

MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY



FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND CULTURE

DISSERTATION TOPIC

Traditional House Painting, Architecture, Decorative Motifs and their Cosmological

Underpinnings: The case of ward 17 Matobo District.

By

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**A dissertation submitted to the Department of African Languages and Culture,
Midlands State University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of
Arts African Languages and Culture Honours Degree.**

May 2018

Supervisor: Dr R. Nhongo

Signature.....

DECLARATION

I declare that **‘Traditional House Painting, Architecture, Decorative Motifs and their Cosmological Underpinnings: The case of ward 17 Matobo District’** is my own work and has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any institution. I declare that the sources that have been used or quoted have been acknowledged and indicated as a complete reference. I authorize the Midlands state University to lend this dissertation to other institutions or individuals for purposes of scholarly research only and also assure that the information in here is true and accurate.

May 2018 Quiet Dube

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APPROVAL PAGE

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the shapes of buildings, decorative motifs and their cosmological underpinnings. The symbols are so engrained into a people's culture that when people see these symbols they do not get the messages infused on the symbols. The thrust of this study is to unpack the cosmogonies, worldview and philosophy of life embedded on the designs and decorative motifs executed on houses in Matobo district. The study is qualitative and relied on interviews, observations and pictures as source of data. The study is guided by Cultural Relativism approach and Semiotics theory. The study found out that architectural designs and decorative symbols are imbued with messages, warnings and advices directed to the society and those outside the society of Matobo to have an understanding about that particular society. These motifs reveal the cosmos, social relations, responsibilities, totems, nature or environment and the history of the producers of art. It is also concluded here that the architectural shapes and decorative motifs tell a story about the artist, the society he/she lives in and can bring out his/her history and life experiences as well as how they interpret the environment they live in. The study recommends that other researchers should also cover and unpack the philosophy of a people embedded on General Dealer Stores and Bottle Stores inscriptions. It also recommends that the responsible ministry should establish initiatives that revitalise the practice of traditional house painting as it reveals more about a people and their philosophy as well as cosmogonies. The study concludes that symbols and designs are means of communication and expressing one's self.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my family and my mother Clara Dube who has been always supportive and my source of encouragement throughout the entire course. I thank you and may the Lord bless you in abundance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr R Nhongo for patience, guidance and diplomat towards me for the study to succeed. I greatly appreciate the friends for the words of encouragement and the maximum support they gave me. I am more grateful than the words can ever express, for the job well-done by the lectures in my department. Heartfelt appreciation goes to my mother and my family. More importantly I would like to thank God for his guidance through my educational journey.

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CHAPTER ONE

General Introduction

1:1 Area of Investigation

The study is in the field of culture specifically focusing on traditional houses, the decorative motifs executed on them and their cosmological underpinning or how they depict the worldview of a people. The study explores the cosmological connotations of traditional house painting and how they facilitate a worldview of a people specifically the Ndebele society of Matobo district in Matabeleland South. The study seeks to unpack the worldview, philosophies, inter alia, embedded on decorative motifs executed on ‘traditional’ houses in Ward 17, Matobo District. The research establishes that art is communicative and the argument is that architecture and decorative motifs or symbols are pregnant with the cosmological underpinnings, worldviews, and philosophy of a particular people or individual. This is postulated by Nyathi and Chikomo (2016:5) when saying that “our decorative symbols are our language of expression...into the warm moist depths of life-giving Mother Earth”. When painters execute decorative symbols they encode a couple of cosmologies, worldviews and or philosophical messages or expressions of an individual, social group and or community. Through decorative motifs certain ideologies are expressed and sent to a particular destination. Thus the study investigates the architecture and decorative symbols as they can be both communicative and aesthetic. This form of art can be done for different reasons and may have different interpretations. The philosophies embedded in them can be inspired by different domains of life encompassing socio-political, historical, and religious and or how they perceive the cosmos.

1:2 Background of the Study

Research works on decorative symbols has been done on other implements rather than on houses. Thus, the study is not a new marvel pertaining to the architecture and decorative symbols. According to Kaushik (2014), the Ndebele in South Africa suffered a horrible defeat in a war against the Dutch-speaking settlers – the Boers, just before the start of the twentieth century. Forced into an oppressive life, the Ndebele people started using expressive symbols to secretly communicate with each other. This supports the view that symbols executed during traditional painting are communicative and disseminates experience and the philosophy of life of a people. This was later adopted by the Ndebele in the Zimbabwean plateau and other sub-Saharan ethnic groups and Africans at large. This reveals the major

inspiration behind advent of traditional house painting. Rivalry between families caused the other group of 'Ndebele' to go further north into Zimbabwe. The Ndebele people were formidable warriors who often subdued the smaller chiefdom's and assimilated them into Ndebele society. Intermarriage ensued and cultural exchange happened. It is believed that early Ndebele house painting strategies were adopted as a result of these relationships. The motifs are eye-catching, aesthetic and appealing to the eyes and invokes curiosity on one's mind and thus, with the notion by the proponent Chinua Achebe (1982) that art for art's sake is yet another piece of deodorised dog shit, the researcher was convinced that there must be some cosmological underpinnings embedded in the art and hence motivated to carry out this kind of research. Matobo as a World Heritage Site on the basis of culture is deeply engrained with historical sites of importance. It is a culturally rich and imbued landscape, and one of the features is traditional house painting amplified by 'My Beautiful Home' competition running in seven wards in Matobo District. During this competition is where most participants showcases their artistic minds and communicate with the world (decoders) and more importantly community members. However, the decorative motifs seems to be losing its meanings at the expense of aesthetics/beauty.

These symbols together with the architectural designs (tangible heritage) can be banks of intangible cultural heritage, meanings and interpretations can narrate hilarious stories and can reveal the identity of an individual or a people.

1:3 Statement of the Problem

Scholars such as Hayner (1961), Nyathi (2013), Nyathi (2016) and others not mentioned here postulate the idea that art is expressive and art is communicative. Symbols have so much significance in a people's lives. The fact that symbols are such an ingrained part of our lives results in most people not even realising how many symbols they see and experience on a daily basis. It is a widely held view that objects of aesthetics experience are to be understood from the viewpoint of their expressive meanings. There is considerably less agreement among philosophises as to how the expressive of aesthetics/artistic objects is to be constructed. These paintings became an expression of both cultural resistance and continuity. The Boer farmers did not understand the meaning and viewed this cultural art as decorative and harmless and thus allowed it to continue. Kerber (2015:58) notes that art is expressive culture. Through creativity a people's culture is expressed and articulated. Symbols are

artistic products and reveal a people's culture therefore interpretations of these motifs should be interrogated to understand a people.

1:4 Research Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify the architectural structures, decorative motifs used in traditional house paintings in Matobo ward 17.
- To trace the origins, execution, taboos and value beliefs associated with traditional house painting or make-up and establish who does the construction of architecture and the decoration of houses
- To unpack the meanings, messages, expressions and philosophy of life embedded or communicated through architecture and the decorative motifs executed during traditional house painting.

1:5 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the cosmological underpinnings, worldview, philosophies and meanings disseminated by the architecture and the decorative motifs executed on 'traditional' houses?
- What are the forces or enablers that lobbies for a painter to execute a particular decorative symbol?
- To whom are the encoded messages directed to and why are they directed to that particular category?

1:6 Justification of the Study

This study is of much importance since art is expressive and is said to be component and carrying culture and culture defines a people hence it reveals how the decorative motifs on traditional house painting defines and are viewed by the Ndebele society. A number of studies more akin to this study has been conducted but most of them did not give much emphasis on traditional house paintings, architecture and their cosmogonies but rather symbols on heritage cites and inscriptions on houses. The study argues that there are different purposes and reasons that drive or inspire people to construct architectural structures and execute certain decorative symbols on walls of houses. The research also argues that the

decorative symbols as well as architectural designs communicates and are pregnant and imbued with a couple of meanings that this study focuses on.

1:7 Theoretical Framework

The researcher triangulates theories in conducting this study. This study is guided by cultural relativism approach and the semiotic theory to analyse data. Cultural relativism approach is employed because the theory seeks to understand a people based on that particular person's own culture rather than judged against criteria of another. The theory seeks to empower the idea and interpretations of the creator or designers whereby a people's world is understood by their own perceptions. Kant (1992) argues that material and social world is mediated through our minds: that peoples experience of the world is mediated through the knowledge and ideas they know about the world. Therefore, the need for the adoption of cultural relativism theory to explore the study and understand how the architectural constructors and painters of decorative motifs mediate the world they live in. Relativism is typically viewed in contrast to realism, which is the idea that what is true and real exist independently of the mind.

Where there are many different kinds of relativism- epistemological, moral, and cultural cognitive, they all have two features in common. The first is, they assert the one thing (moral values, knowledge meaning) is relative to a particular framework (individual subject, a culture, an era, or a language). Secondly they deny that any standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others. Thus, the theory is employed since the study focuses on the architecture and the decorative symbols executed on walls of houses in Matobo district, hence they are unpacked according to how the local communities encode them.

The theory purports that there is no universal truth. Equally important, Nyamnjoh (2015) speaks of traditionalizing modernity and modernizing tradition and says that Africa has displayed remarkable dynamics and adaptability to new socio-economic and political developments, without becoming totally transformed in the process. Therefore, the need to interpret a people's culture according to how they perceive the world around them or which they live in, hence, the adoption of cultural relativism theory. Ndhlovu (2011) postulates that when cultures come into contact borrowing takes place and the weaker culture borrows from the strong one. Up to date, the people of Matobo have lived among and had contact with a couple of cultural groups, attended a number of cultural programs hence, the factors which might have affected their culture or produced either hybrid culture.

The relativism theory has some shot falls for instance people change, culture is dynamic and definitely changes over time, humanity is constantly evolving, developing and adapting. Some symbols are adopted or borrowed from other ethnic groups. Quite a number of symbols share some meanings since most Africans share the same philosophy but differ in how they execute them and some symbols are the same but interpreted differently according to a peculiar group. Again, every individual has a different perspective that is based on their personal upbringing experiences and personal thoughts.

Therefore, to gather valid and reliable data the study is also guided by semeiotic theory. It was propounded by a Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in (1961). The theory purports that signs which incorporates inscriptions, sounds, objects, pictures, symbols or motifs, logos, inter alia, encodes messages peculiar to a particular people or individual. Semiotics is whereby signs, symbols, logos, inscriptions, motifs and designs are examined as the code of men and means of communication within societies. The theory is impactful on the study as it helps one understand the significance and meaning of motifs and architecture and how they project the cosmological underpinnings of a people. Nyathi. P, et al, (2016) notes that the very decorative symbols that we seem to be grappling with were developed by African ancestors who knew what meaning was carried by each symbol. Therefore, the need to employ semiotic theory which helped unpack ancient symbols and architectural structures. Its significance in the study helped to critically analyze and understand the messages which are carried by architecture and the decorative symbols or motifs executed on walls during the traditional house painting. With the guide of these two theories, the researcher is in a position to answer research questions, understand them, analyse and fulfil the research goals.

1:8 Research Methodology

Qualitative research method is employed to gather information for this study. Data was collected across different levels be it individual, communities and organizations. A purposeful sampling technique is the one effective in this study sample, and specific tools to solicit data are developed, guided by objectives and scope of the study.

1.8.1 Data Presentation and Analysis Technique

The data gathered is presented in a descriptive way and critically analysed from semiotics, existing literature and documentaries. Thus, this means that signs, motifs and symbols and photographs are interrogated also.

1.8.2 Data Analysis

A collection of interviews, documents, community public questions is analysed through comparative technic to come up with major themes.

1.8.3 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative technique because of its qualitative and descriptive nature. Best (1999) purports that qualitative method is preferred mostly because it permits the verbal descriptions thus the researcher will be kept closer to respondents and their actions during the research process. The qualitative research is interpretive hence it will suit this study. Grady (1998) states that a case study is less time consuming and in-depth information can be attained to generate the understanding of a greater population.

1.8.4 Targeted Population

This study targeted local communities in Motobo district, Ndebele people, learners/students and cultural custodians, old man and women especially the woman who take part in traditional house painting. The woman and man who partake in execution of symbols and construct architectural structures are targeted since they are the ones exploring their artistic thoughts when taking part on these activities. The academics in the areas of culture is included because they are experts in the field of culture and they understand how art, particularly decorative motifs and architecture express the cosmogonies of a people. Academics and cultural custodians are also targeted as they could help with the historical information of the contact of the Ndebele and other ethnic groups.

1.8.5 Sampling Techniques

Non-probability sampling techniques was used in information gathering. Purposeful sampling technique was mostly used on stake holders, elderly woman (painters) and academics in the areas of culture, hence relevant information was collected for the study. Selective sampling technique was more effective on (painters) women and youth. The information attained is then used to represent the whole population. Snowball technique was also applied to acquire data, to avoid the researcher failing to identify participants who can assist with the needful information.

1.8.5 Data Collection Tools

Interviews, focus group discussion, documentaries, photographs, desk review of literature and document analysis were very effective for data collection. Data gathered is verified in order to enhance its quality on the study. Decrop (1999) postulates that additional sources of information often give more insight into a topic and provide verification and validity. Thus, the researcher triangulated data collection tools which in turn strengthened the research so as to achieve valid and reliable research findings.

1.8.5.1 Interviews

Interviews were used among the cultural custodians, academics, stakeholders and those decorating the houses as well as architecture builders as these were the key informants. Semi structured interviews were effective as it they offered new questions and ideas to the researcher meaning there was a room for further clarifications. The painters added on some important data which the interviewer would have not asked. Again, academics and cultural custodians suggested, and gave additions as the interviews were progressing hence the semi-structured interviews were helpful and impactful for research understudy.

1.8.5.2 Document analysis

Secondary information from various participants and institutions are reviewed and analysed. Only relevant information is preferred for this study. Historical documented books, current television programs about culture, philosophy of a people and decorative symbols, organization of pamphlets, and current textbooks are critically analysed to get information for the study. Also researches, relevant to the study, by other scholars are visited and reviewed to get data. Accuracy was the main thrust to achieve; also current and records of the past helped to generate an understanding hence contributing to the study. Historical documents provides data on the history of area understudy as well as the origins and history of traditional house painting. Organizational pamphlets and current television programs also helps shade some light on how a people interpret symbols and architecture and helped with the philosophy, worldview and the cosmologies of a people.

1.8.5.3 Photography

The researcher took pictures of painted houses around the area of study that depicts distinct decorative symbols and motifs. The captured photos are used for data analysis and for reliability and validity purposes. They also revealed the marvelled cosmologies embedded on the walls and the architectural structure as a whole.

1.8.5.4 Observations

The other method that the researcher employed for data collection was participant observations. The proponents of the concept Strauss and Corbin (2006) purports that observations entail the systematic noting of events and artefacts in a social area in a chosen area. The researcher also observed the architectural designs and symbols found within the Matobo District ward 17 as he carried out his interviews. This helped one attain more information as he felt that some interviewees did not exhaust information either intentional or not.

1:9 Literature Review

This section reviews works from scholars about decorative motifs, symbols, architecture and art and house painting among the Ndebele of Matobo and Africans at large. Various scholars have produced researches of African cultures, decorative symbols amongst various ethnic groups and the Ndebele society as well. Nyathi, et al, (2016) after looking at Zimbabwe's decorative symbols on heritage sites and implements, says that we can only hope that this preliminary and introductory book will spur further research so that we begin to unravel Africa's identity. The researcher seeks to cover that grey area and add to that preliminary and introductory book by unpacking the architecture and the motifs decorated on houses in ward 17 Matobo district. Galileo Galilei's quotation cited in Macnab (2008) argues that you cannot understand the universe without learning the language it is written in... Without the language we wonder in the dark. The proponent reveals that to understand the lifestyle of a people once has to be well aware with how they perceive the universe. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) postulate that our decorative symbols are our language of expression... The idea brought here is that decorative motifs are communicative. Jefferson. L, E, (2007) notes that man's inclination to decorate objects is deep-rooted and universal. Since prehistoric times he has embellished a wide variety of his possessions from his weapons and the walls of his shelter to clothing and even his body. Basing on the proponent Achebe's notion that arts for art's sake is another pieces of dog shit the researcher felt the need to unpack the art executed on the wall of houses in Matobo as well as their architecture.

Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) also went on to say we rejoice when Africa slithers like a snake caressed into life, a life infused with ancient wisdom entombed in symbols on baskets, mates, headrests, wooden plates, ivory, diagnose bones and clay pots. Thus, symbols can be pregnant with the wisdom of a people, their philosophy, values, ethics, perception, their cosmological underpinnings, inter alia, which the research is unpacking from architecture

traditionally painted houses. Kurylo (2012) purports that people use symbols to represent meanings that are relevant to their experiences. Symbols provide a way to express cultural experience with others. Macnab (2003) views that “the desire for the spiritual is deeply embedded in our DNA – and represented in the meaning of numbers, colours, symbols, and fables created by our ancestors and ourselves, all providing clues to the perennial question why”. Designers incorporate the element of the mystical in their designs, often oblivious to the significance of their actions and unaware that there is mathematical relationship that results in harmony. Nyathi and Chikomo (2013) postulate that art needs utility. Thus, this reveals that architecture and walls provide space for art to be executed. Chiwome (1996:96) says the art was naturalist as it reflected the objects that existed in the artists’ environment. It also enhanced the status of the owner. A people’s worldview and cosmology are a result of the interaction between nature and culture. This was also supported by Nyathi P on his speech during the cultural celebration at Midlands State University (MSU) when he noted that nature creates nature. Humans create both nature and culture, and the latter defines a people’s identity, heritage, history, indeed their entire way of life including both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. There are critical aspects of culture that are captured through visual expressions.

Obeng, (2009) says that people can direct political and social views through graffiti. Abel et al, (1977) postulates that the unpolished desk graffiti offer some fascinating visions into people who write them as well as the people in which they belong to. This is to say that the graffiti on school desks disseminates school students’ ethics and anxieties. The previous researchers have focused on inscriptions on commuter buses, clothes, and houses for instance Samantha Mahachi (2016) on her dissertation wrote on inscriptions written on houses and shunned out the symbols on houses. Thus this is a grey area which previous writers have disserted and this research seeks to cover that gap. Not so much has been done on architecture and house decoration hence this area is worth studying.

1.10 Delimitations of the Study

The research was carried out in Matabeleland South province specifically in the ward 17 area of Matobo District. This study was carried out from December 2017 to May 2018. This was largely because in order for the researcher to understand human behaviour, philosophy, worldview and cosmology, there is a need to take time collecting data and from different women who have decorated their houses and builders within Matobo District. The research used women (painters), architecture planners and constructors, the community as a whole to

collect information about the impact and meaning of the architecture and decorative motifs executed on the walls.

1.11 Limitations to the Study

The study encountered some challenges which involve the failure to access some of the symbols. Some of the Symbols were waning away whilst some were completely washed by the rains. Some of the painters did not renew their motifs and others changed them therefore the researcher only accessed an abstract of the motifs in Matobo. However, the researcher asked the respondents to draw some of the motifs that are meaningful to them or those that they once painted on their homes.

1.12 Ethical Considerations

In collecting data the researcher was guided by research ethics which were adhered to in this study. Neuman (2006) postulates that informants should have the right to contribute their own free will and also right to pull out anytime. Thus, the researcher interviewed the informants who gave data willy-nilly and did manipulate, persuade or force them in anyway. However, to foster reliability and validity, the researcher identified one participant that led him to the well informed participants. Only the willing participants were interviewed both individually and in focus group discussions. The researcher also got the consent from the respondents before collection of data/findings, for instance pictures.

1.13 Definition of Key Terms

- ❖ **Cosmologies/cosmological underpinnings/cosmogonies-** how a people or individuals perceive the world/cosmos and implement or reflect it on their culture through various forms.
- ❖ **Worldview** – the way in which a people perceive and interpret the world around them.
- ❖ **Culture-** a way of life of a society/people, values, norms, beliefs, arts, crafts inter alia, as lived and celebrated in a society.
- ❖ **Decorative** – used or intended to decorate.
- ❖ **Motifs-** a figure that is repeated or used more often when decorating or designing.
- ❖ **Symbols-** a figure, character, sign representing or communicating a particular idea/notion.

❖ **Architectural Designs** – the shapes of houses or built structures

1.14 Organization of the Study

The study is composed five chapters of which chapter one is the introduction to the entire research and will include subject of the study in order to understand the research. The chapter is comprised of the introduction, background of the study, area of investigation, objectives of the study, justification of the study, literature, review, research methodology, research tools, definition of terms, delimitation of the study and conclusion. The following chapter (chapter two) is focusing and disseminates the information on the origins of house decorating and the historical background of the inhabitants of Matobo district. What they carried into the contemporary era will also be discussed. Their per-colonial/conquest, colonial and post-independence lifestyle will be compared and examined. Chapter three focuses on the decorative symbols/motifs found in Matobo district ward 17, used and expressive art. The forth chapter gives platform to the participants and unpack the cosmological underpinnings, worldview, philosophy and meanings embedded on the decorative motifs. The last chapter of the study is the concluding chapter which recaps the whole research. That will be chapter five.

1.15 Time Budget

From January 2018 to February 2018 the researcher was observing and collecting data in the area where research was conducted. In February 2018 to March 2018 researcher was have working on chapters two and three. Chapter four and five were constructed from March 2018 to May 2018 when the whole dissertation is to be submitted. Longer period of time gives the researcher time to produce deeper, rich and valid findings.

CHAPTER TWO

Origins and Significance of Architectural Design and Decorative Motifs Executed on Traditional Houses among Africans

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was a general introduction of the study where the problem and its context was explored. This chapter serves as a foundation of the study where much focus will be on the origins and significance of architectural designs and decorative symbols among the Ndebele and Africans at large. Historical background and the beliefs of AmaNdebele will be examined. In this Chapter it is argued that architectural designs and decorative symbols reflect Ndebele people's perceptions about life. To sustain this chapter the researcher used ideas gathered through interviews from two village heads, six elders in the area and one cultural custodian who is also a historian. In this chapter, the researcher seeks to unravel the historical background of house painting and the link between decorative motifs executed on houses and the people's perceptions about the cosmos and the environment around them. The chapter is organised into seven sections.

2.2. History and Beliefs of AmaNdebele

The area under study (ward 17 Matobo district) is located 60km South of Bulawayo, after Matopo National Park, on the east of Mangwe district and west of Gwanda district, in Matabeleland South province. Bozongwana (1983) says Mzilikazi, the Ndebele king, fled from Tshaka in Zululand in the first quarter of the 19th century. The Ndebele were once part of the Zulus known as Khumalos and decided to break away from Tshaka during Mfecane and moved to the north. Bozongwana (1983) continues and notes that after settling in Transvaal for a while, Mzilikazi decided to cross the Limpopo River into the land known as Matabeleland. Nyathi (2007) postulates that even before the Ndebele made contact with whites they had already lived among the Sotho people, a factor which influenced some aspects of their culture. This is to say that that the Ndebele copied or adopted a number of factors from the Sotho people to better their lifestyle, transform their culture and be distinct from Tshaka for security reasons. As aforementioned that Ndhlovu (2011) purports that whenever there is culture contact, culture change is bound to take place. The contact with the Sotho and other fellow Africans led to a Ndebele culture which is slightly distinct from Zulu culture, which is where they descended from.

Bozongwana (1983), purports that all the tribes that Mzilikazi conquered on his way were incorporated into the Ndebele group. With Tshaka's *impis* (regiments) in hot pursuit, Mzilikazi and his group fled across the Drakensberg Mountains, the Orange Free State and

the area occupied by Sotho-Tswana leaving behind a trail of destruction (Becker, 1962). The Ndebele group was formed by different societies with different cultural and historical background, a factor which influenced and lobbed for a culture and beliefs which were and are peculiar to the northern Ndebele (of Zimbabwe). Due to the social intermingling of the various classes or groups in the Ndebele society, Ndebele religious and cultural practices became a hybrid of the beliefs of the various peoples that made up the society. A people can change their material culture partly or completely. Hofstede (1988) purports that a people or their culture is made up of a couple of factors which he compares to an onion. These are symbols, heroes, rituals and values. The symbols are at the exterior layer whilst the latter is in the interior circle. This notion brings out the idea that whenever a culture is inflated the first aspect to be transformed are the symbols followed by the heroes, inter alia. Thus some of the symbols could have been adopted from various societies that were living within the Ndebele state.

The Ndebele believe in life-after-death and the “living-dead”. Bozongwana (1983) says there are certain basic elements in man which make it hard to live without faith, and with the Ndebele ‘*idlozi*’ (ancestral spirits) is number one. The burial of Ndebele warriors also testifies their belief in the life-after-death, whereby one was buried in a squat position or sometimes sitting on his headrest (*umthiya*) and will also hold his weapons lest they encounter battles on their journeys. This was reinforced by the saying ‘*ibutho emhlabeni libutho lasekufeni*’ meaning a warrior on earth is still a warrior even after death. The words used to refer to death are ‘*usedlule*’ (he has passed), ‘*uyekwabaphansi*’ (he has joined the underworld), among others. These reveal their belief in life after death.

The Ndebele as a nation believed in continuity. This is emphasised by Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) when they say that individuals perish but humanity is forever. Such beliefs or perceptions about life would be transformed into art or cultural artefacts. Again, they also expressed their belief that their supernatural beings or ancestral spirits can dwell in other living creatures or objects, through the name of ‘*idlozi*’ (ancestral spirits) being called ‘*izinyoka*’ meaning snakes. Therefore, most of the beliefs will be captured through the making of their products in various artistic renditions.

2.3 Historical Background of the Inhabitants of Matobo

In an interview with a cultural custodian who is also a historian it came to light that the Matobo hills area have had many inhabitants for a very long period of time now. UNESCO (2003) says continuously inhabited area, sites within the Matobo hills marks critical stages in human history and evolution, reading back to 100000 years. In an interview with one of the elders of the community it was pointed that they believed that the San people were the first people to inhabit the area, these are the ones who created the widely known rock art. UNESCO (2003) also noted that the Shona-Kalanga followed after the San (*abathwa*), these are the groups who left iron-smelting furnaces (*imvutho*), granaries (*iziphala*), stonewalls and rainmaking shrines such as Njelele, Dula, and Zhilo among others. After the Shona-Kalanga groups, came the Ndebele of Mzilikazi. These are widely known for their king Mzilikazi's grave and battle field site scaled in Matobo hills area. After the Ndebele, came in the British under their leader Cecil John Rhodes. This group is widely known for the graves of Cecil John Rhodes, Dr Leander-Star Jameson, and Sir Charles Coughlan, the memorials of Allen Wilson's patrol, Man of Teen Hats (MOTH) and the Indaba site which came as a result of the contacts between the Ndebele and western settlers (Walker, 1995).

When Mzilikazi, the king and founder of the Ndebele state left Zululand he accompanied by few men, about 500 soldiers who were known as the Khumalos. A pressure mounted, Mzilikazi sought refuge under King Tshaka whom he served for a brief moment before he led no more than five hundred people out of Zululand (Cobbing, 1976). On the way and even after he had settled in the Zimbabwean plateau he incorporated and assimilated men from raided and conquered groups into Ndebele society. Nhongo (2013) states that Ndebele was originally Nguni or better still Zulu but got the influence of Kalanga, Sotho and Shona as Mzilikazi the leader of Ndebele incorporated some people from these groups. As Mzilikazi moved from Zululand in the first quarter of the 19th century, he expanded his group by incorporating members from the other groups through force, consent and coercion (Hadebe, 2002). In the Zimbabwean plateau, the Ndebele occupied the west and central Zimbabwe which is the present day Matabeleland and Midlands or Shangani.

The Ndebele got into the Zimbabwean borders in about 1838-40 under their leader Mzilikazi Khumalo the son of Matshobana Khumalo. After his further defeat at the hands of the European settlers of the Transvaal Mzilikazi moved northwards and invaded what is today Zimbabwe and established the Matabele Kingdom, ultimately settling in Matabeleland they

subjugated the surrounding Shona. Mzilikazi's successor Lobhengula extended the group's absorbing Sotho, Shona and other extraneous tribal elements. When they got into the Zimbabwean plateau they found Shona-Kalanga groups and others. These groups were conquered and some of their members were incorporated into Ndebele state (Cobbing, 1976). The Matobo hills, by the time the Ndebele arrived at the Zimbabwean borders, was already occupied by the Shona-Kalanga groups under the Mambo (Walker, 1995). When they were defeated they were pushed further east and north-east, however, some were assimilated into the Ndebele group and some asked for protection from the Ndebele, hence joined the group. The Zanzi (AbeZansi) were descendants of the original Nguni, the Enhla (AbeNhla) were originally Sotho or Tswana and the Lozwi were Shona who could be more pejoratively referred to as Holi (AmaHole) (Chennels, 2007). However, Cobbing (1976) argues that these were terms denoting geographical origin not caste and it was the obsession of the British conquerors with class that reimagined these as class divisions.

The Matobo hills area have had many inhabitants for a long period of time now. Campbell (1926) says it is hardly surprising therefore, that this oasis has provided a heaven for both man and wildlife over thousands of years. However, it is very difficult and or debatable to name the date when man first occupied the area. This makes it impossible to come up with a precise date as of when did the first man first occupied the area. Campbell (1926) continued and said that the time of the first man to inhabit the place is the issue for debate guided by the series of archaeological estimations. The stone tools discoveries justifies the notion or historical claim that the San people might have been the first inhabitants of the Matobo hills area, sometime 50000 to 100000 years ago. What signifies or uniquely identifies the inhabitants are their tools and art. The group which followed or came after the San of the Stone-Age belonged to the Early Iron-Age. Around two thousand years ago, the first Iron-Age group arrived in the area from the North (UNESCO, 2003).

Moyo (2013) on Bulawayo24 News postulates that these groups are the Shona-Kalanga groups. This group occupied most of the areas in the Zimbabwean plateau. Again the names in Matobo hills area, be it place names, mountain names and names of rivers, entail that the place was once inhabited by the Shona-Kalanga groups (abaNyayi). Nhongo and Masuku (2012) in *The Dyke*, note that there are three differing views that surround the etymology of the name Matopo. Firstly, the name Matobo itself is argued to have been derived from a Kalanga word '*matombo*' meaning rocks. Nhongo and Masuku (2012) also say that the first view is that the name Matopo is a corrupted version of the name Motobo. They say Matobo

comes from the word 'dobo' a stick used to thrash millet which is almost shaped like a baseball bat. The plural is 'amadobo'. The term 'dobo' comes from a Nyubi dialect. They can also be called 'matobo' in plural. Because mountains is characterised mountains and there is always a mist most of the times, it is the place where mirages were witnessed. The name of the mountain within ward 17 is Domboshaba and the village close by is named after that particular mountain. *Domboshaba* is a Kalanga word meaning a mountain or rock which is white. In an interview with the elder of that area what came out was that during wars or attacks these inhabitants would go for hiding in the mountain curves. In these curves they would have built granaries and stored some food (grain) which will sustain them until the war or attacks came to an end or even after. These experiences gave birth to a Kalanga saying which says '*dombo linetjilenga*' meaning the mountain has life.

The Ndebele got into the Zimbabwean plateau from Zululand and they settled in the Matobo area during the nineteenth century. Historical events reveal that when the powerful group comes, the weaker ones scale to the periphery. The superior states occupy fertile lands while the other groups occupy poor areas. As aforementioned, that the archaeological estimations channels to the notion that the San were the first men to inhabit the place, when the Bantu groups came in with more advanced technology of iron implements, the San moved to the edge. Likewise, when the Ndebele who had superior fighting skills got into the Zimbabwean plateau the Shona-Kalanga had to also move. However, some were incorporated into Ndebele society. Later when the British came in and with superior weapons the Ndebele were moved from certain places to settlements in remote areas like Fumugwe in Matobo and Tsholotsho.

Today the southern and eastern sections of the hills are a tribal area home to Ndebele and Kalanga. As the effect from the confrontation with western lifestyle, many aspects of the modern world have crept into their lives but continue to be a traditional people and their thatched and decorated mud-walled villages still dot the landscape in echoes of earlier times. It is not only the confrontation with Europeans which was effectual to the Ndebele but even fellow Africans as the Ndebele who settled near the Matobo hills in the early 19th century adopted the *Mwari* cult giving it a new name '*Mlimo*', (Bhebe, 1978). However, the name *Mlimo* could have been borrowed or derived from the Sotho word *Modomi* as they had already lived among the Sotho. Daneel (1970) notes that the cult had essentially remained a Shona institution...before the arrival of the Ndebele in western Zimbabwe. Nobbs (1924) says that in the 19th century traditional priests were therefore drawn from Venda and Kalanga families, which were said to have been deeply entrenched in the *Mwari* cult tradition. Ranger

(1999) postulates that oral tradition recalls that Lobhengula housed some of the *Mwari* cult priests at his settlement of Bulawayo... Matobo district has been a mere geographical expression, boundaries constantly changing. Its African population have time and time again been evicted and resettled north. Now it is a controversial and debatable issue on who really are the inhabitants of Matobo. A historian and cultural custodian in an interview said the inhabitants of Matobo in the area of ward 17 and other neighbouring wards were originally or descendants from the BaNyayi people around Masvingo and they came to be known as Ndebele after the incorporation into it. Lindgren (2002) found out that the people in the nineteenth-century origins saw themselves as Ndebele.

2.5 Tracing the History of Architecture and Decorative Symbols among Africans

A human being cannot survive under certain climatic conditions, hence face numerous challenges when it comes safety and comfort. Nyathi (2007) postulates that as a result humankind creates a built environment where he can live comfortably. Besides shelter for the living, humans also constructed numerous structures for various uses, for their implements, grain, bodies of the dead inter alia. When agriculture was adopted by the Bantu groups, it was needful to construct storages for their yields. African continent is home to ancient and complex societies which have been thriving over the course of hundreds of years. The greatest empire of all is undoubtedly ancient Egypt (Williams, 1987). Thus, tracing historical background of structural shapes as well as the decorative motifs in Africa can be traced from Kermit and Kush (ancient Egypt and Sudan) to the pre-colonial times and after. Diop (1974) purports that all African civilization can be traced back to Egypt. Be that as it may, Egyptian culture can be divided into several time periods although historians often disagree in exact dates (Heba-Hamdy, no date).

Heba-Hamdy (no date) notes that structures in ancient Africa specifically Egypt were built above underground burial tombs and would usually have contain a chapel and a statue of the dead it housed. These structures are called *Mastabas* (Heba-Hamdy, no date). Later on in Egypt, the pyramids were built and overshadowed the *Mastabas* by an architect Imhotep, who created the first version of pyramids. These were widely known as step-pyramids which developed geometric pyramids (Jessica Elam Miller, no date). These tombs were popularised by Pharaohs or the ruling classes who constructed them to elaborate their tombs.

The ancient Egyptians did not only construct *Mastabases* and pyramids but also temples, palaces, and homes, and these were usually built with stones for durability purposes and their availability in those particular places. Canadian Museum of History postulates that a pyramid

is a tomb, a four-sided stone structure that symbolises the sacred mountain, humanity's universal striving to reach the heavens. From a two-dimension (2D), the pyramids looks like an up-side-down V-shape (chevron). Palaces...were essentially rectangular structure consisting of high walls topped with tower (Jessica Elam Miller, no date).

In southern Africa, however, there are quite a number of historical architectural structures and even up to date humans still construct their buildings. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) say that most of the ethnic groups found in central and southern Africa belong to the group referred to the Bantu. These are the groups widely known for their dry-stone wall structures, mud-walled and grass roofs and some for their grass and twigs buildings. During the Bantu migration, those who went southwards built the first organised state. The Bantu built Mapungubwe on the confluence of two rivers. These were the BaKalanga or the Shona-Kalanga groups. Moyo (2013) on Bulawayo24 News says that the above statement, (the Kalanga are a hybrid between Ndebele and Shona) was used just as an illustration of the confusion that exists in Matabeleland in particular and Zimbabwe in general as to the identity of the people known as the Kalanga, or BaKalanga, BaNambya and Vhavenda. These groups are the ones who are said to have built most of the exquisite ancient architectural structures in southern Africa. Moyo (2013) on Bulawayo24 News postulates that by 1000 AD, the Kalanga had become a sophisticated people, establishing the first city-state in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Mapungubwe City, on the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers. To support this notion Nyathi and Chikomo(2016) purports that the name '*Shashe*' can be traced back to the BaKalanga groups languages '*haya hhe*' in Kalanga and '*shaya she*' in Shona language, meaning not having a king. Most of the structure in Mapungubwe were circular or cylindrical in shape. The name BaKalanga refers to the groups known as the Shona/Kalanga.

UNESCO (2014) notes that when rainfall decreased after 1300 AD, the land could no longer sustain a high population using traditional farming methods, and the inhabitants were obliged to disperse. Mapungubwe's position as a power base shifted north to Great Zimbabwe and, later, Khami (Nkame). Again, more akin to Mapungubwe the architectural structures in these sites also are circular. Be that as it may, after the collapse of Great Zimbabwe two states were constructed, the Mutapa state north of Great Zimbabwe and the Torwa/Togwa State west of Great Zimbabwe. But lo and behold, the buildings in these might be different but share a similar philosophy and were constructed by groups who were closely linked. Thus, they are undoubtedly circular in shape. The common members of these societies built their house with

cylindrical mud walls and conical grass and pole roofs (Chennels, 1979). Also, the decorative designs in the sites depict to the same cosmogonies of a people.

In ancient African societies for instance Kermit and Kush, their artistic products, architecture, and implements would be decorated with symbols, inscriptions and even three-dimensional art. Heba-Hamdy (no date) notes that geometric patterns in ancient Egyptian history are very wealthy with extended domains from simple patterns to multiple and complicated ones containing many geometric elements. These ancient patterns gave birth of many historical and recent geometrical decorative motifs and illustration. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) say that through symbols created by our own minds and given life by our hands, we allow our minds to be inspired by environments near and far, terrestrial and cosmic. When the sun sets, the night undresses, Africans looked up and learnt from both nature and the heavenly bodies. Among Africans it was believed that there is no better teacher than nature. Jefferson (2007) says man's inclination to decorate objects is deep rooted and universal, since prehistoric times he has embellished a wide variety of his possessions from his weapons and the walls of his shelter to clothing and even his body. Thus, decorative symbols, motifs, inscriptions and art, come from way back from the ancient African times, historic times and even in the post-independence they are still on existence.

Great Zimbabwe is characterised by decorative symbols and art including chevron designs among others. Khami Monument, Naletale, Dhlodhlo, only to mentioned just a few, are characterised by a couple of decorative symbols including checked/chess board symbols, haring bones, among others. Huffman (1996) says in the 18th century the Ndzundza Ndebele people of South Africa created their own tradition and style of house painting. In the autumn of 1883, they went to war with the neighbouring Boer workers. The loss of the war brought on a harsh life and horrible punishments for the Ndebele. Through those hard times, expressive symbols were generated by the suffering people expressing their grief. When the Ndebele of Mzilikazi changed their architectural structures they later adopted this art. Contemporary African Art (no date) says that in nature and all around Africa, there are patterns that can be visualised or conceptualised. On the other hand, observation of floral items like leaves, trees, thons, pods, seeds reveal elegant shapes, lines and patterning. Flowing water, sands, seashells, fish among other things, have beautiful complex patterning for embellishment and colours provides shapes which can be so much reference to use as source. Thus, nature provides artists with symbols and designs of which they interpret and infuse their own particular answers and meanings on the art produced. Be it as it may,

patterns and motifs may change from culture to culture, providing insight into personal style and culturally specific aesthetics.

2.6 Unravelling the Significance of Architectural Designs and Decorative Symbols in Africa

The built structures as well as decorative motifs are products of a people's art and culture, taking note that every creation bears the signature of the creator. The artistic prowess of traditional Africa was given architectural expressions in many physical structures that constituted an important feature of the landscape of pre-colonial Africa. Hughes and Muringanidwa (2003) says that material culture identifies a particular people and defines their level of civilization or sophistication and their ability to cope with and overcome environment challenges. Very often buildings serve more than the basic needs (shelter) referred to above. Some are built to reflect the socio-economic and political status of the occupants (Nyathi, 2007).

There is a close connection between intangible culture and tangible culture which in this scenario are the links between decorative symbols, built structures and values and beliefs of a particular society. Nyathi (2007) says built environment is created on the basis of a myriad of a people's ideology, values and beliefs. Whenever an artist creates a product he/she attach a certain meaning either by its design or by executing certain decorative symbols, graffiti or even an inscription. In African architecture there are more commonalities than there are differences. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) are of the view that at the level of worldview and cosmology there are obvious commonalities.

Most of the African architecture was or is built by people whose design decisions were or are influenced by traditions in their culture. Kostof (1926) postulates that while analysing the building we should consider all factors. Again he is the one who claimed the link between culture, history and architecture. Williams (1987) says that much of the art and architecture in ancient Egypt represents the belief in life after death and veneration of gods. Ancient Egyptian architecture displays some of the most impressive and exquisite works of art and history. Understanding the motivation behind the construction of these monumental structures and the execution of decorative motifs is imperative to understanding the culture of the ancient Egyptians. The architecture and decorative symbols tells a story of a people, their beliefs, values and their perceptions about the environment which they inhabit.

Pashapa (2009) postulates that the original creative work had two important aspects which are aesthetic symbols and their accompanying meanings. Decorative motifs as well as architecture among Africans was and is creative or expressive work, they had significance in Africa and they communicated effortlessly.

2.6.1 Background of the Ndebele Architecture

The architectural structures are made from several materials to form various shapes which are, in most cases, expressive or communicative to a certain people. Nyathi (2007) says the material used depend on what is available. In the savannah grasslands structures have been built of timber and grass. In forested areas logs have been used to build structures. Be that as it may, the environmental/climatic atmosphere also played a role in determining the materials to be used. The beehive of the Ndebele was more susceptible to the vagaries of white ants in an area there was less rainfall (Nyathi, 2007). From the observations of pictures and documents about the history of the Ndebele the old Ndebele hut was a beehive. The Ndebele broke away from king Tshaka of the Zulus and settled in the Zimbabwean plateau in the 19th century, their architecture was the same as that of the Zulu when they arrived in Zimbabwe (Mazarize, 2003). The subfigure beehive hut was a one united structure, with no separate roof and wall. In terms of materials that were used, it comprised grass, a wooden lattice and woven bark fibre or grasses (Nyathi, 2007). Essentially, this type of hut of the Ndebele never provided the surface to for the execution of decorative motifs on the walls as it never had any walls.

When the Ndebele came into contact with other ethnic groups their culture was altered, a factor which transformed the architectural style of the Ndebele. Nyathi (2007) postulates that with time, hut architecture, the beehive huts gave way to the cone-on-cylinder Sotho/Shona huts. These structures had short wooden walls only plastered on the interior and the roof was more akin to a beehive. Nyathi (2007) purports that the centre with thin saplings plastered over, especially on the inside. The wooden walls as well were not safe from white ants, hence there was need to advance to mud walls and brick walls which seemed better than wooden walls in terms of durability. The mud-cupboards were also adopted from the Shona ethnic groups.

When the Ndebele came into contact with Europeans their architecture also changed. Boggie (1962) notes that the European type of house also existed. King Lobhengula's capital town KoBulawayo had a red rectangular brick house with a thatched roof. All these trails of architectural transformations are still constructed by some for various reasons. These

structures were inspired by the cosmos or had cosmic reflections and some came as a result of more than one culture getting into contact with another.

2.6.2 Origins of Traditional house Painting among the Ndebele

The decorative motifs can only exist in the artist's mind unless there is a surface where they can be executed. Art needs utility to carry it (Nyathi, 2016). The Ndebele of Mzilikazi, in South Africa until they settled in northern side of Limpopo lived in beehives with a shorter door for respect and war purposes. They came out of KwaZulu-Natali (KZN) and brought with them the Nguni architectural traditions (Nyathi, 2007). When they changed their structures they did not have utilities to carry art. Nyathi (2007) postulates that occasionally, the exterior was not plastered. Until Ndebele architecture was developed to plastered mud-walls, which provided surfaces for artist to express themselves, the Ndebele did not partake in traditional house painting. The Ndebele group originally in the early 19th century lived in grass huts. They began using mud-walled houses in the mid-19th century when these symbols began to be created on their houses and walls (Hughes and Muzinganidwa, 2003).

2.7 Conclusion

The historical background of the architecture and decorative motifs has been explored. The history of the Ndebele as well as that of the inhabitants of Matobo has been traced. Decorating implements or artistic products has existed since the ancient times in Africa. Among the southern Africans or rather to say Africa at large, architectural designs have been influenced by circular designs. The environment and nature provided a people with decorative symbols which they will, in execution, infuse with their culture. This chapter has traced the history of architecture and decorative symbols in African societies and that of the Ndebele people. However, the next chapter will focus on the architectural designs and decorative symbols executed on houses as a way of expressing one's self.

CHAPTER THREE

Architectural Designs and Decorative Symbols Executed on Traditional Houses as a Vehicle of Expression

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter looked into the origins and the significance of architectural designs and decorative motifs among the Ndebele and Africa at large. This chapter focuses on the decorative symbols in Matobo hills area as well as the architectural designs in the same area. Equally importantly, the chapter will also generally explore how these architectures and decorative symbols on traditional painted houses are used as vehicles of expression among the Africans. This will be done so as to overlay a footing on the unpacking of the symbols executed on houses in Matobo area as well as the building shapes found in Ward 17 of Matobo district.

The researcher interviewed six women who partake in traditional house painting, two village heads, two builders, one cultural custodian who is also a historian, and elders in Matobo District Ward 17. This information is presented in the table below.

The following table shows the summary of the respondents.

Category of research respondents	Total number of the respondents
Women who paint their houses	6
Village head	2
Architectural constructors	2
Cultural custodian	1
Elders of the community	3

[Table 1]

3.2 Architectural Designs in Africa

Africa is divided into a number of regions and has many ethnic or cultural groups. Architecture might differ from region to region and also from one ethnic grouping to the other. The Herald (2014) postulates that the traditional western designs of four corners is abstract in the Zimbabwean context where it is usually circular clearing surrounding for all the houses. Several cultural groups across the African continent had a similar perception and the understanding of the world (Asante, 2000). This could have been the major resulted behind the more akin architectural structures which were or are circular or closer to a circle. Values are not immune to change but they hardly change. Hofstede (1988) also maintained

that the core stands for the values of a certain culture, which is not moving more often. It usually remains the same. Even if something seems to be outdated, it still can subconsciously affect the perceptions of the present generations as evidenced by the ancient concept of continuity among Africans. In an interview with one of the painters it was pointed that art can be borrowed from other groups or recycled but it has to be remodelled to fit into the views and values of the artist and her society. That includes individuals as well as groups.

The researcher observed that materials and layouts are diverged but the idea in execution and construction was closely similar. All groups have common architecture-cone-on-cylinder huts, circular byres and plan for the village layout (Nyathi and Chikomo, 2016:26). Shape or design has power in the African architecture. Most of the architectural structures were constructed according to standards of the society or the leader and were a true reflection of a people's perception of the environment around them (Kant, 1988). In ancient Egypt the pyramids were four-cornered and would be more like an up-side-down chevron unit from a 2 dimensional view.

A people's culture, both material non-material, is dynamic and not static hence, the African architecture has, somehow, went through the phases of change. Williams (1987) says that African architecture has been subject to numerous external influences like western and Islamic artistic renditions. This led to the advent of square, or rectangular shaped buildings. The oblong shape on buildings, observed from picture from across the African continent through the desk review of literature.

3.2.1 Architectural Designs among the Ndebele

The architecture of the Ndebele as well as the shape of those building can be traced back to KwaZulu Natal in Zululand since they broke away from Tshaka the Zulu king during Mfecane in the 19th century. The transformation of their houses or huts is traced from the beehive (*iqhugwana*) in their indigenous language, to what Nyathi (2007) termed the uplifted mushroom. This one, as previously said, had a shorter wall and a roof unto like a beehive. As the time went on the hut also changed to a longer brick and mud-walled and sharp roof top hut, cone-on-cylinder. The rectangular shaped house designs also found their way into the Ndebele society. Again, a number of designs including oblong, pentagon inter alia also became part of Ndebele. From the observation of a beehive in the history and natural museum in Bulawayo, a beehive was and is in a circular design and more in a semi-spherical shape. A sphere is nothing more than an infinite number of circles. Exploring Africa (no date) notes that the Ndebele are now a grouping of farmers and herdsman and are organised in clans;

living in villages with round plant houses constructed using branches and trunks of wood and grass.

There are a number of architectural designs found and observed among the Ndebele. Engenter (1992) notes that the Ndebele huts transformed from a beehive dome grass hut, circular in shape, cone-on-cylinder (rondawell), to square or rectangular thatch roof. By cone on cylinder Engenter reveals that the roof is conical and placed on top of a cylindrical wall. Most of the Ndebele structures formed a circular or a curvilinear shape. In an interview, with one of the inhabitants of Matobo it was said that the elders had taught them as a society that there is beauty and life in a circle. The circle means unity, promise, eternity, continuity and fertility. This is because the circle is a one united shape which does not have neither the starting point nor the end, it symbolises motion that one once you kick off there is no ending, and it also symbolises the womb which is critical in fertility and continuity of humankind species since it is the central point where procreation happen. Most of the structures among the Ndebele were circular, the courtyard of a homestead was in a circular shape, the cattle byre was circular and now is rarely circular, when a people set down to drink beer or eat meat they would also sit making a circle or rather in a curvilinear way (Nyathi, 2007). The researcher also observed that even to date some of the buildings are circular in design. The pre-colonial Ndebele also settled and scaled their homesteads in a circular way and in this case the king's was the nuclear (interview with the elder in Matobo 29 March). Most of the homes if not every home in Matobo hills has at least one or more circular huts. These huts are the ones which are traditionally painted and usually carry decorative motifs.

3.3 Popular Decorative Motifs in Africa

It is very challenging to point out certain decorative symbols as the symbols that are particularly the popular motifs for the entire Africa. This is facilitated by the fact that symbols are the expressions of diverse circumstances that the artists encounter and these could be social, political, economic, religious, philosophical and even cosmic factors. These decorative symbols can be painted or executed on a particular object or utility however, some decorative symbols are curved in a three-dimensional form. There are a number of documents that provide pictures with quite exquisite African decorative motifs executed on a number of products or objects, which the researcher observed and some were seen fit to qualify as the popular decorative symbols in Africa. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) purports that when it comes to decorative symbols there are broad commonalities. In fact it is true of the rest of the ethnic groups in black Africa particularly those in southern Africa. Asante (2000) also

postulates that Africa is a multi-plex of cultures. This does not mean that the underlying values of the various cultures are significantly differently as some have tried contend. Everywhere in Africa there seems to be, from the earliest times, a commonality in the ways humans have approached the universe, environment, society and the divine. When one focuses on what the Africans are doing he can misinterpret the African's understanding hence one should consider why the Africans are doing some of the practices and painting some of the symbols which can help in understanding their philosophy of life and the similarity to other fellow African groups.

Some of the popular symbols might be common to a couple of ethnic groups. Be that as it may, these can have different meanings or interpretations attached to them since these meanings are individually and or socially crafted. Again some share a common worldview but will differ in the execution of that particular philosophy in terms of decorative motifs. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) postulates that the people interface with the environment, both human and physical, in different ways and that difference is captured in different symbols. However, this is not to say there are no commonalities. There are more commonalities than there are differences. The symbols which are shared by more ethnic groups are the ones perceived as popular decorative symbols in this study. There are a number of decorative motifs which are widely used by Africans on the implements, objects or artistic products. Virtually all of the ethnic groups make use of chevron decorative symbol in the embellishment of their various artefacts (Nyathi, 2016). Africans are well known for their use of striking quality art forms decorations that reveal the complexity of their innovation and the culture is indeed a sure way of expressing one's own passion and creativity. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) note that arguably the most used decorative motif in Africa is the chevron.

A circle is also one of the popular decorative symbols in Zimbabwe as it is used in most African ethnic groups or regions. Therefore, in terms of Africa's most basic designs, the circle and the chevron are shared in common by the Bantu and the San as African peoples that share the common visual art form and traditions. The circular design cuts across all regions and in most ethnic groups. The circle is a motif inspired by the cosmic bodies. In an interview with the cultural custodian who is also a historian what came out was that most heavenly bodies are circular in design from the sun, earth, moons and rotates in a circular manner. This inspires the Africans to replicate the upper world into their lower world. The movement of the cosmic structures established repetition and the circle means endlessness, eternity and immortality. Closely linked to the circle there is also curvilinear, semi-circle and

the crescent moon. These are visible on implements such as crafts, utensils, weapons, pottery, mats, walls, baskets, only to mention just a few in the home and exhibited in museums, galleries and heritage sites.

A haring-bone design is also popular among Africans and is visible from a few monuments as well as implements and artefacts. This particular design was observed in sites like Dlhodlho and Naletale (Burnet, 2003) and were also observed from the Nguni and Tonga baskets in a heritage centre within Matobo. Again, checked board decorative symbols were also found among several African ethnic groups and more like the chevron is also observed from historical monuments scaled all over the African continent. Straight lines, either vertical, slant or sloppy or horizontal are also used for decorating artistic products among historical and contemporary Africans. Stars are also widely used for decoration purposes in several African regions or ethnic groups.

3.4 Decorative Motifs in Matobo

There are a number of exquisite and colourful decorative motifs executed and observed in Matobo hills area. Some of those symbols are more or less the same or similar to those of other fellow Africans around the continent. Nyathi (2013) purports that some decorative designs executed by artists on their domestic implements were created by ancestor who knew their exact meanings. Among these motifs there are those which merely existed in the ancient and pre-historic times, but they have been recycled to fit into the contemporary times. These are interpreted by the artists in Matobo with the meanings peculiar to their culture or worldview. These circumference from the artefacts, nature, history, lifestyle, and the environment around them.

Most of the motifs in Matobo hills area are named in their Ndebele language, however, some also have English names especially those which cut across several African ethnic groups or even beyond to the Scandinavian states. These, like most decorative symbols in the entire world, two artistic qualities, beauty or aesthetics and meanings. Be that as it may some of the painters will adopt or inherit some motifs parents, grandparents, friends, neighbours, or even other communities. To them these particular symbols will be only for beauty purposes. The chevron symbol is highly used in the area, by those who paint their houses or homes. In some instances the researcher observed that particular symbols combined together with other symbols whilst the artist will barely recognize it. Most to the huts roofs, in a two-dimension will be more or less chevron unit. This particular symbol is called in Ndebele '*umzwezwe*' a chevron. Again, a symbol which is used by the artists in the area it is '*ithendele*' a guinea

fowl and in this research will be called sea-waves. *Inyoni* a bird or *usiba lwendlondlo* a further of a particular bird species is widely used in Matobo district during traditional house painting and decoration. This looks more like inclining steps from both sides until they meet at the peak of that symbol. Another popular symbol that is familiar to those decorating their homes is named after a dove and called '*ijuba*' in Ndebele language. This is similar in shape to copper ingots found at Great Zimbabwe and said to be akin to the tail of a flying dove. '*Inkonkoni*' or '*ibhalabhala*' a wild beast or kudu is also observed from several houses in Matobo. A spiral also known as *ndoro*, straight lines, stars among others are also used for house decoration. Drums, ladies carrying children with baby carriers, the san, trees, rocks, chess-board, inter alia are also some of the decorative motifs used in traditional house painting and decorating.

3.5 Decorative Motifs and Communication

Communication is carried out in various ways. Visual and performing arts, music and dance, drama, sculpting, painting, among others can be used to express a particular thought, worldview or philosophy. It is only the elements of worldview that are represented by different symbols (Nyathi and Chikomo, 2016). In some works, symbolism is so abstract that it needs explanation or clarification to be understood by the viewer. Symbols can be used to help both the person's understanding of what is being said and as a way of venting out their views. Dewey (1997) notes that symbols or semiotics as it is known in technical circles, plays such a large part in human communication because people are constantly looking for a deeper meaning. Some symbols, however, have become so ingrained within our cultural sphere that they carry an almost universal meaning. The artist in an attempt to hide or explicitly reveal a certain opinion will then choose decorative symbols over any other means of communication, hence decorative symbols can be used to over emphasise a particular opinion. MacBean (2013) postulates that the incorporation of symbols, shapes, colours, or identifiable images, communicates, to the viewer an intended message as statement.

Huffman (1996) says that all art forms communicate even though many are not verbal and those which are often, encode their messages in oblique, partial, and fragmented ways. Artists and to be more precise in the scenario those who paint their houses get opportunities to express themselves, communicate a particular message and vent out their grievances through executing various motifs on their walls. These may be warnings, advice, lessons and messages of being proud to different decoders. Barber (2011) purports that popular arts are

also much more than constellations of social, political and economic relationships, they are expressive acts.

3.6 Unravelling the Significance of Architecture and Decorative Symbols in Matobo

Matobo is ingrained with the culture especially that of the 'Ndebele' and it is a world heritage site on the basis of culture. One of the popular cultural practices, which was initially a waning practise but revitalised by 'My Beautiful Home' competition, run yearly by Amagugu International Heritage Centre (AIHC) in collaboration with other stakeholders is traditional house painting. Some of the architectural designs and the decorative motifs found in Matobo are ancient symbols and designs whilst some are copied or borrowed from other societies recycled and interpreted in a manner that is familiar and peculiar to their culture. The clay-cupboards in the huts were adopted from the BaNyayi people and they replaced the sacred place at the far back of the Ndebele kitchen '*umsamo*'. These cupboards can be in various shapes such as the heart, a number of circles, and square, rectangular only to mention just a few. Again, the spiral decorative motif was borrowed from the Shona. It was passed down the Shoko clan and marked the continuity of their dynasty (Chiwome, Furusa, Mberi, Masasire and Mutswairo, 1996). Most of the homes in Matobo have a circular or rather a cone-on-cylinder hut either roofed with grass '*amathikili*' or thatched '*ukutshovela*', and again there are four-cornered, square and/or rectangular shaped house in the area. These shapes of house are usually linked to western architectural designs, however, has a long fascinating history in Africa too. Art also enhanced the status of the owner (Chiwome et al, 1996:96). Oblong shaped architectural designs have also made their way into the African designs and particularly in Matobo hills area as this study is concerned about that particular place. As aforementioned that, as purported by Ndhlovu (2011) and Nyathi (2007) when two cultures get into contact either change or borrowing takes place, a factor which is very influential on a culture of a people. In some cases a hybrid culture or aspect of culture emerges from that particular interaction.

3.6.1 Decorative Motifs as an Extended Discourse

Discourse is the use of a particular mode of communication in an artistic way. Foucault (1980) defines discourse as an artistic way of using language, inscribed text, as a set of cultural, historical and conceptual processes. In the subject understudy the definition is mainly focused on the use of decorative symbols in ward 17 Matobo district as a means of enhancing human communication. Decorative motifs compliment human words in a

language, body language and writing. In most scenarios the philosophy of life of a people or individual, worldview, and their cosmological underpinnings are infused or embedded in the decorative motifs. The media of communication is closely related to a people's culture. Their symbols, motifs and or fine art is a true reflection of one's culture Therefore, one can argue that in language people use other semiotic tools in their social context which means that use of a language does not occur in an empty space but in the wider terms of social and ancient practices.

3.6.2 Decorative Symbols and Architectural Designs as expressive art

One can actually think of many hilarious ways that a people can be able to express themselves in this particular period of time, he/she can realize that the options for communication are so vast. Email, social media, letter writing, and the good old telephone are just a few of the ways that we can express our needs, wants, and desires with those around us. There are a number of aspects of life in an individual or community that the artist can actually satisfy or meet in a certain artistic product or service.

The moment the audience or recipient sets his/her eyes on the art he/she decodes the intended message and fine art is enough to communicate with others. Artists can also communicate with our fellow humans signalling through our body movements. However, there are times when artists are unable to fully express themselves using words, gestures, or expressions, and when life seems so complicated, and situations so unexplainable that there are no words to express what we are feeling or thinking no avenue to alleviate our emotional burdens some feelings, grievances, messages, lessons inter alia may be left untold. This leaves us not only unable to express our needs and wants to others, but it can also render us blind to our own feelings and desires. Therefore, the only alternative that artists will be left with is to bleed or vent out their issues through artistic products or services. Using the fine arts as an expressive tool is one of the most unique and limitless forms of communication.

Pablo Picasso (2006) says art washes away from the soul, the dust of everyday life. Therefore by using the fine arts as a therapeutic tool can be a cathartic and meaningful avenue of expression and communication with the self, and if you choose with those around you. Communication through artistic products or services and in this particular study the decorative symbols is in two-fold, firstly in interacts with the inner soul of the painter herself then secondly those who gets to see the art. The latter group in most scenarios are the members of the society and those outside the society In an interview, a member of the society who takes part in traditional house painting said that some of the crucial reasons she partake

in traditional house painting is to disseminate information to the young ones in her family and to remind herself of most important, emotional and critical circumstances that she has encountered in her life experiences. In circumstances when one may fail to use facial expressions, movements, or words, the artists have the opportunity to open decoder's psyche using colours, textures, shapes, symbols, performances, concepts, inter alia.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter was focusing on how architectural designs and decorative symbols executed on the traditional house painting could be used by artist as means of expressing themselves or communicating among Africans. A number of decorative symbols observed and found in Matobo were outlined, as well as the historical background closely linked with African architecture was traced. Architectural designs, decorative motifs and fine art in general can be used by artists as an extended or popular discourse in the human communication arena. The next chapter would unpack and explore the philosophy of people and their cosmological underpinnings embedded in the traditional house painting and their decorative motifs as well as on the architectural designs as relative to the artist or painters in ward 17 Matobo district. An analysis of the findings will be given also in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Critical Analysis of Architectural Structures and Decorative Motifs in ward 17 Matobo District

4.1 Introduction

A number of decorative motifs found in Matobo hills area were listed, the historical background of shapes of buildings as well as the decorative symbols were highlighted in chapter three. How art was used as a communicative vehicle was also explored in the previous chapter. This chapter presents and analyses most of the research findings, and unpack the philosophy, worldview and the cosmological underpinnings of a people's perceptions embedded in the architectural designs and decorative symbols executed in traditional house painting in ward 17 of Matobo district. The way of life peculiar to ward 17 Matobo district group will be revealed as it is reflected through decorative motifs and architectural designs. The main thrust of the chapter is to interpret the decorative motifs and shapes of buildings according to the painters and builders themselves and again show how they reveal how a people perceive the world and the environment around them, hence the direct response to the research problem through the analysis of the findings.

4.2 Designs and Decorative Symbols revealing Cosmos

People can communicate or express how they perceive the universe in a number of ways such as written words on documents, audio recordings, video filming, inscriptions on their domestic implements, through artistic products and services, both cognitive and material (The Science Behind Meditation, 2016). A circle is one such symbol. It can be traced back to the ancient times. Most of the African groups are familiar with this particular decorative symbol. The commonalities in how they interpret the circle are more than the differences. In an interview with a woman who takes part in traditional house painting it was pointed out that a circle can have more than one meaning but in most cases the meanings will be closely related.

To begin with, the circle represents unity, fertility, perpetuity and continuity from one generation to the next among Ndebele and Africans as a people. As it is clearly visible one cannot locate where the circle starts and ends so with no doubt the study argues that it means continuity. More similarly, the Ndebele specifically the inhabitants of Matobo believed that the universe was created by their God and that was the beginning of the universe but however, there is no end to it and it will be always on existence forever. Similarly in the

creation god created circular items hence they copied from the cosmos and indirectly from the creator. This was proved by the African culture in terms of wife inheritance (*ukungena*) that if a man dies his wife must choose amongst the young brothers of the deceased to remarry her to continue with one surname. The chosen one has to take care of the family and also bear more children (interview with the elder of Ward 17). They were more concerned about the number thus when a woman could not bear children she was either replaced, or she would bring her uncle's daughter to bear children for her since she would be barren. Be that as it may, the wife inheritance is no longer popular among the Ndebele today. Even their houses, pottery, basketry, crafts among others, are circular or round shaped to represent continuity, infinity, immortality and fertility in the family. Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) postulates that, where death ends life takes off, which explains that the life-death life cycle within which eternity and fertility are expressed. This reveals that Africans as a people they believe in life after death that when one dies he depart to the world of the living-dead to have a longer/eternal life. Asante (2000) notes that one can get a fairly good understanding of the substance of Kermit philosophical ideas by studying some of the more common concepts that emerged in the society. Some concepts which emerged in the Kermitic civilization were *Ankh*, *seneb*, *djed*, *heheh*, *neter* and *meri*. These carried powerful meanings that reiterated the notions of stability, eternity and endlessness. The ankh was used to express the idea of life, living, presence and presence (Asante, 2000).

The heavenly bodies, the moon and the sun, from their view are round in shape. These are important among the Ndebele as they provide light and life. In an interview with another painter what came out was that a circle means equality as the distance from the circumference to the centre is equal from every direction. This is the same with the circular huts, when the family sits inside they will be equally closer to the fire place. The cosmogonies behind this is the equal rights to basic commodities and needs by the community members. It can also mean that life is full of comebacks in the sense that it also represents movement, and give impetus to the spirit of communalism. Again, there is a saying reinforcing this notion which says, '*impilo livili*', 'life is a wheel' and meaning that life is full of surprises and you should live with the mind that tomorrow you will also need help hence you should help others when you can. It was said to warn those who do not share and treat others badly as they hold some powers or resources that they should be good to those who need help lest they seek help from them tomorrow. The earth and other planets rotate around the orbit which result in the change of the time of a day and different seasons. The rotation of the universe which marks change

of seasons and periods is equivalent to the rotation of a wheel and philosophically to the change of power or possessions.

Linked to the circle is the crescent moon, semi-circle, curvilinear and the waves. The waves are linked to the appreciation of the nature as they are called in Ndebele 'ithendele' guinea fowl which is a bird with curvy top. They are also associated with the life experience of the surprises and disappointments and ups and downs as it will be explored as the discussion unfolds.

Again, one observed that the chevron is yet another popular decorative symbol used across Matobo district. It is also linked to the cosmic bodies. A chevron is an open V-shaped unit facing any direction or a triangle. It can also be painted as a pattern, joined V-shapes or triangles. Informed by the philosophy of continuity, one of the attributes or quality of beauty is repetition (Nyathi, 2013). It was also copied from nature. Repetition is such an important African aesthetic sense that it resides in all artistic expressions: music, dance, sculpture, poetry, verse and other art forms including the visual arts (Nyathi, 2013). It also give further emphasis of the important factors among a people. A chevron is a fertility symbol among Africans.

The chevron decorative symbol was also inherited from the historical societies and recycled to have a meaning attached to the worldview of the people of Matobo. It is linked to the life experience of an individual, group and or community at large. Life-time period is never a simple period of flowing events but rather of series of surprises and disappointments, challenges and opportunities. Life is a very complex journey that needs the human beings with the capacity to understand its complexity. In an interview with one of those who paint their houses, what came out was that:

Iphetheni le, umzwezwe ehla isiya phansi ibuye iqanse iveza impilo esiyiphilayo kuwonalo umhlaba. Itsho ukuba empilweni umuntu uyawa abuye avuke njalo, isigaba siyahlanga lobuzima sibuye siqobe njalo. Umuntu angawa kumbe abesebuzimane angathwali imikhono ekhanda akhalale athi kuphelile kodwa kalwise elethemba lokuba kusasa kuzalunga njalo ngaphambili kwakhona kubengcono njalo futhi. Yiyo impilo yakhona, siwa sivuka.

(The pattern, the chevron which goes up and down, reveals the life that we live in this world. People all fall but find themselves up again, a community face a series of challenges but conquers still. If anyone falls or finds him/herself in some hard time let them not give up and accept that it's over but let them fight to prevail with hope that tomorrow will be a better day and day after tomorrow better still and on and on again. That's the life we live, which is full of ups and downs).

This tells of the life experiences of both the individual and the society in all aspects of life, politics, marriage and love-life, economic, to mention just a few. The chevron symbols is packed with the philosophies and the worldview of a people. Another painter said, in an interview, that the reason for painting is to send messages to her own children as well as the society. From the contributions and interpretations of the chevron the researcher observed that this motifs prepares and empowers the children to face the future with hope, the expectation to face challenges and the mind to prosper in circumstances they encounter in life.

There is also the pan-African interpretation of the chevron as a motif, however, it is common to that also in the area understudy. The chevron design was inspired by a body of a woman as seen by Africa to be playing a greater role in fertility and continuity. Nyathi (2013) notes that the human body is beautiful and that makes it a perfect subject of art... a chevron is a shape inspired by the body of a woman who Africa recognizes as playing a greater role in fertility or procreation. Jeminiwa (1995) notes that the woman as a person is an agent of reproduction of life itself. This places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity.



[Fig 1] shows the circles decorative symbols (left) and the chevron motifs (right)

However the motif refers to a single woman and more than one are represented by joined 'Vs.' Nyathi (2013). Therefore, the chevron design symbolises human fertility, and within this triangle is located the womb which is fundamental to human reproduction, procreation or fertility. Thus, the motif is also closely connected to the circle: as it also means fertility and continuity, like the cosmos is marked by repetition or rhythm and means the humanity will be

on existence eternally. The chevron is perceived to be the cone, and a cone is made of an infinite number of circles of either inclining or declining radial, hence it is a 2D representative (chevron) of a 3D reality (circle) (Nyathi and Chikomo, 2016). From a chevron design executed on the wall of houses in ward 17 in Matobo district one can understand the cosmological underpinnings of the inhabitants of the area. Linked to the chevron are the haring bone symbol, chess-board symbol, ingots symbol and diamond symbols. The diamond also recognizes the availability of man and their complementary role they play in the procreation, up-keep and development of the society. It shows their outfit ‘*amabhetsu*’ and also their manhood which is the role and ability to procreate. In painting these symbols the women show appreciation of their role and importance in sustaining the society and not forgetting the man.

4.3 Decorative Symbols disseminating family responsibility

One of the often used motif is the spiral. This decorative motif is engrained with the African philosophy, continuity, ‘*ubuntuism*’ and the concept of one’s responsibility. This symbol might have been imported from the Shona ethnic group into the Ndebele culture. Chigwedere (2014:20) cited in Nyathi and Chikomo (2016) postulates that the spiral, among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, is represented by the conus shell disc, ‘*ndoro*’ which used to be worn by chiefs, as a necklace hanging from their chests. Thus, the interpretation by the interviewee in Matobo also has a meaning which is more akin to the above given interpretation. The participant who executed a spiral on her wall said:

Kusukela kubobabamkhulu besaphila, kusukela lapho okwaqalela khona imuli yangakithi. Labo yibo okuqala khona umzila (uhambo) bacina lapho abaphelela hona umama lobaba, lami kumele ngiwutshove lumzila kuthi sengedlule abantwabami basale bavusa ibizo langakithi umzila uqhubeke. Umzila utshova nxa umlandu usungowakho. Kunje mina ngisphila umlando ngowami, umzila uqhutshwa yimi kuzakuthi abantwana bmi blandele ngemva kukubizwa kwami ngobaba

(Since my forefathers lived, that is where the spiral line begins, they took the line somewhere, so did my father and mother, and I also have to take the legacy to another level, when I am dead my children will take over and those after them, the line continues. At the moment the family looks up to me as an elder and I have to make sure the line keeps extending and my children will take over thereafter).



[Fig 2] shows the spiral decorative motif and the chevron pattern. It was capture in Silungudzi A village.

Whenever you are to continue with the lineage the family’s responsibility is yours. The idea of responsibility is emphasized and taught to the members and the children for the sustainable survival of family legacy and of the community at large. It also brings the aspect of the importance of family genealogies among the Ndebele people. This was inspired by the development phases of the moon. From birth until fool moon, the moon keeps on growing day in day out. The process might be slightly different in the sense that the moon develops to from a complete circle whilst the spiral keeps widening and growing bigger. The spiral adopted from the Shona, that is if they did borrow if from the Shona side, reflects how a people understands the cosmos and apply the knowledge into their culture. This also entails the aspect of continuity which is key among Africans.

Another motif used around ward 17 in Matobo district is of a mother carrying a child, basket, grinding using grinding stone and crushing with pestle and mortar. These pictures depict almost the same philosophy, all pertaining the responsibility and the roles of the females in a society. In an interview, a woman with traditionally painted houses who also make crafts it was said that:

Imicombo le esibalaza ngayo emidulini senzele ukufundisa ontanga laba abasakhula ukuze bakwazi umphakathi obakhangelele kubo. Njengalowu umfanekiso kamama obelethe usane ngapha echola. Abantu ngekhaya kumele badle, abantwana banakekelwe. Thina abadala sesifuna abazukulu ngakho umuntu wesifazane fuze abelethe abazukulu. Kuleminyane imfanekiso uzathola umama egiga iloba ethwele incebethu, yonke izama ukufundisa abesintwana kanye lozulu wonke ngemfanelo ezikhangelelwe emuntwini ongumama.

(The decorative motifs that we execute on our walls are meant to teach the young fellows on what is expected of them by the community that they live in. just like the symbol of a woman carrying a child at her back and grinding corn using grinding stones is meant for such purposes. People at home need to eat and the children taken care of. We as elders want to have grandchildren, thus, women have to give them to us. There are also other motifs of that shows a woman grinding using pestle and mortar or carrying a basket, all these are attempts to educate the female at the entire society of what is to be expected from women).

The philosophy behind these symbols are division of duties in the society between man and women. Women are the ones for taking care of children, cooking, and the harvesting. Man are to also do other chores for the common good in the community. Again, it also disseminates the worldview of a people on the issue of procreation. Women are expected to procreate so does the man, as it is a result of the complementarity of the two sexes. The concept of marriage and the duties in a marriage are also emphasized through the execution of decorative motifs. The marriage should produce children for the society. In an interview with the cultural custodian what came out was that after the all the rituals was done before the bride left for the grooms hope she was counseled to go and bear children. Therefore, the decorative symbols are pregnant with the cosmological underpinnings of a people or an individual and can be used as a medium of expression.

The roles to be played by man and the duties expected of them are also communicated through decorating houses. More similar to those of women, the motifs revealing the responsibilities of a man are of a man carrying a shield, a knobkerrie and a spear or men carrying animals they killed from hunting. In the historic times man went for wars and also hunted game for food. The issue of the responsibility to hunt existed even during the stone-age period. The philosophy embedded on the motif of a man carrying war/fighting/hunting weapons is that, his responsibility in the society is to protect his family and fend for his family. When man does the hunting and the women the cooking it is the complementarity for the common good. This is also linked to the stars named '*isilimela*' which thought to be the bright stars around the Orion. The one ahead of others is said to be a man leading his household or the king leading his people. The people learn the structure of their households or communities from the cosmos hence, the revelation of the cosmogonies of the inhabitants of Matobo area through traditional house painting.

4.4 Motifs that entail life experience and History

There are other symbols executed to communicate about life experiences, encounters and historical information as previously said in the above paragraphs. Some of the motifs are given impetus by dreams. The man drinking beer in a clay pot or gourd and putting on traditional animal skin regalia is used by a number of artists. This tells the history of AmaNdebele about the sections of man. The man set on their own in a court close to the cattle pen and likewise women also had their place closer to the kitchen and the grain bins. The regalia of the Ndebele man and its significance is also disseminated and classified, from the head gear, breastplate, skirts, sandals, inter alia. Equally importantly, the significance of beer can also be disseminated. Clay pots baskets, gourds and some other artefacts are also used. Therefore, the decorative motifs can be pregnant with a people's history and also their perception of the world they live in.



[Fig 3] shows a woman carrying a child and a basket and the man following behind her (left) and the man sitting on a headrest in a traditional regalia drinking beer in a clay pot.

Some of the painters believe in the dreams as a way of receiving the information, knowledge and messages from the supernatural or spiritual world. When they dream they want to tell that dream, interpret it to the community and again, they want to appreciate that dream. When they dream they need a surface to document their dreams, a platform to express themselves. Some of the decorative that people normally execute on the wall they would have dreamt of them prior to the painting. Some are meaningful to the artists and to the society they live in,

for example the flower which signifies a brighter life ahead. Thus, the flower as a decorative motif executed on houses in Matobo is communicative to the artist and the community.



[Fig 4] shows flowers executed on a wall in Halale village.

4. 5 The Motifs that reflect Social Relations

The society is formed of individuals, with different characters, personalities, only to mention just a few. These, despite divergence among them, they also have commonalities, and the capacity to understand each other's complexities, which is vital in the formation of a united society and the concept of '*ubuntuism*'. Those differences are necessary for the community as they will work to achieve the common good from different dimensions. There are motifs which depict this scenario. The jigsaw/puzzle decorative symbol is also used in Matobo district. The pieces of the jigsaw are in the combination of a circle and a chevron, from how the researcher viewed them, which have been explored in this research already.

The society is made of different individuals with distinct backgrounds but as a people they have something in common and they fit into each other as a society perfectly well. Again, it also disseminates that life is an incomplete and a continuous process, hence the society different people to carry on certain tasks. The need for the future generations to come and play their role and continue aiming to complete the puzzle. (Interview with the woman who is a painter on 30 March). The different individuals they form a complete society despite their characters. The researcher observed that just like how clouds of rain, which are like a puzzle, join together until it rains, the society which diverged individuals likewise should work for

the common result. The decorative motifs can also reveal how a people understands and interpret the cosmos which is their worldview and their cosmological underpinnings.



[Fig 5] Shows the jigsaw decorative symbols. It was taken from the ‘My Beautiful Home’ face book page.

4.6 Understanding Nature through Decorative Symbols

Through decorative symbols executed we can understand the nature in that particular place. As a sign of appreciating nature and to show how a people treasure nature they paint it on their houses or any other domestic product. The rocks all over the Matobo landscape are popular on the walls of the inhabitants of Matobo district, to sure their love and appreciation of the beauty of natural world. The rocks which are executed on the coins and notes of the Zimbabwean currency are also painted by a couple of artist, to show pride of staying in a place with recognized natural beauty. Thus, the natural inspired decorative motifs can tell what kind of nature is in the place. This also include the safari or wildlife, which is also appreciated through traditional house painting.



[Fig 6] shows the motifs of rocks in Matobo that are also found on the ‘notes’ of Zimbabwe painted on a wall.

4.7 Symbols and Totems

Decorative motifs executed during traditional house painting can shed some light to the totem of the painter or that of her suitor/husband. They can also disseminate the ethnic group which the artist belongs to, through the symbols as well as the cosmogonies embedded in certain decorative motifs. Most of the Africans in Southern Africa have their totems related to flora and fauna or basically nature. Observed from a house in Mawusumani village, walls are decorated with zebras. As the artist's surname is ‘*Dube*’ translated to zebra which clearly specifies her totem. Just like praise songs, executing one's totem on the walls reveals the pride that one has pertaining that surname, self-esteem and boastfulness. On the same walls there are also a number of lions executed. She said to the researcher, obviously the zebras symbolize me, however, in the Ndebele culture and Africa as well, a home or marriage is made of two or more surnames but nowadays it's two surnames. The lions on the walls express that this is a ‘*Sibanda*’ family, as the participant's husband's surname is *Sibanda*, actually home is called by the man's surname ‘*KoSibanda*’, at ‘*Sibanda*'s. Thus, these animals executed on the wall communicate that this is a ‘*Sibanda-Dube*’ home. Marriage is not entirely an institution of love but joint families for procreation purposes. Some have also painted elephants on their houses as they are of ‘*Ndlovu*’ totem and some who are of the *Nyathi* clan have buffalos.



[Fig 7] shows a zebra painted on a house wall to reveal the totem of the artist.

In the historical times ethnic groups were distinguished by a number of factors, both immaterial and material cultures but especially the material. These include the regalia which are skirts, breastplates, head gears among others, architecture, spears and shields. Within the same ethnic group or nation, regiments were also distinguished by the colour of their shields. Most of the houses within ward 17 in Matobo district have shields, knobkerries and spears executed on them. In an interview with the woman who had painted her home it was pointed out that the shield is linked to the Ndebele nation and its warrior hood. The elder of the community also said a similar point. The Highlanders FC also has the shield with a knobkerrie and a spear to link it to the Ndebele as it is part of the Ndebele heritage. Thus, the decorative symbols in Matobo can also tell to which ethnic groups do the inhabitants of the area fall under. In most motifs black and white shields are painted which are linked to '*Igabha*' and '*Insukamini*' regiments.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented and analysed the research findings on the meanings and interpretations of traditional house painting and decorative symbols. It explored and unpacked the philosophy of life, worldview and the cosmological underpinnings embedded in the decorative motifs in ward 17 of Matobo district. One can as well conclude that the decorative symbols executed during traditional house painting are communicative/expressive of the cosmological underpinnings of a people. The motifs used are inspired by many factors, life experience, history, love, societal relations, and contact with other cultures, nature and the perception of the cosmic world. A community or individual can be understood from the decorative symbols painted on the walls of houses and likewise the symbols are directed to the family, community members and also the outside world. The following chapter which is

also the last chapter will give the recommendations of the research and it will also conclude the whole dissertation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The previous chapter presented and analysed the data on the architectural designs and the decorative motifs found in ward 17 of Matobo district. The current chapter concludes the entire dissertation. The study is in the field of culture precisely on the decorative symbols and their cosmological underpinning. The people see symbols and designs almost on a daily basis and yet they don't get the alarming messages or meanings on the exquisitely striking and eye catching decorative design. Traditional house painting is still practised in Matobo district, though it is facing extinction, due to threats from, modernization, globalisation and westernisation. The decorative, motifs are still executed on house walls and also on other domestic implements. Their existence to date reveals that they are significant to the people. The study was carried out through interviewing the societal members and observing the decorative motifs and architectural designs in ward 17 of Motobo district. The researcher interviewed the elderly people in a society under the impression that they are more knowledgeable in this discourse than any other age group in the community, the women and girls who are the ones executing these symbols and the man who construct the architectural structures were interviewed so as the learn what they mean in their artistic works. Furthermore, the cultural custodians were also consulted to shed some light on the speculations made by the researcher. The study is comprised of five chapters, having each chapter broken down into several subtopics. The first chapter is the general introduction to the entire research. It also overlaid the foundation as well as the background of architecture and the decorative symbols among the Ndebele and Africa at large. This is where the problem of the study and its context was explored. The second chapter of the study focused on the historical background of architectural designs and decorative symbols executed on houses and their significance in Africa. The chapter emphasised on the notion that from the ancient times the Africans looked up and learnt, a factor which influenced their architectural shapes as well as the decorative symbols among them. The motifs and shapes of buildings at the Ndebele nation level were outlined, these symbols and designs are inspired by a number of factors like life experience, love, history, the surrounding environment, the understanding of nature and the cosmos. Some are created by artists themselves whilst some are borrowed and adopted from historical generations and neighbouring groups. Chapter three was focusing on the architectural structures and decorative symbols that exist on the walls of houses in Matobo hills area. The role and significance of art in the communication discourse was also

explore in this section. The executor of decorative motifs or the artistic in general attaches meaning to a particular artistic rendition, a meaning peculiar to how he/she interpret the cosmos and the environment around him. The messages encode through these symbols and shapes are directed to the members of families of the artists, the community as well as those outside the community for better understanding of a people's philosophy. Chapter four presented and analysed the findings. The decorative motifs reveal the cosmological underpinnings of a people, for example the circle which is associated with the heavenly bodies, their movement in circular form. The cosmic world has existed since the creation time and it is perceived that it will last for eternity, hence the notion of continuity, fertility, immortality, infinity and unity through circular symbols. The decorative symbols also bring out the social relations, the history of the people, their gender roles, the nature around them as well as their totems.

5.2 Conclusion

In this study it was found out that the decorative symbols executed during traditional house painting and the architectural designs in Matobo are expressive and are used as a vehicle for communication. These decorative symbols are imbued with the worldview of a people, their philosophy and also their cosmological underpinnings. They are inspired by many aspects of life and more importantly the environment around them. The cosmos, flora and fauna, love life, social interactions, and dreams give impetus to the symbols that are produced and painted on the walls of their house. Needless to say, should acknowledge that the decorative motifs are also executed for aesthetic purposes.

The architectural structures came into existence as the human beings needed protection from various climatic conditions like storm, heavy rains, and freezing conditions. The architectural structures they constructed were inspired by their culture and how they perceived the cosmos and the environment around them for instance the jigsaw or puzzle symbols linked to clouds coming together for the common good which is the rainfall. They used the material available in that particular geographical area. Most of the shapes of the building in Africa were cylindrical or circular in design. Other shapes like square or rectangle, oblong among others were adopted later and it is suggested that they were inspired by the contact with the west. When the house painting was adopted or came into practice most of the decorative symbols were mostly circles influenced by the above stars. Those who seemed distinct from the circle were the chevron, herringbone, checked board, inter alia. These are also linked by other

scholars to circularity when they say that a chevron is a cone viewed from a two-dimension. A cone is nothing but an infinite number of circles either of inclining or declining radial. Straight lines were also used. The straight lines represented the male figure and their role in procreation and social chores. These symbols are related or a replica of the cosmos. The human mind in Africa is compelled to copy or reproduce what is above. Decorative motifs influenced by nature also were popularised in Africa. These symbols reveal the worldview, philosophy of life and the cosmogonies of a people.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The research recommends that other researchers should also cover and unpack the philosophy of a people embedded on General Dealer Stores and Bottle Stores inscriptions. The study also recommends that others researchers in the field of arts, culture and history to also explore on the layouts and set-ups of homesteads and its significance to a people or society. Again, the responsible ministry to establish initiatives that revitalises the practise of traditional house painting as it reveals more about a people and their philosophy as well as cosmogonies. The researchers and those particularly in the field of arts and culture to document the decorative symbols executed on houses as well as their interpretations peculiar to artists.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Guide for the Cultural Custodians and Researchers in the Field of Culture

I am Quiet Dube and I am a student at Midlands State University pursuing a degree in African Languages and Culture. I am doing a research on the cosmological underpinnings, worldview and philosophy embedded on architecture and the decorative symbols executed on walls in Matobo district. I assure you that my research is purely academic. I hope you will help me attain this information and I sincerely thank all those who will contribute to my research. I would like to ask the following questions.

Ibizo lami nginguQuiet dube, ngifunda eMidlands State University (MSU), ngikhangelela ukucocwa kuDegree lendimi lamasiko eAfrica (African Languages and Culture Honours Degree). Ngiyenza iresearch ekhangela ngokuba indlela abantu abazwisisa ngayo umhlaba izezwa njani ngokucomba lukugudula izindlu kanye lokwenziwa kwezakhiwo eMatobo. Ngiyalethembisa ukuba ukudinga ulwazi lokhu kuphathelane lezifundo kuphela. Ngithemba lizangisiza ukuthola lololwazi njalo ngibonga kakhulu bonke labo abazangisiza bagcizelele kule iresearch. Ngizacela ukubuza imibuzo embalwa engilayo lapha.

- a) Kungakhulunyiswana ngandlela bani kusetshenziswa imicombo, izakhiwo, imbazo leminye imisebenzi yeminwe?
 - b) Ubona ingani ukucomba lokhe kusaselencazelo zesiko?
 - c) Kungani kufanekiswa imicombo thize emidulini kumbe kwezinye impahla nje?
 - d) Budlelwano bani obukhona phakathi kwezakhiwo, impahla ezibambekayo lolwazi ngesiko lenkolo yabantu?
 - e) Yiphi imbali yeMatobo njalo ingenelana njani lezakhiwo lokuconjwa kwezindlu eMatobo?
 - f) Mgokuzwisisa kwakho mutsho bani ovezwa yimicombo yezindlu?
 - g) Kungaba abantu beMatobo kuyibo abaqala ngalelisiko?
 - h) Yiphi imihlobo yokumiswa kewakhiwo lamaphetheni emicombo oyaziyo njalo atshoni kuwe?
 - i) Isebenzani i-art esizweni se Africa lesiNdebeleni kumbe ebantwini abahlala eMatopo?
 - j) Imicombo leyo iqondiswe kubani? Yindaba?
- 1) How can communication be done through art?
 - 2) Do you think traditional house painting still retains its cultural meanings?
 - 3) What is the purpose of executing decorative designs onto the walls or any other utility?
 - 4) What is the relationship between material culture and values, philosophy and beliefs of a people?
 - 5) What is the history of Matobo hills area, and how is that related to architecture and traditional house painting?
 - 6) According to your own understanding what do you think could be the philosophy of traditional house painting?

- 7) Are the people in Matobo the pioneers of this practice or they adopted it from elsewhere?
- 8) Which of the architectural designs and decorative motifs have you encountered? And what do they mean/communicate?
- 9) What are the functions of art in African societies, especially the Ndebele or the occupants of Matobo district?
- 10) To whom are the executed messages usually directed to?

Thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix 2

Interview Guide for those Taking Part in House Painting and Structure Building as well as Elders in Matobo

I am Quiet Dube and I am a student at Midlands State University pursuing a degree in African Languages and Culture. I am doing a research on the cosmological underpinnings, worldview and philosophy embedded on architecture and the decorative symbols executed on walls in Matobo district. I assure you that my research is purely academic. I hope you will help me attain this information and I sincerely thank all those who will contribute to my research. I would like to ask the following questions.

Ibizo lami nginguQuiet Dube, ngifunda eMidlands State University (MSU), ngikhangelela ukucocwa kuDegree lendimi lamasiko eAfrica (African Languages and Culture Honours Degree). Ngiyenza iresearch ekhangela ngokuba indlela abantu abazwisisa ngayo umhlaba ivezwa njani ngokucomba lukugudula izindlu kanye lokwenziwa kwezakhiwo eMatobo. Ngiyalethembisa ukuba ukudinga ulwazi lokhu kuphathelane lezifundo kuphela. Ngithemba lizangisiza ukuthola lololwazi njalo ngibonga kakhulu bonke labo abazangisiza bagcizelele kule iresearch. Ngizacela ukubuza imibuzo embalwa engilayo lapha.

- 1) What are your historical experiences or memories that you feel should be conserved or preserved decorative Symbols or building?
- 2) Which ethnic/racial group have you had contact with or live amongst from whom you might have borrowed art?
- 3) Besides beauty what is the purpose of house painting?
- 4) Do shapes of buildings mean/communicate anything? If so what is the meaning of some architectural structures?
- 5) What does traditional house painting tell or mean to you?
- 6) What could be the negative and positive effects of traditional house painting to you and the society at large?
- 7) What inspires you to execute certain decorative designs?
- 8) Why do you practice or partake in traditional house painting?
- 9) What sort of societal values and beliefs are associated with traditional house painting?
- 10) Who does the construction of buildings and also the execution of decorative symbols? What could be the reason behind this?
- 11) Who is being communicated with through house painting and architectural motifs?
- 12) Which of the buildings and decorative motifs are expressive or communicative?

Thank you for your participation

