Their poetry can be taken as an index into the complex mythology and mystery that has surrounded the Lake across time.

The two Vhavenda poets, Daniel Malivhadza Ngwana and Azwifaneli Fanie Netshivhuyu, have produced poems that allow the reader access to some of the aspects of Lake Fundudzi that also feature prominently in the Vhavenda's traditional religion and philosophical outlook. A deep analysis of these poems reveals the Vhavenda's perception of Lake Fundudzi as a womb, and also as an explanation of phenomena and noumena in Tshivenda lore. The objectives of this article are: (a) to reflect on Lake Fundudzi based on an analysis of selected Tshivenda poetry to provide knowledge about the Vhavenda's mythology, (b) to encourage discussions about Lake Fundudzi as a significant aspect of the Vhavenda's folklore, history and philosophy within scholarly circles, (c) to decode Tshivenda indigenous knowledge systems, which are considered in this article as the core in the debates of decolonising curricula and research methodologies. Accompanying these objectives are the following research questions: (a) What indices into Vhavenda's mythology can be gleaned from some Tshivenda poetry? (b) How do some Tshivenda poems provide insights into Lake Fundudzi and the Vhavenda's perception(s) of it? How do some Tshivenda poems galvanise the Vhavenda towards embracing and celebrating their identity and culture? In response to the questions, it is shown in this article how indigenes in South Africa, i.e., Vhavenda, have always had ways to express their sense of selfhood and philosophy. This article shows that indigenous poetry has been one of the tools deployed to express a sense of identity and culture.

THE VHAVENDA AND THEIR PERCEPTION(S) OF LAKE FUNDUDZI

Ethnographers such as Hugh Arthur Stayt, Nicolas Jacobus van Warmelo, John Blacking and Wilfred Mutsetsho Razwimisani Daniel Phophi, among others, have documented some significant aspects of the Vhavenda's history and culture. In their works, one learns about the geography, history, clothing, ornaments, flora, fauna, food, narcotics, industries (pottery, calabashes, woodwork, basketry, etc.), wars, trading, birth, infancy, child life, puberty and initiation, marriage, family life and etiquette, mortuary rites, property, succession, inheritance, relationship terminology, kinship system, traditional leadership, territorial governance, law, justice, conceptions of the universe, religion, medicine, music, dance, song and folklore of the Vhavenda. The Vhavenda occupy approximately a large part of the inhabited territory of the Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province of South Africa (Dakalo, 2009). They speak the Tshivenda language, which belongs to the so-called Bantu language family (a sub-category of the Niger-Congo family) (Loubser, 1989; Stayt, 1931; Wentzel, 1983). According to Blacking (1965:15), the Vhavenda

“have a culture which distinguishes them clearly from other Bantu-speaking people in the Republic, and a language which is classed on its own, though it has some affinities with Sotho and Karanga”. Apart from the aforementioned ethnographers, several other Vhavenda scholars have produced research on Tshivenda linguistics and literature. However, these scholars rarely comment extensively on Tshivenda mythology in general and Lake Fundudzi in particular. Hence, we saw an opportunity to launch a discussion on the latter aspect because it forms the crux of Tshivenda cosmology and mythology (Nettleton, 2006).

Lake Fundudzi, as a natural phenomenon, was formed by a huge landslide in the Zout/Soutpansberg mountain range, and is fed by the Mutale River although it does not appear to have an outlet (Munyai, 2016). Recognised as the only natural Lake in South Africa, Fundudzi is central to the old mythologies of the Vhavenda. The Vhavenda perceive Lake Fundudzi as a metaphorical womb, that is, the origin of life (Nettleton, 2006). Linked to this metaphor is also the *Ngoma* ‘Drum’ which is an image of Lake Fundudzi or the womb, within which swims the crocodile (the king), represented in the drum by two pebbles, *mmbé*. *Mmbé* are taken from the stomach of a live crocodile in the water by a powerful healer or diviner and the king swallows them on his investiture, where they remain in his intestines until his death (Nettleton, 1985). When the pebbles rattle in the drum, they are likened to the crying of the baby (Nettleton, 2006).

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

This paper draws its inspiration from the experience of the two authors. Moffat Sebola is Tshivenda speaking, and grounded in Tshivenda culture, history and folklore, while Sekgothe Mokgoatšana is an experienced folklorist, a language expert with a deep knowledge of African history, epistemology and indigenous knowledge systems. Drawing from their experience, the article largely benefits from self-reflexive interrogation of Tshivenda lore, and mythology. For analytical convenience, we conclude that only an ample metatheory can adequately consider the multi-dimensions of the African cultural experience; and this metatheory ought to be based on Afrocentric foundations (Asante, 1998). Therefore, this article was undergirded by Afrocentricity as its theoretical lynchpin. Afrocentricity means literally, placing African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour (Asante, 1998). To Asante (1998:137), “Afrocentricity is the most complete philosophical totalization of the African being-at-the-center of his or her existence”. In other words, Afrocentricity is the relocation and repositioning of Africans in a place of agency where instead of being spectators to others, African voices are heard in the full meaning of history (Asante, 1999).

The overall project of reorientation and relocation of African action and data has been the rational constant in all the works of Afrocentrists (Asante, 1999). In his, *The Afrocentric Idea*, Asante (1998: xi) avers that, “the main aim of Afrocentrists is to

seek ways to *unite* the country based on mutual respect for the cultural agency of all its peoples” (original italics). Mokgoatšana (1999:30) proffers that, “Afrocentricity in itself implies taking a perspective from African experience and there is no way in which these experiences can be left out in an attempt to recreate an identity”. Thus, Afrocentrists view themselves as cultural analysts who are committed to the systematic exposition of cultural behaviours as they are articulated in the African world. Part of the aim of Afrocentrists, among other things, is to enhance the appreciation of the complexity and historicity of African culture (Asante, 1998). For the Africalogist, contends Mokgoatšana (1999:30), “the African experience should be the axis of our social analysis of reality. In interpreting phenomena, be it African or otherwise, the African worldview should guide us into a meaningful understanding of that aspect of reality”. Afrocentrists insist that there are other ways in which to experience phenomena rather than viewing them from a Eurocentric vantage point (Asante, 1998).

To propound their theoretical thrust, Afrocentrists essentially pose two important questions: “How do we see ourselves and how have others seen us?” and “What can we do to regain our own accountability and to move beyond the intellectual plantation that constrains our economic, cultural, and intellectual development?” (Asante, 1999:3-4). Afrocentricity is therefore preferred as a theoretical lynchpin of this study because it constitutes a radical critique of the Eurocentric ideology that masquerades as a universal view in the fields of intercultural communication, rhetoric, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, education, anthropology, and history (Asante, 1998). The critique is radical in the sense that it suggests a turnabout, an alternative perspective on phenomena. This turnabout entails, for example, taking the globe and turning it over so that all the possibilities of a world where Africa is subject and not object are seen.

Secondly, Afrocentricity is preferred here because it is helpful in generating an understanding of how people come to create material realities, including their mythological outlook (Asante, 1998). Thirdly, Afrocentricity allows the current authors the latitude to offer a critical (re)evaluation of the Vhavenḍa’s selfhood, identity and culture on the basis of Afrocentric orientation, a stance assumed against the Western standards that are imposed as interpretative measures of other cultures (Asante, 1998). Fourthly, anchoring this study to Afrocentricity also allows the authors the freedom to inject the agency of Africans (Vhavenḍa) into the equation of social and historical transformation. Therefore, the impetus of Afrocentricity purports that the people who have been relegated to the fringes of society must now be looked upon as players in the field, albeit players who have operated from a position of less power for centuries (Asante, 1998). Fifthly, Afrocentricity’s intellectual assault on the dominance dogma is initially *historical*; that is, it presents a set of facts describing events and phenomena in such a way that a more valid interpretation of the agency of African people emerges even in the circumstance of

oppression (Asante, 1998). Apart from the *historical* assault, Afrocentricity is also *analytical* in the sense that it examines the conceptual frames of domination and makes a critique of domination in the linguistic, social, aesthetic, cultural, political, and economic spheres (Asante, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

This article relies heavily on published Tshivenda poetry that thematised Lake Fundudzi. The article was purely qualitative in approach. We realised that the selected authors use reflexive methodology because of their connection with the living world of the subject under investigation. The separation between the researchers and the subject of debate is so blurred that the inside and the outside are interwoven. This is why we preferred to analyse on what the poets had to say about the Lake under analysis. Two Tshivenda poetry anthologies, *Vhakale vha hone* (Ngwana, 1958) and *Tshililo tsha vuvha* (Netshivhuyu, 1990) were purposively selected because the former anthology provided two poems whereas the latter provided one poem on Lake Fundudzi. Abetted by our sociological understanding of Tshivenda culture in particular as well as teaching the culture, folklore and history of the indigenes in South Africa, we were able to explore the nuances of Tshivenda mythology in the selected poetry.

DISCUSSION

Traversing into the forbidden: linguistic codes around Lake Fundudzi

The Vhavenda poets, Ngwana and Netshivhuyu, provide insights into the myths and mysteries that surround Lake Fundudzi. It will be noted that in their provision of insights into the myths and mysteries surrounding the Lake, the poets recurrently use words (codes) that only those who are well-versed in Tshivenda cosmology and mythology will understand. Although the words used might on the surface appear to be those that feature in everyday language, for the poets, however, the words are strategically used as indices into the crux of the Vhavenda's philosophical outlook. Such word usage is evident in Ngwana's (1958:17) poem, *Dzivha Fundudzi*. The poem reads thus:

Dzivha Fundudzi li vhone duvhani [d̄ziβa][Fundudzi] [li][βɔŋɛ][d̄uβani]
 ɔ no vhone maɖuvha manzhi-manzhi[ɔ] [ŋɔ] [βɔŋa] [maɖuβa] [maŋzimaŋzi]
 Ndo ɖuvha u ɖamba kha dzivha he[li];[Ndo] [ɖuβa] [u] [ɖamba] [kha] [d̄ziβa] [he[li]]
 Dzivha li re na vhadzimu vha hashu.[d̄ziβa][li] [re] [ŋa] [βaɖzimu] [βa] [haɖu]
 Ndo ɖuvha u lidza ngoma Fundudzi, [Ndo] [ɖuβa] [u][lidza] [ŋgɔma][Fundudzi]
 Ndo ɖuvha u dzula miɖavhani ya[ɔ];[Ndo] [ɖuβa] [u] [d̄zula] [miɖavhani][jaɔ]
 Ndi ɖɔɖa u dzula na vhokhotsi anga;[Ndi] [ɖɔɖa] [u] [d̄zula] [ŋa] [βɔkʰɔtsi][anga]
 Ri tshi imba dzavhuɖi dza Matongoni.[ri][tʰi] [imba] [d̄zaβuɖi] [d̄za] [Matʰɔŋgoni]

[See Lake Fundudzi in the sun
 It has seen so many countless days
 I miss bathing in this lake;
 The Lake inhabited by our ancestors.
 I miss playing the drum at Fundudzi,
 I miss sitting on its sands;
 I want to stay with my fathers;
 Singing beautiful songs from Matongoni.](Ngwana, 1958:17)

The poet's word choice in the poem should not be taken lightly, for the words are deliberately chosen to reinforce the myth of genesis that surrounds Lake Fundudzi among the Vhavenḁa. Every culture embraces creation myths – stories about how life began (Le Roux, 2009). Most Tshivendḁa narratives that are told or acted out on different occasions mainly reflect their origin and identity (or cultural religious practices) as transmitted to them by their livingdead. That there has been a transmission of oral and indigenous, mimetic knowledge is evinced in the poet's longing to unite with his livingdead, not only at Lake Fundudzi, but also at the ancestral home of the Vhavenḁa, Matongoni. The recurrent word *ṭuvha* (miss; yearn) in the stanza above is used to front the idea that the persona is restless on earth and can only be at ease upon reunion with his *vhokhotsi* (fathers; the livingdead) who apparently inhabit the Lake. The repeated verb stem *ṭuvha* functions as the central theme foregrounded in the stanza, with incremental ideas: *u lidza ngoma/u dzula miṭavhani yaḁo/u dzula na vhokhotsi*. The actions suggested by the incremental ideas in this stanza are connected to “playing”, “sitting” and to “stay[ing], which have overtones of a pleasurable experience, filled with the harmony and balance created by the sound of the drum, and the resting place of the livingdead. This idyllic, serene landscape is further amplified by the intermittent use of the word *ṭamba* (bathe) in the poem to describe renewal and cleansing qualities of the Lake. It is only by accessing the Lake that the poet can truly be cleansed and renewed; suggestive of purification and rebirth.

Lake Fundudzi observed as a centre for regeneration

In this sense, the Lake is not only associated with renewal, but also with regeneration and even recreation. Here, the genesis myth associated with water, more specifically with Lake Fundudzi, gains a foothold. The poet views Lake Fundudzi as a metaphorical womb from which life flows. The poet believes that his livingdead who inhabit the Lake are life-giving agents. Hence, he longs to join them in the Lake so that his youthful vigour is renewed. The use of the word *ngweṇa* (crocodile) also affirms the belief that the Vhavenḁa's royal (traditional) leaders interact with crocodiles in the Lake prior to their reception of the royal

sceptre from the ancestors. Interestingly, the crocodile is amphibian, living in water and on the land. This dual habit is an extended metaphor to explain the ancestors' transcendence, living in the underworld as the livingdead and visiting the living [in the terrestrial world] through dreams and visions. The concept "livingdead" is a popular description in African philosophy to refer to ancestors. The ancestors are described as such because in African culture, ancestors are not dead, but conscious of the lives of the living, and while they occupy the realm of the spiritual world. This ability to be in both worlds gives them credence, and power over the living, who depend on the support of their livingdead, and their authority. Because of their special position before their livingdead, only royalty is granted access to the Lake. If one is a commoner, it is believed that he or she will never return to the world of 'human beings'. This is why the poet alludes to his royal status and privilege as factors that will prohibit the crocodiles from devouring him. It is also possible that the poet intends to advance the notion that only those who legitimately trace their ancestry to the Vhavenḁa's ancestors can swim with crocodiles in Lake Fundudzi. Implicit in the poet's longing to access the Fundudzi waters is the idea that he is part of the legitimate (Vhavenḁa) people who can interact with the livingdead and emerge unharmed. Hence, he says:

Ndo t̥uvha u t̥amba Fundudzi,[Ndɔ] [t̥uβa] [u] [t̥amba] [Fundudzi̇]
 Ndo t̥uvha u nwa maḁi Muḁale;[Ndɔ][t̥uβa] [u] [nwa][maḁi] [Muḁale]
 Masek^hwa matshena a tshi khou tala;[Masek^hwa] [mat^hḁḁa] [a] [t̥^hi][k^hɔu][t^ʔala]
 Ngweḁa dzaḁo dzi sa nnyiti tshithu.[ngweḁa] [dzaḁo] [dzi] [sa] [nnyit^ʔi] [t̥^hit^hu]

[I miss bathing at Fundudzi,
 I miss drinking water at Muḁale;
 While white ducks float;
 Its crocodiles doing me no harm.] (Ngwana, 1958:17)

Lake Fundudzi as the origin of the world in Tshivenḁa mythology

In the poem, Lake Fundudzi is centralised thematically because it is important in both oral and written histories and in the continuing customs of the different groups who constitute the Vhavenḁa. That in Tshivenḁa mythology, Lake Fundudzi is recognised as the origin of the world and the sacred space of ancestors is notable in how the poet not only implicates this notion, but also in how he longs to join his 'fathers' whom he believes inhabit the Lake. In yet another poem titled: *Fundudzi*, Ngwana (1958:68) writes:

Mpheni phapha ndi rambe ḁoḁe; [Mp^hḁḁi][p^hap^ha] [ndi] [rambe][ḁoḁe]
 Fundudzi ndi dzivha ḁa kukalaha ḁetshiavha;[Fundudzi̇] [ndi] [[dziβa][ḁa]
 [k^ʔuk^ʔalafia][ḁḁi^hiaβa]
 Mwali mudzimu wa Vhavenḁa o ita dambi, [mwali][mudzi^himu][wa][βavenḁa][ɔ]

[itʰa][dambi]

Ngefha!aa! ho alama dambi-;[ŋgeφa]a][fiɔ] [alama] [dambi]

Aiwa, lo alama vhukati ha dzithavha; [aiwa][ɔ] [alama][βukʰatʰi] [fa] [d̥zitʰaβa]

Matombo o li tikaho ndi vhuthengethenge[matʰombɔ][ɔ][li][tʰikʰafɔ] [ndi]
[βutʰeŋgetʰeŋge]

[Give me wings so that I invite the whole world;

Fundudzi is the lake of the old man N̄etshivha;

Mwali the god of the Vhavent̄a performed the magical,

There! Spreads the magical-;

Ah, it spreads amidst the mountains;

The rocks that support it are artistic designs](Ngwana, 1958:68)

The poem opens with the poet's plea for wings to fly across the world inviting people to come and witness the magical properties of Lake Fundudzi. The poet ascribes Fundudzi to both N̄etshivha and Mwali/N̄wali, the God of the Vhavent̄a, with the latter acknowledged as responsible for the mytho-aesthetic aspects of the Lake. Ascribing Fundudzi to N̄wali should not be considered strange because the Lake is surrounded by a number of natural features that are identified as belonging to Raluvhimba (N̄wali), including some boulders (*matombo*) which are believed to be his 'drums' and the mountains (*dzithavha*) (Nettleton, 2006). The mention of *kukalaha* 'small, old man', N̄etshivha, is also gravid with meaning and contextualised mythological understanding. Nettleton (2006) records that the Singo were unable to take physical possession of the Lake, which meant that the N̄etshivha lineage of the Vhangona remained the guardians of Lake Fundudzi even after the Singo invasion. Hence, the poet identifies the N̄etshivha lineage with the Lake. Also, annual offerings to the spirits of the Lake are said to have been made by the head of the N̄etshivha lineages on behalf of the major Singo chiefs, the Ramabulana and Tshivhase (Nettleton, 2006:70). The poet goes on to say:

Afho mudavhini u tshimbila ndi vhumbombombo; [Aφɔ] [mudaβini] [u] [tʰimbila]
[ndi] [βumbɔmbɔmbɔ]

Wa sa thanya u a wa, wa si vhuye;[wa] [sa] [tʰana] [u] [a] [wa] [wa] [si][βuje]

Maisane, nga khaladzi ndo toḁa u wa;[maisane][ŋga][kʰaladzi] [ndɔ][toḁa] [u] [wa]

Vhe ndi gadaba la muḁambapfunda;[βε] [ndi] [gadaba] [la][muḁambapfunda]

Lo ḁamba Munzhedzi a kuna[ɔ][ḁamba][munzɛdzi] [a] [kʰuna]

A sala tshi nga dzuvha li maḁini. [a] [sala] [a] [tʰi][ŋga][d̥zuβa] [li] [maḁini]

[One must walk on its plains with tremendous caution;

If one is not careful, he or she falls and never returns;

I swear by my sister, Maisane, I almost fell;

They say it is populated by the fabaceae;

Munzhedzi bathed there and became clean

And was left looking like a rose in the water.](Ngwana, 1958:68)

Nettleton (2006) reveals that the Singo were believed likely to die from contact with the Lake's waters, while the mischievous, grotesque spirits, the *zwiḽuḽwane*, who inhabited the Lake's parameter, could attack ordinary people (in the sense of not being royalty). These *zwiḽuḽwane* are said to be fond of venison, and consequently dig game pits. Because of these pits, it is difficult to walk around or near the lake, which is why the poet says one must be careful when walking here lest they fall into the pits. According to the poet, if one falls into these pits, he or she will disappear forever. Whilst on the myth of disappearance, it is worth mentioning that Lake Fundudzi is also connected with the disappearance of the first Singo king of Venda, Ṭhohoyanḽou. It is believed that Ṭhohoyanḽou disappeared into Lake Fundudzi to live there with his court, replicating the courts of his descendants still on the land. It is also believed that Ṭhohoyanḽou was a newcomer to the Lake, a leader of the invading Singo who apparently had arrived from the north and taken control of the Soutpansberg area only sometime around 1700 (Nettleton, 2006). The Singo are believed to be the last of a number of invasions of Shona-speakers and they, together with the Vhaṭavhatsindi and Vhangona, make up the different strata within the Vhavenda society. Legend has it that the Vhavenda's cultural hero, Ṭhohoyanḽou's disappearance into Lake Fundudzi and spirit occupation of the waters established the Singo hegemony within the Lake sacred to the earlier inhabitants, the Vhangona. In the above stanza, the poet indicates that he nearly fell into the pits, implying that he too could have disappeared (like Ṭhohoyanḽou) had he fell into the game pits. The poet goes on to comment on the trees that surround the Lake, one of which is *muṭambapfundo*. *Muṭambapfundo* (Fabaceae) is a plant species used for medicinal purposes (its root and stem bark are used as ingredients to prepare polyherbal decoction taken against malaria) and to make drums (Bapela, Meyer and Kaiser, 2014). By mentioning *muṭambapfundo*, the poet shores up the cultural understanding and the essence of drums surrounding the Fundudzi legend.

Significance of drums within the culture of Vhavenda

Drums are mentioned in Ngwana's poem because they are integral to the Tshivenḽa traditional religion as well as the endorsement of a royal leader. In fact, in Tshivenḽa culture, it is unthinkable to be a king without drums (Nettleton, 1985; Van Warmelo, 1932; Stayt, 1931). It is a prerequisite of the Vhavenda's rule that all Vhavenda kings of Singo descent have replicas of the drums, but no one else can own them. Possession of such drums empowered kings not only through their magical properties, but also by symbolically embodying Lake Fundudzi through various details of form, materials, and relief (Nettleton, 2006:73). Apparently, those who ventured close could hear Ṭhohoyanḽou's *Tshikona* bands' music, the drumming

on his *ngoma* (drum) coming from the lake and his young women performing the *Domba* although no one appears to be there (Munyai, 2016:17). *Domba* “is an initiation school for young men and young women” (Mulaudzi, 2001:9). Perhaps it might be helpful to digress and offer a brief discussion on the essence and role of drums as a communication medium among the Vhavenda.

The Vhavenda’s drums feature quite significantly in the Vhavenda’s folklore and mythology. The Tshivenda *ngoma* ‘drum’, as a musical instrument, is made up of an animal skin which is tightly stretched over a round frame. *Ngoma* is a large, pot-shaped drum with a hemispherical resonator carved out of solid wood and is played with a drumstick or beaten by bare hands. Among the Vhavenda, there are various drums, and their shapes and sizes distinguish these drums. A drum is more significant than any other instrument for the Vhavenda (Nemakonde, 2006). In fact, Nemakonde (2006) avers that the Vhavenda believe that the sounds of drums are the voices of the ancestors. This is most notable during the *malombo* dance where the spirit of the livingdead is believed to inhabit a living human being and seeks to communicate a message from the ancestors (Munyai, 2016). *Malombo* is performed seasonally in Tshivenda culture unless there are some obligations from the ancestors that it must be performed at a particular time for a certain reason (Nengovhela, 2010:17). This dance is performed when there is a person who has an ancestral call that he or she must start operating in. The person cannot start operating without the connection to and endorsement from the ancestors. Therefore, for the person to be connected, the *Malombo* ritual dance must be performed first. Another name for this ritual dance is *u tika ngoma* (to hold/keep the drum in balance). The most important part of this ritual is *u wisa midzimu* (to settle the spirit of the gods). During the dance, drums are played to facilitate communion between human beings on earth and the livingdead. Drums are, therefore, used for communication with the ancestors in Tshivenda culture.

Drums are also used for celebration and entertainment, particularly in Tshivenda dances such as *Tshikona*, *Tshigombela* and *Malende*, which cannot be discussed in this paper due to spatial limitations. The Vhavenda’s drums vary from each other, especially in their construction and function. In Tshivenda culture, there are basically three types of drums, i.e. *ngoma khulwane* (big drum), *thungwa* (small drum), and *murumba* (alto drum). *Ngoma khulwane* is a hemispherical instrument which usually has four handles. Different materials are used to make drums and this, of course, may differ from one tribe to the other. The Vhavenda use a wooden tree trunk, which the sculptor scoops out to create a drum that is decorated on the outside. The decoration symbolises a specific historical event of the Vhavenda people (Nemakonde, 2006). *Thungwa* is a pot-like drum, identical in shape to the *ngoma khulwane* but only smaller (Van Warmelo, 1989). *Thungwa* is made from a *mufula* tree trunk and its head is covered with a skin which is usually pegged to the wooden rim. The *thungwa* player keeps a steady beat throughout the dance. The

little hole at the base of each drum has the function of producing sound. *Thungwa* is beaten with a *tshiombo* (knobbed drumstick). *Murumba*, on the other hand, is a long, cylindrical membranophone instrument made from curved wood tapering to the end (Nevhuḡalu, 1995). It is tall and resembles a milk pail in shape, head at thick end, open at the other, and is held between the legs when beaten with hands by females (Van Warmelo, 1989). *Murumba* is carved from a single piece of softwood, *mukunde* or *mufula*. The wood carver usually uses tools such as the axe and chisel to decorate the instrument. The head is usually covered with an ox hide which is pegged on it while wet (Nemakonde, 2006). *Murumba* has one large handle on the side, which helps the performer to place it between the legs when it is played. The tips of the fingers and the palms of the hands are used to produce two distinct types of sounds. The flat palm strikes the head of the *murumba* near the centre while the tips of the fingers strike the *murumba* near the rim.

Ngwana leaves it to reader to imagine which drum among the three he longs to play in the Lake. It is possible that Ngwana's vague reference to the drums is intended to hint at the possibility that all these drums are played in the Lake. In the last two lines of the poem, the poet still appreciates the cleansing qualities of the Lake. He mentions that Munzhedzi bathed in the Lake and was made clean, as if to purport that the lake has sanctifying powers. The poet does not come out clearly on who Munzhedzi is and how Munzhedzi is linked to the Lake. Where one might be tempted to view Munzhedzi as an ordinary person and therefore conclude that just any person has access to Fundudzi's waters, the third stanza will argue to the contrary:

Vhe maḡi a Fundudzi ha ḡambi mutsinda;[βε] [maḡi] [a] [fundudzi][fa][ḡambi]
[mutsinda]

A ḡambiwa nga vhakololo vha Tshivha; [a] [ḡambiwa] [nga] [βak'ololo][βa][ḡ'iaβa]
Uvhani Fundudzi a hu dzhenwi [uβani][fundudzi] [a] [hu][dʒɛnwi]

Ndi haya ha zwiḡudwane; [Ndi] [haja] [ha] [zwiḡudwane]

[They say strangers are forbidden from bathing in Fundudzi's waters;

Only the Tshivha royal members are permitted to bathe there

Because entrance into Fundudzi is prohibited

It is the home of *zwiḡudwane*] (Ngwana, 1958:68)

The poet emphatically informs his readers that entrance to the spirits inhabited Fundudzi is only privileged to the Netshivha clan. Netshivhuyu's (1990:9) poem, *Dongodzivhe* does not explicitly mention Lake Fundudzi, but nevertheless features Lake Fundudzi and emphasises the essence of water in Tshivenda mythology:

Shaḡani ja thavha Tshinetise,[jaḡani][ja][t'haβa] [t'hiḡet'ise]

Ningoni ya tshikwara Dongodzivhe, [ningoni] [ja] [t'hiḡ'wara]

Ho tewa vhualo ha maḁi,[hɔ][tʰɛwa][βualɔ][hɛ][maḁi]
 Hone zwifhoni zwa Maseḁoni.[hɔŋɛ][zwiḁni] [zwa] [maseḁni]

[On the shoulder of the Tshinetise mountain,
 On the nose of the Dongodzivhe hill,
 A watery bed is laid,
 The core of the Maseḁoni's burial place.]

Tshiḁandamelo ri vhona mboni,[tʰiḁandamelo][ri][βona][mboni]
 Ya tshiswaḁe tsha one mavhanda,[ja][tʰiḁaḁe][tʰa][ɔŋɛ][maβanda]
 A tshi ri findu-fundu! Kodo-kodo! [a][tʰi] [ri] [findu fundu][kʰɔdɔkʰɔdɔ]
 A inga mphaso dzivhani; [a][iŋga][mpʰaso][dziβani]
 E mbwanda, dzadzadza![ɛ] [mbwanda][dzadzadza]

[At Tshiḁandamelo, we see wonders,
 Of the touch-chase game of beasts,
 Doing the backflip! Projecting only their buttocks!
 Piling libatory gifts in the lake;
 And then submerge, disappearing out of sight!]

Zwa vuwa-vho ri vhona ḁembe, [Zwa] [vuwaβɔ][ri] [βona] [ḁembe]
 ḁa tshinzie ngomu tivhani,[ḁa] [tʰindziɛ] [ŋgɔmu][tʰiβani]
 Nngwa dzi tshi honedzela;[nŋgwa][dzi] [tʰi][hɔŋɛdzela]
 Dzi tshi ḁula tsinyamaḁanga.[dzi] [tʰi] [ḁula] [tsinamaḁanga]

[When troubled, we see the miracle,
 Of utter disarray in the lake,
 Dogs grunting deeply;
 Forewarning about ensuing destructions.] (Netshivhuyu, 1990:9)

Emphases on linguistic codes around Lake Fundudzi

The allusive qualities of the words *zwifhoni* (burial site), *tivhani* (in the lake), *ḁembe* (miracle), *mbwanda*, *dzadzadza* (submerge, disappearance) and phrases such as *vhualo ha maḁi* (a watery bed), *tshiswaḁe tsha mavhanda* (the touch-chase game of the beasts) and *mphaso dzivhani* (libatory gifts in the lake) point to the significance of water in the Vhavanḁa's mythology. Both Ngwana's and Netshivhuyu's poems encapsulate mountains in Venḁa as places linked to their communion with and veneration of ancestors. Fundudzi is also surrounded by the Soutpansberg Mountains and the Thononda Hill also overlooks the Lake, which serve as sources of the mytho-aesthetic aspects of the Tshivendan traditional religion. Netshivhuyu's poem, cited above, ends with a gloomy picture, hinting at what happens when the spirits

are troubled in the Lake. Apart from the awe-inspiring occurrences witnessed in the Lake such as beasts back-flipping and playing a 'touch-and-chase' game, these 'beasts', when offended or troubled, also bring misfortunes upon the human world. The same tone is evinced in Ngwana's last three stanzas of the poem, "Fundudzi", where he says:

Vhe ṅamusi zwo vhifha hu duba vhutsi;[βɛ][ṅamusi][zwo][βiɸa] [ɦu] [duba] [βutsi]
 Hu fukulwa lufuko thavha i a ṅununa;[ɦu] [fukʷulwa][tʰaβa] [i] [a] [ṅuṅuṅa]
 Vhe zwiḍuḍwane zwo tanga dzivha loṯhe;[βɛ] [zwiḍuḍwane][zwo][tʰaŋga][d̄ziβa]
 [ɬoṯhe]
 Uvhani Vho-Ṇetshiavha na ndebvu avha tsha vheula;[Uβani][βoṅɛtʰiaβa][ṅa]
 [ndebvu][aβa][tʰa][βeula]
 Vha vho lala vho ima vha tshi rerela midzimu yavho;[βa] [βo] [lala] [βo] [ima][βa]
 [tʰi][rɛrɛla] [midzimu][jaβo]
 Ngei thavhani tshikona tshi tou vhimbila.[ŋgei][tʰaβani][tʰikʷoṅa][tʰi][tʷo]
 [βimbila]

[They say things are bad today, smoke blows;
 The covering is removed, the mountain grumbles;
 They say *zwiḍuḍwane* surround the whole lake;
 Even Mr. Ṇetshiavha no longer cuts his beard;
 He sleeps standing while venerating his gods;

At the mountain *tshikona* continues to be piped.] (Ṇetshivhuyu, 1990:9)

Connection with the ancestors

As has been repeatedly indicated, Lake Fundudzi is said to be connected to ancestor spirits of Ṇetshiavha of the Tshiavha clan and is supposed to be inhabited by the spirits of other Vhaṭavhatsindi people (Mashau, 2004; Stayt, 1931; West, 1976). This kind of belief has a great impact on the lives of the Vhavenḍa people. Because of the presence of spirits, Lake Fundudzi is greatly feared and revered. It is greatly feared because of the influence that the ancestors are believed to have on the living, i.e., their ability to bring misfortunes on the living when disregarded (Mashau, 2004). In the above stanza, the poet reveals the terror and panic experienced by people when the ancestor spirits are troubled or offended. In such instances, Ṇetshiavha, the guardian of the lake, must see to it that he finds out what the cause of the ancestors' fury is, and placate them.

According to the poet, Ṇetshiavha will spend sleepless nights, if need be, interceding for the people with his ear attuned to the frequency of the spirits' voices to meet their demands. Ṇetshiavha does not even cut his beard, perhaps to emphasise the point that propitiating the ancestors is much more important than

his own hygienic needs and to symbolise that the ancestors are infuriated. Or, he has been so occupied with attempting to mollify the ancestors that there has not been time to care for himself. This implies that pleasing the ancestors is far more important than drawing pleasure from basic conveniences of human life.

In seeking to placate the ancestors, the traditional dance, *tshikona*, is also performed, seemingly to no avail. The reason the priest, Ntshivha, goes all out to mollify the furious ancestors, as already stated, is that the ancestors are said to bring either benefits or misfortunes to their descendants (Mashau, 2004). Mashau (2004) says accidents, illness, miscarriage, (and so on) are caused by angry spirits of one's family when such a person disregards them. Ntshivha spends sleepless nights (and days) trying to combat the occurrence of these misfortunes by allaying the wrath of the ancestors. The poet also affirms that ancestors among the Vhava are referred to as *midzimu* (gods) in the plural (Mashau, 2004). In the singular, it is *mudzimu* (god). The poet's reference to *midzimu* indicates that the ancestors remained central to the Vhava's belief, so that their relationship with their ancestors has so much more meaning than their relationship with Raluvhimba (Nwali). The poet also says:

Ho țangana maswuhana ndi kunzhelele-kunzhe;[hɔ][țangana][mașufana] [ndi]
[k'unzhelelek'unze]

Nga ngei Tshiheni vho ima nga zwiingamo;[ŋga] [ŋgei][tʰiheni][βɔ] [ima] [ŋga]
[ziingamo]

Vha tshi vhone zwi itwaho Fundudzi;[βa][tʰi][βona][zi] it'wahɔ][fundudzi]

Maisane! nga Tshavhumbwe ri a lovha iwe vhatu;[maisane][ŋga][tʰaβumbwe]
[ri] [a] [loβa] [iwe] [batʰu]

Kha hu rambwe tshikona u kunguwedza midzimu;[kʰa][hu][rambwe][tʰik'ona] [u]
[k'unguwedza][midzimu]

Ndi Vho-Makhavhu vho ima fhasi ha muenze[Ndi] [βɔ] [makʰaβu][βɔ] [ima]
[φasi] [ha][muenze]

Vha tshi khou feta ndebvu dzavho.[βa][tʰi][kʰu][fet'a][ndebvu] [dzaβɔ]

[Young men have all
come together, unified in rhythms of dance;
At Tshiheni, they stand at the thresholds;
Seeing what is being done at Fundudzi;
Oh! I swear by Tshavhumbwe, we perish!
Invite the tshikona crew to pacify the gods;
Makhavhu says while standing under a tree

Whilst fiddling with his beard.]

Vha hashu, hu shavhisa Mwali nandi;[βa][haʃu], [hu] [ʃaβisa] [Mwali][nandi]

Mudzimu waṅu o dzivha Fundudzi;[mudziṃu] [waṅu] [ɔ][dziβa] [fundudzi]
 Riṅe ri takala ri Tshiheni tsha ha Nyaphungatshena;[riṅe][ri][tʰakʰala][ri][tʰihifeni]
 [tʰa] [ha][ṅapʰuŋga][tʰeṅa]
 Tomboni ṽa mbila, hune re ri ri tshi vuwa;[tʰomboni] [ṽa] [mbila] [ḥuṅe][re][ri][ri]
 [tʰi] [vuwa]
 Ra ḍi vhona nga tshivhoni tsha dzivha.[ra] [ḍi] [βona][ṅga] [tʰiβoni][tʰa][dziβa]
 Ane a ṽoda u vhona nga a ye hu tshi kha ḍi vha zwino;[aṅe] [a] [ṽoda] [u] [βona]
 [ṅga] [a] [je] [ḥu] [tʰi] [kʰa][ḍi]
 [βa][ziṅo]

[Brethren, the frightful one is Mwali really;

Your God has procured Fundudzi;

We are happy when we are at Tshiheni of Nyaphungatshena;

The rock of the xylophone [or rock rabbit], where when we wake up;

We see ourselves in the lake's mirror.

Whosoever wants to see must go while it is now](Netshivhuyu, 1990:9)

The poet still emphasises the need to pacify the ancestors. In the event where misfortunes are incurred by the living, the Vhavenda people will basically say that '*midzimu i a hana*' meaning that 'the ancestor spirits are not in agreement or are refusing' (Mashau, 2004:71). What provoked the wrath of the ancestors is not mentioned in the poem. The central theme of the last stanzas is the need to propitiate the troubled or offended ancestors. According to the poet, Mwali/Nwali is deeply connected to the ancestors inhabiting Lake Fundudzi. He is acknowledged as one jealously guarding the Lake and further prohibiting unauthorised entrance into the Lake. In fact, Lake Fundudzi is believed by the Vhavenda to be the 'swimming pool' of Nwali/Raluvhimba (the creator), who left his giant footprints in the mountains around it at the moment of creation, while the earth was still soft (Nettleton, 2006). Furthermore, it is believed that the python writhes on the perimeter of the Lake, signifying the powers of the healers, of members of other lineages, and of members of the Vhavenda communities politically disempowered by Singo dominance. In addition, in Tshivenḍa culture, the Lake and a pregnant woman's womb are both containers, and the belts worn by pregnant women, which 'tie' the baby in its place, are likened to a python. The poem ends with the poet's declaration that the people who live near Lake Fundudzi, i.e., Tshiheni, are happy there, despite its frightful properties. Tshiheni is an area due west of Lake Fundudzi. Furthermore, the poet links the Vhavenda's corporate identity to Lake Fundudzi by conjuring up an image of Fundudzi as a mirror. Put laconically, the Vhavenda investigate the Lake to see a reflection of themselves, which in and of itself metaphorically means Lake Fundudzi is implicated in identity constructions and articulations of the Vhavenda. However, the myths that surround Lake Fundudzi have faded among the modern Vhavenda.

LAKE FUNDUDZI MYTHOLOGY IN THE PRESENT-DAY CONTEXT

Much in Venḁa territory has changed in both the political and cultural dimensions of rural life. Along with this change also came disillusionments with the old mythology that seemingly shores up chiefly and priestly privilege. Several factors can be attributed to this disillusionment. For one thing, the arrival of missionaries in Venḁa resulted in much, if not all, of the Vhavenḁa's traditional religion dismissed as antagonistic to the Judeo-Christian worldview, and therefore, pagan. Colonialism and the apartheid system in South Africa ensured that along with the dehumanisation and bestialisation of Africans, their socio-cultural traditions are also relegated to insignificance. Modernisation and globalisation have also resulted in the disturbance of much of the Vhavenḁa's religion, socio-cultural traditions and philosophy, resulting in most Vhavenḁa in the modern-day context either indifferent to or ambivalent about their own culture and traditions. Furthermore, Lake Fundudzi has become the centre of controversy in the new power struggles, which are related to the question of land distribution (Nettleton, 2006). Notwithstanding, revisits to the Vhavenḁa's etiological myths and stocks of their lore are imperative, particularly considering the ongoing discourse on decolonising pedagogies and epistemologies in African centres of knowledge production. Disillusionments with Lake Fundudzi in the present-day context should not be taken to imply that the myths and mysteries that surround it have been totally obliterated among the Vhavenḁa. On the contrary, the Vhavenḁa who embrace African Traditional Religion (ATR) still speak of the Lake with reverential awe and proudly implicate it in their cosmology and cosmogony (Munyai, 2016).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summation, it is striking how D.M. Ngwana and A.F. Ntshivhuyu use poetry to provide indices into how the Vhavenḁa trace their life and cosmogonic view from water. The poets link their understanding of this view to Lake Fundudzi in an effort to highlight the notion that there is fellowship between the Vhavenḁa and their livingdead. Thus, by analysing Tshivenḁa poetry in light of this cosmogonic outlook, one can gain a deeper understanding into the life and worldview of the Vhavenḁa. In this way, Tshivenḁa poetry serves as one of the springboards to gaining a wholesome insight into the Vhavenḁa's myths and philosophy. Although the myth has faded among the Vhavenḁa, the glimpses provided by the selected poets enable one to locate the premises of the Vhavenḁa's cosmology.

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