

A Reflection on the Communicative Aspects of Tshivenda Traditional Attire

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ABSTRACT

Tshivenda traditional attires assume a socio-cultural and communicative significance and thus are more than mere products of a textile sweatshop. Their true significance becomes apparent in Tshivenda culture when a particular attire either by virtue of its design, colour or embroidery conveys a non-verbal yet meaningful message to the observer. The aim of this study was to affirm the notion that Tshivenda traditional attires carry and convey cultural meanings. The focus was on how both the male and female attires, including beads and how various colours on such attires serve as communicative implicatures in Tshivenda culture. The study employed a qualitative design because it relied on document analysis and literature review for its data collection. The study revealed that there are various attires in Tshivenda culture and that these attires are worn for a variety of reasons and with different meanings, such as during ritual performances, initiation ceremonies, to depict power relations, gender and even one's marital status.

Keywords

Traditional attires; Identity; Ideology; Meaning; Gender; Power

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Introduction

Since time immemorial, people have always sought means to cover or clothe their bodies. Ascribed to these clothes was not a mere valuation and protection of their dignity and decency but also an expression of "ideological signification" (Abodunrin, 1992), a communication of cultural meanings, and a "construction and articulation of identity" (Mashige, 2011:13). Apparently, "there are two important functions of clothes in non-verbal communication. First, they help us to negotiate identity, present our situated identities or roles, moods, value and attitudes to one another. Secondly, they help us to define situations, that is, to socially construct the basic interactions" (Kaiser, 1985:216). It must be stated from the onset that one form of covering that people considered in the past, including the Vhavenḁa people, was the skins of animals (Phophi, 2004). Still, meanings were attached to these animal skins that functioned as people's attires. Phophi maintains that the animal skins were acquired either from domestic or wild animals. In the present-day context, animal skins as attires in Tshivenda culture, can be seen during the inauguration of the chief or king. In such an occasion, the royal leader would be wearing a leopard's or cheetah's skin (Mabayi, 2009:25). During the *tshikona* dance, *malogwane* (the referee or leader) often wears the same animal skins, of cheetah or leopard whereas the dancers were garments that look like gowns (Mabayi, 2009:26). In some instances, the performers wear trousers only and leave the upper body bare. In Tshivenda culture, however, there is no specific prescription for what should be worn during the *tshikona* performance. *Tshikona* is "the bamboo pipe dance" (Kruger, 2007:36), its performance is often associated with traditional politics.

A shift from animal skins to somewhat a modern form of attires occurred predominantly with the arrival of the Whites in South Africa, where the Western fabrics began to symbolise a person's place in the tribe (Mushaisano, 2009). For Phophi (2004:18), fabrics were introduced to Blacks

through trading. Phophi maintains that the Arabs and the Portuguese exchanged clothes, beads, brass and copper rings and iron hoes for ivory, copper, gold, horns and skins. It was from this trade that stores were established all over the country to conduct this business. With this, changes in the material culture of Blacks in South Africa came and these changes also affected even their dress codes. Missionaries also made a significant contribution to this change, not only a change of attires but also of the life and worldview of the Vhavenḁa (Khorommbi, 1996; Maḁadzhe, 1985, Mafela, 2006; Makhado, 1980; Milubi, 1997; Phophi, 2004). However, of particular interest in this study is how clothes, Tshivenda traditional attires to be precise, are embedded with cultural nuances and meanings.

The central aim of this study is to evaluate the meanings, implicatures and significance of Tshivenda traditional attires. Following from this is the need to affirm the notion that Tshivenda traditional attires carry and convey cultural meaning among the Vhavenḁa. It is important to do so because if these meanings are not taken into consideration, as 'ordinary' as they may appear to be, the likelihood is that Tshivenda traditional attires can become so simple and so common that 'people ultimately lose their cultural and aesthetic significance' (Mashige, 2011:13). Hence, the view maintained in this study is that attires represent a people's sense of identity, an expression of their socio-cultural meaning and ideology. By attire, it is meant 'anything placed on the body, covering the whole body or parts of the body' (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:2).

At a first glance, one may rightly state that the only motive for clothing is to cover one's nakedness but upon close inspection, one is also likely to realise that (traditional) clothes do not merely protect a person's 'modesty', there are also socio-cultural meanings embedded in the various attires that people wear. This notion is also cherished by Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:1) who investigated the socio-cultural significance and coded meanings of Tshivenda female attire. Their argument is that the Tshivenda female attires function as non-verbal

communication, where the wearers convey messages to the observers. Raphalalani and Mashige further aver that the Tshivenda dress codes not only communicate socio-cultural meanings to the observer, but also signify gender, age group, rank, authority, status, marital status and identity, as well as power relations, including the supernatural and the sacred (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:1; Mushaisano, 2009:1). This study will allude to the afore-mentioned aspects with special reference to their role and significance, the symbolic meanings of Tshivenda dress codes worn during initiation ceremonies, dances and the socio-cultural meanings of colours on traditional attires in Tshivenda culture.

Types of Tshivenda Traditional Attires

There is a wide range of Tshivenda attires. With this wide range, it is also imperative to state that the meanings ascribed to the attires may vary from one place to another among the Vhavana. For instance, the Vhavana at Ha Tshivhasa may differ with the Vhavana at Ha Mphaphuli in terms which are attires are worn for which initiation school (Mabayi, 2009:19). Some of the attires that will be considered in this study are: *nwenda*, *tshideka*, *tshitimbi*, *tshirivha*, *tsindi*, *sheḑo*, *musisi (mukhasi)*, *gwana* and various types of beads.

2.1 Nwenda

Nwenda is a female Tshivenda attire, worn from puberty to old age (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018). In Tshivenda culture, there can be a communicative significance that is exhibited by wearing *nwenda* and that is often based on how *nwenda* is worn. For instance, a widow will wear *nwenda* inside-out as an indication that her husband has passed on (Mushaisano, 2009:61). This widow will wear *nwenda* until the prescribed days for her mourning are over, and then she will wear it the right way. Still on this, a widow will wear black *makunda* (anklets) on her legs during her mourning period, as an indication that she is grieving. At this time, she will not talk to anyone across the fence or respond to anyone talking to her from a distance (Mushaisano, 2009:61). A girl known as *phalaphathwa*, that is, a girl whose breasts have not yet developed (Milubi, 1987:129; Phophi, 2004:61), will wear *nwenda* with a single line of embroidery (Mushaisano, 2009:61). The single line of embroidery indicates that one is not yet engaged whereas multiple lines on *minwenda* (plural form of *nwenda*) will often indicate that one is engaged. A Muvenda who is classified as *khomba*, a young female who is eligible for marriage (Milubi, 1987:129), wears *nwenda* with two layers which is similar to the one worn by women. Thus, *nwenda* can be worn to communicate a variety of messages in Tshivenda culture. It can be worn to indicate that one is a widow and to distinguish a *phalaphathwa* from a *khomba*. Following from this is that one who is communicative competent in Tshivenda culture and its various symbolic attributes can ascribe the appropriate interpretation to the attire.

2.2 Tshideka

According to Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:3), *tshideka* is a 'square piece of fabric about 10cm wide and 10cm long. *Tshideka* is sewn on a *ludede* ("string"). Phophi (2004:82) regards *tshideka* as the basic garment for a child. It is worn at the age when the child begins to crawl. At this age, Phophi further argues, the child has not yet developed a sense of modesty. All in all, *tshideka* is a piece of cloth used to protect private parts but the buttocks remain uncovered (Phophi, 2004). Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:3) also assert that children, both boys and girls wear *tshideka* from when they start walking until they are under the age of three years. *Tshideka* can also be made of two squares, one to cover the front, and the other to cover the back of little boys and girls.

2.3 Tshitimbi

Raphalalani and Mashige postulate that *tshitimbi* is almost similar to *tshideka*. They further indicate that there is a difference between the two in that *tshitimbi* is made of beads while *tshideka* is made of cloth. *Tshitimbi* is used for adornment and also to cover the genitals of both girls and boys. This garment, however, is 'rarely worn these days and whenever it is worn, it is largely as part of the cultural accoutrements that form part of expressing tribal identity and cultural pride, a significant gesture of acknowledging Tshivenda heritage' (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:3).

2.4 Tsindi

The Vhavana males had their own type of dress called *tsindi*. It is made from lion skins (Mushaisano, 2009:6). *Tsindi* is a loin covering that *madunana* used to wear in the past (Nemapate, 2009:220) *Tsindi* is a triangular piece of soft skin covering the front, passed between the legs and tied at the back (<https://www.morningsun.co.za/activities/venda-cultural-experience/>). According to Nemapate (2009:90), the attire for *madunana* when *Domba* songs were performed was *tsindi*. *Madunana* (little men), according to Nemapate (2009:85), are mature boys who must have gone through the *thondo* initiation school. The *thondo* initiation school, according to Munyai (2017:60), existed in Venda, and it formed part of the basic education of the Muvenda child. Each Venda boy needed to complete his initiation schooling in order to attain manhood. Nemapate (ibid) indicates that *thondo* is an initiation school where mature boys are checked to see or find out whether they have got sperms that can make children. These mature boys' maturity is also called *u sema vhalakaha* (to scold old men), according to Nemapate (2009:220). Another idiom for these boys who are matured is *u luma luḑanga* (to bite the reed). In the olden days, *madunana* used to wear *tsindi* only (Nemapate, 2009:90). Thus, to wear *tsindi* in Tshivenda culture, one must have attended the *thondo*. The *tsindi* then, was not merely for covering one's genitals, but also to depict a maturity, including the capacity to reproduce.

Muḑa or *hogo* is an initiation school where Vhavana males are circumcised. The circumcision in Tshivenda culture takes place during winter. Those who attend the initiation (also known as *mashuvhuru* prior to the actual circumcision)

do not wear anything during the day and during the night, they wear blankets (Mabayi, 2009:22). The vhadabe (mentors) only wear trousers when they are going to fetch *tshivhono*. The *Vhalidi* and *Zwihotola* wear whatever they want as an indication that they have completed the rite. *Ramalia* (the leader of the initiation or the one who is circumcising) puts on a hat made from animal's skin for the purposes of reverence. Shoes are forbidden at the initiation school, whoever puts on a chicken or an owl (Mabayi, 2009:22). When the initiation school closes, the initiates leave wearing blankets or being naked since they leave during the night without anyone seeing them. They do not wear trousers put they are not completely healed; wearing trousers might cause the wound to fester. They wash themselves and are smeared with *luvhundi* all over their bodies. In some instances, however, they may wear trousers only and carry a walking stick so that they can walk properly. They also put beads known as *mpakato*. On the day that they wash off *luvhundi*, they can then wear whatever they want.

2.5 Sheḑo

Sheḑo is normally worn by girls from the age of three and older. It is a narrow strip of cloth between the legs hanging over a girdle in front and behind (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018). Like the male *tsindi*, aver Raphalalani and Mashige (2018), the *sheḑo* has a connotative meaning associated with sex, primarily; because both the *tsindi*'s and the *sheḑo*'s purpose is to cover the genitals, whose primary functions, among others, include copulation. According to Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:6), this further gives the contextual clarity to the expression: *U na sheḑo/She has sheḑo*, or *U na tsindi/He has tsindi* –implying the person being referred to is sexually promiscuous. In Tshivenda culture, one wears *sheḑo* until they participate in the *domba* initiation ceremony. According to Nemapate (2009:81), *domba* is the initiation school for girls although boys also participate in this school. It is a final initiation school to be performed before marriage. This is where girls perform and are taught how to take care of their families and the community at large. The *domba* dance “serves an educational significance among the Venda people” (Mulaudzi, 2001:9). *Domba*, according to Mulaudzi (2001:9) and Stoffberg (1982:69), is an initiation school for young men and young women. Sivhabu (2017:80) asserts: “*Domba* has two main functions namely teaching girls how to prepare themselves to become wives (birth planning, giving birth and child care, how to treat a husband and nowadays the avoidance of HIV and AIDS)”. Matinya (2003:82) adds:

Domba does not take place regularly. The school is a general preparation for marriage, where boys and girls who are usually separated, are brought together. By means of symbols and metaphors they are together taught to understand the true significance of marriage.

For Mmbara (2009:12), “*Domba* is a dance that is associated with bestowing honour on royalty”. Upon returning from the *domba*, one no longer wears the *sheḑo* because a marriage proposal would have been submitted. The attires worn at the *domba* include: *vhukunda*, *gwana*, *muthephuthephu*, *tshitingwa* and *mukhethengwa* (Mabayi, 2009:16). Thus, in Tshivenda there are attires that are

specifically reserved initiation schools. Upon completing the *domba*, the initiate wears *musisi*.

2.6 Musisi

Phophi (2004:198) regards *musisi* or *mukhasi* as a “rectangular piece, of salimpo fabric worn as the back apron”. Phophi further asserts that the rectangle is shorter than the *nwenda*. The social significance of *musisi* in Tshivenda culture lies in the understanding that it is worn only by married women. When a married woman wears *musisi*, she shows the status of being in her own family. The bridesmaids, however, can also wear *musisi* during the marriage ceremony (Phophi, 2004:198). It must be stated that the size of the *mukhasi* (*musisi*) worn by a woman differs from the one worn by a girl. The *musisi* worn by a woman is relatively longer than the one worn by a girl. Candidates from the *domba* may also wear *mukhasi* instead of *gwana*, thus indicating that they have completed the school (Phophi, 2004:198). The reason for wearing *mukhasi/musisi* may differ from place to place in Venda. Hence, Phophi (2004:198) states that “when a confined woman puts on *musisi*, it is an indication that she is immunised while in certain areas...if she wears *mukhasi/musisi* instead of *gwana*, it is an indication that the woman has given birth to a second child. The royals usually practice this”. After the *tshilalandoima* day, the day in which *domba* is performed throughout the entire night, after seven days, the performance is that of removing the attire called *mareḑo* (plural form of *sheḑo*). They then wear the attire called *musisi* because they are now waiting to get married (Nemapate, 2009:116). Milubi (1996:134) says *musisi* is a female attire that is worn from the waist to the knees, or beyond the knees whereas the top part of the body remains uncovered; she is bare breasted. *Musisi* is worn by a woman, and not a girl. *Musisi* is not worn with the *sheḑo*, it is worn just as it is. The woman wearing *musisi* will also wear *tshiluvhelo* (underwear) so that when she kneels, her thighs and genitals are not exposed. Phophi (2004:174) defines *tshiluvhelo* as a front apron worn together with *tshirivha*, *gwana* and *mukhasi*. The sole function of *tshiluvhelo* is to cover the front part of the body, specifically the genital area. The married woman is not allowed to wear *sheḑo* anymore. In fact, upon marriage, the husband literally instructs her to never wear the *sheḑo* again, she must wear *musisi* (Mushaisano, 2009:28). She may, however, wear *sheḑo* under *musisi* during her menstrual cycle (Mushaisano, 2009). *Musisi/mukhasi* thus depicts a woman's marital status (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:5).

2.7 Tshirivha

According to Mabayi (2009:14) and Stayt (1968), *tshirivha* is made from goat or sheep skin and is worn with *tshiluvhelo*. In the olden days, *tshirivha* used to be worn by married women. Stayt (1968) corroborates this when he states that married women in Tshivenda culture are noticed by their dressing. He further points out that married women wear *tshirivha*. The goat or sheep skin is thoroughly softened by rubbing cow dung and water all over the surface of the skin and stretching it. It is stretched broad wise, being pinned down with *mutuni* thorns (Stayt, 1968). Three little

gussets are cut and sewn up on either side to help shorten and flatten the garment. The hair is left on the skin.

2.8 Gwana

According to Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:11), *gwana* is an apron made of sheep skin. They further indicate that the *gwana* is worn together with the *tshiluvhelo*. *Gwana* looks like *tshirivha*, with *pfunelo* in the front to support the latter. "In the olden days, *gwana* had a great socio-cultural status as it symbolised royalty" (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:11). Mabayi (2009:14) and Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:11) concur that according to the culture of the Vhavanḁa, *gwana* is worn when the initiates of the *domba* are being escorted to their respective homes. During this process, only virgin girls would put on *gwana* as a symbol of pride for being found pure". These days, however, the royal meaning attached to *gwana* no longer holds, due to the shortage of sheep's skin (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:11).

Types of Beads, Other Aspects of Tshivendḁa Attires and their Meanings in Tshivendḁa Culture

Beads are embedded with a variety of meanings and purposes in Tshivendḁa culture. Among the beads that will be considered in this study are: *mapala*, *thuthu*, *mukheḁhengwa*, *ludede*, *marare*, *tshiluvhelo*, *luḁomolatsie*, *mufunga*, *tshiala*, *muvhofho*, *tshithuza*, *thuzu*, *tshitendende*, *tshithivhavivho*, *tshotshwane*, *tshitingwa* and *tshikhaḁlamazuḁa*.

3.1 Mapala

These beads, in Tshivendḁa culture, are symbolic of the fact that a woman wearing them is still young and fertile. *Mapala* take the shape of a flower, implying that when the flower wilts, there are seeds inside it and this symbolises fertility. Hence, *mapala* are not worn by elderly women, that is, women who have passed child-bearing age (Mushaisano, 2009; Mabayi, 2009). A widow, in Tshivendḁa culture, does not wear *mapala*.

3.2 Thuthu

During the *domba*, there is an attire worn by the *vhatei* (initiates) when the *domba* initiation songs are performed (Nemapate, 2009:90). Nemapate (2009:90) maintains: The initiates wear *mareḁo* and wear plenty of *vhukunda* on their feet and on their hands. They also wear *thuthu*. *Thuthu* is the belt made of pieces of the broken shell of an ostrich egg. They also wear *mapala* (*vhulungu*). This is white in colour. They indicate that the girls are mature. They may now get married and give birth to children that will make the Venḁa nation continue to exist. Old women do not wear *mapala* because they cannot give birth to children any longer.

Thuthu, according to Van Warmelo (1989:380), are copper clasps or pieces of copper twisted around a string of cotton worn around ankles and waist in the olden days. *Thuthu* are worn by a female who just came back from the *domba*.

Their sole purpose is to balance the *sheḁo* so that it does not slide from the waist. The tail of the *sheḁo* covers the *thuthu*. The females who wear the *thuthu* are royalty (Mabayi, 2009:12). Various descriptions of the *thuthu* may be provided in Tshivendḁa, depending on the various locations in Venḁa. For others, *thuthu* may be *vhukunda* that are worn around the arms and legs whereas for others, *thuthu* (also called *tshotshwane*) may be worn around the waist by girls going to the *domba* and that it is worn with the *sheḁo* to decorate the buttocks since *thuthu* is worn around the waist. For others, *thuthu* may be worn by a royal female from the day she is an initiate to the day she completes the *domba* initiation. In any case, however, *thuthu* is intended to indicate that the girls are mature and marriageable.

3.3 Mukheḁhengwa/kheḁhengwa

The *mukheḁhengwa* are beads worn around the waist to make a woman more attractive (Nemapate, 2009:354). *Mukheḁhengwa* is worn by females heading to the *Domba*. It is worn like a belt. The main idea is to expose the beauty of a woman's waist (Mushaisano, 2009:35). It is worn on top of *musisi*. It is worn by the females known as *vhabvana* (females who already have children). They wear *mukheḁhengwa* on top of *tshirivha*. *Tshirivha*, according to Phophi (2004:37), is a goat skin back apron of married women and is sometimes worn by girls during initiation occasions such as *Vhusha*. *Vhusha* is 'attended to as soon as possible after a girl's first menstruation. During *Vhusha*, girls are introduced to the secret *milayo* (laws), meant to prepare them for their future role as wives and mothers' (Munyai, 2017:62). *Tshirivha* is worn by a *khomba* returning from an initiation school (Milubi, 1996:133) and they wear this when they return from the *Domba* where *luvhundi* would have been washed off. They only wear *tshirivha* for three days, on the fourth day, they wash off *luvhundi* and take it off (Mushaisano, 2009:39; Stayt, 1968:106). *Luvhundi* is red ochre (Munyai, 2017:62; Mabayi, 2009:18) that is applied on the initiates. There are contrasting views on who wears *tshirivha* in Tshivendḁa culture. In Mushaisano (2009), some of the participants indicate that *tshirivha* is worn by *khomba*, some say it is worn by *vhabvana*, women who have recently given birth, old women whereas other maintain that it is only the elderly women who wear it. For Stayt (1968), *tshirivha* can also indicate a woman's marital status whereas for some it depicts the royal status of the chief's wives.

3.4 Ludede

Ludede is a cotton girdle tied in front to support loin dress (Phophi, 2004:30). It is worn by children on the waist. When worn by females, its purpose to ensure that the *sheḁo* remains intact around the waist. For the infants, *ludede* would be worn on the waist but it would also have been 'touched' by the traditional healer to protect the infant from diseases and witchcraft. This ensures that the child grows up healthy and safe.

3.5 Marare

Marare is the attire worn during the *tshigombela* dance (Mushaisano, 2009:42). Khorommbi (1996:65) says the *tshigombela* is a female dance usually performed by married women. *Tshifhasi* is similar to *tshigombela* but is performed by young unmarried girls (Khorommbi, 1996). *Marare* are the strings that are twisted out of the bark of the *Mudzulatshiny*a tree (Van Warmelo and Phophi, 1967).

3.6 Tshiluvhelo

Tshiluvhelo is to the Vhavanḁa people what “panties in modern society” (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:4) are to people in general. *Tshiluvhelo* is not meant to be exposed or seen because its sole purpose is cover one’s genital area, and so, a great deal of respect is attributed to this dress. It is worn by women (Mushaisano, 2009:44). It is worn either with *tshirivha* or *musisi*. For Phophi (2004:174), *tshiluvhelo*, is worn with *tshirivha*, *gwana* or *mukhasi*, and it covers the front part of the body.

3.7 Luṭomolatsie

Luṭomolatsie literally means “to remove one’s eyebrows” (Nemapate, 2009:343). *Luṭomolatsie* are beads worn around the head and beads worn around the arms. These beads are often worn as an attire in the *malende* performance songs. *Luṭomolatsie* is worn by women who want the attention of men. “She wants someone to love” (Nemapate, 2009:343). It is noteworthy to indicate here that, in the *malende* songs’ performance, cleanliness is of great importance. *Malende* is one of the social ceremonies in Tshivendḁa culture (Mabayi, 2009:24). It is usually performed when people are happy and drinking *mahaḁhe* (traditional beer). Nemapate (2009:333) posits that women do not perform *malende* being dirty. They wear clean *minwenda* (clothing) sewn with different threads that have different meanings. They also wear *vhulungu* (beads called *tshipfuṅo*) with *pfuṅelo* (decorations) that are white in colour. They also wear silver *vhukunda* (Nemapate, 2009). *Luṭomolatsie* is worn by women who are not married (Mushaisano, 2009:45). This is so because its central purpose is draw attention to oneself, since one would be declaring their singleness to potential suitors who might be interested in her. Hence, the implication in the noun ‘*luṭomolatsie*’ is that when men see it, their ‘eyebrows are removed’, probably depicting their intense stares at the woman wearing the beads. *Luṭomolatsie* may also be regarded as a symbol that one is promiscuous or is a prostitute (Mushaisano, 2009:45). However, the common interpretation of *luṭomolatsie* in Tshivendḁa is that the female wears it to beautify herself and also to indicate her availability for marriage. It is commonly by young women.

3.8 Copper bangles

Copper bangles are not classified as beads in Tshivendḁa culture. However, wearing copper bangles has several meanings in Tshivendḁa culture (Nenungwi, 2015:115). Nenungwi (2015:115-6) mentions that the various aspects denoted by copper bangles in Tshivendḁa may include

protection against evil people, spirits, diseases and bad luck. Copper bangles may symbolise different things to different people among the Vhavanḁa.

3.9 Mufunga

These, according to Phophi (2004:192), are beads made from ostrich eggshells. Phophi further states that the string is worn around the waist and that in some instances, it is worn by royals only, usually young children, girls and chiefs’ wives. *Mufunga* is a sign of high status and wealth (Phophi, 2004). A commoner wears *mufunga* only when she is married to the chief. A girl from the royal family returning from the *Vhusha* initiation will be distinguished by *mufunga*. In the olden days, *mufunga* would be worn by women on the head. This was worn by a woman when she went to the royal kraal to be counselled concerning marital issues. Upon returning, the woman would have been given a new name (Mushaisano, 2009:46).

3.10 Tshiala

Tshiala is a string of ostrich egg shell beads worn around the head by women who are married in royal families (Van Warmelo, 1989:39). *Tshiala* may be white cotton worn around the head by those who passed through the *vhutambo* initiation. *Tshiala* is made from *mufunga* and is not worn by an old woman who does not have children (Mushaisano, 2009:48). The significance of *tshiala* in Tshivendḁa culture is mainly to show respect to the chief/king. Thus, predicated to this significance, is the need to teach women how to respect. Moreover, a woman who has attended the initiation school is noticed by wearing *tshiala* (Phophi, 2004:200). Phophi maintains that *tshiala* is taken off when one’s husband dies since there is no longer anything to boast about.

3.11 Muvhofho

Muvhofho in Tshivendḁa culture is used reshape the woman’s belly to its original or ‘normal’ size prior to her giving birth. Phophi (2004:197) and Mabayi (2009:12) define *muvhofho* as a thick medicinal girdle worn after confinement. This is made of fabrics that are rolled and stitched...its purpose is to reshape the tummy of the *mudzadze*. *Mudzadze* is a woman who has just recently given birth.

3.12 Tshithuza

Tshithuza, according to Phophi (2004:37), is not a Tshivendḁa cultural dress, it is the Vatsonga’s attire. However, in Tshivendḁa culture, *tshithuza* is worn by girls when they dance *Tshigombela*. It is worn on the waist. *Tshigombela* is an indigenous Venda traditional women’s musical ensemble performance. It is a group performance, with drum accompaniment (Mugovhani, 2009:54).

3.13 Thuzu

These are worn around the calves by the *Tshigombela* dancers. As they dance, they make noise just like the rattles, thus complementing the rhythm of the drum and song (Phophi, 2004:200). There are fruits picked from the *mutuzwu*, and when these fruits are dry, the seeds are taken

out and a few of them are put within shells. It is these seeds that make the rattle sounds that Phophi alludes to.

3.14 Tshitendende

Mushaisano (2009:52) indicates that *tshitendende* hails from the Ndebele since in Tshivenda, *tshitendende* did not originate from the Vhavenda. *Tshitendende* refers to the necklace beads and is worn by *vhabvana*, both married and unmarried. The idea behind wearing *tshitendende* is to demonstrate that one loves themselves and cleanliness.

3.15 Tshithivhavivho

Tshithivhavivho are dangling beads worn around the neck and rest against one's chest when worn. Their significance is to indicate that one is not or will not be envious (Mushaisano, 2009). It is worn by elderly women with the intention of not being envious of the *vhabvana* who could still be married since the husbands of the elderly women are still permitted to marry another wife.

3.16 Tshitingwa

Tshitingwa is a square piece of fabric sewn to the tail of the *sheḁo* which hangs over the girdle in front (Phophi, 2004:37). Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:5) provide a distinction between the *tshitingwa* of *mukololo* (royal member) and the *tshitingwa* of a *musiwana* (commoner). They assert that the *tshitingwa* of *mukololo* is wider, longer and fully covers the thighs, also in order to hide the scars caused by pinching, which is often applied as punishment and discipline during initiation. The *tshitingwa* of *musiwana* is shorter. Thus, *tshitingwa* can serve as an identity marker and social class distinctive feature. Some of the *vhakololo* prefer to cover their thighs with *zviluvhelo* (bigger aprons) instead of *zwingwa* [smaller aprons] (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:5). *Tshitingwa* covers the front of the *sheḁo* if or when her *sheḁo* is too short to cover her thighs.

3.17 Tshikhaḁamazula

Tshikhaḁamazula is a pink anklet worn on top of the white anklets, usually worn by the women of *vhuronga* (Phophi, 2004). These beads, when sewn are thick enough to surround one's muscles. Its purpose to reveal whether the purpose is gaining or losing weight, and to beautify oneself when one wears *minwenda*.

Colours as Symbolic Meanings in Tshivenda Attires and Culture

Colours have symbolism (Nengovhela, 2010:3). In some cultures, for example, wearing black clothing communicates the fact that there has been death in the family (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:2). Nengovhela (2010:15) says the 'black colour is primarily associated with the negative aspects of human experience including death, disease, famine and sorrow. The same colour, however, avers Nengovhela (2010:15), may have positive connotations in Tshivenda culture where black represents fertility and ancestors. With this in mind, only three colours will be

considered with the aim to examine how colours on Tshivenda attires connote and convey communicative significance among the Vhavenda.

4.1 The Black Colour and its Meaning in Tshivenda Attires and Culture

In Tshivenda culture, the communicative significance of the colour black is noted when a woman has lost her husband. She wears black for some days after losing her husband because this symbolises that she is mourning and that she is forbidden from to have an affair with another man because she is unclean (Nengovhela, 2010:18; Pandelani, 2011:22). For her to be able to see another man, a ritual called *u bvula nguvho* (to undress, Nengovhela, 2010:18), must be performed. After the performance, she will be dressed in white and this will symbolise that she is clean and ready to marry. Nengovhela (2010:18) says the white colour symbolises happiness and shows that she is no longer mourning and that she is ready to start a new family. Hence, at the performance, it will be declared that "*tshiila tsho fhela*" (the taboo has ended) meaning, she is no longer forbidden from seeing another man.

4.2 The Meaning of the White Colour in Tshivenda Attires and Culture

In Tshivenda culture, white colour often symbolises success. Hence, the expression *zwo mu tshenela* is commonly used to acknowledge one's success or great achievements (Nengovhela, 2010:16). The significance of the white colour in Tshivenda is noted during some ritual and traditional performances or dances. For instance, during the traditional ritual dance called *malombo*, there are special cloths that are worn and one of the cloths is *nwenda mutshena* (Nengovhela, 2010:16). *Malombo* is a [ritual] practice related to pacifying troubled spirits (Munyai, 2017:55). *Nwenda mutshena* (white *nwenda*) is used to protect the family members who are around from the bad luck that can be passed to them when the ritual is performed because it is believed, says Nengovhela (2010:16), that the [ancestral] spirits that are in the dancers can be passed to the people around if they are not protected. So, for their protection, they must wear *nwenda mutshena*. It must be stated, however, that other clothes that are worn when people are performing *malombo* are called *matongo* (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:12). *Matongo* are "made from fabric that is as soft as the fabric used on a handkerchief and are worn by dancers possessed by ancestral spirits during *malombo* ritual" (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:12). The *malombo* performers wear clothing with red, sky blue and green colours (Nemapate, 2009:362). On these colours, Raphalalani and Mashige (2018:12) say:

The colour black is associated with the dead, white with purity, red with soil, while blue is associated with the sky. These colours represent the African worldview that connects the dead, the living, the soil, and the sky to form a communicative continuum.

On the attire worn during the *tshigombela* dance or performance (which is often a white shirt), Nemapate (2009:315) indicates that young girls do not wear a white shirt. They do not have this white shirt because they do not

have a man who is intending to marry them because they are still very young. For the mature girls (*dzikhomba*) however, the white shirt is worn and it is the responsibility of the man who is going to marry the girl to buy a white shirt for the *tshigombela* performance (Nemapate, 2009:315). The colour white, in this sense, is used as a depiction that a girl has been chosen by another man for marriage. Furthermore, when dancing *malende* in Tshivenda culture, cleanliness, according to Nemapate (2009:333), is of great importance. Women do not perform *malende* being dirty. They wear clean *minwenda* sewn with different colours and also *vhulungu* (beads called *tshipfuno*) with *pfunelo* that are white in colour. The implication here is that the white colour symbolises cleanliness.

The white colour may also be used to symbolise purity in Tshivenda culture. This view is cherished by Nengovhela (2010:17):

When a person has been cleaned [cleansed] from “*tshinyama*” (bad luck) by the traditional healer, he or she dresses in white or uses ‘*ludede lutshena*’ (white girdle). This is done to give courage that he or she is pure and clean from the evil things that were attached to him or her. In some cases, a white belt is placed on the head of the person who has received cleansing so that people are sure that the individual is now clean and pure.

The white belt may also be used at females’ rituals in Tshivenda culture. One such a ritual is called *u zolwa* (virginity testing). If the girl is still a virgin, she is given a white belt that she ties on her forehead where everyone can see it (Nengovhela, 2010:18). Nengovhela further indicates that this is done to show that she is clean and she thus needs to be respected because she is still a virgin. In this instance, the white colour is used to indicate cleanness and virginity. Nemapate (2009:115) points out that when the initiates, particularly girls, are examined by the older women to find out if they have been deflowered or not, those who are found to be virgins are extremely praised and wear *tshirivha*. Thus, the colour white on the attire or as part of the attire, carries and conveys a communicative significance in Tshivenda culture.

4.3 The Meaning of the Colour Red on Tshivenda Attire and Culture

According to Nengovhela (2010:25), in Tshivenda culture, the red colour symbolises death and bad luck. For instance, if a person’s death is brought about by a car accident, being shot by a gun or being stabbed, the closest people to the deceased dress in red, or they a red cloth tied on their heads. The red cloth serves as a symbol of danger or bad luck that happened to the deceased (Nengovhela, 2010:25). All in all, there are various reasons why people wear the clothes they wear and oftentimes, attached to those clothes are cultural meanings and even psychological protection. On psychological protection, Kaiser (1985:52) concurs:

The use of dress or adornment for psychological protection has a long historical and cross cultural tradition. For instance, many cultures have used symbolic clothing or adornment to ward off evil spirits. In China and many other parts of the far East, the traditional colour for a wedding dress is red for a reason. In our culture and in our primitive

lives, we may find that we have some clothing symbols, that we believe bring us good luck or happiness.

Thus, clothes are worn to protect one’s dignity or modesty, keep the wearer warm, to express beliefs, for psychological, emotional and even physical protection and to celebrate one’s culture and identity. Clothes may also reveal or symbolise social stratification where people’s status, prestige, privilege, power and influence may be expressed through them.

Conclusion

This study affirms the claim that Tshivenda traditional attires are embedded with symbolic meanings. In times past and sparingly today, traditional attires were worn to emphasise the difference between sexes and age (Phophi, 2004:61). Furthermore, Tshivenda traditional attires served as a significant construction, signification and articulation of the Vhenda people’s sense of identity, socio-cultural meaning and ideological outlook. Thus, Tshivenda traditional attires could be considered invaluable when it came to African epistemologies that undergird an expression of a people’s identity, culture and ideology. Unfortunately, in the present-day context, people no longer wear traditional attires and if or when they do, it is primarily out of choice and not necessarily because there is an observation of the message that the attire originally conveyed. The modern-day Muvenda rarely seeks to decrypt the meaning embedded in the attire. These days, Tshivenda traditional attires are just worn by the Vhenda as they please, without ever taking into account the original cultural relevance and status significance (Raphalalani and Mashige, 2018:11).

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