THE ROLE OF MAKHADZI IN TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AMONG THE VENDA

BY

PFARELO EVA MATSHIDZE

SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE FACULTY OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

DECEMBER 2013

SUPERVISOR: PROF. G.V.C. BUIJS

CO-SUPERVISOR: DR. N.R. NGCOBO

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis which I hereby submit for the degree: Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Zululand, is my own work and has not previously been submitted in fulfilment or partial fulfilment of the requirements of another degree at another university.

…… ……

Pfarelo Eva Matshidze Date

ABSTRACT

This contribution considers the role of a father's senior sister (*makhadzi*) in traditional leadership among the Venda speaking people in the present South Africa. It also considers their place in the new democratic South Africa against the backdrop that the legislations enacted to give effect to traditional leadership did not recognise them explicitly. While reviewing gender based propositions the study demonstrates that even though in most African societies, women are insubordinate to men there exists a special class of women who play critical role in the public sphere and whom the society highly regards. In the case of Venda people these are the *makhadzi.* It used a qualitative approach to study the role of *makhadzi* and how people act towards them despite that they are explicitly recognised in the legislations because as an anthropological study, it examines human behaviour with a view to understanding society. Based on primary data collected using participant observation and interviews, the role of *makhadzi* in society was unearthed. The study found that among the Venda the *makhadzi* has different roles which are important in traditional leadership and that such women can be traced in other societies in Africa. It establishes that among others, the *makhadzi* play critical roles in succession, resolution of disputes, regency, initiation of girls and spiritual roles. While some of the cultural practises are repugnant to the notion of justice and morality and would be of dubious legality given the constitution essentialisation of human rights and dignity, the study has shown that the *makhadzi* has a place and role in the new democratic society.

Key words: South Africa, Venda, traditional leadership, *makhadzi*, *ndumi, khadzi*, *khotsimunene*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the following persons for assisting me in this research. First, I express gratitude to Professor Gina Buijs for providing me with invaluable material support throughout my study and supervising it, as well as her contributions towards my intellectual growth. I also wish to thank my children, Tshifhiwa, Livhuwani and Thikho for their understanding when I was away doing fieldwork and working on the thesis.

My research has been supported or influenced by many people in different ways. While I am compelled to name a few, I do so with hesitation as I am bound to leave out those that I am actually meant to name. From them I seek forbearance. My mother, Nyatshivhenga Matshidze; my late father, Bukuta Matshidze (post-humously); and the late Professor Victor Nkhumeleni Nemakhavhani Ralushai have been my mentors and teachers. Professor Ralushai passed on when I was in the final stages of my research, and his support will always remain fresh in my memory. I would like to thank Dr. R.R. Mashapha who provided me with support throughout my studies and Dr. Peta Jones who took pains to proofread and edit my work diligently.

I also wish to thank those who have provided me with information which was crucial for my research. Last but not the least, I wish to thank the Almighty God who made it possible for me to reach this level.

GLOSSARY OF VENDA TERMS USED

Note that the proper diacritical marks have not been applied to the Venda orthography used here, and that pronunciations may vary according to the regional dialect used. Mostly the use of grammatical prefixes has been avoided, as in English the word 'Venda', for instance, does equally well for language, country and people, as well as individuals.

Venda word as spelled in this dissertation	*Approximate meaning in English, with some explanation*
Domba	The final stage of girls' initiation among the Venda.
Dzekiso	The wife whose *lumalo* has been paid for by the royal family or with the cattle which came into the family on the marriage the *khadzi*, chosen by the royal family to bear the heir to the throne
Dzunde	Special field belonging to the chief, the produce of which is used for the hospitality and charity extended by the chief on behalf of his people. For this reason, the people participate in the preparation, cultivation and harvesting of this field.
Gota	Headman of village, or councillor
Ha-	Prefix usually denoting a locality or village named after a family
Khadzi	Senior sister of family head or chief – i.e. set to become *makhadzi* to his successor. Usually the daughter of a different mother but the same father as the chief.
Khoro	Traditional court, or hearing by a traditional court
Khotsimunene	Senior brother of family head's or chief's father, where seniority is not necessarily that of age. He would have been *ndumi* to the predecessor chief.
Lulidzavhakalaha	Cancerous gonads, the removal of which is believed to promote longevity in men.
Lumalo	A set amount paid by a prospective husband or his family to the bride's family.

Venda word as spelled in this dissertation	*Approximate meaning in English, with some explanation*
Makhadzi	Senior sister of family head's or chief's father, where seniority is not necessarily that of age. She would have been *khadzi* to the predecessor chief.
Misanda	Plural form of *'musanda'*
Mphambo	Ritual beer, made from specially selected sorghum.
Mufaro	Traditional basket, usually with lid
Mufumakadzi	Chief's wife
Mukololo	Chief's daughter or son
Mukoma	Head man
Mungome	Diviner
Musanda	Meeting place or court of a leader, usually a royal one
Mutanuni	A chief young wife (plural – *vhatanuni*)
Muvhuye	A wife whose *lumalo* is paid with that (usually cattle) which was paid into the family when the chief's *khadzi* married.
Ndayo	Etiquettes' learned during initiation of girls
Ndumi	Chief's senior brother, usually from a different mother but the same father as the chief.
Nendila	Messenger between families in marriage negotiations, preferably not related to either family. Also *zhendedzi*.
Nwenda	Current traditional national dress for Venda women.
Pembela	Ceremony which includes medication and treatment given to the chief to prevent procreation

Venda word as spelled in this dissertation	*Approximate meaning in English, with some explanation*
Phasa	Libation
Pfamo or ***pfamoni***	Chief's dwelling within the royal compound
Raluvhimba	Supreme deity
Thevhula	Ceremony conducted after harvest, to thank the ancestors
Tshiendeulu	Royal grave
Tshifhe	Priest or traditional healer
Tshikanda	Second phase in Venda girls' initiation, between *vhusha* and *domba*. It is supposed to take place every three to five years at the headquarters of chiefs and certain senior headman, just before *domba*. During *tshikanda*, considerable time is spent practising the *ndayo* exercises of *vhusha*, which are accompanied by music in a call-and-response form.
Tshikona	Male traditional dance
Tshileli	A chief's favourite who acts as a mat when the chief dies
TshiVenda	The language spoken by the people of Venda; also LuVenda
Vhakoma	Chief's mother
Vhavenda	Chief's younger brothers, although the term is also used for the Venda people as a whole.
Vho	Honorific, equivalent to 'sir' or 'madame' as used in English
Vhusha	The first stage of girls' initiation among the Venda.

Venda word as spelled in this dissertation	*Approximate meaning in English, with some explanation*
Voda	Chief's daughter
Zhinda	Chief's son
Zwileli	Plural of *tshileli*
Zwiendeulu	Plural of *tshiendeulu*
Zwifhoni	Ritual site in a *musanda* containing two stones, one representing a man and the other a woman.
Zwitungulo	Royal artefacts or insignia

TABLE OF CONTENT

CONTENTS

CHAPTER THREE
GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE VENDA PEOPLE

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER FIVE
ROLE OF THE MAKHADZI

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

In South African traditional societies, the system of traditional leadership is firmly entrenched since the arrival of Bantu ethnic groups to the southern part of the continent. There are several studies that have investigated the institution of traditional leadership. Some of them have examined the ways in which traditional leadership has coped in the democratic transition in South Africa(Bank and Southall 1996; Mashele 2004). Some have argued that traditional leadership is a relic of the past, that does not have a place in the new democratic dispensation(Maloka 1995; Maloka 1996) while others have argued that traditional leadership does not belong to an eroded or outdated past (Fokwang 2009). I argue in this study that the institution of traditional leadership in South Africa and indeed, across the African continent remains relevant despite the presence of democratic alternatives. This will be made evident through a critical appraisal of the role and status of the royal paternal aunt, *makhadzi* among the Venda, whose ritual and symbolic office proves to be the most influential power within traditional leadership.

Generally, traditional leaders served as governors of their communities with authority over all aspects of life, ranging from social welfare to judicial functionaries. Traditional leadership occupies an important place in African life, and historically in the body politic of South Africa. It embodies the preservation of culture, traditions, customs and values of the African people. According to Cele (2010:9), traditional leaders claim legitimacy based on history and religion. Historically, traditional leaders claim political authority derived from the pre-colonial period. They are seen to represent 'indigenous, truly African values and authority'. Religiously, they claimed links to the divine, whether gods, spirits, the living dead or ancestors. This made the traditional system accessible and highly participatory, despite that most of such leaders were and are still not democratically elected, but come into leadership on the basis of lineage or succession.

Whilst it is true that heredity or succession is a means for assigning leadership posts, there exist mechanisms through which traditional leaders would be ripped of their entitlement to be leaders if they do not enjoy societal approval and support (Olivier 1995:201). It is an argument in this study that traditional leadership is accessible and participatory in the sense that there are instances when members of a society are given an opportunity to express their opinions on a variety of issues under the province of traditional leadership. Salient is *tshivhidzo* (a calling from the chief's kraal) among the Venda. Community members are through *tshivhidzo* offered an opportunity to voice their opinions pertaining to affairs of the community.

1.2 Problem statement

The *makhadzi* occupies a significant position in the Venda socio-political system. However due to shift in the dimensions of government brought about by colonialism and apartheid it appears they have been side-lined or not recognised. Effect of failure to recognise them in the new democratic political dispensation could be interpreted to mean that they are not supposed to be of any relevance in traditional leadership hence this study.

It is noteworthy that the institution of traditional leadership has been a subject of robust and acrimonious controversies in the transition to a post-apartheid order in South Africa. The study gives a particular attention to the fact that traditional leadership has metamorphosed over time and the institution became vulnerable to political opportunism challenged by the democratic principles. Traditional leaders have lost most of their authority during the colonial era. During apartheid, some of the traditional leaders were dismissed because they were perceived to be colluding and conniving with the apartheid government (Mamdani 1996:56).

Such controversies are enclaved in controversies. According to Oomen (2000:214) the debate about traditional leaders and democracy has contradictions. It is dichotomised into African and Western, rural and urban, traditional and modern. This dichotomy gives rise to traditional authority either being trivialised or sentimentalised. In a political context, those who trivialise the traditional leadership system may be viewed as idealists who give high regard to the principles of accountable, democratic government and see no governmental role for traditional leaders.

The new constitutional dispensation in South Africa sought to recognise traditional leadership, Section 211 and 212. Section 211(1) provides that the institution, status and role of traditional leadership, according to customary law, are recognised, subject to the Constitution. Section 212 highlights the role of traditional leaders. Section 212 (1) notes that national legislation may provide for a role for traditional leadership as an institution at local level on matters affecting local communities. Subsection (2) addresses with matters relating to traditional leadership; the role of traditional leaders; customary law and the customs of communities observing a system of customary law. A mere recognition by the constitution of the role of traditional leaders shows the commitment of the South African society to ensuring that even in a new democratic system, the place and role of traditional leaders is not trivialised.

Chapter 12 of the *South African Constitution Act 108 (1996)* thus specifically acknowledges the institution of traditional leadership and its place and role in the system of democratic governance. It provides for the continued authority and functioning of such leaders in accordance with traditional law, within the broader legal framework, and for traditional leaders to participate at local government level. Further the Constitution also established a Council of Traditional Leaders. Other pieces of legislative enactments that reflect commitment on the part of government towards the strengthening of traditional leadership system include the Traditional Leadership Government Framework Act and the Traditional Court Bill.

The primary objective of the 2003 *Framework Act* was to establish and recognise traditional councils at a local level, in order to align traditional rule and traditional councils more strongly with the principles of democracy and hopefully to remove some of the negative perceptions associated with traditional rule and traditional councils. Under this law, the premier of each province has power to influence the establishment of a traditional council in an area which he/she has recognised as a traditional community. Furthermore, the Act acknowledges a position for traditional leadership, not only within local government, but at the provincial and national levels as well.

Despite the controversies, the reason why *makhadzi*s were left out in these legislations remains a major concern. As noted in the introductory pages, they perform crucial roles in traditional leadership. While the government sought to recognise traditional leadership a snub to *makhadzi*s as part of the traditional leadership begs the questions whether they are of any relevance in a new democratic order. Who then will play the vital role that the *makhadzi*s played in traditional societies? Were they given a snub because they are women? Did even parliament understand the role of *makhadzi*s when enacting the legislation giving effect to traditional leadership in a new legal order? These remain the probing issues that this research seeks to supply perspectives on as it turns a search light on the role and place of *makhadzi*s among the Venda.

1.3 Significance of the study

There is generally a need to those who are interested in the role and value of traditional leadership to understand the significance of the *makhadzi* because according to custom she plays an important part in the institution of traditional leadership. Comparatively few anthropological studies have examined the position of a certain class of women that has a place in traditional leadership in Africa, and South Africa in particular. Each member of the family recognizes her importance and her functions as well as her obligations, which are governed by family interests. *Makhadzi* takes very important decisions in the family and in most communities she is the ritual leader. Sometimes the source of women's influence in traditional life is spiritual. Women, *makhadzi* in particular are often highly regarded in the Venda community as spirit mediums believed to be intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds.

The Venda society is patrilineal, which means that descent is traced through the male line. This also means that the society emphasises male superiority. Even though the society is patrilineal, *makhadzi* features quite prominently in the lives of the Venda people. In the governance structure of these traditional institutions, females have always played an important role. A father's senior sister in particular, plays a role in all areas of traditional leadership ranging from deciding the succession (that is, who would succeed to the chieftaincy) to being a priestess for both private and public rituals. Of importance is the fact that she also puts mechanisms in place to ensure consistency in the conduct of traditional leadership (Van Warmelo and Phophi,

1948:67). For example, she is influential on issues related to decisions regarding family disputes. The head of the family in consultation with makhadzi is responsible for the conduct of its members. She arranges meetings for the adult members of the family in order to discuss the matter with the people when there is a dispute.

In the royal family makhadzi plays an important part in succession matters as well but she does not do that alone. She works with the khotsimunene (traditional leader's paternal uncle). The makhadzi, the khotsimunene and the traditional leader are important in Venda traditional leadership. She commands a privileged position in the kinship system of the Venda and particularly so in the royal houses. The Venda descent system is patrilineal and therefore male-dominated. Makhadzi is thus strategically, a female father. She along with a senior paternal uncle, khotsimunene, and the chief constitute the supreme organ of traditional leadership in Venda. It is in this respect that Venda traditional leadership can be aptly characterised as a triumvirate.

The apparent difficulty that even necessitates this study further is the fact that it is suggested that they are of no relevance in a society governed by the Western democratic models. Sithole (2009:76) mentions in this regard that traditional leadership in South Africa has been extensively debated by academics. What is at the core in the debate is whether traditional leadership is compatible with notions of democracy and human rights. In response to that she mentions that there are two different schools of thoughts relating to traditional leadership, the democratic pragmatists and the organic democrats. The democratic pragmatists' argument is that traditional leadership is a system that allows for inheritance of leadership and this is incompatible with democracy. They maintain that traditional leaders are people who were given power by an illegitimate regime, who have orchestrated political strategies to keep that power and who have been successful in coercing the docile rural masses and government in doing this despite the conceptual anomaly that they are within modern forms of governance. For this reason, those who advance this school of thought and who engage in any thinking on the integration of traditional leadership with state institutions do so with an ambivalent feeling and a sense of compromise. That is why the enactment of legislations has some shortfalls.

According to Jackson et al (2009:56), the other school of thought is the organic democracy which sees traditional leadership as a different and unique system of democracy. The organic democrats do not see traditional leadership as an anomaly, a contradiction or a compromise of democracy. They see traditional leadership as a system of governance that fulfils different needs for people who understand more than one type of democracy. A compromised understanding of this thinking sees traditional leadership as an institution that fulfils a governance gap where conventional democracy has not fully extended itself.

It is important to mention that there are almost seventeen million people in South Africa who are subjects of traditional leaders or live under customary law systems. As in other parts in Africa, South Africa's traditional leaders were co-opted by the colonial powers to govern rural areas. From the early 1950s under the apartheid government, the development of legislative and administrative structures in the Bantustans saw traditional leadership used in increasingly cynical ways and implicated chiefs ever more deeply in apartheid government. The apartheid government's power of patronage was encapsulated in its power to depose and install chiefs and it was an effective tool in implementing apartheid policies in rural areas.

During the colonial and the apartheid era the *makhadzi* were partly stripped of their powers because Western laws that were introduced furthered the interests of the whites. The status of traditional leader was elevated to the extent that he was presented as a supreme leader. This appears to be the issue that might have led to the side-lining of the *makhadzi* and even with the new political order that sought to recognise traditional leaders; the *makhadzi* appears to have received a final blow. The new legislation did not care to mention them, let alone their role.

There is a proposition that traditional leadership is irrepressible and that it is this aspect of traditional leadership that has impelled the South African government to enact legislation outlining the scope and operations of traditional leadership in the country. It is therefore important to look at the ways in which this legislation addresses the institution of traditional leadership. There is in this regard a need for anthropological investigations to understand if indeed these institutions are still relevant after South Africa acquired its democracy.

If one considers the fact that traditional leadership among the Venda consists of three people, namely the *makhadzi, khotsimunene* and the traditional leader him/herself, one would then conclude that the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Act of 2003* recomposes and re-orients the Venda traditional leadership. It focuses mainly on one leader, who is the traditional leader and remains silent on the role played by the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* who are by no mean standards an indispensable element of the traditional leadership. The Act seems to undermine the role of *makhadzi* as it was defined. The constitution of Venda traditional leadership put the triad at par with each other and yet this is not reflected in the Act. If one delves deeper into the threesome, there is a perception that *makhadzi* in certain situations is in fact superior to men.

In her writing Ortner (1975:5) makes reference to the secondary status of women which she maintains is a universal and pan cultural fact. According to Stayt the fact that among the Venda *makhadzi* is regarded as a custodian of culture challenges how she portrays women. In the royal lineage as previously mentioned, the *makhadzi* is charged with a lot of responsibilities and one of her administrative centres in her office is that in the absence of a traditional leader, for example, during the interregnum period the *makhadzi* may become a regent. It is common cause that during that period the *khotsimunene* is the preferred candidate but in exceptional cases she might be the right candidate for the regency. Traditional leadership among the Venda revolves around the *makhadzi* and the traditional leader is but a ceremonial leader. Whoever has the decisive role is the *makhadzi*.

It is therefore imperative to understand the role of *makhadzi* in leadership because in South Africa today, some key political, cultural and social decisions are predominantly made by a large majority of men, with only peripheral participation by women. Ideally, men and women should be involved to protect the interests of all. Male dominance seems to be high, although the level has not yet been established but there is a postulation that in almost all African societies women are subordinate to men. The cause for concern is that the legislation that was enacted with a view by the government to accommodate traditional leadership did not do so.

There is need for research to diffuse the conundrum created by the *Traditional Leadership Act* which refers to the traditional leader (kingship) or the traditional leader being the sole leader in traditional leadership. The main features of kingship as portrayed are that the kings command political power. They are the fathers of the nation, the traditional leaders are the priests, the judges, the rainmakers (in some cases), to mention a few. They are portrayed as being endowed with the ability to ensure the prosperity and well-being of their people. On the face of it traditional leaders are seen as such and I am sure that on that score traditional leaders need to be respected, even venerated, by their followers. But to me what needs to be challenged is the fact that as true as it may appear to be there is always a subtext which also needs to be examined. Among the Venda people, the above traits accorded to the traditional leader are also in essence accorded to the *makhadzi*. The success of the traditional leader lies with the *makhadzi* because she is the ruler while the traditional leader is the face of the institution. The Act fails to indicate the important function or the scope which the *makhadzi* plays in order to make the institution a success.

If examined, traditional leaders, the *makhadzi* included, their pre-colonial functions have been eroded beyond recognition. The encounter of chiefs with missionaries, merchant capital and colonialism significantly and ominously undermined traditional leadership. Traditional leadership is an important relic of the pre-colonial and colonial orders that poses a special challenge to post-colonial state makers. Overtime the institution of traditional leadership underwent many changes in its procedures and rules of appointment, in its roles and functions and in the jurisdiction of powers. Some of these changes resulted from the natural evolution of the institution whilst others resulted from outside interference (especially during the colonial period).

There has been debate on the bill which to some regresses South Africa to the days of apartheid. In his newspaper column "African justice needed" iNkosi Phathekile Holomisa[1] writes that there is a need for South African laws to reflect Africanism. It is true that the transformation of the

[1] 20th May 2013

judiciary is important if it is to reflect the demographics of South Africa. Botha in the Sowetan[2] responded to Holomisa. Firstly, he sought to know if the traditional court bill was constitutional. Secondly, is the bill not taking us back to where we were during apartheid? Thirdly, is it correct for the ruling party not to conduct a proper public process hearing process beyond speaking to the traditional leaders and lastly is this bill not undemocratic and does it not go against everything that the African National Congress has represented for the last hundred years?

He mentions what he thinks is fundamentally wrong about the bill. He says that the bill creates a second class justice system for more than seventeen million South Africans. It also gives more power to chiefs that are recognised by state law and nothing to all other legitimate traditional leaders. It also allows and permits these chiefs to decide what "custom" means. It confirms apartheid bantustans boundaries. The way the bill is crafted it applies to everyone and no one can opt out even when one has a reason to do so nor does it allow for legal representation. This bill prevents women from representing themselves and this contravenes the constitution. Clause 4 of the 2008 Bill provides for the Minister of Justice to appoint traditional leaders who are recognised in terms of the Framework Act, as the presiding officers of Traditional Courts. The Minister may also, at the written request of a king, queen or senior traditional leader (as defined in the Framework Act), appoint a headman or headwoman or a member of the royal family as an alternative presiding officer, in the absence of the king, queen or senior traditional leader. In effect, this limits the pool of people who may become presiding officers to traditional leaders and those of royal blood and excludes the *makhadzi*.

The Traditional Court Bill provides that the traditional leader is the ruler single-handedly; this may corrupt him/her and when it comes to the appointment of presiding officers the traditional leader may do that alone. It also removes checks and balances on power, creating an environment for corruption and control. This might lead him/her to become an aggressive and/or an authoritarian leader who takes decisions alone without consulting other members of the traditional institution because s/he is empowered by the Act to do so. The bill excludes women and young men in all decision-making processes. All powers and responsibilities vest in the

[2] 30th May 2013

presiding officer alone. There is no mention of *makhadzi* who plays an important role in the *khoro* (traditional court).

With the advent of democracy and the enactment of different legislation the *makhadzi'*s power declined. Most of the functions that she performed were stipulated in the Act and how those should be done. For example, the traditional leadership act states how a successor should be chosen after the death of the traditional leader. Positions of traditional leadership are hereditary, passing normally from the father to the oldest son of the senior wife. At the death of the father, it is the duty of his oldest sister *(makhadzi)* to introduce the heir to the family or suggest a new heir if that son proves to be incapable. If the heir is too young to become the head of the family, she fulfils that role as a regent. The *makhadzi* of a royal family is frequently one of the main advisers to her brother's son, who is the traditional leader. She may act as a regent in his absence or after his death.

Surprisingly the Act does not mention that if the heir is deemed not to be fit what the position would be. Customarily there are ways to disinherit a rightful heir; the procedure is outlined in the constitution of traditional leadership and that should have been outlined as well in case a dispute over succession transpires. Custom also dictates the conditions under which a rightful heir be disinherited and that is not even hinted in the Act.

Recent legislation has impacted ominously on *makhadzi'*s prestige and relevance. The situation with regard to traditional leaders has, however, changed remarkably through these enactments. The honouring of traditional leaders or kings, let alone the *makhadzi* has declined. Almost everyone has lost reverence and social status for royalty. Royalty among the Venda denotes the traditional leader, the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene.* Kings and other royal dignitaries are no longer viewed as authoritative figures. This is confirmed by Houston (1996:25-26) who states that it is quite clear from the 1996 Constitution that traditional leaders have been stripped of their powers. Very few subjects are prepared to listen to and obey the headmen or traditional leaders. The title of being referred to as *vhamusanda* (traditional leader), and all that goes with it, has lost most of its value and significance.

*Makhadzi'*s participation in many of the traditional rituals is essential for the well-being and prosperity of the community. For many activities, the traditional leader's younger brother or oldest surviving uncle may appear on her behalf. Access to traditional leaders by those who are not family members is normally difficult, and persons with problems have to work their way through a hierarchy of counsellors before being granted an audience with the traditional leader. The Act does not give the *makhadzi* the authority to carry out these functions. It is silent about a lot of things and activities that are supposed to be done by the *makhadzi.*

The Tshivenda speaking people practise initiation ceremonies such as *musevhetho, domba, vhusha, murundu,* and *tshitambo*. Such initiation ceremonies could not get underway without the approval of the traditional leader and the *makhadzi*. The *makhadzi* has to inform the wives of the traditional leader when girls' initiation has to commence. The *makhadzi* would then inform the traditional leader. Failure to report this matter to the traditional leader would result in punishment from the traditional leader or immediate closure of such activities. Today, there is a change in this regard. More often than not approval to institute an initiation is nowadays predominately in the hands of the local government, traditional leaders are hardly consulted (*City Press*, 2007:8). This shows that the traditional leaders' powers and those of the *makhadzi* are diminishing quickly.

Regarding judgment of village cases, in the event a case has been thrashed out, the traditional leader, who is the judge, sums up with extreme efficiency, and it is unusual for the smallest detail of the proceedings to escape his vigilance (Stayt, 1968:220). The traditional leader does not decide the case alone in some instances, but he does that in consultation with the *makhadzi*. This confirms the fact that traditional leaders together with the *makhadzi* played a vital role regarding judgment of the cases. With the introduction of the traditional courts bill, the *makhadzi* does not feature in the judgment of cases. The presiding officer who is either the traditional leader or the one he appoints has more power than the *makhadzi*. The prestige that she used to have is now undermined by legislative pronouncements.

As mentioned, traditional leaders used to judge cases among their subjects. In the event someone offended another person, the matter would normally be reported to the traditional leader via the *mukoma* (headman). The headmen had powers to settle some of the minor cases without the traditional leader's interference, (Nenguda, 1990:49). The offended and the offender would be summoned to the traditional leader's kraal for a hearing. The traditional leader, together with his royal council (*makhadzi*, khotsimunene), would hear both sides of the case and then come up with a verdict. There used to be order when it comes to the handling of the subject cases. Reporting of cases involved some payments by the reporter, to the traditional leader and these payments benefited the traditional leader. Most traditional leaders no longer benefit either materially or financially out of trying cases. The *makhadzi* on the other hand, even if there was no material or financial gain, the fact that she could adjudicate in some matters gave her prestige and status.

The South African Constitution as well is silent on the role which traditional leaders have to fulfil in the newly created municipalities. The powers and authority of traditional leaders are being diminished by the existence of local municipalities. The paradox between the Local Governments and traditional leaders has a history that is rooted in the apartheid era when tribal leaders were given custodianship of land that was then allocated by them to individual members of a community for various uses such as residential, grazing and arable. This inevitably leads to conflicts and resettlement on both sides. Although the *Constitution of South Africa Act* 1996, together with *Traditional Leadership Governance Framework Act, 2003* (Act 41 of 2003), states that local government and traditional leaders should work together, the relationship is not as cordial as would be expected as there are misunderstandings between these structures. The local municipality seem to have taken over some of the functions of traditional leaders, for example, the allocation of land. *Makhadzi* used to enjoy this privilege because before the land was allocated she was informed and her consent was sought. The aforesaid is a manifestation that the power of traditional leaders as well as that of *makhadzi* has been abridged.

Traditionally, when a traditional leader has died succession to traditional leadership is done secretly by the elders who appoint the successor. The *makhadzi* together with the *khotsimunene*

are the only people who have the right of appointment. The final say on succession, however, rested with the *makhadzi*. This is the time that the *makhadzi* would be highly respected and honoured by the whole royal family for her final decision. The *makhadzi* was and for that matter is still required to be a person of integrity because she needs to be entrusted with secrets. She has to be a person that cannot be bribed. There had to be due sensitivity to succession matters. There should be no influence from any member of the family or a headman as this can destroy the reality of traditional leadership. A traditional leader is allowed to marry as many wives as he can, as long as amongst them there is one who is supposed to give birth to a successor. The woman to bear a successor should be of royal blood from another related traditional leadership.

Within the Vhavenda culture, no public declaration was required about the heir until after the death of the traditional leader. Only then could the royal council, in collaboration with the royal family members take a decision about the successor on the basis of his mother's rank, and any other relevant facts. In the traditional leader's harem, there are usually a few high-ranking women in which case other factors are also considered before making a final choice. Today, because of the new dispensation in South Africa, succession is no more a private issue controlled by royal members. The final approval of a successor is given by the government. If a dispute arises, the dispute is lodged with the court for adjudication. This then becomes a public affair while before the current Traditional Leadership Act, one would not even know that there is a dispute, everything will be resolved privately.

The royal family is compelled to inform the provincial government about its choice of a successor. Before approval, investigations are also conducted to ensure that the successor has been chosen correctly. The government is also responsible for the registration of a new traditional leader at the provincial level. The date of installation is also required to be confirmed and regulated by the National and Provincial legislation. This is an indication that traditional leaders have no powers even to keep their secrecy in as far as succession issues are concerned. Traditional leaders cannot do their own things alone without the interference of the government.

This means that the impact of politics in South Africa is gaining more influence daily; the powers of the *makhadzi* and the traditional leader are being eroded on a daily basis. The impact of modern politics seems incompatible with traditional leadership. Some people value traditional leadership while others do not see value in it. Traditionalists support traditional leadership but there are those who are against the traditional leadership institution.

1.4 Aims and objectives

The main aim of this study is to investigate the role and place of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership among the Venda. The specific objectives of the study are to establish the significance of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership, to investigate the relevance of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership within the new democratic dispensation.

1.5 Research questions

There exist a number of questions that this study endeavours to supply answers to. First is whether the *Makhadzi* were of any relevance in traditional leadership in Venda and if so whether they still are of relevance in the traditional leadership today. Second is whether they are of any relevance a democratic South African society. This is followed by an inquiry as to why they were given a less than favourable treatment in the laws that sought to recognise traditional African leadership. This study also seeks to find out whether and if so, the extent that recent legislation has impacted on *makhadzi's* prestige and relevance.

1.6 Gender as a social construct

A question may pose as to whether the institution of *makhadzi* undermines patriarchy or whether it in fact reinforces it. It is not a proposition of this study that the institution of *makhadzi* subverted the patriarchal orientation of the Venda. This study however establishes that apparent devaluation of the institution of *makhadzi*, including its exclusion from socio-legal life, can be explained by gender discourses. A study of the evolution of the institution of *makhadzi* reveals that if gender is to be viewed as a social construct then it has, through the influence of colonialism, religion and politics, re-oriented and re-defined the institution of *makhadzi as* well as its place and relevance in South Africa today. This is not however to suggest that women

occupied a status equal to men in Venda. Being a patrilineal society, women actually received a less fortunate treatment in many spheres of life. The *makhadzi* however occupied a seemingly ordinate place among the Venda but, as shall be shown, this position has since changed. The question whether this change of position has been influenced by the gender dynamics at the instance of religion, politics and colonisation is one that this study shall revisit.

In seeking to explain the importance of *makhadzi* in traditional Venda society, this study will attempt to give perspectives on some of these issues using feminist theories. The point of departure is that beside the shortcomings of the *Traditional Leadership Act* that has led to the erosion of traditional leadership among the Venda, there is a need to explain gender discourses in Africa because this might also have contributed to gender stereotyping and why *makhadzi* as a female was not considered when this legislation was enacted. Gender in Western discourse is conceived as first and foremost a dichotomous biological category that is used as the basis for the construction of social hierarchies. The body is used as a key to situate persons in the Western social system in that the possession or absence of certain body parts inscribes different social privileges and disadvantages. The male gender is considered as the privileged gender.

Some scholars argue that gender is essentially a social construct and that gender constructs are not in themselves biological, they are culturally derived, and their maintenance is a function of cultural systems. Consequently, using western gender theories to interpret other societies without recourse to their own world sense imposes a western model, (Yai 1999:12). According to Edholm, Harris, and Young, cited by Oyewumi (1997: 115) the concepts we employ to think about women are part of a whole ideological apparatus that in the past has discouraged us from analysing women's work and women's spheres as an integrated part of social production. Women/man is a social construct. Among the Yoruba, for instance, there were no women until recently. There were of course *obinrin* which are anafemales. Their anatomy just like that of *okunrin* (anamales) did not privilege them to any social positions. While this proposition is rational, it would occur that these social constructs, unconsciously pervades most societies regardless of their level of sophistication and even before the implementation of the colonial agenda, devaluation and insubordination of women was a reality except that it was not

rationalised in feminist theories then. That is why this study would join issues with Oyewumi, not in the fact that gender is a social construct, but in the fact that women have received a less favourable treatment than men even in the African societies.

Oyewumi (1997: 115) contends that the worldwide exportation of feminist theory, for example, is part of the process of promoting western norms and values. Taken at its face value, the feminist charge to make women visible is carried out by submerging many local and regional categories, which in effect imposes western cultural values. Global gender formation is then an imperialistic process enabled by Western material and intellectual dominance. The Yoruba case illustrates that gender is not a given. Among the Yoruba, the social category "woman" anatomically identified and assumed to be a victim and socially disadvantaged did not exist. One cannot invoke gender in the same manner and to the same degree in different situations across time and space. Gender is both a social and historical construct, which came during the colonial period among the Yoruba society.

According to Ortner (1990:35) in the earlier years of feminist movement a question about matriarchy was asked because there was a need to know if there were societies in which women had power and authority like men has in societies. They unanimously agreed that indeed there was none. A second question followed which said if there were no matriarchies in the past and with this second question there was less consistency in their answer, they did not want to make a strong claim for matriarchy. A further question was about egalitarian (equal classless) societies, if indeed they existed. In this case there was no consensus which then meant that these questions then needed to be investigated.

Writers such as Rosaldo as quoted in Ortner (1990:49) said that men were in some way or the other treated as first class citizen or first sex in almost all societies. Like Oyewumi, they also echoed her sentiments that there is no truly gender egalitarian society in the world. Rosaldo maintained the universalists' position that it was in some sense culturally accepted in every known society that men have greater prestige and/or status. There was a dimension of relative prestige which was claimed by the fact that men are the first sex and a high status was accorded

to them whilst women are second, and have a greater cultural value and authority. It is agreed that there are explicit or tacit cultural assumptions of male superiority which are quite universal but it is argued that these cultural assumptions are undercut in practice by various forms of on-the-ground female power. But there has always been a contestation around that and a denial that men have culturally defined greater prestige than women in all societies. In this case sexes were being ranked and nothing was ever mentioned of male – female relations and behaviour. What was quite distinct was the question of male dominance as opposed to female subordination. Men exert control while women conform to male demands (1990:37).

The other question is female power which assumed that neither male dominance nor male status can refine women's ability to control some spheres of their own or others existence or determined some aspects of their own and others behaviour. Those who were pro universalism were talking about either male dominance or female power. They did not claim that male prestige and status repudiate female power. One would say that there are two reactions which are different, the first one being that there is a cultural assumption that males are superior and that is a universal stance but they are weakened by female power. In another reaction there is a rejection that men have a greater culturally defined prestige than women.

There has to be a balance between cultural assumptions of male prestige and status and the reality of practical life in which women have a great deal of power and influence. Rogers as quoted in Ortner (1990:56) says that even among societies that seem to be unequal, when analysed they may have a certain type of sex equality. She used the example of peasants whose men seem to have less power than they appear to have while women have more, so that there is actually a balance. She calls this balance a "myth of male dominance" in which both sexes sustain the formal notion that men are superior to women and have greater prestige and status.

Rogers later agreed that between men and women there has to be power/prestige balance. Sanday, as quoted in Ortner (1990) as well argues that male supremacy or sexual asymmetry is not as evenly spread as some anthropologists have argued. She then maintains Rogers's concept of male dominance myth in which males are given symbolic prestige and status while women

make important decisions. Ortner and Whitehead were interested in the theories of social values (prestige). They wanted to interpret gender ideologies and different logics that different cultures use in constructing their notion of males and females as well as sexuality and reproduction. They concluded that it was cultural ideas and practices related to prestige that seemed to provide the most powerful interpretations for understanding the social and cultural ordering of gender sexuality and reproduction cross culturally.

No society or culture is totally consistent with issues of equality. Every culture has some axes of male prestige and some of female, some of gender equality and some axes of prestige that have nothing to do with gender at all. An example of patterns of equivalence and equality among Andaman islanders is given where the division of labour is balanced, for example men hunted or fished, women gathered wild fruits. It was quite flexible in that women might go on collective hunts while men do a lot of gathering in some senses. Besides division of labour, one of the most striking features of their social relations is the marked equality that exists between sexes. But concerning community influence or leadership the question of equivalence gets a bit trickier. Men described a system of chiefs and specifically say that females (like minors) cannot be chiefs. Radcliffe-Brown says that the affairs of the community are regulated entirely by the older men and women (1965:90).

It would seem that for the purpose of leadership, it is actually the senior couple rather than the classic male chief who is in control. Some aspects of Andaman Islanders are described as an egalitarian hegemony. Men and women seem to have been expected to participate equally in all forms of social relations. There was no obvious male dominance, the man did not control and have exclusive right and access to leadership. There is no organised government; the affairs of the community are regulated by elderly men and women. Among the Andaman Islanders there was an absence of genderisation of domestic and public domain. According to Ronaldo as quoted in Qrtner (1990) sexual asymmetry was grounded in the way men occupied the public sphere of social life while women tended to operate within the domestic sphere but among the Andaman Islanders men and women participate equally and equivalently and complimentarily to affairs related to the household and to the public domain.

Despite the equality, there are two elements which were mentioned, which are ritual roles which were reserved for men. The role of shaman involving primarily the controlling of the weather and other spirits caused misfortune. The second was the role of ritual performers who release the initiates from their eating taboos at the end of initiation rites. The Shamans though performing functions that are necessary around weather and those that control illness violated the equality. They performed rituals in their exclusive maleness and this is an example of the kind of tendency towards male dominance. During initiation senior men were the only ones who decided when the young initiates of either sex were to be released from the various food taboos that they were observing and it was the senior men who hand fed the first but of these de-tabooed foods to the initiates. It was specifically noted that it was only senior men not women who officiated even in the case of girl's initiation. Radcliffe-Brown (1965:107) calls these two rituals very important because they turn juniors into seniors. Through this ritual, initiates were being reborn into adults and it was senior males who were reclaiming to deliver them into adulthood. This sort of ritual then may take the Andaman Islanders from the egalitarian hegemony box to the male dominant box.

Among the Hawaiian Islanders, male dominance was pervasive in both ideology and in the structuring of many institutions. Ideologically men were sacred and women were profane or unsacred. For example there were taboos against men and women eating together. If they do, the women would have offended the gods with whom men were in communion. There were separate eating houses for men and women. The women were supposed to eat with boys. There were large numbers of male foods which were sacrificial offerings and they were shared with the gods and those foods were not allowed to be eaten by women. Women were not allowed in to the temples where male priests made sacrifices to the gods on whom the welfare of the society as a whole was said to depend.

Next, at the level of economic and political institutions, property was inherited by the oldest son, while daughters and second sons had no rights. They were formally non-inheriting. In political leadership most chiefs were men, all men were metaphoric chiefs vis-à-vis their households. Men performed domestic sacrifices that maintained the well-being of the household. Hawaiian

society prioritised male dominance and it was articulated as a cultural statement of greater prestige. Male dominance pervaded in a wide range of relations and practises public as well as domestic rituals and authority.

Among the Hawaiians there was some level of equality and equivalence, for example, the fact that the first born child regardless of gender, has to succeed to the chief ship at the very highest and most sacred levels of aristocracy. In the royal genealogies there are a significant number of chieftainesses. There was a similar tendency of equivalence with respect to property, inheritance, household, leadership and related matters in a variety of ways. Generally the first born was the favoured heir, land transmission to and through women was always a possibility and women could legitimately act as heads of households.

The Hawaiian system displayed a conjunction between a male dominant hegemony and a series of areas in which there was significant equivalence between men and women in prestige and again in chiefly succession as well as in autonomy. Sahlins as quoted in Ortner (1970:20) emphasised that in some instance among the Hawaiians men were to women as chiefs were to commoners. Early Hawaiian genealogies favoured the male line, and even after the tide had begun to turn men were still preferred as high chiefs, as a condition that favoured patrilineal succession. It is also critical to note that one area of female power was in the public domain that is in positions from which statements and practices of social encompassment, of universalistic concern were enacted. The legitimate presence of chiefs in the Hawaiian political arena, even though not fully sacred in Hawaiian cultural terms, placed women in positions from which they attended to the affairs of society as a whole. Chiefs were allowed to enter the temples and to perform the highest sacrifices for the general welfare, even if they themselves were restricted from gaining the fullest benefits from them.

Ortner (1972:5) writes that women provide us with one of the most challenging problems to be dealt with. One of the true universals in the society is that women have a secondary status, a pan-cultural fact. Within the universal fact specific cultural conceptions and symbolisations of women are unbelievably varied and equally incongruous. The way women are treated and the

power that they wield and their contribution differ immensely from one culture to the other. This is also dependent on the history of that particular cultural tradition. Both the universal fact and cultural variation constitute problems for explanation.

Ortner (1972:6) says that she wishes to see genuine change about the status of women. The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists with every social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates that there is something that is very philosophical, very tenacious, something that cannot be remedied by merely rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system nor even by rearranging the whole economic structure. She gives an example of the Chinese, in the ideology of Taoism, where yin the female principle and yang the male principle are given equal weight. The way these two forces oppose each other, alternate and interact with each other gives rise to all phenomena in the universe. Hence we may then suggest that among the Chinese maleness and femaleness are equally valued in the general ideology of their culture. If one looks at social structure there is quite a strong patrilineal descent principle that is the importance of the sons and the patripotestal structure of the family. A conclusion might be assumed that China is an archetypal patriarchal society. Looking at the power and authority that is wielded by women, the roles that they play and material contribution that is made by Chinese women which if one observes are quite substantial, one is tempted to say that women are also allocated a great deal of [unsaid] status. If we focus on religion, there is a goddess known as *kuan-yin* who is the most worshipped and most depicted deity in Chinese Buddhism. There has been mention of goddess-worshipping culture in pre and early historical societies so one is also tempted to say that China is a sort of matriarchy.

Ortner further says that everywhere in every known culture the woman is considered to some degree as inferior to man, she is referring to cultural evaluations which mean that each culture in its own way and in its own terms makes this evaluation. She mentions that there are three types of data that serves as evidence when we look at any particular society that considers women inferior. For example, there are elements of cultural philosophy and statements that overtly devalue women. Secondly there are symbolic devices such as the attribution of defilement, which may be construed as making a statement of inferior assessment. Lastly social rules that

prohibit women from participating in or having contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside. This type of information accounts for how females are given an inferior status in the society. They might not all be found in every society but at least one may define an inferior status in a particular culture or society.

A search for a genuinely egalitarian let alone matriarchal, culture has proven fruitless. There is an example of one society that has been on the good side of the ledger *vis-a-vis* the status of their women. Among the matrilineal Crow, Lowie points out that "women had highly honorific offices in the Sun Dance, they could become directors of the tobacco ceremony and played a more conspicuous part in it than the men. They sometimes played the hostess in the cooked meat festival. They were not debarred from sweating or doctoring nor from seeking a vision. These women (during menstruation) formerly rode inferior horses and evidently this loomed as a source of contamination, for they were not allowed to approach either a wounded man or men starting on a war party. A taboo also lingers against their coming near sacred object at these times Ortner (1972:24).

To sum it up one could say that among the Crow women have certain rights and powers which place them in high positions. Yet ultimately the line is drawn; menstruation is a threat to warfare. Some valued sacred object of the tribe is tabooed to the direct touch and sight of women. This demonstrates that female subordination is culturally universal. If one can say that female devaluation is a cultural universal then this case may be rested on biological determinism. One may argue that there is something genetically that makes man a dominant sex which is lacking among females. One could then say that women are not only naturally subordinate but quite satisfied with their position since if affords protection and opportunity to maximize maternal pleasures that are the most satisfying experiences of life. But this position has failed to convince very many in academic anthropology. A woman is being identified with, or, if you will, seems to be the symbol of, something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being at a lower order of existence than itself.

It does not mean that biological facts are irrelevant or that men and women are not different but it is to say that these facts and differences only take on significance of superior/ inferior within the framework of culturally defined value systems. An explanation for why this is the case may be found in nature if it does not fit in any category. Ortner says that a woman is being identified with or symbolically associated with nature as opposed to a man who is identified with culture. Women are seen as being closer to nature than men. Culture sees women as active participants in its processes but at the same time being closer to or in direct connection with nature than men. The male lacking natural creature function must assert his creativity externally.

Ortner goes on to say that woman cannot be only attributed to nature because she is also an individual human being who is endowed with consciousness. She thinks and communicates like other men. She participates in dialogue not only with other women but men as well. Levi-Strauss as quoted in Ortner (1972:18) says that, "A women could never become just a sign and nothing more since even in a man's world she is still a person". A woman has full involvement and commitment to the cultural project of transcendence over nature. She also has an understanding of cultures' logic and arguments and reaches cultures' conclusion along with the men. De Beauvoir says that a woman too is in existence, she feels the urge to surpass and join the men in the festivals that celebrate the success or victories of males.

Ortner writes that since women are associated with or more or less confined to the domestic milieu, they are identified with nature pure and simple as opposed to culture. The family represents a lower level as opposed to interfamilial relations which represent high, integrative, universalistic sort of concerns and that fall within a male domain. Cultural reasoning goes to men who then become natural proprietors of religion, ritual, politics and other realms of cultural thoughts and actions. Cultural reasoning one may say is also assigned to woman because there are aspects of her situation within the domestic context which demonstrates her participation in the cultural process. Apart from tending new borns she also acts as a primary socialising agent. She becomes a representative of culture during the socialisation process. Yet this is also true for man, there is a point at which the socialisation of boys is left solely in the hands of men for

example during initiation. Women, according to Ortner are assumed in the most diverse sorts of the world views and in different cultures to be closer than man.

According to Oweyumi (1999:90), gender has been an organizing principle in Western societies. What is very important in the conceptualization of gender is the division between male and female, men and women. They are dualistically ranked in relation to each other. It has been widely written that maleness and femaleness in the Western social practice are not free of hierarchal association and binary oppositions in which the male implies privilege and female subordination. It is a dichotomy based on a perception of human sexual dimorphism. The Yoruba like any other society has been analysed using Western gender concepts. Among the Yoruba Oyewumi wants to illustrate that on the contrary among the Yoruba gender was not an organizing principle before colonisation by the West. The societal category of men and women was non -existent and that means no gender system was in place. There was the primary principle of social organisation which ranked seniors defined by age. Categories of men and women are social constructs which derive from Western assumptions. Gender is a social construct which is historical and culture-bound.

Among the Yoruba categories *obinrin* and *okunrin* as female and male is a mistranslation. This mistake was made by those who translated Yoruba culture. These categories are not in binary opposition or hierarchical. Once one refers to man that generally encompasses man and woman and on the other hand women are the other and they are being defined as antithesis of men who represent the norm. She says that *okunrin* is not a category of privilege; *obinrin* is not ranked in relation to *okunrin.* It does not have a negative connotation of subordination and powerless. Unlike male and female in the west, the categories of *obunrin* and *okunrin* are primarily categories of anatomy suggesting no underlying assumptions about the personalities or psychologies deriving from such. It refers to two anatomies namely procreation and intercourse. They do not refer to gender categories that refer to social privilege and disadvantages.

Among the Yoruba, language is a social institution and it constitutes and institutionalises culture. Seniority is the primary social categorization that is apparent in Yoruba language. Seniority is

the social ranking of persons based on their chronological ages. Age is the pivotal principle of social organization. There are pronouns that are used to refer to older people or younger people regardless of age. In social interactions and conversations it is necessary to establish who is older because that determines which pronoun to use. It is possible to hold a long and detailed conversation about a person without indicating the gender of the person unless the anatomy is central to the issue under discussion as with conversations about sexual intercourse and pregnancy. Within the lineage authority devolved from senior to junior, the oldest member of the lineage being at the helm. If the female member was the oldest person present in the lineage then she was at the apex of authority.

One of the central arguments in this thesis is that while the institution of *makhadzi* remains of great essence in traditional leadership, it has not received recognition and institutionalisation through laws and policies. One may argue that the basis for their having been left out is the fact that they are women and considering that men are the ones that dominate the institutions that make laws and policies, their exclusion was a male agenda. The important question that can be drawn from such a conclusion is whether *makhadzi* occupy a first or secondary status in the traditional leadership? Venda history depicts a *makhadzi as* a significant figure that was accorded respect over and above what ordinary women would attract. This is despite that Venda is a patrilineal society which is male dominated and succession also follows the principle of primogeniture. First born sons are the ones that inherit and succeed their fathers. A patriarchal society necessarily means that the interests of men are highly regarded. This debate is significant and shall be revised in the concluding chapter because through it, the place of the *makhadzi* can be rationalised as well as their exclusion from the legal and political structures of the society today.

1.7 Limitations of the study

This study looks at the role of *makhadzi* specifically, and not the leading women in common households. This is to enable an understanding of the overall functioning of traditional leadership. The rationale for undertaking this study is that in African cultures, particularly those that are patrilineal, there is an assumption that men wield more power than women. This study

looks at the fact that the *makhadzi*, the senior paternal aunt in this case, can nonetheless have an important role to play in which she is considered superior to men, and she is seen as a custodian of the culture. It is apparent from the discussion that has been furnished in the foregoing chapter that politics has an impact in as far as the dishonouring of traditional leaders is concerned. One would expect the government to make sure that traditional leaders are given major functions in matters pertaining to the ruling of their subjects, but it would appear as if the opposite is the case. Traditional leaders are faced with many challenges. They have to deal with some subjects who are no longer loyal and obedient. They also have to work with the local government that, in many people's view, undermines their traditional authority. As both traditional leadership and modern forms of government cannot be wished away, it is thus crucial that these institutions find a way of cooperating for the sake of serving their people effectively. Different pieces of legislation were enacted but that did not in any way assist in synergising traditional leadership and the democratic government.

1.8 Chapter breakdown

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 gives an introduction to traditional leadership. It examines the problem that characterises the debate on the role of *makhadzi* in the new democratic dispensation. It also gives a theoretical orientation on gender discourse. Chapter 2 is the literature review chapter. It reviews literature on the role of *makhadzi* in Venda in particular and how other African countries relate to the concept. Chapter 3 gives the historical background to traditional leadership among the Venda. It also outlines the linguistic aspects of traditional leadership as well as the geographical and cultural background of the Venda people. Chapter 4 is the research methodology chapter. It gives a framework on how data was gathered as well as the sampling procedure used in this study. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the role of *makhadzi* in the present dispensation. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis and gives a summary and recommendations

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with a review of literature by looking at the status of women in traditional societies. It will also look at the status of the senior paternal aunt *(makhadzi)* in Venda society as well as the status of such an aunt in other African societies. It will address issues of whether women were subordinate in African societies while at the same time steadfastly examining the role of makhadzi. It will again explore the role of *makhadzi* in Venda and compare it with other African societies. This chapter therefore seeks to show what is currently understood about the importance of the *makhadzi* in Venda traditional leadership. There are several thematic issues that this study has dealt with including the gender discourses and the object of this chapter is to survey the literature on those issues. Principally though, as indicated this chapter mainly reviews existing literature since it does not claim to be the only one on traditional leadership in general or *makhadzi* in particular. It builds on previously studied works, though it does so from a slightly different perspective on its major theme which is on the relevance of *makhadzis* in a democratic society in the light of their role in society.

2.2 Debate on patriarchy and women in traditional leadership

According to Nwoko (2012:71) conceptually, patriarchy has been defined in various ways by scholars. It has been defined as a social system wherein the family headship and along with it power and possession passed from the man on to his sons. It also referred to a social system in which men wielded all the powers and used them only to their own advantage. Since it was normal for authority to go with function, patriarchy as practiced in Africa naturally assigned authority to the men for the system had allowed them all the powers and their use. Nwoko (2012:78) further said that consequently, since they wielded all the powers and the discretionary right to use them, it was only natural that they were bound to use it selfishly. One of the functions bestowed on the men by the system of patriarchy was the headship of the family. And since the family remained the smallest building block of the society, though not exclusive, the men became the leaders of the society by extension.

In Africa, the concept of patriarchy was entrenched due to its reinforcement by socio-cultural institutions and beliefs. In Nigeria, like in many parts of Africa particularly since the women's domain was believed to be in the kitchen and cradle, their contributions to the male sphere were not seen as deserving of any attention. These socially and culturally ascribed functions of women had put them in a position and situation in which they were materially and psychologically dependent on the men. Consequently, any attempt at improving the conditions of women largely attracted pessimism

According to Chinweizu (1997:18), "the matriarch zone of function and authority includes the physical protection of the homestead and its territory, the male economic sphere, the spiritual sphere and the social sphere." The matriarch zone of function on the other hand restricted the women to the kitchen, cradle, and the female economic sphere, mostly perceived as demeaning for men to venture or intrude into. These socially ascribed functions inhibited women's participation in public life, since they were to be seen and not heard.

Rosaldo as quoted in Ortner (1990:48) also speculated that sexual asymmetry is grounded in the tendency for men to occupy the "public" sphere of social life, while women tend to operate largely within the "domestic" sphere. The reason for this differing preponderance of the sexes in the two spheres has to do with the mother role: mothering activities tend to restrict those who do them mostly women to the domestic realm, whereas men, who are not so restricted, are free to monopolise the realm of public affairs. The Rosaldo framework has been subjected to several critiques and the issues are complex. Rosaldo's own critique, picking up on points raised by Yanagisako is that binary oppositions like domestic/public necessarily carry cultural baggage about the supposedly inherent differences between women and men; rather than opening up the question of the politics of these terms of how those supposedly inherent differences got assigned to the genders in the first place.

Ortner further says that Rosaldo is somewhat hasty in dropping a distinction that, as she says elsewhere in her article, is "as telling as any explanation yet put forth" for universal male dominance, at least as the question was posed at that time. She agrees that the domestic/public

distinction as such may tend to presuppose certain gender differences that should not be presupposed, but it also embodies some very useful distinctions that should not be thrown out. She proposed that all the oppositions so frequently used to characterize the implicit logic behind the male and female split, domestic and public, could be resolved by observing that the sphere of social activity predominantly associated with males encompasses the sphere predominantly associated with females and is, for that reason, culturally accorded higher value. The dichotomy also varies from culture to culture.

Nwoko further says that in medieval Europe for example, though the ideals of equality of the genders, women empowerment and liberation, feminism and other ideals that were geared towards the elimination of the vestiges of patriarchy emerged but despite all the mobilization and even legal support in most countries for women, patriarchy was still dominant and matriarchy vestigial. Even the political elite of those societies still did not accept or appreciate women's participation in public life. A Roman senator Cato, said our ancestors did not allow women to handle any business even domestic, without special authorization. They never failed to keep women dependent on their fathers, brothers or husbands. This outlook made it impossible for women to be acknowledged in areas where they were often seen as intruders, or even encouraged to venture into activities that were believed to be reserved for their male counter-parts.

2.3 Feminist discourses of gender

Amadiume (1987 and 2000), wrote an interesting study of Nigeria looking at matrineality and cases of possible differences being misread as inequality. According to Adesina (2013:8), Amadiume is widely regarded for her pioneering work in African feminist discourse. Her work has made a tremendous contribution to new ways of thinking about sex and gender, the question of power, and women's place in history and culture. She examined the societal dynamics of Nnobi (in Eastern Nigeria) and identified a strong matrifocality and female orientation.

Challenging the received orthodoxies of social anthropology, Amadiume argues that in pre-colonial society, sex and gender did not necessarily coincide. She examines the structures that enable women to achieve power and shows that roles are neither rigidly masculine nor feminine.

The study was conducted in the Igbo town of Nnobi in Eastern Nigeria. The study is divided into three periods: pre-colonial, when the traditional systems operated: colonial, when the British ruled Nigeria: and post-colonial, when Nigeria became an independent nation. First we will take a look at gender and the economy. This was part of the pre-colonial period.

According to Amadiume during the pre-colonial period, the Igbo in general and the Nnobi in particular, traced the gender ideologies behind their sexual division of labour, and those governing the relations of production, to their myth of origin. The gender ideology governing economic production was that of female industriousness. *Idi uchu* perseverance and industriousness, and *iteuba*, the pot of prosperity, were gifts women were said to have inherited from the goddess *Idemili*. Associated with this were strong matrifocality and female orientation in this supposedly patrilineal society. The culture prescribing industriousness is derived from the goddess *Idemili*– the central religious deity (1987:27). Women among the Nnobi are expected to derive prestige and power from their control and successful management of, and effective organisation around, subsistence economy. Politics and religious structure were intertwined among the Nnobi society. Although male authority was clearly vested in the descent system or the patrilineage, female authority was vested at a level beyond the patrilineage of worship of the goddess.

Wealth for men consisted of the possession of houses, many wives and daughters who would bring in-laws, voluntary and involuntary titles, and ancestral compounds with surrounding lands while wealth for women included livestock, fowls, dogs, daughters who would bring in laws and presents and many wealthy and influential sons, voluntary and involuntary titles. Male and female symbols of wealth are apparently the same even if in principle men and women did not own the same things. A very important resource which women did not own was land.

The formalist approach in anthropology to the patrilineal system of inheritance is that sons inherit their father's land and daughters do not, therefore women do not own land. According to Amadiume, Nnobi society was organised on a dual-sex principle, and although the ideologies pertaining to each sex reflected this, gender was flexible and was not determined by biological

sex. This meant that an eldest daughter could take on the position of eldest son and inherit property, land and livestock from the father. She then became the head of the homestead or the *Obi*. In Ifi Amadiume's terminology, she became a male daughter. As we have seen in the case of the Nnobi, the institution of "male daughters" disproves this theory of male inheritance. The *makhadzi,* in the context of Venda could be considered as 'female fathers' granted the status they occupy and the seemingly masculine role that they play in a patrilineal society.

In this position the female daughter was able to marry wives in order to increase her wealth. She might allow her wives to marry outside of the patrilineage in which case she would receive bride wealth for them, or the wives might continue to live with their female husband and all their children from casual lovers would belong to the patrilineage. Daughters within the patrilineage also took on the position of husbands in relation to village wives. They were therefore in a position of authority over wives. Male daughters are given more power because had they been men, they would have had the same power as lineage men. When they are met by lineage wives, the former bow their heads.

Citing the work of a number of scholars, Amadiume (2000) explained matrifocality which is a focus on the mother. Interestingly, she noted the phenomenon of what she termed "female husbands" which means the wives taken by first daughters, barren women, rich widows, wives of rich men, and successful female farmers and traders. In rare cases, women owned land as male daughters when they had been accorded full status in the absence of a son in order to safeguard their father's obi, line of descent and the property associated with it. Procreation intercourse happened between the wife and chosen relatives of the "female husband", with resulting offspring recognised as the child of the "female husband". This, she argued, proved that much of the anthropological works of the 19th and 20th century on gender, kinship and descent were derived from specifically Indo-European histories which were mapped on non-European experiences.

Women in non-western countries were viewed as being subservient to men by their own as well as the western world. This is because an economic change in colonial times that undermined

women's status and reduced their political role and Amadiume (1987:90) maintains that, patriarchal tendencies introduced by colonialism persist today, to the detriment of women. Critical of the chauvinist stereotypes established by colonial anthropology, one should stress the importance of recognizing women's economic activities as an essential basis of their power. But one should also be critical of those western feminists who, when relating to African women, tend to accept the same outmoded projections.

In indigenous Nnobi society, there was a direct link between the accumulation of wives, the acquisition of wealth and the exercise of power and authority. The ultimate indication of wealth and power, the title system was open to men as well as women, as was the means of becoming rich through control over the labour of others by way of polygamy , whether man-to-woman marriage or woman-to-woman marriage. The Nnobi flexible gender system made either possible Amadiume (2000:42)

Among women the *ekwe* title is taken only by them and was associated with the goddess Idemili. From all descriptions of the title, it was believed to be based on involuntary possession, but in reality, it had a strong association with a woman's economic abilities and charismatic attributes, real or potential. Nnobi did not have kings in the sense of a centralised system under a monarch. It had *ekwe* titled women at each wider level of the political organisation who ruled over women, while *ozo* titled men with *eze*, played the role of big men.

According to Amadiume (1987:119), the post 1990, saw the invasion of Igbo by the British. This was followed by the violent suppression of indigenous institutions, western education and Christianity was imposed, the introduction of the new economy and local government administration through the warrant chief system. These systems greatly affected the structural position of women among the Nnobi society. The new concepts introduced through colonial conquest carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions. To the Westerners a woman was always a female regardless of her social achievements, prestige or status. Under colonialism, indigenous systems and institutions condemned their way of life as pagan and anti-Christian. The values were reinterpreted to the

disadvantage of women. The *ekwe* title was banned, which was a socio-political acknowledgement of female success. Indigenous customary laws associated with the institution of woman-to-woman marriage became confused as a result of its reinterpretation according to canon law and Christian immorality (1997:123).

Strong male domination was imposed on Igbo society both indirectly by new economic structures, and directly, by the recruitment of only men into native administration. This was exacerbated by mission schools. As a result of the ban on the *ekwe* title, women lost a position at the centre of local government because such titles are only meant for men. Seats were only meant for women. This reveals an underestimation of the importance of the female element, and as a result the importance of women in the overall seat of power (1987:173). This can be rationalised in the construction of Tuner (1970: using his concept of '*liminality*'. Tuner reflects on this concept by arguing that there can be a departure from the normal social life. While his theory is given from the perspective of ritualistic participation, it can also explain the import of the gender dynamics occasioned by colonisation. We see from the work of Amadiume that the coming of colonialists reoriented the concept of gender and the place that women generally occupy in the Igbo society.

Lebeuf (1963:100) acknowledges the real authority exercised by women in traditional African political systems. If they lack authority today, it is a result of policies initiated from Western prejudices which relegates women to the sphere of domestic tasks and private life and men alone are the ones that deal with the burden of public life.

The Lovedu who inhabit the north eastern Transvaal have a history of being ruled by a female. They have a patrilocal residence and they trace their descent patrilineally. On the other hand, women were given particular importance in many traditional African societies. Mention may be made of the Lovedu of southern Africa, not a populous society, but they have a great reputation among their neighbours because of their queen, *Modjadji*. The Lovedu queens have long been sacred queens with a reputation for rain-making. *Modjadji* was conceived by her neighbours as someone who was immortal, inaccessible and mysterious. Even to her own people she was

inaccessible, but she was not immortal and her particular mysterious power was that of causing clouds to precipitate rain. The ancestors of *modjadji* also made rain but they were kings, not queens (Krige and Krige, 1943:1-2), so the power of these women does not necessarily derive from their gender, but is incidental to it.

As among the Nnobi, sisters have a higher status, a queen reigns at the capital and she is the head of the 'judiciary'. She has supernatural power, she makes rain, she is given "wives" and therefore that makes her the female husband. Like Nnobi male daughters she may not officially marry a man but may have children. The children of her wives belong to her, and through them she has affinal links with her subjects. She has no military backing but she is surrounded by her divinity. Among the Swazi, the king's mother shares power with her son. Among the Lunda, a matrilineal people ruled by a patriarchal aristocracy, the king shares power with his kinswoman who is regarded as the mother of the kingdom. (Amadiume 1997:187)

This thesis does not assume that the paternal aunt plays a role among the Venda people only. The concept of the power and influence of the father's sister exists in many societies in Africa. For example, among the Bunyoro, Ashanti and many other societies women's status has never been undermined in the traditional context. While it is true that the *makhadzi* play significant roles it does not mean that they are the only powerful women in the royal family. Others include female traditional leaders.

In some cultures in pre-colonial and postcolonial Africa, marriages, be it woman to woman or opposite-sex marriages were often conducted out of family duty, most times for purposes of inheritance, and not so much motivated by love, or sexual orientation. Not that there is anything inherently wrong or right about "loveless" marriages, they were the norm in most cultures of the world through most of history and are still popular today. Among the Igbo of south eastern Nigeria, the institution of marriage was greatly regarded. While distinguishing it from lesbianism as practiced elsewhere, women to women marriages in Igbo land were not contracted in response to the sexual emotions or attractions of the couples, but simply an instrument for the preservation and extension of patriarchy and its traditions. The concept of female husband in

Igbo land served more of the interest of patriarchy than contended against it. Amadiume concludes that the two gender nomenclatures; patriarchy and matriarchy should be re-conceptualized to reflect the eclecticism that has been present in gender relations overtime. Woman to woman marriage or the institution of female husbands was more pronounced than might be supposed especially in Africa where it occurred in over thirty societies, including the Igbo of south eastern Nigeria, the Zulu of Southern Africa, the Nuer of East Africa, the Venda amongst others. Indeed, the presence of woman to woman marriage suggests the flexibility and dynamism that gender roles in Africa have attained (1997:187).

Among the Venda, there have been women chiefs and wealthy women who married other women, a concept called 'woman-to–woman' marriage. Ethnographic studies reveal that many African societies have practised woman-to-woman marriage, and some still do (Herskovits 1937; Krige 1974; Obbo 1976; O'Brien 1977; Oboler 1980 and Buijs 2002:59), including the Yoruba and Ibo of West Africa, the Nuer of Sudan, the Lovedu, Zulu and Sotho of South Africa, and the Kikuyu and Nandi of East Africa.

Woman-to-woman marriage, also known as 'woman marriage' or 'marriage involving a female husband' refers to the institution whereby a woman marries another woman and assumes control over her and her offspring (Krige, 1974:11). In most cases, the wife will bear children for the female husband, with the biological father being chosen often by the 'female husband'. All ceremonial aspects of these marriages are observed, bride wealth is paid to the girl's father, and all rules of divorce in the society apply (Herskovits, 1937:335). Woman-to-woman marriage could reflect a superior position for women in African societies.

The theory of patriarchy and female oppression in terms of gender relations has long been discussed in the literature of feminism. Such theories almost ignore woman-to-woman marriage because the concept does not accord with the philosophy of male dominance. Woman-to-woman marriage could be seen as a strategy that women use to further their social and economic positions in society. Female husbands were often diviners who had become wealthy in their

own right and used that wealth to acquire wives as wealthy men would do. Among the Venda, *makhadzi* is a symbol of the female principle of power.

2.4 Female leadership in African societies

In West Africa, there are similar patterns in many societies. Among the Bamileke of Cameroon, the chief's mother who wears masculine attire is equivalent to the chief. She controls the agricultural work of the community which is a female sphere. In the administrative council she takes precedence over the chief. She is under the control of no one, her children belong to her not her husband. Among the Chamba of Benue in northern Nigeria, a female relative of the king rules over the women and has corresponding duties to the king's. She is in charge of the female cult and participates with the king in the ancestral cult and she is buried the same manner as the chief. Her husband is invisible (Amadiume 2000:59).

Among the Ashanti of Ghana, the female joint ruler with the king has powers greater than those of any man. Her court, from which she rules in female matters, is separate from the king's. She is the custodian of the consecrated royal stools and participates in the royal ancestral cult and some other rituals performed by the king. She is involved in the election, presentation and enthronement of a new king, and remains his adviser, guide and critic and in his absence takes his place in the war. The situation in Ghana is similar to the makhadzi among the Venda. She also rules with the chief and she presides over judiciary matters. She also serves as a priestess in the royal lineage. They perform rituals to appease the royal ancestors. She is regarded as the feminine and maternal aspect of the Supreme Being, she is the moon and the king is the sun. Among the Bemba of North Eastern Zimbabwe, the Bushongo of the Kasi and the Loanga, the king shares power with a woman. According to Amadiume (1997:188), in the region of the great Lakes, the tripartite rule obtains whereby the king shares power with two women. The women have important ritual duties, and are custodians of the royal crown of regalia. This is the case among the Kitara, Ankole and the Bateke.

Stayt (1931:194) says that the Venda traditional leadership system is also a tripartite alliance, between the chief, the *makhadzi* (chief's paternal aunt) and the *ndumi* (chief's paternal uncle).

He further mentions that, "although outwardly surrounded with all the trappings of royalty the chief is not absolute monarch. There is power present behind all his actions, whose authority he must respect and whose wishes he is bound to consider". Stayt likens chieftainship to a pie which, although carried by one member of the family, has the thumbs of other people embedded in it. The importance of the thumbs has to be appreciated in order to understand the true position of the chief, the man carrying the royal pie. According to Van Warmelo and Phophi (1949:1030), the chief is not a single all-powerful individual in a rabble of commoners. On the contrary, in Venda society most of the power, wealth and privilege are in the hands of a ruling blood group. The chief is but one of its members, albeit the highest in rank according to birth and/or certain other criteria. Among the Venda, the ruling blood group is embodied in the *makhadzi, khotsimunene, ndumi* and the *khadzi.*

There are other systems that are close to Nnobi male daughters who are mentioned by Lebeuf (1963) for other African societies such as the Babamba and the Mindossi in the Congo region, the Lovale of Zimbabwe and the Mende of Sierra Leone. Among the Venda, such women practise woman-to- woman marriage as it was mentioned earlier. Also among the Venda and Mboshi (Congo), Luba (Katanga), Mende (Sierra Leone) some groups chose to have women as hereditary chiefs, as a mark of their reverence for the spirit of female ancestors.

This study therefore would like to fill a gap by saying that in the African political system one should avoid saying that a particular society is either matriarchal or patriarchal. One should be able to dismiss the anthropological definition of recognising a matriarchal versus a patriarchal society. There is nothing in the history of this continent as was illustrated above where one would find that this or that society is completely ruled by either a female or a male. According to Bloch (1976), the claim for patriarchy remains valid only if what women do in society and culture is denied and they are treated as invisible. Matriarchy and patriarchy are parts ideology, patriarchal ideology being oppressive to women, matriarchal ideology being strongly linked with motherliness and love, indeed at the expense of mothers. Any ideology or culture has its contradictions and people may become mystified.

According to Amadiume (1987:191) says that she sees female deities as a means for recognising and accepting female power. The fact that women did not have power from the start then becomes absurd because women were the bedrock of the society which was matriarchal until a patriarchal culture intruded and began to undermine the female autonomy and power. One then could conclude that alien factors such as colonialism, racism, and imperialism changed the whole spectrum of power and autonomy.

According to Buijs (2007:4), the power of women rulers in southern African kingdoms is mystical in origin and related to their connection to fertility and the ability to make rain. Tshisinavhute of Mianzwi was, around the 18th century, the Mbedzi ruler in eastern Venda and a female ruler in her own right as well as being a rainmaker. She was given her rainmaking powers by her father who, according to oral tradition, had to solicit the assistance of Chief Ligege Tshivhase to drive out and kill her brother, who also had been a powerful rainmaker at Mianzwi. Since then, succession to the headship and powers of rainmaking at Mianzwi has passed from mother to daughter. Buijs (2007:6, quoting Ralushai and Gray, 1977) suggests that the change from male to female succession at Mianzwi may partly be explained by the increasing incidence of male circumcision in the area, a custom that was introduced by Sotho-speakers from the south west. They mention raids on the Mbedzi from uncircumcised men. These raids were detrimental to the rain-making powers of the Mbedzi because circumcised males were not allowed to hold Venda sacred objects.

Matshidze (1988:24) states that Vondwe also has a female chief. This chieftainship emanates from Nyatshitahela, who was the wife of Chief Rammbuda of Dzimauli. She returned to Vondwe after the death of her father, Chief Ramugondo of Vondwe, following a succession dispute. There are different versions of exactly why there is a female ruler in Vondwe. Some of Matshidze's informants mentioned that Vondwe ancestors preferred female rulers while others said that Nyatshitahela engineered the removal of her classificatory brother, who was installed as chief shortly after her father died. In an interview[3] the Vondwe female ruler said that her ancestor was made headwoman at Vondwe by her brother, who was a local chief. She said that

[3]VhamusandavhoSeani Gumani Rammbuda 16th July 2012

Nyatshitahela was married to the chief of a nearby village, and when the chief died she was blamed for his death and the people of the village wanted to kill her. In order to save her, her brother made his sister headwoman in his chiefdom at Vondwe. Nyatshitahela was succeeded by males, but their reigns were ill-fated. The one who succeeded her died after he was struck by lightning, and in 1976 his successor died from unknown causes without leaving an heir. After these two unfortunate events, the community and the family agreed to install a female chief again. There was a presumption that Nyatshitahela, now an ancestor, might be asking for a female chief since the male descendants were dying prematurely. In 1976 Chief Gumani was installed and she is still in her position today. Despite the fact that when she was inaugurated there were some relatives who challenged the chieftaincy on the grounds that a woman should not become a ruler, the tribal council went ahead with the inauguration.

According to Krige and Krige (1943:186-7), the Lovedu queen is at the head of the court. She never sits in the court itself, because it is the courtyard for men, but she is always in the background. In theory all the decisions at the capital should be reported to and confirmed by her. The queen's approval is still always sought in disputes concerning commoners. It is the queen's prerogative to settle disputes between royal relatives, but she also privately settles differences which, for reasons of public policy or of the prestige of the parties, should not be publicly discussed, and sometimes to avoid the hardening of transient differences into permanent hostility even withdraws cases, especially witchcraft cases, from the jurisdiction of the court. The queen has an unshakable reputation for integrity and acts independently if she likes, although often she consults trusted advisors.

Amadiume (1997:29) emphasises this point when she says that "my quarrel with patrilineal/matrilineal dichotomy as a tool of analysis is not only that it obscures women's contribution to and role in the economy. It is also because it is assumed that a society defined as patrilineal means that it is men who have power in that society, while women have power in matrilineal ones". This is a wrong assumption because she says that it is in the supposed patrilineal societies that women have most power. They have power, not only as the central force in the domestic and economic sectors, but in their participation in the structural seats of

power in society. These are societies which still show strong elements of matriarchal heritage, irrespective of their definitions in terms of patriliny or matriliny.

Amadiume (1997:72) says that the nineteenth century debate on kinship became simplistic when seen as a dichotomised choice between matriarchy and patriarchy as the determinant of the social structure. The implication of this position is that the oppressive rule of absolute patriarchy is the highest form of civilisation. Patriarchy in South Africa is the fundamental social and ideological base on which African kinship and wider social and moral systems rests. It seeks to control and rule women and indeed everyone and brings anyone under the rule of a male. It is a basic masculinist ideology which celebrates power of men; however, this patriarchal masculinist ideology takes on different characteristics under different political economies or under different social systems. Women were said to be inferior and this overshadowed women such as *makhadzi* who wields power in the Venda society. It is against this background that we have to assess contemporary transformation. The introduction of colonialism in South Africa imposed a new economy, as well as the imposition of new government systems, changes in marriage practices and gender relations, property inheritance and this led to a new gender ideology of power, demarcating public space and power as male to the exclusion of women. Male dominance was in effect written into law, resulting in new experiences of subordination for women. Unfortunately, oppressive attitudes generated by the new institutions were carried over as policies. At the end African women and South African women in particular found themselves more oppressed than before the pre-colonial period where socio-political systems instituted women's spaces in both the private and the public domain.

This thesis will also look at how the colonial rule legitimised politics in such a way that men manipulated the gender ideology to monopolise power in the public sphere. It should persuade women to negotiate from a position of greater strength than they are now. According to Amadiume (1997:17) mother focus seems to be a more appropriate term than matrineality as it embraces other indispensable roles played by women in traditional Igbo societies, other than their importance in succession and inheritance. Mother-focus/matrifocality covers the importance of women in kinship terminology, domestic arrangements, and their central role in

the economy as producers and providers. As soon as all these aspects of women's contribution in society are taken into consideration, one begins to recognise the limitations of analysis based on the simple dichotomy of matrilineal and patrilineal. She says that among the Igbo, mother focus included matrineality, which anthropologists have classified and presented as patrilineal. She gives an example of the Ohaffia, which is a group of people found among the Igbo. A phenomenon in Ohaffia, which is absent in the most likely prejudiced and therefore inaccurate accounts of supposed patrilineal Igbo areas, is the ritual superiority of the female in the matrilineage. The Ohaffia matrilineage recognised two heads, a male and a female one. The male head took care of secular duties involving the general management of property, its allocation and exploitation, and the settlement of disputes. An adult female could play this role when no male was available. The sacred duties of the female matrilineage head, also called "female king", involved performance of sacrifices to the sacred pots representing the ancestress of the matrilineage. This role could never be performed by a male. The female head was therefore completely in charge of the ancestral cult of the matrilineage. Stressing the importance of these women, Nsugbeas quoted by Amadiume writes "the living female elder is the spiritual focus of all the living members, males and females alike, of an Ohaffia matrilineage.

Yet another Nigerian, Oyewumi (1997:89), focused on the Yoruba society and confronted the gender narrative in Western feminist discourse. She stated that in pre-colonial Yoruba society, body-type was not the basis for social hierarchy, males and females were not ranked according to anatomical distinction. Put simply, gender was not an organising principle in Yoruba society prior to colonisation by the West. Rather, the primary principle of social organisation was seniority defined by relative age. What Amadiume, Oyewumi and others establish is the importance of history, one that goes back to before late colonialism and how Indo-European influences profoundly reshaped many African societies.

The central thesis of Oyewumi (1997:78) is to deny that gender is a fundamental social category in all cultures. Drawing her examples from the Oyo-Yoruba in western Nigeria, Oyewumi argues that gender has not historically been an important organising principle or a first order issue. Contra European discourse, amongst the Yoruba, biology was not used to explain or establish

social relations, subjectivity, positioning and hierarchy. Oyewumi's claim for the absence of gender in Yoruba culture was based on the fact that in place of gender, she claims that seniority is a key organising principle in Oyo-Yoruba.

Amadiume concludes that gender is not only socially constructed but is also historical. Furthermore, she points out that the current deployment of gender as a universal and timeless social category cannot be divorced from either the dominance of Euro/American cultures in the global system or the ideology of biological determinism which underpins Western systems of knowledge. The myth of African maleness has to be exposed.

It was only after European powers colonized so much of the rest of the world that women in Europe itself obtained political and even economic power. Forbes (1994:34) notes that in the Middle East, Asia, parts of Africa and Latin America there is a tendency to exclude women from having any direct political voice. In Islamic countries, for instance, women are often discouraged even from being politically exposed to unrelated males. In some parts of the world, male dominance has reached such a level that women are excluded from public activities (except under rigid rules of segregation or when accompanied by a husband or male relative). In such societies, men usually deny that women are considered mediocre or disrespected. They claim segregation is customary to protect women from unwanted male contact.

Drawing from what Amadiume said about the Igbo, the study hopes to say that African women already had power during the colonial times, they wielded power while their European counterparts had no basic rights at all. They were chattels of their husbands, to be guarded, chastised and done with as men wished. For example, among the Venda, the makhadzi wielded power in her own right. As Amadiume (1987:83), noted they did not have to "grow" male organs or like queen Hatshepsut of Egypt fake a beard in order to be accepted as rulers or in order to feel comfortable as rulers. The system itself requires that they have to have power, status and prestige.

2.5 *Makhadzi* and the role they play: An overview of existing literature

There are privileges that the *makhadzi* enjoys. According to Stayt (1931:145) she receives a percentage of all taxes and the chief is bound to honour her reasonable requests. The *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* are influential in the Venda chieftainship, but the *makhadzi* seems to be more powerful than the *khotsimunene*. According to Stayt (1931:198), the *khadzi* is the *makhadzi* in the making. The *makhadzi*'s social position is that of the chief because she rules with the chief.

The *makhadzi* among the Venda as well seems to be invisible in the new political dispensation because in legislation that has been recently enacted, she is not mentioned. But she enjoyed equal privilege with her male counterparts. According to Stayt (1931:208), sometimes a chief's wife is addressed and referred to as *makhadzi* (father's sister). This adds confusion to the various people called by this term. This of course is readily explained by the fact that the chief's great wife is often called his sister and so called by the people *makhadzi;* possibly it is used as an injunction to the chief's sister to be his great wife. According to Buijs (2007:61), *makhadzi* can be translated as "one who commands or one in control", an adviser. When a man succeeded his father as chief, all the late chief's wives would be classed as *makhadzi* as well as the actual father's sisters. All are referred to as *makhadzi*. By virtue of their position and their age they are considered as advisors. When there is a problem in the *musanda*, the chiefly household, the *makhadzi* would be summoned and they would offer advice.

2.6 Survey of the existing writings on the specific roles of *makhadzi*

2.6.1 Role in dispute resolution

According to Rambau (1999:78), socially and traditionally a *makhadzi* is like a mediator for the whole family where disputes arise between a husband and wife, child and father, bride and father-in-law or mother-in-law. She resolves all the problems in the family; for example, when a wife has a particular problem, she does not directly confront her husband about it, she first has to inform the *makhadzi* and, after hearing the case, the *makhadzi* will listen to both sides and adjudicate on the matter. Disputes between siblings are also settled by the *makhadzi*. When there are serious cases, the father will call upon his senior sister to come and adjudicate the case.

The *makhadzi* is highly honoured and in most instances her decision is final. In a traditional family, or even amongst people who have a nuclear system, the *makhadzi* champions social cohesion among family members.

2.6.2 Acting as regents

A regent is a person selected to act as head of state (ruling or not) because the ruler is a minor, not present or debilitated. In a monarchy, a regent usually governs due to one of these reasons, but may also be elected to rule during the interregnum when the royal line has died out. According to the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Act,* a regent rules where the successor to the position of king, queen, principal traditional leader, headman or headwoman identified in terms of section 13 of the Act is still regarded as a minor in terms of applicable customary law or custom. The royal family concerned must, within a reasonable time identify a regent to assume leadership on behalf of the minor. At the same time the royal house must inform the Premier of the province concerned of the particulars of the person identified as regent and the reasons for the identification of that person.

2.6.3 Ensuring continuity of rule

Van Warmelo and Phophi (1949:1027) say that succession to chieftaincy was in the past frequently accompanied by bloodshed between the factions of rival brothers, although the majority of the people never participated because the status of royal wives and the circumstances of their marriages were not generally known. They maintain that succession was a private matter which was dealt with by the ruling group, which included the *makhadzi*. Succession matters were not discussed openly, and the successor was not mentioned until the right time arrived. If anyone initiated a discussion around succession, that person would be reprimanded.

The theory so described that underlies the Venda method of succession and mental reasoning of the Venda helps one to understand the complexities of chieftainship. The chief does not hold office because of his prowess in warfare or because he is the most suitable person. He fills his deceased father's position as a sacred representative of his family. In

order to ensure that the family's interests and not individual interests are served, when the chief is appointed his senior sister (the *khadzi*) and brother (the *ndumi*) are also appointed to assist him. When he dies, they represent the family as *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene* and they nominate the new chief, the new *khadzi* and the *ndumi*. This implies that the respect that the son had for his father is then transferred to his 'female' father, the senior sister of his father, and his 'little' father, the younger brother of his father who is of course his senior paternal uncle. They may, until they die, command the chief to represent the family (Stayt, 1931:196).

Among the Venda people there seems to be a balance between the female and the male principles. This is reflected in the power and authority of the *khadzi*, *makhadzi* (the chief's senior sister and his senior paternal aunt), the chief himself, and the *khotsimunene* and the *ndumi* (the chief's senior paternal uncle and his senior younger brother). Stayt (1931:208) writes that, when the succession is disputed, it is the duty of the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* to come to a mutual agreement that will satisfy all concerned. Relationships are traced and every possible factor is considered. In the event of a deadlock, it is the *makhadzi* who will have the final say.

From what has been mentioned above, it is evident that the *makhadzi* is very important in traditional leadership. Matters of succession are imperative in the continuity of the chieftainship and the royal lineage. The *makhadzi* needs to be someone who is able to give direction, and is focused and assertive. Against that backdrop this raises a lot of questions such as: since she is so crucial, how is she chosen? If a chief has a number of sisters and brothers, how does the *makhadzi* go about choosing one to be the *khadzi* and the brother to be *ndumi* who, when the chief dies, become respectively the next *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene*?

We can demonstrate the influence of women in traditional leadership roles from examining the role and status of the *makhadzi* in traditional Venda society. Women have power because in each and every activity that had to be carried out, whether it was among the commoners or

royals, the makhadzi had to be consulted. The male members of the family would not arbitrarily take a decision without seeking advice from makhadzi. As will be reflected later in this study, when it comes to traditional leadership the *makhadzi* seems to be more important than the *khotsimunene*. This is also suggested by Stayt (1931:196) when he writes that "all vital matters connected to the state must be referred to her [the *makhadzi*]".

2.6.4 Facilitating communication with ancestors

According to Stayt (1931:241) "the relationship between an individual and his ancestors is by its very nature essentially a family affair and the spirits are only concerned with the members of their own families. But in the event of any national thanksgiving or calamity the chief ancestors, although actually propitiated by the chiefs' lineage alone, are felt to be associated with all the people".

Further than this "in most cases the priestess is the sister in the family or the sister of the chief. The sister of the head of the lineage, who is so important in its social behaviour, plays an equally important part in its religious affairs. She is the priestess of the lineage" (Stayt, 1931:250). There is a belief that those who have departed have an influence on the living and they have to be appeased by means of an activity known as 'ancestor worship'. This type of worship is not a religion in and of itself, but a facet of religious expression which recognizes an element beyond human control. The *makhadzi* is the one that communicates with members of the royal lineage who are deceased. What she does is more of a reverence for the dead. According to Mbiti (1971:51) the basis of 'ancestor worship' seems to stem from two principal ideas: those who have gone before have a continual and beneficent interest in the affairs of the living; and, more widespread, uneasiness, fear of the dead, with practices to pacify them. The latter ideas more often serve as a form of dispensing emotions than of worship.

He further mentions that the dead were seen as something unnatural, uncanny, to be feared and conciliated. The attitudes toward ancestors among the Venda are ones of reverence with the expectation of help and guidance. The dead are believed to become ancestors and there are ceremonials to be performed by the *makhadzi* involving libations and prayers to the departed so

as to give the living the blessing of rain, fertility, and happiness. The *makhadzi* derives her power from her association with the ancestral spirits, whose power she can invoke to enforce her decree. Among the Venda, the main importance of the *makhadzi* as a link between the dead and the living is the continuity of the family and veneration for the wisdom of the elders (ancestors). The rituals, essentially a family affair, are performed privately, but for a *makhadzi* in the royal family the ceremony can be a public affair because she acts as a representative for the whole society to the royal ancestors – for example, during the thanksgiving ceremony (*thevhula*), described further below.

The *makhadzi* is also a leader during the *thevhula* ceremony where every family group gathers once a year on a specific day and pays tribute to the ancestors, with the *makhadzi* in the lead (Van Warmelo 1932:374). Family members also bring their complaints about any misfortune that befell them during the past year. Van Warmelo further maintains that during *thevhula*, the *makhadzi* prepares unfermented beer to be poured during pacification and she personally fetches water from the river to pour into the ritual wooden plate which is kept for the purpose of contacting the ancestors. If diseases, bad harvests, natural catastrophes, accidents or quarrels disturb the harmony in the village, the cause of such evil has to be identified. Diviners help in this process, and the correct ritual is always effective in cleansing the community.

Equally, in the agricultural cycle, the ancestral spirits have to be invoked before sowing and reaping. Traditionally at the time of first harvest or 'first fruits', before vegetable and field crops can be consumed by the family the *makhadzi* must first do a libation or perform pacification sacrifices. When crops are ready for harvesting, the *makhadzi* picks a sample of each vegetable or fruit, and vegetables and field crops are cooked with herbs. She casts thanksgiving spells and informs the ancestors that what was cultivated is ready. The ceremony is called *'u luma',* the biting of the first fruit (Stayt 1931:164).

2.6.5 Role in initiation

According to Stayt (1931:136) and Van Warmelo and Phophi (1949:60), the *makhadzi* is instrumental during initiation rites. She sees to it that children in the royal household are taught

the correct formulae and how they should behave in adult life. They are even taught about taboos which are found in every aspect of peoples' lives. Adult women, especially the *makhadzi* together with the wives, will pass information to the initiates. According to Stayt (1931: 138), a girl at her first menses is considered to have reached a stage where she has to discard her childish practices and become a responsible member of the community. Before she goes to initiation she is called *musidzana*, but after that she is called *khomba*, which means 'dangerous', implying that sexual relationships may now result in pregnancy. There are some taboos relayed during initiation which are especially meant for girls in the royal family. During the initiation period the *makhadzi* and some women in the royal household have to see to it that the commoners and the royals kept apart because even their formulae are different.

According to Van Warmelo and Phophi (1949:61), Venda girls attend four initiation different schools: *musevhetho, vhusha, domba* and *tshikanda*. *Vhusha* is the first school after a girl has reached puberty. When a girl sees her first menstrual blood she informs her father's junior wife. The junior wife informs the *makhadzi*, who will inform the girl's parents. The *vhusha* taught girls that the essence of Venda womanhood is humility. However, the girls are also educated on sex, sexual behaviour, betrothal and marriage.

One of the most striking features of initiation schools is the learning of *milayo* (wisdom or esoteric knowledge). The main purpose of initiation school is to prepare the average Venda man or woman to have self-respect and respect for other people. It teaches the skills of relating to other people as well as respect for the opposite sex (Van Warmelo, 1932:103).

According to Tshiguvho (2008:97), circumcision among boys has been a critical identifier among the Venda clans and had implications for sacred practices. Those who belong to the royal family must not be circumcised. Those who are circumcised are not supposed to be buried in the sacred sites. Instead, they are buried in public cemeteries or secondary sacred sites which were established to accommodate such deviant behaviours. The *makhadzi* is quite critical in this issue, because she has to know who had gone and who had not gone for circumcision. During the

thanksgiving ceremony of *thevhula*, no-one who has undergone the circumcision is allowed to handle the royal artefacts *(thungu).*

2.6.6 Cohesion of the family

The father's senior sister plays a very crucial role in Venda life, sharing with her elder brother the privileges pertaining to the head of the family (Stayt 1931:174). One of the reasons for the superior position of *makhadzi*, to which the Venda themselves attach great importance, is the fact that she is through marriage the primary factor in bringing into the family the cattle by means of which her brother is able to obtain his wife. The *makhadzi* is thus the one who is responsible for establishing her brother's household. This makes her the person who is best fitted to approve of the heir who will continue the family lineage. A man has to obtain a wife through the proper channels in order for his sister, the *makhadzi,* to have power and authority over his children. If the wife is not acquired through the usual channels, her husband's senior sister may not enjoy privileges that befit a *makhadzi*. For example, if the *makhadzi* makes suggestions as to who should become the heir and also how her brother's property is to be disposed of, her decision might be disregarded simply because she was not responsible for the establishment of that family.

2.6.7 Arrangement of marriages

The *makhadzi* is also instrumental in arranging marriages. There are different methods of finding a wife; for example, a marriage partner may be acquired by organizing either a preferred or an arranged marriage. This is done in close consultation with family members, but the *makhadzi* takes a lead. According to Van Warmelo and Phophi (1949:28) in former times the Venda did not like to intermarry with people to whom they were not related, for fear of getting mixed up with wanderers from afar. The main reason for avoiding non-relatives was the fear of becoming connected to evil persons, wizards, thieves, simpletons, or those suffering from hereditary diseases and members of hostile tribes. Witchcraft is the danger feared most. A woman who is a witch is not wanted in a household, for she might bewitch people there. The daughters of a woman suspected of witchcraft are not married by people who live nearby and

who know her. The custom of marrying one's children to people who were known was a method of keeping witches out of one's house.

Van Warmelo and Phophi (1932:37) say that the chief would always marry a woman from the family of another important chief, so that any son born to her might be indeed of noble descent. Some Venda chiefs even marry the daughters of minor wives of their fathers, that is, their half-sisters. Van Warmelo and Phophi (1949:89)'s interpretation is that such girls are their half-sisters in the genealogical sense only, not in fact, because so few of a chief's offspring are really his own.

Rambau (1999:67) and van Warmelo (1932:65) maintain that, when a young man wants to get married he must first consult his *makhadzi*. Traditionally, the *makhadzi* must approve the girl and her family. The *makhadzi* may refuse permission for the match if she does not like the family. She can also decide to choose a wife for her nephew, after consultation with other members of the family. After marriage, the bride is introduced to the new family and its regulations. If there are any disputes between the husband and the wife, the *makhadzi* resolves them. The matter needs to be solved amicably and if not the *makhadzi* has a final say (Stayt 1931:174). If the *makhadzi* is not available, the husband's mother plays the role of the *makhadzi*. She will be the one who has a final say in the place of the *makhadzi*. This role cannot be relegated to the husband's father because the matter of marriage is in the female domain, reflecting the fact that the Venda culture is based on gender-sensitive principles.

The significance of marriage lies in the fact that it provides a man with the only recognized vehicle capable of carrying him towards a full and independent legal status and responsibility. Marriages among the Venda are either arranged or preferred, meaning that the parties to the marriage are either chosen by others, or that they are culturally acceptable, for example, a marriage between cross – cousins is preferred. When marriages are arranged, the *makhadzi* and other members of the family will have to look for the absence of witchcraft allegations in the family of the girl to be proposed to and/or consider marriage between cross cousins. No matter how beautiful the girl might be, and what other endowments she might boast of, if there is any

suspicion of *vhuloi* (witchcraft) it would be a case of courting the gravest danger to have any dealings with her (Van Warmelo and Phophi 1949:27).

The *makhadzi* becomes important during arranged marriages because she is the one who will indicate which girl is the best to marry and which one is undesirable. Arranged marriages are primarily the concern of the families of the future man and wife. This type of marriage bestows special privileges. This indicates the status of a woman as a main wife and the status of her son is not publicly announced as successor until the husband dies. In an interview with *vho makhadzi* vhoMphephu[4] she said that the legal fiction of not knowing the identity of the heir is maintained as far as possible.

Women of royal blood are trained to realize that the only marriage befitting their rank is with men of national standing chosen by the royal family. Among the Venda, even when a princess falls deeply in love with a commoner she is not allowed to marry him because her marriage has to be an arranged one. 'Preferred' marriages are also encouraged among women and men of royal blood.

Kriel (1971:98, quoting Junod) maintains that the advice of a man who is married will carry weight in the discussions in which he takes part, and he will be esteemed. According to Venda custom it is quite rare for an unmarried male to be a member of the traditional court. The rationale is that an unmarried man does not have the responsibility that a married man has. He is still immature and inexperienced when it comes to family as well as community issues.

According to the same source (Kriel, 1971:207), in traditional African societies marriage is never a union neither of two hearts nor of interests. The wife is never accustomed to exchange endearments with the husband, for it would not be etiquette for her to do so. When people are present, a woman would not even speak to her husband unless first addressed by him, but still husbands do privately consult their wives on important matters. With the modern times and

[4]Makhadzi vhoMphephu is the sister to the late President Patrick Mbulaheni Mphephu, the first Venda president in 1979 when Venda got its independence.

changes in the social order many things have changed; new interests have appeared which are often shared by members of both sexes. These days both boys and girls attend school and church together and they might be attracted to each other. According to Teevan (1989:230) their relationship encompasses finding each other, honesty, coordination, synchronization, dedication, commitment, discipline, accommodation of different viewpoints, caring and a dedicated shared vision of the future in the interest of the people and patriotism.

2.7 Writings on comparative institutions similar to *makhadzi*

The tripartite alliance of the Venda traditional leadership does not happen only among the Venda. There are other African societies with alliances similar to that of the Venda people, for example, the Bunyoro, Tonga and many others. The traditional government of Bunyoro in Uganda consisted of a hereditary ruler, or king (*omukama*), who was advised by his appointed council. The *omukama* occupied the apex of a graded hierarchy of territorial chiefs. Among the most important of the *omukama*'s advisers were his 'official brother' (*okwiri*) and 'official sister' (*kalyota*), who represented his authority within the royal clan, effectively removing the king from the demands of his family. Unlike the Venda *makhadzi*, the *kalyota* was forbidden to marry or bear children, protecting the king against challenges from her offspring. Among the Venda people the Venda *makhadzi* could marry, but she was not supposed to marry just anyone – for example, a commoner. She was supposed to marry someone from the royal family, such as a son of a neighbouring chief. Among the Nyoro the king's mother, too, was a powerful relative, with her own property, court, and advisers[5].

According to Buijs (2006:2, citing Beattie 1958), among the Bunyoro, the *kalyota,* the chief's senior sister, was also a kind of a chief. This is also true for the *makhadzi* among the Venda. Stayt (1931:196) emphasised that the *makhadzi*'s position allows her to take important decisions which might be taken by the chief. In other instances, if she disagrees with the chief she may overrule his decision. The chief rules together with the *makhadzi*. The *kalyota* among the

[5] http://www.mongabay.com/history/uganda/uganda-banyoro.html

Bunyoro held and administered estates from which she derived revenue and services like other chiefs. When there was a dispute, the *kalyota* would settle it. She would decide cases of inheritance and matters of precedence among the Bito women, Bito being the name of the royal clan. She was not regarded as a queen; she could best be regarded as a kind of female counterpart of the king. She was also considered as a head of the Bito women and the chief lady in the land.

Buijs (2006:2, citing Beattie 1958) further writes that, due to the modern system there seems to be little place for the *kalyota* in the Ugandan modern system but she still holds an official rank and she is paid a small salary. Buijs (2007:15) indicates that the position of the *kalyota* in colonial Uganda seems to have been viewed with disapproval by colonial authorities, if one were to read between the lines of Beattie's comments. These days the *kalyota* is socially overshadowed by the king's true consort, the *Omugo,* whom he married according to Christian rites and who has borne him several children. The *Omugo* is the one who accompanied the king on his visits.

The *makhadzi* officiates during rituals and she is also a principal organiser during the *thevhula* ceremony. Other societies had similar ritual objects to the Venda. According to Nettleton (1984:208-209), the *mbonga* was a sister of the Karanga chief and was in charge of the "sacred" objects of the tribe. She was also a close confidante of the chief. Among the Karanga, neighbours of the Shona, it is often the sister of the chief who acts as medium for the spirits of the chief's ancestors, a role paralleled by the chief's *makhadzi* as a spokeswoman for the group in ancestor worship among the Venda. She is considered a priestess in the lineage. Any person who needs to appease his/her ancestors must inform the lineage through *makhadzi* and she performs the rituals.

Radcliffe-Brown (1965:19) says that the father's sister is also called the female father. In some South African languages there is no special term for father's sister, thus in Xhosa, she is denoted by a prescriptive term *"udadebowawo"* literally father's sister. In Zulu she may be referred to by a similar descriptive term or she may be spoken of simply as *"ubaba"* father, just like the

father's brothers. She is taken very seriously and if something is not going on well the father's sister has to be told.

According to Mndede writing about the Xhosa (2000:1) in any family nothing would be done by the male side without informing *umafungwashe* (first born woman). The first born daughter of a woman married in that family. If it is a polygamous family the eldest daughter born in the family would be highly regarded compared to the others. For whatever needs to be done in the family the other members of the family can only be informed after she has been consulted. No ritual can be done without informing *intombi* (females born within the family). It will be incomplete and will never be successful from a cultural standard**.**

The traditional kingdom of Buganda has the *kabaka* (king) as the political head. Buganda's monarchical system was based on a hierarchical social structure shaped by gender, people's relationship to the *kabaka*. Social classes included chiefs, officials, sub chiefs, retainers, peasants and slaves. Women were generally subordinate to men with the exception of the queen mother (*Namasole*) and the *kabaka's* co-heir usually his eldest sister (*Lubuga*), who both wielded considerable political and economic power in the kingdom (Lebeuf, 1963; Schiller, 1990; Musisi, 1991; Jjuuko, 1993).

Among the Banganda there is also the *Sssenga*. The origin of the special status attached to paternal aunts among the Baganda is not entirely clear. Magoba (not dated) suggests that paternal aunts evolved as tutors to young girls and women in ancient Buganda in response to the gender violence and abuse that took place within families. The male patriarch in the home often ruled his wives and children with an iron hand. Physical chastisement and wife abuse were accepted as part of his cultural duties. In order to offset this, *bajajja* (grandmothers) came up with a plan for survival. Paternal aunts were enlisted to tutor young girls in behavioural tactics that would save them from the wrath of their future husbands. Most of the historical material presented here is therefore largely based on oral histories and popular beliefs.

The father's sister (*Ssenga*) is the most significant moral authority for girls. Grandmothers instruct girls soon after their menstruation, during a period of seclusion, about sexual matters and future domestic responsibilities. Under the ancient system, marriages were not pre-arranged, but the *Ssenga* nevertheless played a pivotal role in the courtship and negotiations surrounding her nieces' marriages. As her primary responsibility was to groom her nieces to become "good" subservient wives or co-wives, a husband who was dissatisfied with his bride's behaviour, particularly her "bedroom etiquette", would blame it on the laxity of her *Ssenga*, even returning the bride to the *Ssenga* for "proper" training. However, this tutelage also included some empowering messages. For instance, a*Ssenga* would encourage her nieces to engage in some home industry or economic ventures (such as weaving or pottery) in order to avoid total dependence on her husband. The *Ssenga*also made it clear that a wife did not have to tolerate an abusive spouse; that she had the right to *kunoba* (to go back home). Needless to say, sexuality featured prominently in *Ssenga*'s tutorials, which would focus on erotic skills, sexual paraphernalia and aphrodisiacs in the form of herbal perfumes, sensual oils, sexual beads (*obutiti*), and so on.

Buijs (2007:17) writes that Huffman (1996:64) has also speculated that there was a special sister of a Zimbabwean ruler who had similar duties to the Venda *makhadzi*, was called *vamoyo* in Rozwi praise poetry (Huffman 1996:64, citing Hodza and Fortune 1979:15-17). Shona traditions recall the sister of the founding father as the 'great ancestress', the senior female representative of the ruling clan. Each new chief's reign was supposed to begin with the ritual union of the chief and his sister. However Huffman says that there is no documentary evidence to prove that there was any marriage between the chief and his sister. He further cites Bocarro (in Theal 1964 [1898]: volume 3, 358), who refers to the Monomotapa having many wives. "It is believed that most of Monomotapa's wives are his sisters or his relatives and the principal one called *mazazira* is always one of the king's sisters."

Huffman (1996:93) also mentions the concept of the father's sister among the Shona chiefdoms in Zimbabwe. She is known as the *samakhadzi*. The *samakhadzi*'s functions are, amongst others, presiding over rituals, settling disputes and exercising officiating powers over inheritance

proceedings when the chief dies. She also keeps the sacred medicines that allowed her brother to govern. Not only could the chief not govern without the medicines kept by his ritual sister, but his life could be in danger too. The *samakhadzi* therefore has important spiritual and political roles.

It is not only in African societies that the father's sister is honoured. Among the Kareira, an aboriginal group in Melanesia, the position of father's sister, who is also called the "female father", is one of utmost importance. She receives the greatest respect from her nephew who will also not call her by name. A man applies the name *toa* to his father's sister; he is not allowed to talk to her nor have any social dealing whatever with her. If for any reason he is obliged to be near one of his *toa,* he must take care that he does not look at her. He will, if possible, interpose a hut or a bush between himself and her, or else he will sit with his back at her. This rule breaks down when a man gets on in years and has long been married with children of his own. He then ceases to speak of this woman as *toa,* calling her *yunami* instead, and he is permitted to speak to her if he wishes (Reed, 1975:350). Among the Melanesians it is also possible for an unmarried woman who wished to have sexual relations with a man first to approach her father's sister; it is also usual in Melanesia for such a proposal to come from the woman. The chief function of the father's sister was that of 'maker' of fathers or, more comprehensively, the maker of paternal relations between fathers and sons.

Among the Polynesian Tonga, the patriarch is generally the head of the family, and land passes down from a father to his eldest son. Women, however, possess high (even superior) status in other facets of family life. The place and role of the father's sister in western Polynesia has aroused the curiosity of many anthropologists for a considerable time, and is probably one of the most original features of this cultural area. As pointed out by Read (1932:49) at the beginning of this century, the functions of the father's sister appear at least as fundamental as those of the traditional chiefs in the understanding of the Tongan culture. The respect a brother has towards a sister is more powerful than the respect given to one's elder in the family. The elder and his children should be respected, but he does not regulate the family as much as the sister. Most of the studies on this topic emphasise the respect due to the father's sister (*mehekitanga*) and the

taboos which consequently surround her person. The supreme rank of the *mehekitanga* in the kinship system is constantly reaffirmed by all the observers.

A child must respect his father and his father's brother who are in many ways *tapu* to him; but to his *mehekitanga* he must pay even greater respect. It is she who is really supreme in the family. Her person, food, clothes and bed are *tapu*; she often controls the matrimonial destinies of her brother's children (Gifford 1929:17). It is however generally the father's sister's power to curse her brother's children that has been particularly stressed. The *mehekitanga* can provoke the death of the newly born nephews, or curse her pregnant brother's wife and cause her to miscarry. This power of veto that the father's sister can exercise on her brother's offspring has been interpreted in different ways.

According to Buijs (2007:3), Tongan women, especially chiefly women exercised social authority throughout life as sisters. Sisters would have authority over their brothers and brother's children, his household and his descendants. The sister and her children were *fahu* to the brother and his children. *Fahu* is a custom that asserts the spiritual superiority of sisters and sister's lines over brothers and their lines. In Tonga, the brother/sister relationship is central to a large (and not always visible) net of social relationships. Without entering into all the details, we may consider certain very important principles which give form as well as content to this relationship. The brother/sister relationship is, like all hierarchical relationships, marked by respect (*faka 'apa 'apa*), taboos and honorific as well as economic privileges. Respect is conceived as reciprocal and, this *faka 'apa 'apa* is the very expression of the '*ofa* or affection which must exist between a brother and a sister. She further says that the term *fahu* included the claims of sisters and sister's children. The term meant "above the law" or beyond custom.

The *mehekitanga* plays a very important role in a Tongan marriage. The bride's kin must always prepare one or more pieces of bark cloth (*ngatu*) and some mats for the bridegroom's *mehekitanga*. Mats and *ngatu* are rolled together and form a sort of ceremonial chair for the new couple. In funeral rituals, when someone dies, his (or her) father's sister or *mehekitanga* must stay inside the deceased's house with the other women from the father's side. The maternal kin

stays outside, cooking for the whole family and the guests. During the whole ceremony, the *mehekitanga* sits close to the head of the deceased. She has the *pule* (power) inside the house. She has nothing to do, except to be there, quiet or even sleeping. At the end of the funeral, she carries out the taboo release by sprinkling around a liquid or *loloku*. The close kin of the deceased (for example the sisters, daughters, or his wife for a man) must prepare a mat and a*ngatu* rolled together, for the *mehekitanga*. If all the sisters (real or classificatory) of the father's side (or the father's father's) are dead, then a *mehekitanga*'s grand-child or great-grand child is taken for the same office.

In different cultures, both the terminology and the social significance of a paternal aunt in a kinship network vary considerably. In English-speaking countries, the word 'aunt' is typically used for all three categories of relationship: the mother's sister, the father's sister, and an uncle's wife. The lack of distinction between these three kinds of relatives may reflect the structure and organization of modern industrial societies. In Western countries, kinship systems are bilateral. Family members trace descent through both females and males, and both parents have equal social weight in determining kinship. In bilateral kinship, neither side of the family has economic or social control over relatives. As a result, for instance, both nieces and nephews have equal inheritance rights (Radcliffe-Brown 1950). Some families in the United States do not use the uncle-aunt terms at all but refer to these relatives by their first names (Coombs 1980:57).

In contrast to English-speaking countries, many other societies differentiate aunts on the mother's side from those on the father's side. The terms also specify whether the relationship is through blood or marriage and indicate the gender of the person through whom a relationship exists. In Denmark and Sweden, for example, families distinguish between maternal and paternal kinship relations. A *moster* is the mother's sister (and usually also the wife of the mother's brother); a *faster* is a father's sister (and usually also the wife of a father's brother). According to anthropologists, kinship terminology provides guides for proper behaviour and usually has social significance (Schusky 1983). It is not clear, however, why the kinship terms of some Western countries refer to aunts (and uncles) more precisely than others.

In many non-industrialized cultures, distinctions between a paternal aunt and a maternal aunt are important because they reflect authority, ties to the mother's clan and/or father's clan, or close kinship bonds. Whether the kinship system is matrilineal (descent traced through females) or patrilineal (descent traced through males), the father's sister is treated as a sort of female father. Among the Bunyoro, Swazi and Ashanti in Africa, as well as among Australian aboriginal tribes, for example, the father's sister may discipline her brothers' children, commands the same respect and authority as her brother, and arranges her nephew's marriage or may forbid it if the nephew chooses an unacceptable mate (Beattie 1960; Fortes 1969; Hart & Pilling 1960; Kuper 1950).

The role of important women in a number of African societies related to the Venda has relevance here. The *mohumahadi* (principal wife) plays a crucial role among the Pedi. She is a very important person in the Pedi tribe because she bears the future chief, who then becomes the axis of tribal life and the link to the royal ancestors. This woman has a particular and essential role to perform which she holds not in her own right but through her marriage to the chief (Monnig 1967:256)

Women are said to be religious specialists, and this also holds true of the *makhadzi* among the Venda. She also has a religious role in a way which echoes the Lovedu, mentioned elsewhere in this study. Although the majority of Venda professes Christianity, there is a strong belief in ancestral spirits and a supreme deity known as *Raluvhimba* equivalent to the Shona deity *Mwali.* This deity is seen in the forms of eagles soaring aloft during the day; a shooting star is Raluvhimba travelling at night; his voice can be heard in the thunder, and he is at rest when Tswime Mountain is covered by clouds. During thunderstorms Raluvhimba appears as fire that can never be reached, and makes his demands known to the chief in a voice of thunder. Raluvhimba or Mwali control the rain. It is an important function of the chief to bring rain, which is achieved through appropriate sacrifices and rituals to the tribal ancestors as well as to the supreme deity (Van Warmelo, 1949:97).

2.8 An overview of role of makhadzi in legislations and bills

Unlike among the Bunyoro, among the Venda the *makhadzi* has a place in the new political dispensation. If there is a succession dispute, the *makhadzi* is called to arbitrate on the matter in the modern courts. The *makhadzi* may be called to go and provide expert evidence if need arises. But there is a concern about the new *Traditional Courts Bill*, because apparently the *makhadzi* is no longer referred to in the manner described by Stayt. For example, someone who had committed an offence might appeal to the *makhadzi* for a lighter sentence but in terms of the current *Traditional Courts Bill* the *makhadzi* is no longer empowered to mitigate a sentence because section 12 specifies that the orders of traditional courts are final, except where an appeal is lodged or where a matter is taken on review. In this case, if someone were to make an appeal s/he would not appeal to the *makhadzi* or the *khoro* (traditional court) as such. S/he would appeal to the modern courts as spelled out in section 13 of the Bill. Section 13 accordingly sets out the powers of a magistrate's court when it deals with an appeal from a traditional court in respect of certain orders made by a traditional court. A magistrate's court, hearing an appeal as contemplated in section 13, has the power to confirm the order of the traditional court, amend or substitute the order of the traditional court, or dismiss the order of the traditional court as it deems appropriate in the circumstances.

There are other serious criticisms that could be levelled against the Bill, such as the fact that it is deafeningly silent on how to deal with the underlying discriminatory structures of most traditional court systems where women are relegated to an inferior status. In many of these courts they are not even allowed to represent themselves. According to the Twaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, which wrote a commentary on gender equality regarding clause 3(b), which deals with access to justice, this clause provides for the need to promote access to justice for all persons. Although this appears to be a gender neutral clause – in fact one could even say a clause which promotes gender equality – in reality women in the traditional setting are unable to access the courts, especially the chief's courts. This is because, traditionally, women who are in mourning are considered unclean and are forbidden access to the royal family. Should a dispute arise concerning such a woman, there is a concern that, as is the practice in certain areas, she would be unable to represent herself. Where a third party acts on her behalf, he/she may fail

properly to present her case. It is true that the new Bill provides for access of justice, but it does not look at taboos that might be obstacles that prevent women access to the royal court.

The Bill unequivocally concentrates power on traditional leaders by providing that traditional courts will be presided over by "senior traditional leaders" who, coincidentally, happen to be the existing chiefs. This means that legislative, executive and judicial powers will be concentrated in the hands of a single individual. There is little by way of checks and balances in the Bill with regard to limiting the exercise of the vast powers. In this case the traditional leader will have absolute authority. This then weakens the position of the *makhadzi* among the Venda. The *makhadzi's* role will diminish because the chief will have decisive powers alone. It will be at the discretion of the chief to include the *makhadzi* or not in decision making when it comes to matters of justice. If he feels he does not want her to be party to the decision he may exclude her. It gives the chief a choice which did not previously exist, when it was a given that the *makhadzi* had to be included because in essence she was supposed to rule with the chief.

The Bill is also silent about who should make up the traditional courts. Section 17 of the Bill states that "the Minister may, within the resources available at the magistrate's court in which jurisdiction the traditional court sits, assign one or more officers to assist a traditional court in performing its functions under this Act". This section has changed the present position altogether, because members of the traditional court are members of the community, the *khotsimunene* and the *ndumi* included since they may give judgments in the courts. This section therefore suggests that someone from the magistrate's court may be sent to assist in the performance of traditional court duties. More often than not, the person sent might be knowledgeable about the procedures of the modern courts and but not about the procedures of the traditional courts. He might also not be from the same community, and this may have an effect on the judgment that s/he might give. The members of the community may also not trust the traditional court system because it has been influenced by the modern court system, and individuals are not acquainted with the changes.

Despite the negativities that the Bill presents, there are also positive aspects. For example, it spells out the sanctions and orders that may be given by traditional courts. In past cases the judgments that were meted out were not the same in the traditional courts as in modern courts. The Bill is quite explicit, specifying that, in the case of a criminal dispute, a traditional court may not impose the following sanctions: a punishment which is inhumane, cruel or degrading, or which involves any form of detention, including imprisonment, banishment from the traditional community, and a fine in excess of the amount determined by the Minister from time to time by notice in the gazette and corporal punishment. This will bring consistency in the traditional court system, hitherto lacking in some of the courts, as reported by some of the respondents in this study.

According to Blacking (1974: 19-21), migrant labour is, in fact, only one aspect of the general treatment of labour which existed under the prevailing economic system at the time. When cheap labour was first needed on a large scale to develop South Africa's economy, very few rural Africans were interested in joining the industrial economy. But by the time that the poll tax had been introduced as a device to bring them into the labour market, conditions in the rural areas had begun to deteriorate, so that increasing numbers of peasants were, in fact, anxious to migrate to the urban centres.

Blacking (1974:21) further says that migrant labour was also welcomed as an opportunity for those in rural areas to escape from the influence of tribal chiefs, who became increasingly autocratic as a result of the presence and support of foreign administrators and the introduction of money into an economy in which tribute had formerly been paid in perishable goods, so that no one could amass exceptional wealth. Migrant labour became a means of redressing the minor imbalances and inequalities of the traditional social systems, which had become exaggerated as a result of contact with Europeans. Europeans came to interfere with traditional life in one way or another: they wanted converts, consumers, or labourers, and their interference was inevitably selective and dependent on the interests of certain groups.

According to Blacking (1974:22, citing Houghton), the migratory labour system can be seen both as a symptom and a cause of most of the economic, social and political problems which beset our community even to this day. Similarly, social life was affected by the control or destruction of 'ancestor-worship' and initiation rites –directly by missionaries and administrators, and indirectly by the local use of African labour, and by contact with an economy centred on profit rather than on human relationships. In spite of the effects of migrant labour, large sections of the rural populace still respected chiefs as their traditional leaders. Most people have relatives who are or have been migrant labourers and live or have lived in the cities, but who have not changed their allegiance to the chiefs as well as to the *makhadzi.*

2.9 Conclusion

Generally, there exists cosmic literature on traditional leadership in South Africa and Venda in particular. But in most of those works, the role of the makhadzi is not clearly articulated. The political organisation of the Venda has been written by famous authors amongst others such as Stayt, Ralushai, Buijs, Fokwang and others but little was done relating to the makhadzi and their relevance today. Some of the authors examined both traditional leadership and *makhadzi* from a descriptive perspective. They do not examine the role of makhadzi in a democratic society, particularly in South Africa and does not exposit the contextual historical and cultural perspectives that indeed give a clearer picture of the role of makhadzi. It is this gap in Venda traditional leadership that has necessitated this inquiry.

This work will therefore make a significant contribution to the study of women's position in traditional leadership. It even reviews the gender debates in attempting to rationalise the role and place of the *makhadzi t*oday. Africa has an ancient history of gender equity and needs to use extracts of the "useful past" to deal with problems of the present. There is a need to expose the fallacy of a number of commonly held beliefs regarding gender roles in Africa and South Africa in particular. According to Adesina (2013) one of these fallacies is the perceived subservient role of women on the continent ("chained to the kitchen sink due to domesticity and the absence of economic power") which is the result of patrifocality, that is, a focus on the father.

This study is further necessitated by the fact that whilst the South African government has and is in the process of enacting legislations on traditional leadership with a view of accommodating traditional leadership as a form of governance, these legislations did not however specifically include *makhadzi.* As a result, not much scholarship has been dedicated to such institutions which in any case were not explicitly recognised by parliament. By focusing on this institution, this study will not only fill the gaps left by previous study but will also provoke debates on peculiar aspects of traditional leadership particularly, the place of makhadzi, the institution under study in this contribution.

CHAPTER THREE

GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE VENDA PEOPLE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the geographical, historical and cultural background of the Venda people. Traditional leadership can only be understood against the backdrop of such contexts. The role of the *makhadzi* can thus only be understood if one considers the socio-cultural context of institution as well as their place in traditional leadership. The chapter first discusses the geographical location and linguistic history of the Venda, then the concept of traditional leadership, then its structure among the Venda as well as the specific history of the royal lineages. The penultimate part of this chapter considers the place of women in traditional leadership while the last addresses developments on the Venda political history.

3.2 The geographical location and linguistic history of Venda

The Vhavenda, who today live in the Limpopo Province and other parts of South Africa, traditionally occupied the area, in and around the Soutpansberg Mountains in the north-eastern part of South Africa. The Venda area shares borders with south-eastern Mozambique and south Zimbabwe. On the eastern ridge of Venda, is the northern part of the Kruger National Park. The word '*Venda'* partly refers to the people known as Vhavenda and partly to the territory they inhabit. Their language is Venda or Tshivenda. According to Ralushai (1978:55), Venda culture is composed of a fascinating combination of other cultures as it has integrated a variety of East African, Central African, Nguni and Sotho characteristics. One example of this cultural integration is from the Lemba group who do not consume pork. This prohibition is common on the East African coast, where Islam made its entry. Another example is the practice of male circumcision, which is common among many Sotho, but not among the Nguni people. Oral accounts concerning the early history of the original Vhavenda prior to their entry from into present day Zimbabwe are vague and fragmented, but from the evidence available, it is probable that their original home is located in the Great Lakes region of East Africa (Stayt 1931:250).

The Venda language, Luvenda, emerged as a distinct dialect in the 16th century, before the arrival of Dimbanyika in the Soutpansberg. The Tshivenda language evolved from the earlier language, Lungona (the Ngona language). Today, Tshivenda vocabulary is similar to that of SeSotho, and as noted by Wentzel (1983:7), its grammar also has similarities to the Shona dialects spoken in Zimbabwe. Apart from the valuable written sources in Karanga and Nambya, Venda history shows that the language could have been influenced by the Shona dialects long before the Venda reached their present domicile south of the Limpopo River.

According to oral traditions, the Vhavenda stayed for a long time near today's Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) where the Karanga had arrived very early in the history of the Bantu occupation of the southern part of Africa. Wentzel (1981:9) claims that Venda is closely related to western Shona, both historically and linguistically. He compares the Venda expression *"muthuwathovhela"*, literally translated as "person of *thovhela*" which is an idiomatic expression used to refer to a pregnant woman – that is, a person who should be treated with respect. Therefore *thovhela* in Venda became a symbol of respect – hence the translation of the Karanga phrase *NdauyaThobela* "Be greeted your Highness". In Venda too, *ndau* is used as a form of address, meaning "sir". For example, *ndauyanduna* (the male lion) is used, while in Shona the equivalent is *NdauyaThobela*. It has been discovered that essentially the BaPedi of Hananwa of Khalushi, the Karanga (Shona) or Nyai of VhuKaranga (currently Zimbabwe), and the Venda were originally the same nation, called the Ngona (or Bakoni).

Stayt (in Ralushai, 1977:22) states that, from the inadequate nature of the evidence about the Vhavenda origins, it is doubtful if anyone will ever know how, why and when the Vhavenda and the other southern African peoples found themselves in great numbers in areas which are now historically associated with their settlements.

Figure 1. Map situating Venda within the Southern African Region.

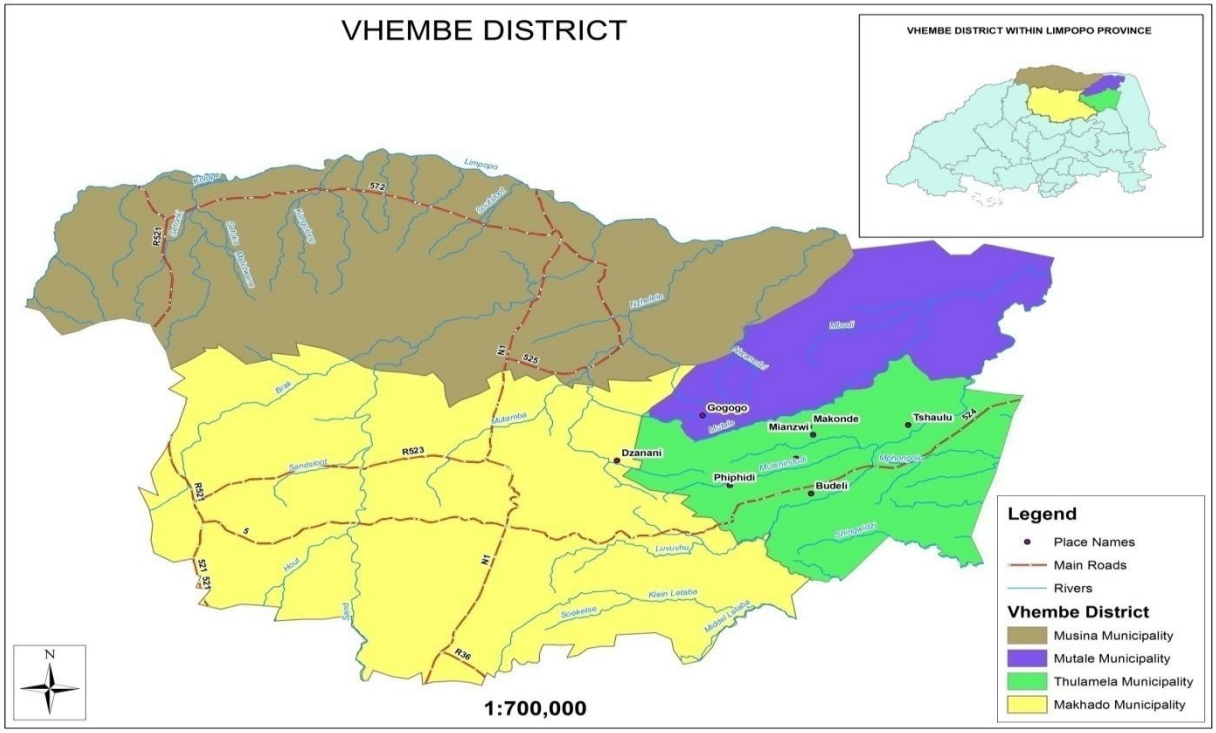

Figure 2. A map showing the location of the study area and villages where data was collected

3.3 The concept of traditional leadership

According to Schapera (in Nthai 2005:2), the institution of traditional leadership has been in existence on the African continent for some millennia. Nthai (2005:2) claims that the African people knew no other form of government, except the institution of traditional leadership, although it is worth acknowledging, there are some areas in Africa that never had traditional leadership. He further states that, contrary to popular belief, the African ruler's power was never absolute in the past. A traditional ruler who attempted to impose dictatorial rule on his people would face a revolt or replacement. Traditional leadership remains an important institution that continues to play a vital role in societies in a number of ways. As Davenport (1987:44) avers kingship was the cement of African society.

Peculiar forms of traditional leadership are indigenous to South Africa and some other African countries as they are not universal. According to Haviland (1996:328-9), in a majority of centralized societies, traditional leadership is characterised by chiefdoms. Chiefdom is a ranked society in which every member has a position in the hierarchy, with one person at the top. In such a society, an individual's status is usually determined by membership in a descent group. Those in the uppermost levels closest to the chiefs are officially superior and receive different treatment from those in the lower ranks. A traditional leader is generally a true authority figure, and this authority serves to unite the community in all affairs and at all times. It is noteworthy that the power of the office is vested in the position, and not necessarily in the person who occupies it. This means that the traditional leader does not have power in his personal capacity, but he derives power from his position as a traditional leader.

Chieftainship has an important role to play in society in which it occurs. It provides leadership to people as well as being a custodian of customs, traditions and cultures. Bekker (2002:129) describes traditional leadership in terms of standardized and persisting activities concerning the exercise of public authority over people to ensure orderly co-existence. With regard to traditional African leadership, at least three status positions can be distinguished: rulers and leaders, councillors, and followers (subjects, citizens). Each of these positions has distinctive powers, duties and functions. In pre-colonial times, the institution of traditional leadership encompassed

more status positions (ruler, ruling family, councillors, ward heads, citizens), as well as procedures, for instance, to identify leaders, to make and enforce decisions at different levels, to acquire membership. The scope of authority included values, norms, practices and rules (for instance with regard to consultation, and participation in decision-making processes).

According to Hammond-Tooke (1974:71-72), in all Southern African groups, the chief governed in consultation with a council of advisors and on most occasions would call a meeting of all his subjects to discuss cases of importance to the chiefdom as a whole. These advisors were an informal body consisting of men who enjoyed the trust of the chief and whom he consulted privately on all significant matters. The group was composed of different sorts of people, and when an issue arose, an expert will be consulted to look into the matter. In addition to this, a chief had a more formal council that met regularly for matters related to the general administration of the chiefdom, for example, the settlement of disputes.

Bekker (2002:131) maintains that traditional government is grounded in the belief that the power to rule was handed down from time immemorial, informed and maintained by the ancestors. Legitimacy to leadership was thus based on sacred traditions, being what the community owes to its ancestors. Tradition therefore legitimised the institution because it is seen as rooted in the practices of the ancestors. In essence, a traditional ruler's powers were directed by the flexible traditional norms based on legal, social and religious ideas about good governance. These norms were adaptable to changing circumstances, without a specific legislative process necessary to bring about change. Kings were not elected by the people but acquired their positions mainly on kinship grounds. Like other institutions and structures of governance, the institution of traditional leadership evolved over time but European colonial expansion into Africa, and particularly in South Africa, significantly altered the social organisation of African societies and transformed them so that they became amenable to European control.

3.4 The structures of traditional leadership among the Venda

Venda was divided into chieftaincies with different status levels, and some are still being disputed as these chieftaincies were created in the past for political expediency in the running of

the 'independent' Venda state. Traditionally, the status hierarchy was Paramount Chief *(Khosikhulu),* then senior chiefs followed by petty chiefs and headmen.

In the context of this discussion, it is critical to examine the different forms and levels of chieftainship among the Venda. Ralushai (1978:37) notes that the Venda people use the elephant as their symbol of power and unity. The Venda are composed of various clans, such as the Senzi, Nyai, Mbedzi, Lemba, Ngona, Laudzi, Kwevho, Nzhelele, Luvhu, Famadi, and other smaller groups. Most chiefs belong to lineages of one clan and some clans are associated with royalty, while others are not. These different groups have, over time, formed a nation sharing a past and speaking the same language – known as TshiVenda.

According to Stayt (1931:106), the Venda chieftainship can be classified into categories or levels according to royal seniority. At the apex is the head - *thovhele,* which is translated as 'king'. This title ranks high in contrast to *mahosimahulwane,* who are senior traditional chiefs. '*Mahosi'* refers both to chiefs and junior chiefs. Another category is *magota*; these are headmen, but some *magota* are also junior chiefs. They are given the praises reserved for chiefs when they are in public places or when they talk *(u kumela).*

A *thovhele* (king) rules over the largest area, and has a number of *mahosi* (senior chiefs) paying tribute to him. A *khosi* (senior chief) rules a section of Venda which is usually made of more than two villages. Each village is ruled by a *vhamusanda* (junior chief). A *vhamusanda* can appoint a *mukoma* to be his/her personal assistant. A *mukoma* does not have to be of royal blood, and is appointed at the *vhamusanda*'s discretion to be the eyes and ears of v*hamusanda*. Below the *vhamusanda,* there is a *gota*. According to Professor Ralushaia *gota* should be from a royal family but in Venda there are some *magotas* who are commoners who ascended to a higher position because they were close to the chief.

There is another category of rulers known as *vhakoma*. Ideally a *vhakoma* should be a person from the royal household, but sometimes there are deviations because certain factors

militate against it. An individual may and can become a *vhakoma* through personal achievement, or he could be a commoner from an important family whose father was a traditional healer, a general, and so on. The chief may allocate land to a traditional healer, and when he dies his son may succeed his father, the traditional healer.

There is also one important male known as *Nyamita,* who is also a commoner. According to Huffman (1996:81), this man lives in close proximity to the chief's wives' quarters for he is in charge of these areas. He supervises and controls all female labour associated with the royal part of the *musanda* (royal court). He is also an important person historically linked to the land on which the kingdom is established. In addition, he is responsible for escorting visitors to the *vhakoma* in the village. Thus he is considered to be chief of staff, and his house is located at the entrance to the *musanda*. Venda society is shaped by several layers of authority. The smallest unit is the household, which is a family, and this is called *muta*. The *muta* might be a nuclear family or an extended family, depending on whether the male head is monogamous or polygamous. The *makhadzi* plays an important role in these households.

Traditions about early Venda practices ascribe great authority to the chief, grounded in spiritual powers. As an extension of this belief, the chief is regarded as a living ancestor and has to be treated with the utmost respect. Despite the exalted position the chief enjoyed, he was not a tyrannical despot and had to operate within the boundaries set by the laws and customs of Venda society. The chief, together with the *makhadzi,* approaches the ancestors on behalf of the people. There is a saying among the Venda: *"khosi ndi khosi nga vhathu",* which means that a chief is a chief because of his people. This principle acts as a check and balance to limit the chief's tyranny, and provide for others to participate in the decision-making process.

Ralushai has stated that among the Venda, a chief who is perceived to be too harsh would probably drive his people away from his territory as they would avoid revolting. For example, people who have not been treated well by a traditional leader may come up with an excuse for moving to another area where there are better natural resources. A cruel chief among the Vhavenda could end up being assassinated. Assassination could only be carried out by royals

because it is not within the mandate of commoners to fight for a change in the kingdom. An example of this was Mphaya, a traditional Venda chief who ruled in the 1950s. His people considered him a ruthless leader, and so to escape from his wrath some people diplomatically moved to other areas.

Among the Venda, the affairs of the chiefdom were managed by the royal family council *(khoro ya mudi)* which consisted of the *makhadzi* (senior paternal aunt) and the *khotsimunene.* The *makhadzi* was the most important individual in the royal household. It was not normal for commoners to be open in opposing a chief and hence, there were people whose duty was to specifically to censor and check those who were always against the chief. The traditional system was deemed acceptable as given, as part of the nature of things.

As described by Stayt (1931:78), in the mind of his people, the chief is the most important and powerful member of his nation. Chiefly authority is described in the idiom of kinship. Thus, a ruler was talked about as the father of his subjects, and his great wife as the mother. Like the patriarchal head of a household, the chief's powers were generalized and diffused. He was expected to judge disputes fairly, to govern wisely, to provide for the needy and to tend to the welfare of his people. Many of these powers derived from a belief that the ruler was a direct descendant of his predecessor. Hence, through a notionally unbroken tie of blood, he provided a channel of communication with the ancestors of his people. Because of this special relationship, he was imbued with the spiritual powers necessary to maintain the natural order. In particular, he was able to ensure good rains and fertile crops, and, for this purpose, he presided over the nation's principal rituals. The ruler also had a range of powers and privileges of a more secular nature. He could order his subjects to work on his lands and provide labour for public works; he could levy taxes and demand tribute from the harvest. But all this he cannot do alone, he does that in consultation with the *makhadzi* of the household.

Bekker (2002:131) points out that, the institution of traditional leadership is embedded in the social system of patriarchy among the Bantu-speaking people of South Africa. The only exception is the matriarchal society of the Modjadji in the Limpopo Province. 'Patriarchy'

implies that the position of traditional leadership is limited to male members of the family; and is usually limited to the eldest son of the principal wife. As such, the position of the successor is determined by factors, such as the status of the principal wife; gender (male); first son born (i.e. the principle of primogeniture in respect of males); and physical ability. At the time of succession, the successor is perceived to represent the most senior living link with the ancestral world of the ruling family.

This principle does not apply universally, because there has been and there are still female chiefs and headwomen on the African continent and South Africa in particular. It is true that we are living in a patriarchal world where males are more dominant, but there are female rulers such as Modjadji the rain queen of the Lovedu area, and Xhosa women chiefs and headwomen as well as Pedi and Venda women chiefs and many more, with some notable historical examples. However, male writers and anthropologists, generally outsiders to African societies, seldom realised the power and authority that women in traditional African societies often have. Women play a very meaningful role and this research is an attempt to address the past misinformation and incongruities regarding the role of women in traditional leadership.

3.5 The specific history of the Vhavenda royal lineages

Politically, and socially Vhavenda provide one of the classical examples of sacred leadership as they uphold a distinct division between nobility (*vhakololo)* and commoners (*vhasiwana)*. Due to the special traditions and customs surrounding royalty, the form of Tshivenda language spoken within the royal households is highly symbolic and differs from the language spoken by commoners. The royal terminology was developed to distinguish commoners from royals and also to keep royal secrets among the nobility so as to deceive commoners who might be eavesdropping when the royals are conversing.

In order to monitor the correct interpretation and understanding, the V*hakoma* (Chief's mother), closely supervised the royal children's acquisition of the language (Khuba 1993:56). This different terminology was also developed to engender pride in royalty and to uphold the royal status. It is noteworthy; however, that the royal language is not a language on its own, for it is

not very different from the commoners' Tshivenda. It is just that some words have been replaced by others, but the grammar and the syntax remain the same. One could state that, it is full of special terminology which does not qualify it as a language, as such.

This terminology is still in use in the royal households but not as often as it was in the past. However, it is still being used at ceremonies such as the *thevhula* (harvest thanksgiving), which is still among the most elaborate and sacred events of all Venda public functions. It is used at rituals, such as *u tambisa vhana* ("to wash girlhood" - an initiation rite for girls who belong to the royal household). It is during these ceremonies that the nobility also learn the royal terminology and learn to use them on a daily basis. Royal children are corrected when playing if they use the common conventional terminology.

Today, it is not unusual to hear the royals conversing in the so called "commoners' language". The royal terminology these days seems to be diluted, mainly because royal children spend most of their time in modern schools, and they do not spend as much time with their mothers as was the case in the days of yore. The mothers were responsible for educating and training them in the use of the terminology in the past. In addition, the mothers also spend their time at work as they are employed as well and are also not home most of the time. Furthermore, in school, royal children converse with classmates in the conventional Venda language that is understood by everyone and there is no room for the use of the royal terminology. These are some of the reasons behind the reduction in the use of royal terminology in the royal households.

The history of Venda chieftainship is complex in that it has been shaped by conflict and fighting for succession amongst the sons of the deceased chiefs. Those who were installed as chiefs did so either with the help of some supporters, or they got into the position through enlisting help from other tribes and foreigners who were in the territory at the time. In these instances, those who were defeated were forced to flee with their followers and had to establish themselves elsewhere. In fact the exploration of Venda traditional leadership would not be complete without referring to the Singo dynasty as the Venda history is heavily steeped in the historical background of the Singo dynasty as aristocrats. In the 17th century a powerful Karanga-Rodzvi

clan called the Singo migrated south from north of the Limpopo River. Oral history has it that the Singo came from the Great Lakes in Central Africa (present day DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania). Written accounts, however, suggest that the Singo were Karangas who broke away from the Changamire/Rozvi Kingdom. They crossed the Limpopo River and settled in Venda. The Singo conquest subjected some Ngona clans to a second wave of Karanga-Rozvi conquest, since some areas had already been conquered by Twanamba, Tavhatsindi, Nyai, and Lembethu. However, the four did not seek to impose their rule over all Ngona, as they only occupied some areas. The Tavhatsindi settled in Thengwe, Tshiheni, and Mabila. The Twanamba settled in Mapungubwe, Musina, Tshivhula, Madzhie, Matshete, Mulambwane, and Lishivha. The Nzhelele/Lembethu and Nyai settled in Mutele and Thulamela.

The majority of the Venda people are believed to be descendants of the Singo group. According to Fokwang (2003:36), some historical accounts suggest that the Venda came from the Congo region but there are those who maintain that they migrated from the great lakes of central Africa and moved downwards to the southern part of Africa. Fokwang further states that the history of the Venda people is characterized by complexities and unending disputes but Stayt (1931) adds that, oral accounts suggest that most of the important migrations that occurred came from the north of the Limpopo River during the 17th and 18th centuries. After settling in Venda, the Senzi and Lemba lost their Karanga affinities through intermarriage with the Ngona, and this resulted in their being assimilated into Ngona (Venda) culture and language. According to these accounts, although somewhat disputed by some, the king of Mapungubwe was Shiriyadenga and Tshidziwelele, one of his sons was killed at his home by Vele Lambeu of the Senzi group.

Ralushai (1977:16), Nemudzivhadi (1977:5); Mudau (1958: 11, 45-6); Motenda (1958: 76, 82-3), argue that the Ngona people are the aborigines of Venda territory and the stone ruins of their homesteads are still found in open flat areas. Ralushai (1977:30) adds that the Dzivhani ruins at Makanga and Mathaga are on small flat hills and Dzivhani is a clan name of the Ngona people in the current Sibasa area. These areas were ideal for farming, as they are very fertile but were not ideal for defence purposes. According to oral sources from non-Ngonas (Ralushai 1977:20), the Ngona are invariably presented as members of the *Daumutupo* (*Dau* totem), who are afraid of

identifying themselves for fear of the Singo and their offshoots. But the Singo and other non-Ngona groups feared the Ngona in turn. From some accounts from people in the Thengwe area, it was gathered that a local businessman's two children were born blind because he ignored warnings and ploughed on Ngona land. Ralushai adds that at Ha-Ralushai, a man built his homestead on Manashi, an Ngona site, and after this, two members of his family went mad. It was concluded that the mad family members were victims of Ngona spirits. In the same vein, Neluvhalani (1992:89) explains that, in the past, because of fear of the spirits of the Ngona, the Senzi and the Lemba generally avoided putting up their homesteads on the Ngona ruins without a Ngona leader performing proper rites over the area in question.

In the west of the occupied area, Singo chiefs were so afraid of offending the Ngona spirits, although they were the dominant rulers, and despite their marital unions with the Ngona, they did not perform their annual religious thanksgiving ceremonies (*thevhula*) before the local Ngona had performed theirs. In fact when the Ngona and Singo first met, marriage was not permitted between them as they were related clans. But according to Ralushai (1977:90), this situation did not last long, because among the Ngona women, there were some exceptionally beautiful women that the Singo men could not resist. However, the children from these unions were barred from succeeding their Singo fathers as chiefs. Meanwhile, the Singo and other ruling dynasties made use of the Ngona priests and medicine men to assist during circumcision, *domba* dance, *tshikona* and other traditional rites.

Though the Singo became the dominant group politically and militarily, they were insignificant in population and hence to keep their tribal purity and their political domination intact, they always expressed their fear of the Ngona as follows: *Mungona mubikwa na ive, ive la vhibva Mungona a sala* ("If a Ngona is cooked together with a stone, the stone will get cooked and melt but the Ngona will remain uncooked or intact as before"). In short, the Ngonas were perceived to be so very powerful that, if allowed to intermarry with the Singo and other non-Ngona groups, the latter would die or have a family misfortune.

According to Moller-Malan (1953:18), the paramount chief of the Ngona people, was a peace-loving man and instead of fighting with the Senzi, about whom he had gathered fearsome stories, he relocated with his followers southwards across the mountains. He built his new village on the slopes of the mountain Sunguzwi where they enjoyed peace and quiet. Nemudzivhadi (1977:3) states that, the history of the Venda was wrongly linked to that of the Senzi and the Lemba and in so doing, left out the fact that the Venda are the Ngona. He further argues that the Ngona are the people who gave names to the fauna and flora in the land. The annotations by Nemudzivhadi at the Dzata visitor centre support the fact that the Ngona were the children of the soil. Stayt (1931:11) notes that an old Ngona, Netshitumbe, could recite twenty six parental ancestors, which reinforces the point that they were indeed predecessors of the Venda.

Supporting the point that the Ngona are probably autochthones is the fact that the Ngona are called *vhongwaniwapo* ("those who have been found there"). That is, they were considered to be indigenous inhabitants of the area. There is no knowledge of any place that is historically associated with them other than the area just south of the Limpopo (Ralushai, 1977:80). This is supported by the names of the ancient ruins which still retain the Ngona names and they stretch far and beyond the modern political borders designed by the European colonists who arrived on the scene later. The Ngona people were peaceful and Stayt (1931:10) describes them as "non-warlike rather disorganized people, who allowed the invaders to settle peacefully among them". The Ngona chief was subdued by the Makwinde group.

After the Makwindes migrated to the mountains, now called Soutpansberg, they dominated the entire area under the leadership of their paramount chief, called Dimbanyika. Another name for Dimbanyika was Mulozwi. He was a very tall dark man who was very fond of hunting and Moller-Malan (1953:20) states that he liked hunting from an early age. As a result, he kept a group of lion dogs as big as calves. His dogs wore white cotton bands with tassels round their necks so that everybody would recognise them as the chief's dogs. Dimbanyika settled in Tshiendeulu where the Tavhatsindi had established their capital. He did not rule for long, as he died around 1720 after he had made his children and some of his kinsmen petty chiefs. Before his death, he had brought some other groups under his dominion. However, Dimbanyika's death

was surrounded by controversy. Moller-Malan (1953:22) states that, some people said that he was killed by his eldest son Phophi, while others claimed that he went hunting and, when he was inside a cave, a rock fell and covered the entrance and he was never seen again.

One day, it is said he heard the dogs barking at rock rabbits and he took his bows and arrows and went after them. One of the dogs crept through a deep crevice and could not come out. It is said that Dimbanyika noticed a small stone resting under a big rock and he thought that if he could remove the stone his dog would be free. He tried to free the dog but a big rock came down crashing him. However, in the crevice, the entrapped dog kept howling. The other dog ran home and when those who were at home did not see the owner they became elated and followed the dog. It led them to the rocks where they heard a faint echo sound of howling from the trapped dog. The people went round and round trying everything within their power to lift the rock but more boulders came tumbling down and they feared for their lives and fled.

According to Moller-Malan (1953:20-21), when Dimbanyika was nowhere to be found after he had gone hunting, those who went to look for him informed the *makhadzi* that "the chief had vanished". *Makhadzi* was the first person to know about it outside the search party. She was considered the most important royal person after the king, without whom they could not make decisions. In the meantime, the *makhadzi* and the *mukoma*, the official who controlled the chief's household, together with the elders ran the affairs of the kingdom and the *makhadzi* knew who would be chosen to sit in the chair of the one who had vanished. That is, the one who would become the new ruler. Since Dimbanyika's time, the father's sister (*makhadzi*) has been central in traditional leadership. Fokwang (2003:37) states that, from oral stories, at the time that Dimbanyika died or vanished, he had four adult sons of whom Phophi was the oldest. Phophi (Thohoyandou) ruled in Nzhelele near Dzata.

The Singo dynasty was important in establishing an aristocracy among the Venda since most of the chiefs belonged to lineages of the same clan. The Singo who had crossed the Limpopo River started controlling the Ngona, who they found in the area of present day Venda. This was during the latter half of the 18th century, which meant later than the migration of Dimbanyika and his

people. Most of the political feuds of the Venda took place between rival ruling families and clans, and the majority of the commoners had to be content with looking on and waited to see which side to back. The Singo dynasty was founded by Dimbanyika; splinters were formed that gave rise to senior chiefdoms such as Mphephu Ramabulana, Tshivhase, Mphaphuli and Rambuda

When Dimbanyika vanished, he was succeeded by his son Phophi, who chose to call himself Thohoyandou. The name Thohoyandou came about earlier, when Dimbanyika conquered the Karanga. He wanted to build a city for himself but there were not enough stones. The Karangas were forced to carry stones from the neighbourhood of the Great Zimbabwe, where they stayed for a while. The city of Dzata was believed to have been built with stones carried for many miles on the heads of weary conquered people. The valley that they were living in was the home of large herds of elephants which gave them trouble. It was the youngest son of the chief, the one who was ever by his side carrying out his commands, who first outwitted the animals by building strong fences round their gardens to keep them out. This son began praising himself "I am the head of the elephant -Thohoyandou since I am cleverer than they are" (Moller-Malan 1953:53).

Phophi decided to relocate to Dzata, which is a place of significance as it is regarded as the ancestral home of the Venda people because that is where they built their city after Dimbanyika conquered the aboriginal people living there. Thohoyandou's reign was described as a golden age because all the chiefdoms were united under his leadership. After the death of Thohoyandou the kingdom disintegrated due to family disputes and intercine warfare. Thohoyandou was strangled and his followers were slain by an army that came to Dzata. Tshisevhe ruled Makonde, Tshivhase in Phiphidi and Bele in Vuvha. He had appointed them as chiefs in satellite villages; under the leadership of Tshivhase during a succession dispute. Thohoyandou was alerted by his councillors and ran away in the middle of the night when they were told that the Tshivhases were going to kill him, and they did not find him in the capital. They looked for him everywhere and ultimately found him. They killed everyone in the chief's company but the chief,was strangled because royal blood of the Ramabulanas (Dimbanyika's clan) should never fall and stain the earth as this was a taboo. The bodies of his followers were thrown into a deep ravine and set on

fire to wipe away all traces of the dark deed. Besides those directly involved, and they were very few, no one ever knew what had happened (Moller-Malan 1953:30).

Thohoyandou's people still thought that he was going to come back and lead them. At the time of Thohoyandou's death, his wife was pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. When the boy was born, he was first called Mpofu, which means "the child that has never seen his father". His mother Nyatshikalanga was helped by the headman to run the affairs of the land but after some time it was felt that it was not safe for the child to remain in the valley as his uncles and the brothers was fighting for power amongst themselves. The headman accompanied the mother and the child over the mountains to the south and later they moved to a shelter at Swunguzwi, the cattle post that Thohoyandou had constructed.

Those who knew that Thohoyandou had been slain kept whispering among themselves that a chief was needed. They prompted that Tshivhase should become the chief. This brought about a division, because the elders still thought that Thohoyandou would return. They did not want to install Tshivhase, a half-brother as chief because he had caused a lot of disquiet in the area. They preferred Mandiwana, whose other name was Mpofu, Thohoyandou's eldest son. Tshivhase was associated with fire because, as he was crossing the eastern mountains to his home, he started a big bush fire to prevent the new chief from following him. The fire lasted for a very long time, killed many people and destroyed many possessions. The name of the place became corrupted to 'Sibasa' from Tshivhase.

Tshivhase's supporters were not happy about the change in leadership, but they pretended that it was fine. Although they agreed to summon both Mandiwana and Mpofu, they planned to kill Mpofu. As they were discussing how to kill Mpofu, an old man overheard them, and he informed the headman that Mpofu should not go to Dzata because those who supported Tshivhase were planning to kill him as they had secretly proclaimed Tshivhase as chief.

After Thohoyandou died, the three brothers who were left behind declared themselves independent of the capital of Dzata. Tshikalanga (Mpofu) was appointed to succeed his father

Thohoyandou. Taking into account their descent from Dimbanyika, Tshivhase and the Ramabulana (Mphephu) became very powerful although they were always fighting each other. Mpofu became a young warrior and killed many people who were against him. He married and his first born son was called RaithuuRamabulana. The Mphephu leadership now traces its descent from Tshikalanga, and established its capital at Nzhelele near Dzata, where Thohoyandou had ruled before becoming the King of Venda.

The Tshivhase dynasty dominated the eastern part of the Venda territory. After Thohoyandou died, Tshivhase declared himself independent. He became a very powerful and wealthy chief and was succeeded by his son, Mukhesi after his death. When Mukhesi died, he was succeeded by his son Ligegisa, who moved his capital from Miluwani to Mukumbani, and this is the present Tshivhase. Other chiefdoms, such as Sinthumule, Kutama and Rammbuda were founded and were recognized by the colonial and apartheid authorities. Thus the Venda kingdom fragmented into a number of independent chiefdoms, and this splintering was aggravated by the arrival of the European invaders and colonialists.

The Singo subjugated all the clans in Venda. All were fused to form the Venda nation and a powerful kingdom was built. Thohoyandou was a great king who expanded the kingdom. Data gathered by the Dutch at Delagoa Bay between 1723 and 1730 point to the fact that, during Thohoyandou's reign, the Venda kingdom stretched from the Limpopo River in the north to the Crocodile River in the south, and included people who were not Venda-speaking. The Karanga of southern Zimbabwe were also subject to Thohoyandou, and the Pedi chiefs recognised him as their sovereign.

Ralushai has stated in an interview that the Singo traditional stories have it that King Thohoyandou disappeared without trace and it was believed that he went back to Vhukaranga (Zimbabwe). After King Thohoyandou's disappearance, one of the sources of conflict in Venda rivalry was over the succession to the throne, which finally led to the division and disintegration of the Venda kingdom. After the death of a king or chief, the Venda are prone to factionalism. This has often resulted in a proliferation of independent chiefdoms and violent confrontations.

The rivalry that followed King Thohoyandou's death led to the division of the Venda kingdom into three main kingdoms and numerous independent chiefdoms. The three kingdoms were Ramabulana with its base at Tshirululuni (not far from present day Makhado town), Tshivhase with its base at Dopeni and later Phiphidi, and Ravhura with its base at Makonde. The Mphaphuli and Rambuda houses later split from the Tshivhase house and founded their own dynasties, with their bases at Tshitomboni and Dzimauli respectively. Historians surmise that the mountainous geography of Venda was not conducive to unity, and that the temptation for the Ravhura and Tshivhase houses to convert autonomy into independence was too strong to resist. The Singo rulers had tried to counterbalance this temptation by favouring certain houses that could not succeed to the supreme title, such as the Ndalamo and Mphaphuli.

Thohoyandou's sons were Mandiwana, Munzhedzi, and Ratombo. Munzhedzi became the king of Ha-Ramabulana and ruled from Tshirululuni. Mandiwana settled in the Nzhelele valley, while Ratombo settled at Ha-Ratombo in the Luvuvhu valley. Both Mandiwana and Ratombo paid tribute to their brother, Munzhedzi. Raluswielo, Thohoyandou's brother, also known as TshivhasaMidiyavhathu, established a dynasty known as Ha-Tshivhasa. It is not clear when the Mphaphuli house split from the Tshivhase house. It is, however, important to note that the Mphaphulis disputed that they were once ruled by the Tshivhases, while the Tshivhases insisted that the Mphaphulis used to herd their cattle. Ravhura established his dynasty in the Mutale valley with its base at Makonde. It is, nevertheless, not clear whether the Vhandalamo of Ha-Tshikundamalema and Vhalembethu of Ha-Mutele and Thulamela were under Ravhura. Today Makonde is part of Ha-Tshivhasa. Ralushai states that, from Dimbanyika's patrilineage, the Mphephus and the Tshivhases became the most powerful due to their intimidation and nocturnal secretive killings and destruction of villages.

According to Venda oral tradition, the Singo kings had a magic drum known as *Ngomalungundu* (Drum of the Dead). This was a sacred drum of *Mwali* (or *Mwari*), the Great God of the Singo. *Ngomalungundu* was thus the spear and shield of the Singo. The Singo's king is known to have worked miracles with this drum which was believed to have magical and killing powers. In fear of *Ngomalungundu*, other groups surrendered to or fled from the Singo. Through conquest, the

Ngona came to revere and fear this great drum. They regarded this drum as the voice of their Great God, Raluvhimba, the lord of all their ancestral spirits, and so the drum was considered the instrument of the royal ancestral spirits. By the late 19th century, the Venda had come to think of Raluvhimba and Mwali as interchangeable names for the same deity, although they had once been separate. The title for an Ngona king was *Thovhele,* while the Singo title for king was *Mambo.* These titles were also used interchangeably, although the surviving one is *Thovhele.* The Ngona were said to have been a disorganised and most unwarlike folk who were easily conquered. Today the Ngona have been absorbed by other groups and have lost their original culture.

It was believed that the Singo king could protect his people from attack by beating this special drum because, according to the legend, the sound of the drum would strike terror in the hearts of the enemy and they would flee. Some of the Venda say that this king disappeared from his home one night with this special drum and was never seen again. It is believed that at Mashovhela, the drums can still be heard in the echoes of the cliffs and the place is considered a sacred site by the Vhavenda. Against this background of the Vhavenda, this discussion now looks at traditional leadership in general.

3.6 Women and leadership

The discussion about traditional leadership is not complete without women who are involved in making the institution a success. Although the general rules of succession are in favour of men, it should be noted that there are exceptions to the rule. In traditional leadership, there have been women who have played major roles and still do today. They govern their societies and they command respect. The feminine principle is based on the understanding of the balance between the cherished individualism and the essential women's social existence. It is not reflective of anything male and does not coexist or exist in tension with anything male, for it is inherently liberated from patriarchal problems as it does not trade on the idea that women are morally or ethically different from or superior to men.

It is important that we take cognisance of the powerful voice women traditionally enjoyed and which still exists today. Among the Venda and other indigenous South African societies, women were considered to be important members of communities and societies hence their roles as *makhadzi* (either as commoners or as royals) among the Venda. In the recent past, women have been taken as minors both economically and legally. They were not permitted to enter into contracts without the assistance of a male guardian or husband. They were also not allowed to litigate but could only appear before the judiciary as witnesses or as the accused (Olivier, Bekker and Olivier 1995:125). In the new political dispensation, however, through the South African Constitution, these restrictions have been removed. The equality clause in the Bill of Rights provides that everyone is equal before the eyes of the law. Now more than before women have powers granted by the Constitution, and they are being conscientized by the government and other organizations about their rights.

Despite the fact that the new democratic dispensation has achieved a lot, there are still challenges that face female traditional leaders. For example, gender inequality with particular reference to female traditional leadership. The patriarchal nature of the South African society in general and Venda society in particular allows for the principle of primogeniture, succession of the first-born, usually male. It applies to almost all Venda people, with the exception of some villages such as Vondwe, Tshaulutsha Ha Bohwana, Phiphidi, Mianzwi, and one or two other areas which are ruled by female traditional leaders. These exceptions are quite rare, but because they have religious implications, the villagers concerned take them very seriously.

Stayt (1931:215) states that, among the Venda, there are women who are minor chiefs in their own right. For example in Phiphidi, VhoNyadenga was accorded a high status among the Venda. She became a chief when her father Tshivhase left Phiphidi to establish a capital at Mukumbani, leaving the daughter in charge. Nyadenga became his successor because she was the only child from his 'first wife.' But because Nyadenga was a woman, she could not succeed her father as the great chief, but at Phiphidi she had the full rights of a man and she was only accountable to the chief himself. Her position, according to Stayt, could be inherited by her daughter. However, this is not the current situation. Nyadenga was not succeeded by her daughter, and there has been

no female chief since Nyadenga died. Nyadenga only had one daughter who was married at the time of her mother's death, and the son succeeded her. The son had acted as her assistant when she was frail and old, and succeeded her when she died. After Nyadenga's son died, he was also succeeded by his son who is the present chief.

There are also women chiefs among the Lovedu, south of Venda. The rain forest in Lovedu is the home of a rain queen, known as the *Modjadji*, a South African legend as she is believed to possess special powers of being able to control the clouds and rainfall. She is also believed to be the divine transformer of the clouds, and so a highly respected and feared queen in Limpopo Province. This legend originated in the sixteenth century and is still held to be true today, as to this day a queen reigns over the Lovedu.

Modjadji means "ruler of the day". The *modjadji* became the most powerful rainmaker in southern Africa, even the Zulus feared and respected her, and gave her the name *mabelemane* ("four breasts"). They were certain that the fertility and richness which she brought to the earth is mirrored in her own body. *Modjadji* reigns from her capital, which is also called *Modjadji*. However, she is rarely seen by tourists, unless special arrangements are made.

Throughout South Africa, the Swazi queen, the king's mother, is famed for her rain medicine (Kuper 1963:2). She is the custodian of the sacred rain medicine, which her son uses. According to West and Morris (1976:56), the king presides over the highest court and the queen is in charge of the second highest court, and the shrine hut in her homestead is a sanctuary for people appealing for protection. This shrine cannot be violated even by the king. The sacred national objects are in her charge, but they are not effective without the king's cooperation. Queens also provide the beer for libation. The Swazi annual ritual of kingship is held in the queen's home. The queen has the power to rebuke the king publicly if he wastes national wealth (Kuper 1963:30).

Kuper (1963:33) maintains that, when the Swazi king dies, the queen is expected to train his successor and hand over power when the new king reaches maturity. Sometimes she acts as a

regent when the son is still very young to be a king. She has to be consulted by the regent in all matters affecting the royal family and the estate. She has her own household, which is the ritual capital of the tribe. The important annual 'first fruits' festival is held there as well as meetings of the tribal council. The king has an army that he controls, she has her own regiment and most often the commander-in-chief of that regiment lives in her village, which is the capital. The regiment is also stationed there to protect her, and always works for her. She exercises separate judicial powers. The king invariably consults her before taking any action in any important matter and follows her advice (Schapera 1956:180).

Among the Swazi, the queen enjoys a special relationship with her son and she is treated with affection and respect by the members of the homestead. According to West and Morris (1976:60), the Swazi queen addresses the ancestors on behalf of the nation. The queen mother also exercises the same sort of restraining power over the king as the headwoman of a compound exercises over a compound headman. The government cannot function unless there is rapport between the two; together they must carry out the rituals of the cult of the royal ancestors in the national religion (Bohannan 1963:276).

It seems that, over a considerable past, African women have played an important role in traditional leadership, and there is evidence for this assertion from Mapungubwe. Mapungubwe, an archaeological site dated from the 11th century of the Common Era, is situated in the central Limpopo–Shashe basin, and was arguably the first southern African capital of a kingdom. According to some oral traditions, Mapungubwe was ruled by king Shiriyandenga, also called Nemapungubwe or Mako'eMakolele. The other name of Mapungubwe is God's Eye (*Ito la Nwali*). This World Heritage site lies on the northernmost border of South Africa, in the Limpopo Valley, some 70 km west of Musina, where the borders of modern Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Botswana meet at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers. The vertical cliffs of the flat-topped sandstone Mapungubwe Hill tower 30 metres above the surrounding landscape, forming a natural fortress with spectacular views into all three countries. This Iron Age site in Limpopo Province reveals part of our little-known southern African prehistory.

According to Buijs (2007:9, quoting Huffman 1996:188), there have been three burials – excavated in 1937 and 1963 – associated with gold objects. The first excavation was of the grave of a woman who was buried in a sitting position facing west. She was wearing almost a hundred gold wire bangles around her ankles and there were over twelve thousand gold beads in her grave. Huffman (1996:192) suggests that the seated position of the body is significant, since it is associated with high status. The evidence of twelve thousand gold beads in the burial of a female suggests that she was a ruler since gold was not found in the other graves that belonged to men. Buijs (2007:16) also mentions that there could have been times when a ritual sister and royal mother had greater standing than their male counterparts.

Buijs further states that re-analysis of the evidence suggests that women of Mapungubwe might have played important roles in the emergence of sacred leadership, which incorporated functions such as rainmaking and political control. From the historical and archaeological evidence, there is little doubt that the status of women and men was a complicated issue in the Mapungubwe civilization. The African Iron Age has generally been thought of as characterized by male dominance, and Mapungubwe has long been interpreted as a male hierarchy of ruling power and authority. Women were believed to fulfil their main roles as wives and mothers, yet the archaeological evidence suggests a much more influential political and possibly economic role for women among rulers and the nobility.

Women of Mapungubwe seem to have been the shapers, shifters and custodians of their society. Some had roles to play in rituals and ceremonies as healers, rainmakers, and royals while they still supported their husbands holding positions of authority and status. It is perhaps appropriate that today, in South Africa's heritage industries, there are many women in leadership and management positions, nurturing and revealing to others the country's historical and prehistorical traditions, although serving from behind.

According to Buijs (2002:67), the position that women have as female traditional leaders or headwomen does not only reflect their standing in a society, but also alludes to material wealth. As an example of women who hold material wealth, some women who are traditional leaders or

traditional healers may ‘marry’ women. This concept is known as ‘woman-to-woman marriage’ and it has been documented in most African populations, including the Yoruba and Ibo of West Africa, the Nuer of Sudan, the Lovedu, Zulu and Sotho of South Africa, and the Kikuyu and Nandi of East Africa.

Arrangements for two women undergoing formal marriage rites, typically, involve the requisite bride price payment by one party as in a heterosexual marriage. The woman who pays the bride price for the other woman becomes the sociological ‘husband’. The couple may have children with the help of a sperm donor, who is a male kinsman or friend of the female ‘husband’, or a man of the wife’s own choosing, depending on the customs of the society. The female ‘husband’ is the sociological ‘father’ of any resulting offspring. The children belong to her lineage, not to that of their biological father.

In indigenous African societies, such as the Venda, the chief’s principal wife, also known as ‘chief wife’ or ‘great wife’ was highly regarded. She is an important woman in the royal household, and has a role to play in traditional leadership. When the traditional council selects the main wife of a traditional leader, or prospective leader, it pays special attention to the mode of marriage of the women and the rank of their parents. These factors are interrelated, since the nobler the birth, the more elaborate as a rule is the marriage ritual. The chief’ wife assists the senior paternal aunt (*makhadzi*) to bring order to the royal family. There are certain activities that the *makhadzi* may not have time to do, for example overseeing what is happening among the royal children. She gets the information from the chief wife. If a royal child is sick and needs medical attention, the chief wife has to report that to the *makhadzi* for her to call the traditional healer. She therefore becomes the ears and eyes of the *makhadzi.*

Among the Venda, the chief wife is considered to be knowledgeable about traditional customs and in matters related to the royal family; she is given respect by virtue of her being the first wife. When these children, that is, children belonging to all the wives are being reared they are taught to behave as children from the royal family. They should be able to differentiate themselves from commoners in terms of their behaviour and are taught to respect older people by

curtseying to them. As previously mentioned, there is an important social division among the Venda between commoners, known as *vhasiwana*, and the children of chiefs and their descendants, who are called *vhakololo*. The chief wife's role is to reinforce the status differences between the two and these children have to grow up knowing the difference.

Royal parents provide their children with skills that they believe can help them in future. One chief wife said that parents raised in a commoner's homestead raise their children the way they perceive the world. A child who grows up in the royal household is perceived to have more confidence than the one raised in the commoners' home. A child from a royal family is raised by someone from the royal family. The chief wife also plays an educative role towards young mothers in the royal household. For example, she gives physical support to new mothers, where family and friends assume household obligations so that the new mother can rebuild her strength for at least one month after delivery. Traditional teachings imparted by the chief wife are invaluable even in today's world; they teach young mothers what a mother needs to do to take care of the child. For example, a mother with a small child is not allowed to share a bedroom with her husband or any other man. This is a taboo.

The polygamous nature of the Venda people allows a man to have other women, as a result, when a wife has given birth; the husband has conjugal rights with other women. The chief wife educates the young ones that, according to tradition, Venda society shows great respect to the very young and the very old. The reason for this was that the very young were seen as being still close to the ancestors while the very old were expected to join the ancestors soon and therefore become ancestors themselves.

Women in the *musanda* (the chief's household) are also categorized. The role of *makhadzi* cannot be looked at in isolation; it has to be looked at in relation to the principal wife (*mufumakadzi muhulwane*) and other wives. In some royal households there is a principal wife that is the one who was married first, and is also a *mufumakadziwa dzekiso*, a wife who is married to bear an heir to the throne. The other women are called *vhatanuni*, 'younger' wives. In traditional leadership the chief wife looks after children of the younger wives and is

considered to be their mother. She has to see to it that they are well fed and that they are taught Venda cultural etiquette. Venda people consider it quite important that children are raised in a manner that is consistent with Venda norms, values, teachings and tradition. This is done through enculturation, which, according to Haviland (1996:128) refers to the passing on of cultural information from one generation to another. In fact, until very recently, all women played an important role in educating the youth through stories told around the fire.

The chief wife takes decisions in the chief's household that relates to the other wives in consultation with *makhadzi*. If there are visitors to the chief's residence, she receives them and shows them where they are supposed to go. The young wives have to report whatever happens at the chief's residence to the chief wife. If the chief wife cannot handle the matter then it will be referred to the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* (the senior paternal uncle). The headmen also consult her on other issues related to the village. If someone dies in the village, she is the one who is told about the death. She must take care of young wives, the *vhatanuni,* and check that they are behaving in the ways expected of them. She monitors them to see that they are not engaging in extramarital affairs. One vho-Konanani, *makhadzi*,said that there are certain junior wives who are not well behaved. When they are not called by the chief for conjugal rights, they will easily find a lover. If a chief wife observes such behaviour, she is under a duty to reprimand the woman because this creates a bad image for the royal family.

Among the Venda, the chief wife directs the initiation sessions of girls and arranges group work or collective community work for the chief's field, because the harvest from the chief's field is used to feed the poor or anyone who has had a misfortune with his/her crops. The unfortunate people get their supplies from the collective granaries of the royal family. The chief wife oversees all tribal rites and has to arrange for the brewing of beer.

3.7 Recent Venda political history

The political history of Venda cannot be separated from the history of South Africa as a whole as some of the Bantustans were granted national independence. The so-called "TBVC States," comprising of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei were declared 'independent', while

others, such as KwaZulu, Lebowa and Qwaqwa received partial autonomy, but were never granted independence. The independence was not officially recognised outside of South Africa (Khangala 1999:86).

The Apartheid Policy segregated South Africans ethnically and racially. This policy was operationalized through the creation of homelands also known as Bantustans. These were territories for the indigenous South African inhabitants which resulted in making each of these territories ethnically homogeneous. In turn, this was used as the basis for setting up 'autonomous' nation states for the indigenous South Africans and this was the background to the setting up of the Venda Homeland for the Vhavenda.

In the above-mentioned arrangement, politics, the economy and cultural affairs were organised by the National Party government in such a way that they fostered division among different ethnic groups. Culturally, the government created a feeling of a communality based on language, religion and regional particularities. In the far North-Eastern Transvaal, the creation of Venda homeland meant the establishment of a separate government. The idea behind the formation of the self-government state was to form a mini republic for each homeland. The homeland developed at its own pace as an autonomous state or republic within a South African Republic. Nation states like Venda, which were found in remote areas, were far behind as far as social and economic development was concerned (2nd session of first Venda Legislative Assembly report 1979:105).

Prime Minister Verwoerd's intention was to reduce the number of Africans resident in South Africa's urban areas by requiring them to live in their respective homelands and seek employment in nearby towns and cities to which they would be able to commute every day for work. This was supposedly a way of addressing rural poverty. Verwoerd's policy of separate development, which was sometimes interpreted as separate freedoms, was attractive to Venda chiefs because it promised to give them respect, power and dignity (Danzinger, 1983:94). All Venda chiefs who were ruling at the time favoured the new government policy, mainly because of Venda's isolated location in the far Northern Transvaal, where the chiefs had been able to

maintain their traditional system of government better than elsewhere. They were less affected by external influences promoting rapid modernization (Maylam, 1986:171).

Venda attained its so-called independence from Pretoria on the 13th September 1979 and was the third of South Africa's emerging black states to be granted sovereign 'independence' during the apartheid era. This was the culmination of a long process of political, administrative and economic development stretching over many decades (Benso 1979:10). With the dismantling of the apartheid system and the repeal of discriminatory legislation that started in 1989 and was completed in 1994, the way was opened for an increase in migratory labour from Venda to the industrial centres and major cities of South Africa.

Traditional leadership in Venda applied to the position of the president during the apartheid era, when Chief Patrick Mbulaheni Mphephu was the leader. The South African prime minister, Hendrick Verwoerd believed that the only solution to the country's race problem was to transfer the political power of the Africans to the 'homelands'. This was done to empower traditional leaders – whose authority was crumbling because most of the male population was employed in urban areas. This migration was caused by rural poverty, overcrowding and the lack of job opportunities in the reserves. The administration of the Africans was to be transferred to the homelands, with the chiefs in command with senior white officials to assist them (Seiler 1980:139). The only contact that the Venda rural community was to have with whites was to be with the missionaries, traders and government officials.

The apartheid policy compelled the government to introduce the homeland policy which was established in 1951. The political development of the homelands as from 1951 gave powers to the chiefs and ensured that political development was based on ethnic lines. In 1953, Venda had the smallest population of all African ethnic groups in South Africa (Thompson 1990:167). It was ruled by chiefs like Mphephu, Kutama, Sinthumule, Tshivhase, Rammbuda and Mphaphuli amongst others. These chiefs have links to the Singo dynasty which will be illustrated in the subsequent discussion.

The purpose of creating homelands was supposedly to allow indigenous South Africans to govern themselves and to preserve their culture, but in reality their residents were denied any opportunity to participate in South African politics. By being limited to a homeland, the Venda people lost their South African citizenship as they were also regarded as forming only a small fraction of the South African population.

According to Fokwang (2003:35), during the apartheid era, Venda was reunified as a homeland under the leadership of Chief Patrick Mphephu who traces his ancestors to the legendary leader, Thohoyandou. The South African Government created Venda as a homeland for the Venda-speaking people in 1962. In 1973 Venda was granted self-government and on the 13 September 1979, it was granted 'independence', still under Mphephu. The capital city was called Thohoyandou in honour of the great Venda chief of the same name.

When Venda became a 'self-governing' territory on 15th February 1973, it took the penultimate step to 'independence'. The Venda leaders and some subjects believed that they should expend their energy towards making Venda economically sustainable. They viewed Venda as a self-governing territory which would be less and less dependent on grants from the South African Government (Thohoyandou Special 13 September 1979). The Tshivhase dynasty was not content because it perceived the Mphephu dynasty as having been more accommodating to the apartheid government.

Chief Mphephu, in particular, supported the new political dispensation. As a strong traditionalist, he wanted to preserve the chieftainship of his forefathers; as such he welcomed the Nationalist government's policy of restoring traditional rule. He reasoned that the development of homelands would alleviate rural poverty in his chieftaincy; as the homeland was very poor and there were no employment opportunities. Those who were literate were either teachers, clerks in government offices, or nurses. Mphephu saw the new policy as an opportunity for developing the Venda nation.

The onset of the struggle for political liberation in the late 1980s ushered in a turbulent time for traditional leadership for they were being undermined by resistance organizations. This was because traditional leaders were being perceived as puppets to the white nationalist government of South Africa. As a consequence, civic organizations developed in many towns and villages and started to control the population through intimidation. Subsequently, in the early twenty-first century, a system of mutual tolerance came into being between Venda traditional leaders and civic organizations. Villages and towns were combined to form local councils to deal with issues relating to local governance and most of what was formerly the Venda 'homeland' now forms the eastern part of the new administrative district, called 'Vhembe'. Vhembe is one of the Venda names for the Limpopo River and after the new political dispensation instituted in 1994, Venda was incorporated in the Northern Province. This later came to be known as the Limpopo Province, one of the nine provinces of South Africa.

Towards the end of the 1980s, some chiefs were prudent enough to ally themselves with the African National Congress, which, at that time was rightly perceived as the ruling party of the future. The ANC accepted the chiefs because after all they were kith and kin with the people and if ANC did not embrace the chiefs, the chiefs could have joined the National Party under the leadership of F.W. de Klerk. Although some were chiefs who were considered puppets, there were others who were quite instrumental during the liberation struggle, for example, King Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo, who was the king of the Zulu nation and others who were made vice-presidents of the ANC, and were given due recognition after the establishment of the national democracy in 1994.

After the demise of the apartheid system which had ignored the original nationhood of the South African indigenous peoples, a new democratic dispensation was ushered in 1994. Venda became part of the new South Africa.

3.8 Changing and enduring Venda settlement patterns and structures

The Venda people still live in villages and most rely on subsistence farming, even if as an adjunct to other forms of earning an income. Many in the rural areas still live in extended

families and lead a relatively simple life. They keep livestock and grow crops for household consumption. After Venda 'independence' in 1979, many people moved into Thohoyandou and neighbouring towns within Venda. According to Matshidze (2005:45), the emergence of Thohoyandou as a town has also seen an increase in churches, for example mainline or traditional mission churches such as the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist and the Roman Catholic Church.

Khorommbi (2001:91, quoting Du Plessis 1911:349), says that the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa changed the whole face of Southern Africa. Many people, including Venda men, went south to seek employment when diamonds and gold were discovered. They then became attracted to the teachings and preaching of the missionaries established in those places. Some were converted and became disciples of the new faith, while others attended night schools in missionary establishments, where they learned reading, writing and arithmetic. Major Lutheran mission stations were also established in Venda: Beuster Mission in 1872, Tshakhuma Mission station in 1874, Georgenholtz Mission in 1877 and Gertrudsburg in 1899. There are a number of pentecostal churches in Venda at present: the Assemblies of God, Faith Mission, Charis Missionary Church, Rhema Kingdom Life Church, Calvary Christian Church and the Christian Worship Centre, just to mention a few. These churches have a very large following and the membership ranges from 500 to 3000 for each denomination.

With the advent of Christianity in the villages, most people are now Christian. They may belong to different denominations, but they still pay their allegiance to their chiefs. The chief is the political head of his village or territory. Where the chief stays is not easily accessible to everyone. He is surrounded by his subjects, who protect him. Access to the chief's residence, especially by strangers, was limited. In most *misanda* (chiefly courts – *musanda* being the singular form) the design of the chief's household is circular. The chief's own residence is somewhat secluded, and it is reached by a winding path. After permission has been granted for an audience with the traditional leader, the visitor would be led through winding passages to the large hut which is the official meeting place.

While anthropologists such as Stayt (1931:89) lament the disappearance of many traditional village structures, present-day Venda leaders still live in *misanda*, and these compounds form an important part of village life. In a modern village characterized by having electricity, water and sanitation, with schools both primary and secondary, the chief lives with his or her family, important officials and a few followers. These days, instead of using mud-built houses, chiefs have built brick houses, which can easily be seen when one enters the *musanda*. In some *musanda*, the chief's house may be secluded by trees which provide protection against enemies, but there are others where one can see the house from all angles. The settlement pattern of *misanda* has really changed.

Fig. 3 A modern *musanda* (partly rebuilt) at Ha-MakumbaneTshisaulu

Many people live at the *musanda*, including not only the chief and his family, but important officials, some commoners who like living under the chief's protection, unwanted 'lunatics' and some widows of commoners who cannot support themselves. In the past, people who were poor used to be fed or given food at the *musanda*.

The *musanda* is usually located in a strategic position or location. Most *misanda* among the Venda, for example, are situated on the tops of hills, because the inhabitants want to see who might be coming to attack them so that they may be ready to fight enemies. The hill is seen as a defence mechanism, since the enemies will find approach difficult. The steep ascent of the slope will tire the enemies before the actual fight starts. The 'spies' or those people who protect the chief also get the opportunity to attack from a hidden position, which the enemy cannot see. Being higher than the rest is also symbolic of the prestige and status enjoyed by the chief.

Most *misanda* usually face a southerly direction because there is an assumption that the Venda originally came from the north; this information was provided to me by Mr Mudau[6], this is because the Venda are not afraid of where they come from because they have already conquered the north, but they are fearful of where they are still going because this is an unknown territory and they do not know what to expect. They prefer to face the unknown and the unfamiliar because they do not know what might emerge from that direction and should be ready. The understanding is that the *musanda* is a fortress that seems to be shared by all. In case of fighting, it acts as a refuge.

Fig 4 Another modern *musanda*

[6] In a personal interview conducted at Vuvha on 13 May 2011

The *khoro* (courtyard) is the playground and dancing place, law court and a reception hall for visitors. It is there that all the public affairs of the district are conducted. In areas where there are plenty of boulders or stones, the *khoro* is enclosed by a stone wall, otherwise an adobe one. One or two large trees are left standing near the middle of the *khoro* to provide shade. It is important to note that the *khoro* is not necessarily a building, but a circular form under a tree. The significance of the circular form is that each person is able to see the other. At the far end of the *khoro* is a gate called the *tshivhana,* which leads to passages, yards, huts, granaries and beer-huts.

To the left of *khoro* there is generally a path leading to a private hut called *thondo.* This is the small boys' school where norms and values particularly for boys are taught. It also serves as sleeping quarters and it is always strictly guarded. According to Huffman (1996:46), the *thondo* is a school where boys from about seven years to puberty learned Venda laws, customs and military techniques. The activities in the *thondo* are kept a secret. Huffman writes that the place usually incorporated an S-Shaped doorway so that no one could see directly inside. It was constantly guarded and only members of the *thondo* school were admitted. In personal communications, I was told that the *thondo* was originally restricted to royalty but eventually commoners were allowed to participate.

There is also another hut, *tshivhambo,* which has more or less a public character. The *tshivhambo* may be used as a meeting hall, a guestroom or for any other purpose. The *tshivhambo* is also a girls' school where the rites of passages and other religious rituals are performed. Another hut, the *khombo,* is provided for the bachelors. Other houses found at *musanda* are the wives' huts, called *tshamudane.* Each wife has her own hut and kitchen, where she prepares food for her husband and children.

Physical expressions of Venda royalty are also seen in chiefly symbols, such as sacred doors with crocodile designs. If one walks around a village, one does not see a door with a crocodile's design because that is exclusively for the chief whose dwelling is not visible. According to

Hammond-Tooke (1974: 71), in everyday speech, the chief's door is called the "crocodile", his salt is "sand" and his dogs are referred to as "messengers".

Most of the information recorded was collected as the team travelled to the villages and visited important chiefs in their homesteads. As the researcher was moving around conducting interviews, she noticed that most traditional homesteads are not as they were in earlier years. The traditional compound's main house *(pfamo)* in many *misanda* is not secluded. The setting of the homestead is no longer as it was in the olden days. This is attributed to culture change and modernization. The arrangement of the houses is affected, because in most traditional homestead compounds there are no longer thatched adobe houses. Thatched roofs have been replaced with tiled roofs, and the shapes of the structures are more often square than round. In royal compounds, where adobe houses are found, they are almost dilapidated.

The people who live in the homestead are also different. For example, in the olden days, the traditional leader's wives would all live in the traditional compound, but these days one might find that only one wife lives in the homestead and all the others are living in their own quarters with their children. The one who lives in the royal compound will preferably be the principal wife, but that also depends on the traditional leader – whether he wants the principal wife to remain in the royal kraal or whether he would rather have a younger wife there. The traditional leader will visit his wives at a time determined by him. In some traditional compounds there are animals such as cattle and goats kept by the homestead, and in some there is only poultry, while in others there is no livestock at all.

Most traditional settlement patterns have drastically changed, and the information that was provided by the respondents was that cultural norms and customs have changed and people do not behave the way they did in the olden days. People then depended on each other and upon extended families that provided them with a support system. These days, people belong to nucleated families and hence the drastic change in the settlement pattern.

3.9 Conclusion

The history of the Venda began with the establishment of the Common State in the 11th century and Mapungubwe was the capital. At the time, women seem to have played an important role in state affairs. According to tradition, King Shiriyadenga was the first king of the VhaVenda of Mapungubwe, and he was succeeded by his children, who moved first into what is now Zimbabwe and then later back across the Limpopo into the Soutpansberg. The Vhavenda may be regarded as one of the first African groups to enter the area south of the Limpopo River. The home of the Venda king Thoho-ya-Ndou ("head of the elephant") was called Dzata, and the remains of his earlier homestead were recently declared a national monument. Dzata had great significance to the Vhavenda because they subsequently buried their chiefs facing in its direction. When Thohoyandou died, divisions arose between the different houses as a result of disputes regarding the question of who was to succeed him. Factions and rivalry arose following Thohoyandou's death. This resulted in the formation of different kingdoms and many chiefs ruling over different groups.

Traditional leadership has over the years experienced a myriad of changes. The changes began with the arrival and settlement of the Europeans in Africa. The colonial governments manipulated the institution of traditional leadership, ensuring that it carried out some of the Eurocentric government functions. The later 'apartheid era' in South Africa saw the establishment of 'Bantustans', conceived as 'independent homelands' for various ethnic groups. Today, the South African democratic government is attempting to transform the institution of traditional leadership so as to bring it in line with democratic principles. Such attempts included the passing of various pieces of legislation as well as implementing programmes to support the traditional leadership.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Creswell (2002:50) notes that methodology is a general approach to studying any type of situation. Research methodology includes a description of how information is gathered –such as survey interview and participant observation. Research methodology thus refers to the research process and kind of tools and procedures used in a study (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Methodology concerns the selection of appropriate research design for a study, which comprises the plan, structure and the strategy of the research. According to Leedy and Omrod (2005:38), a research design involves the process of planning what and how data will be collected and analysed. This can be done by making use of a specific research methodology.

It, perhaps, is vital to mention that I conducted this study not as a sociologist but an anthropologist. As an anthropologist, I am under a duty to 'objectively 'collect and interpret ethnographic information. As Whorf (1952: 5) suggests, an anthropological study is heavily influenced by the native culture and, perhaps also disposition of the anthropologist. I come from the Venda community, implying that I am disposed to be influenced in the pursuit of such study, which my ideological perception of what the society is. Most importantly, I am related to the traditional leadership in the sense that I am associated by virtue of my grand childhood with traditional leadership. Certainly, this had many advantages as well as disadvantages which I have highlighted and the extent to which they influenced my study of this important phenomenon. This is important because I have noted that I employed interviews as well as observer participation.

The difficulty that this study posed is that while as an anthropologist I am, as mentioned, intended to be 'reflective' in that I am meant to use the 'self' to evaluate and investigate other people's selves, I could not distance myself so much from the realities of my perceptions of the institution that I was studying. In a sense, I can be described as a 'native' anthropologist, though the question that arises in how native I am as an anthropologist. I would proceed on the premise that though I am a native anthropologist, I am not so 'natively' associated with the institution of

makhadzi as not to be in a position to objectively study the phenomenon under question. I have mentioned that I am associated with the traditional leadership by virtue of consanguinity. My association was however at a not so close level since; I was not a *makhadzi* myself. Neither is my parent nor my grandparents. This means that I could to an extent, be reflective, though with a very limited aspect in this respect. First, I am not a traditional leader, in another capacity so as to reflect on this phenomenon, from a different perspective. Since I am also Venda and the institution I was reviewing obtains from the Venda community I could only achieve reflectively through a comparative study of the institution of *makhadzi* with other similar institutions elsewhere. This was however limited, since I did not consider all aspects of another society comparatively with the *makhadzi.* While, for instance, I considered the Yoruba society and draw conclusions from it, I did not 'reflect' upon the place and position of Yoruba women today.

Native anthropologists face a difficult task in creating enough distance between themselves and their own cultures. During the first few interviews I was so intrigued by the information that I got from the makhadzis, I would take notes. Surprisingly my vivid reactions became diluted as I proceeded with fieldwork because it seemed I knew the information. The behaviours to me seemed usual. I was unable to create enough distance between myself and them. I then waited for at least two months without going to do fieldwork so that I regain a sense of a reflexive perspective. After freshening up, I resumed field work and I was able to make a reflection and at the same time being reflexive. To be reflexive, rather than reflective about our own collective self, one must achieve the sense of distancing from self. Reflexity, then, is the capacity of the self to become an object to itself. Reflexity pulls one toward the other and away from oneself.

During fieldwork what I realised was the effect of my presence. People who I interviewed would always make an assumption that what I was asking them should have been common knowledge to me and that was not the case. Nayaran (1993:678) mentions that given the diversity within cultural domains and across groups, even the most experienced of "native" anthropologists cannot know everything about his or her own society. In fact by opening up access to hidden stores of research materials, the study of anthropology can also lead to the discovery of many strange and unfamiliar aspects of one's own society. Some would even go to

an extent of saying that why I am asking them such questions while I have answers to them as if I was wasting their time. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:585) said that the effect of the presence of an anthropologist differs greatly between native and non-native anthropologists. He cited an example that among the Japanese foreign anthropologists were given "red carpet treatment" and they go out of their way to accommodate their visitors. This usually happened for Western anthropologists in many Third World countries. Unfortunately the disadvantage of this favourable treatment is that the host people "perform" for them; the anthropologist's presence becomes an important factor in the way the host people act and react. The ethnographic observation tends to become the "negotiated reality" between the informants and the anthropologist at least until the anthropologist's presence becomes less conspicuous.

I must also say that as a 'native' anthropologist, I had many advantages at my disposal, just as those that any native anthropologist could have. Ohnuki-Tieney (1984:585) has argued that native anthropologists are able to understand the emotive dimensions of behaviours. What served as an advantage to me was that as an anthropologist from within I was able to understand the emotive dimensions of behaviour. The psychological dimensions are hard for outsiders to understand but what was important was for me to be able to distance myself emotively. In the course of my interviews, I was, for instance, able to notice certain reactions to certain questions; these would be of reactions of comfort or discomfort. I would quickly re-evaluate my line of questioning, but in retrospect, had I not had this advantage of understanding the emotional dynamics, I would possibly not have obtained the information that I did. This study does not also suffer from what scholars have described as 'negotiated reality.' I have certainly been part of the Venda society since my birth. I have also been associated, though loosely with the institution of traditional leadership. There was therefore nothing very unusual that would make my informants feign a reaction or information, except under very rare incidents. In fact, I sometimes interacted with informants, with whom we share working environment. Having known them and given my interaction with them, it assured me of the veracity of the information that I received.

Having made that observation, I would note that this research made use of both primary and secondary information. Secondary information consisted of books, journal articles, reports and

internet sources. In instances where these were used, the cited authors were acknowledged and references provided. Primary information consisted of data obtained from the field. Both primary and secondary data were used in addressing the research question but this chapter devotes itself only to primary collection data methodology. It focuses on how the area of study was identified and the data collection and sampling procedures. This chapter also provides a description of the research methods which were used, the study area itself, the population covered by the study, as well as sampling procedures, data collection, ethical considerations and data analysis.

4.2 Study design and implementation

A study design describes steps that the researcher takes to answer several fundamental questions about the research. A design is thus a plan of how a researcher intends to conduct a study (De Vos, 2005:59) and can generate either qualitative or quantitative data, which has to be processed in order to generate information. Various types of research designs exist, including exploratory, descriptive, experimental and evaluative designs just to mention a few among many others. This study employed both exploratory and descriptive designs.

4.2.1 Qualitative design

The research design that was used in this research is mainly qualitative. Qualitative research design is defined as a multiple perspective approach to social interaction, aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing this interaction in terms of meanings that the subject attaches to it (Badenhorst 2007:47). In a qualitative study, as in other scientific research, the researcher collects evidence and produces findings that were not pre-determined. Such research should be able to produce findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study, using a sample to represent a population. Additionally, it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the population it concerns. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally-specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of particular populations.

As part of the design, the researcher selected qualitative methods found to be appropriate for the study because they allowed for an in-depth investigation of the subject, about which there was a dearth of information. This design enabled the researcher to get profound information about people's feelings and reactions towards women, and *makhadzi* in particular, in traditional leadership. In this study the emphasis is on words and feelings; this was necessary in order to understand the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership. Case studies are presented and analysed so as to capture the role of *makhadzi* in a traditional setting. This is useful in this study, because it gave room for expression of emotions, feelings and perceptions. It allows the researcher to use observational techniques such as using a camera for the observation of behaviour in natural settings. A digital camera was used to record the activities observed in different traditional households or *misanda* (chiefly households).

Most of the information that the researcher wanted to understand about the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership was personal and varied from one informant to the next. The information also depended on the individual nature of the traditional leadership households (*misanda*). Some people were quite open during first encounter. They gave information very freely and with ease. However, some were not free, and had to be persuaded to give information. This demanded patience and understanding because of the personal nature of certain information. Babbie and Mouton (2001:34), state that qualitative designs are research methods that emphasize in depth understanding, that attempt to tap the deeper meanings of human experiences and which are not easily reduced to numbers.

According to Leedy and Omrod (2001:43), qualitative researchers are mainly interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles. For example, in a *musanda*, there is a specific pattern to the arrangement of the structures of the royal household, applying only to the *musanda*, or the royal homestead. The *musanda* is also located or situated on top of a hill.

The symbols can also be reflected in the language used. There is a special terminology that is used in the royal household; for example, the kitchen is referred to as a *'tshamundane'*, and a wooden spoon is referred to as a 'hand'. These terms are not used by ordinary users of the language. Mouton (2001:17) argues that a major distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher attempts to understand people in terms of their own viewpoint. This principle served as a guideline when the research was conducted. Those who were interviewed were given a chance to explain the role of *makhadzi* in terms of how they understood and identified with the institution. This study used a qualitative design because it sought to cover a broad area concerning the role of the *makhadzi* in traditional leadership. In this research, information was collected using a semi-structured interview protocol using a set of questions.

4.2.2 Study population and location

A study population is the entire set of objects or people which is the focus of the research and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics (Weiss1998:45). Even if it were possible, it is not necessary to collect data from everyone in a community in order to get valid findings. In most research, only a sample of a described population is selected for any given study, the main requirement being that the sample should be truly representative of the population. A study's research objectives and the characteristics of the study population determine which and how many people to select as a sample.

Limpopo is one of South Africa's nine provinces. It consists of five districts, namely Capricorn, Mopani, Sekhukhune, Vhembe and Waterberg Districts. Within each district are local municipalities. Thulamela Municipality is one of the four local municipalities in Vhembe district. The other three are Musina, Mutale and Makhado Municipalities.

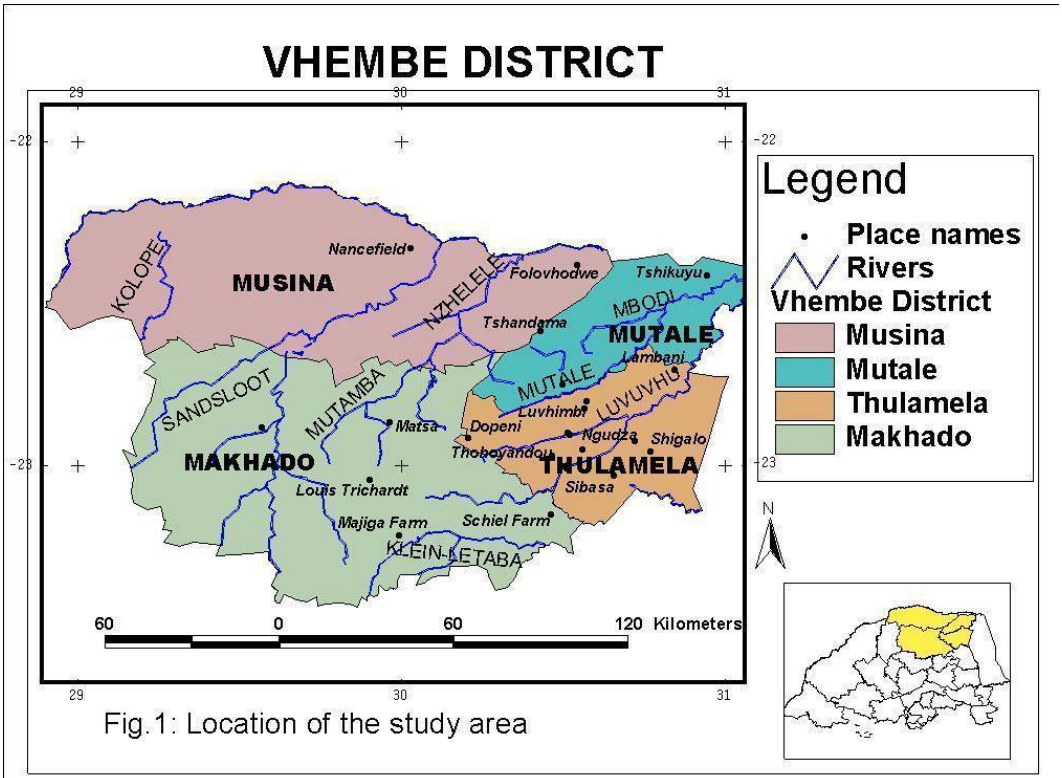

Fig.1: Location of the study area

For the purpose of this study, a selection of traditional leaders from the eastern part of Vhembe District was made. Vhembe district is one of the largest districts in the Limpopo Province. Of the various cultural groups and languages in the district, there are two which dominate the eastern part – that is, Venda and Tsonga people –and the researcher sampled her respondents on the basis of the Venda cultural group, who therefore constitute the study population. In the royal kraal a royal court there is a special language among the Venda that is spoken by members of the royal household. Fortunately, the researcher was acquainted with the words and phrases that are used in the royal households. She is also familiar with the culture of the inhabitants.

Having identified the study population, the researcher moved on to consider its components. The study population consisted not only of two separate cultures, but of members of the royal households as well as members of those households who are regarded as commoners– that is, those who are not members of the royal family. Even the views of commoners who are not resident in the royal households were solicited. Their views are quite crucial in order to

understand the role of *makhadzi* and her importance in the royal political landscape. The researcher wanted to establish if both commoners and royals have the same understanding of the role that the *makhadzi* plays in traditional leadership.

4.2.3 Sampling

In this study, non-probability sampling techniques were used, referring to the case where the probability of including each element of the population in a sample is unknown (Brynard & Hanekom, 1997:43). The general type of non-probability sampling adopted was purposive sampling, where the researcher could use her own judgments about which respondents to choose (Babbie 1992:45) as well as snowball sampling. For instance, in this research study where the researcher wanted to establish the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership, she sampled females who fit the description of a *makhadzi*. Anyone in that category could be asked to participate. In this case when the researcher was collecting data, I chose the *makhadzi* from different royal households because the researcher had an interest in their role in traditional leadership.

In this study the researcher contacted a well-known traditional leader who is also a professional colleague. After interviewing this traditional leader, the researcher then asked him to suggest the name of other traditional leaders known to him who could also provide the information required. This procedure was followed with all the traditional leaders who were interviewed. It can thus be argued that the sample comprises traditional leaders who were identified by their own kind. These traditional leaders also identified the *makhadzi* to be interviewed by the researcher. This was most helpful, because there were certain royal households that would otherwise have been inaccessible, but because the introduction was made by someone known to them, it became easy for the researcher to secure an appointment for an interview. It was not always easy to secure an appointment despite persistent phone calls to the tribal council. The researcher was continually told to leave numbers for them to ring back. The researcher was about to give up when she went to another royal household, and fortunately saw the required *makhadzi* there. This one was able to introduce the researcher to the one she had hitherto been unable to contact, and the interview was facilitated.

Non-probability sampling is a technique whereby the samples are selected in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. In any form of research, true random sampling is always difficult to achieve. In contrast to probability sampling, non-probability sampling is not a product of randomized selection processes. The subjects in a non-probability sample are usually selected on the basis of their accessibility or by the purposive personal judgment of the researcher.

With non-probability sampling, population elements are selected on the basis of their availability (e.g. because they volunteered), or because of the researcher's personal judgment that they are representative. This type of sampling is most often used when demonstrating that a particular trait exists in a population. It can also be used when the researcher aims seeks to conduct a qualitative study, or when randomisation is impossible, as when the population is almost limitless. It can also be used when the research does not aim at generating results that are to be used in policies affecting the entire population.

In purposive sampling, the researcher samples with a *purpose* in mind. The researcher would usually be seeking one or more specific predefined groups, and one of the first things the researcher is likely to do is to ensure that the respondents do in fact meet the criteria for being in the sample. Purposive sampling can be very useful in situations where a targeted sample needs to be reached quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern. With a purposive sample, you are still likely to get the opinions of your target population. Purposive sampling starts with a purpose in mind, and the sample is thus selected to include people of interest and exclude those who do not suit the purpose. Purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher regarding respondents that are typical or representative of the phenomenon being studied. Popular with qualitative research, the variables to which the sample is drawn up are analytically and theoretically linked to the research questions (Brink 1996:67).

Another sampling type that is used is 'snowballing', also known as 'chain referral' sampling and is considered to be a type of purposive sampling. In this method, participants or informants with whom contact has already been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other

people who could potentially participate in the study. Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit 'hidden populations'. These are groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies.

Snowball sampling applies to the situation where one respondent refers the researcher to another respondent. In social science research, snowball sampling is a technique for developing a research sample where the existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus the sample group appears to grow like a rolling snowball. As the sample builds up, enough data is gathered to be useful for research.

In snowball sampling, one begins by identifying someone who meets the criteria for inclusion in your study. One then asks the selected people to recommend others who they may know who also meet the criteria. Snowball sampling is especially useful when one is trying to reach populations that are inaccessible or hard to find. However, if you go to a particular research area and identify one or two people as samples, you may find that they know very well who other suitable people may be in their vicinity, and how to find them.

4.3 Data collection mechanisms

4.3.1 Interviews

Data collection techniques allow us to systematically collect information about our objects of study (people, objects, phenomena) and about the settings in which they occur. In the collection of data one has to be systematic. If data is collected haphazardly, it will be difficult to answer the research questions conclusively. Data collection tools are ways in which data is obtained from a source. Data can be collected by various means including questionnaires, observations and interview guides (Babbie 1992:34). Interviews are the most common qualitative methods. One probable reason for their popularity is that they are very effective in giving a practical feel of the study. In addition, conducting and participating in interviews can be a rewarding experience for participants and interviewers (Hammersley 1990:45).

Interviews are also especially appropriate for addressing sensitive topics that people might be reluctant to discuss in a group setting. The semi-structured interview, a variation on the in-depth interview, is flexible and it allows for new information to be incorporated should it occur that during the interview the respondent gives an answer that needs a follow up. Again, during such an interview, if a respondent answers a question which needed the researcher to probe further, the interviewer could then probe for clarity. This design allows one to include information about how the respondent considers his or her world. For example, in the interview protocol used in this study, there was a question that read, 'what is your opinion about the significance of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership?' This question required an elaborate answer and it is more complex than a "yes" or "no" question.

'Probes' as used in semi-structured interviews are neutral questions, phrases, sounds, and even gestures that interviewers use to encourage participants to elaborate on their answers and explain why or how. Suggestions for probes are sometimes outlined in the interview guide, but they are also left to the discretion of the interviewer. The particular probe used depends on the response given by the individual participant. Probing therefore requires the interviewer to listen carefully to participants and to engage keenly and actively with them.

In this study, data was collected by using a semi-structured interview guide and participant observation. The semi-structured interview was used because, while the original script for an interview guarantees the uniformity of topics across the whole sample, each particular interview may be different due to the new questions elicited by the particular answers given by the interviewee. For this study, a respondent could be asked a question and might give an answer which would require a follow-up and this type of interview allowed that. For instance, in the interview guide there was the following question: "Do you think the role that was played by the *makhadzi* is still the same in the new political dispensation?" Such a question could not get a similar answer from all the respondents. That had an effect on the follow-up questions, which would not be same.

Also, the research was carried out in an area where most respondents were not literate. A semi-structured interview does not need to be filled in by a respondent, as a questionnaire would be. During fieldwork, the researcher visited fifteen *makhadzis'* in different *misanda*. Some were semi-literate and others were illiterate. Questions were read to them and explained. The researcher had to be physically present for the duration of fieldwork; it was not possible for the respondents to respond to the interview schedule on their own as if it were a questionnaire because of their literacy level. Although the interview guide was translated into Venda, it did not help much to ask interviewees to read it, because some of the respondents were not literate. A few *makhadzi* have undergone Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) courses, but to ascertain that the respondent had understood the questions well, it was necessary for the researcher to be physically present and to put them in person. Some *makhadzi* were fully literate; for example, one was a professor at the University of Venda and another was a head of department at a primary school, but for consistency it was still necessary to ensure face-to-face interviews.

The fully structured interview was not suitable, because that could exclude potentially useful information which had not been specifically asked for, and would also limit the probing which might elicit relevant information. The researcher was therefore in a position to be a participant observer, as described above, the central person between information and the informants that is, she was able to conduct observation sessions, interviews and listen to statements of informants in order to get information, making her a prime instrument of data collection.

When the researcher was conducting the interviews, a research assistant was present who was able to understand different Venda dialects, and could also speak English. Having him as a research assistant was an advantage because he was from a royal household. It was also not disturbing to have a man present when the researcher was interviewing women. The *makhadzi* became quite comfortable when they heard that he was from the royal kraal as well. Most of the time he was able to make contacts with people from the royal household and set up appointments. He really created a friendly atmosphere between the royal interviewees and the researcher, who knew him from church. One day in the course of chatting, he mentioned his

links with Chief Makumbane. The researcher then took advantage of the situation and asked him to be the research assistant, and he gladly accepted the offer. He was first requested to set up an appointment with Chief Makumbane at Tshisaulu village, which he did. The assistant helped with further appointments for interviews. He accompanied the researcher to the traditional households or *misanda*. He was quite helpful during the study in setting the scene for the interviews, and he knew how to make the respondent relax before the interviews began.

Initial formal meetings were held, with the respondents determining opportune times to conduct the interviews. A schedule was drawn up with dates and times when the visits would be made. This exercise was very fruitful because the respondents were ready to be interviewed at the times convenient to them. The interviews created a contractual relationship which was respected by the researcher and the respondents. Information collected through semi-structured interviews was obtained by talking to people who lived in the villages surrounding the royal homesteads as well as from people who lived in the royal homestead. Some conversations were casual but very informative. Sometimes the conversations would start off quite formally but after some time it would flow and become an informal talk where the respondent would feel very safe and relaxed.

The researcher firstly informed the respondents of the purpose of the interviews. In order to establish social facilitation, the traditional leaders were informed that their names had been recommended by their colleagues. It was also proper to mention the name of the traditional leader who referred the researcher to a respondent. This created a serene environment and the interviews proceeded well. The rationale and the format of the interview were explained to the respondents in more or less the following way:

> I am currently doing research on the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership as a requirement for a postgraduate degree at the University of Zululand. I would like you to respond to the questions that I will ask you. Your responses will give me an idea on the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership. I would like you to give me an account on how the *makhadzi* is chosen among all other females in the royal household. After her inauguration she is charged with responsibilities

> and assignments and it is my humble request that I be given that information for my research. I will be recording the information in the interview protocol and I will also use the audiotape to record our conversation as well as writing field notes.

At the start of an interview session, the researcher indicated the purpose of the interview as well as the objectives of the study. All the respondents knew what the interview was about. They were also told that the study was not for financial gain, so they should not have any expectations, for example, payment in cash or in kind. That was explicitly mentioned in the beginning when rapport was being established.

The interviews took a considerable amount of time because the researcher allowed the respondents to give whatever information they had about the topic. Notes were taken during the interviewing process and there was also a tape recorder. For some of the secret formulae that are difficult to understand, help was available from elders who explained them without prejudice. These linguistic formulae, usually connected with initiation schools, are only understood by those who have been through the rites of passage, for example puberty rites. Most participants were willing to help with obtaining such valuable information.

According to Malacrida (2007:1334), the relationship between the interviewer and the participant begins at first contact, with the participant's first impression of the interviewer based on a variety of factors such as the greeting, manner of speaking, clothing, and body language. All of these should be appropriate for the specific culture and setting and convey respect for the participant. Conducting research in a royal household is different from conducting research in any setting, be it rural or urban. In a royal household protocol has to be observed; for example, you do not go straight to a respondent for an interview. Courtesy would require that one consults some people before approaching a *makhadzi.*

'Morals' are essentialised in a royal family. In one royal village visited, elders were very strict; they did not allow the researcher to sit on a chair, this being unsuitable for a woman. The

vhakoma (chief's mother) ushered the team in and showed the research assistant a chair, but the researcher, being a woman, was given a mat to sit on. When the *makhadzi* arrived, she was also given a mat. She sat on the mat and the interview session begun. Cell phones were turned off and placed out of view, so as to avoid the perception that the participant's testimony is of secondary importance. Switching off a cell phone also helped the researcher to concentrate fully during an interview.

Observing such protocols was crucial because the study and the interviews were conducted in royal villages. The manner in which the researcher spoke to the *makhadzi* had at all costs to display respect. Such respect included the way the researcher dressed. A dress, or at least skirt and blouse was mandatory; trousers worn by women are considered disrespectful to the royal house. In some royal villages a woman wearing trousers was not allowed; even to enter the royal village. That was a taboo. But such things depend on the particular royal household. In one royal household visited, girls were wearing trousers.

That some respondents enjoyed being interviewed was evident in some of the interviews conducted. The researcher would sit for hours talking to the respondent about the topic. When another appointment was scheduled in the hope of finishing early, since it would be a follow up on the previous one, it still took a long time. This seemed a clear indication that both interviewer and interviewee enjoyed the interviews. The researcher tried as much as possible to establish rapport with the respondents, and they trusted each other. One informant *makhadzi*, Nyadzanga Tshikundamalema said:

> When you come here everything comes to a standstill because what you are here for is important for the nation. My children and my grandchildren would know the role of *makhadzi* in the society. This information will also assist those who come after me.

She was very excited during the interview.

From the interviews conducted there was a sense that the respondents liked what they were engaged in. For instance, one day an interview was scheduled in a particular village, but the researcher did not know that was the day the *makhadzi*, who was quite elderly, would be going to collect her old age pension. Although the researcher waited, the intention was only to make another appointment and not to interview her because it was assumed that when she came back she would be tired. When she was asked for another appointment, she did not agree, she said:

> Today we need to talk. Don't you have questions to ask? I have a lot of information that I thought of after you had left, so we need to talk.

This seemed to be an indication that interviewees liked being part of the study.

As already mentioned interviews are useful for learning the perspectives of individuals and are an effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. In one interview, the *makhadzi* was quite open and she wanted the interviewer to know how she felt personally because she is a *makhadzi*. She said:

> Being a *makhadzi* is difficult; it is not a child's play. When you look at me you might think I am enjoying myself, I am not. I am called names; some would say I am a witch. The reason for such hatred might be that one may have thought that his son would be the heir and because of some exclusion rules he is not. Sometimes one might have given birth to a delinquent and the mother might suspect that it is because you do not love her.

When she was saying this she was in a pensive mood.

In the example above; the respondent was asked questions where there had been a dispute about the chieftainship. Sometimes it becomes very difficult for the respondent to answer. The dispute might be because the mother might not be from the royal family or the heir might be illegitimate.

The reasons why they do not want such a candidate as a traditional leader are known only to the *makhadzi* and a few close kin. In order to give such information, the respondents need to trust the interviewer. In this case the researcher had established such rapport with her respondents that she did not really struggle to get such information, but one could sense the sensitivity of the matter as the respondent gave an answer.

The researcher clarified and explained the questions to the respondents in order to get in-depth information from them, and in almost all the interviews there would be follow up questions. These helped the researcher to clarify some of the more useful information. This method of interviewing was also chosen because the topics were often sensitive and subject to secrecy, and the researcher hoped the respondents would be more open and honest in a less formal setting. Mostly the respondents did seem to be open and honest, to judge from their non-verbal cues. Many were comfortable during the whole process. This is attributed to the social facilitation done by the researcher before engaging in data collection. Participants were openly told that the information was needed for academic purposes and there is no way in which it would be used against them.

Later analysis was undertaken to determine each interviewee's attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. During the interviews follow-up questions (some of which were scripted in the interview guide) were asked in order to elicit participants' more complete knowledge and experience related to the research topic. Participants were probed for an elaboration of their responses, with the aim of learning all they could share about the research topic. For example, in the interview schedule, there is a question that posed, 'what is the balance of power between *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene*?" The respondents were not very open on this question, some *makhadzis* would say that the power that they have is similar to the power that *khotsimunene* has.

Probing was employed to enable respondents to explain their answers satisfactorily. What was wanted from the respondents was for them to describe the power relations between a *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene* or *ndumi* (chief's brother). If a *makhadzi* was asked if what she did is similar to what an *ndumi* does; the answer would be in the negative. She would maybe say that she has

more important roles to play; for instance, the *ndumi* cannot talk to the ancestors. That in turn would indicate that the power of talking with the ancestors vests with the *makhadzi* and not with the *khotsimunene*. There are some rituals that cannot be performed in the absence of the *makhadzi*; the *ndumi* reports everything to the *makhadzi* in most *misanda*. From the probing one can then infer that *makhadzi* has more important roles than the *khotsimunene,* which translate to her having more power.

But the situations are different; some *makhadzi*s would explicitly say that the *makhadzi* has more power than the *ndumi*. They would also outline what the *makhadzi* does and what the *khotsimunene* does. Judging by what was said and sometimes by observing non-verbal behaviour, one would presume that the *makhadzi* shares some of her responsibilities with the *khotsimunene,* but that the *makhadzi* has an upper hand compared to the *khotsimunene* because he cannot take any decisions without consulting the *makhadzi.*

During the conduct of the interviews, the researcher used a tape recorder to record the information on the interview schedule and some information was recorded in a note book. The researcher afterwards transcribed the audio taped interviews and independent translators translated the interview protocols from English to the indigenous language. The researcher herself translated the Venda verbal transcripts of the interviews into English. The interview protocols were read again to ensure that objectivity was maintained and that there was no loss of information due to translation.

4.3.2 Participant observation

Participant observation is a qualitative method with roots in traditional ethnographic research, the objective of which is to help researchers learn the perspectives held by study populations. As qualitative researchers, we presume that there will be multiple perspectives within any given community. We are interested both in knowing what those diverse perspectives are and in understanding the interplay among them. Qualitative researchers accomplish this through observation alone or by both observing and participating, to varying degrees, in the study

community's daily activities. Participant observation always takes place in community settings, in locations believed to have some relevance to the research questions (Spradley 1979:21).

This study was carried out using overt participant observation. Giordano *et al.* (2007:270-71) maintain that the study must be carried out with the agreement of the subjects being studied. This agreement may be tacit or formally expressed. In the latter case, the researcher makes it clear that social science research is being undertaken, and the subjects themselves are invited to give explicit permission for the research to proceed. In the former, the researcher also reveals his or her identity as an outsider, but states the purposes of the study less clearly, usually in the form of a general statement of interest in the subjects.

Patton (1987:57) says that the method of participant observation is distinctive because the researcher approaches participants in their own environment rather than having the participants come to the researcher. Generally, the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an 'insider' while remaining, inevitably, an 'outsider'. While in these community settings, researchers make careful, objective notes about what they see, recording all accounts and observations as field notes in a field notebook. Informal conversation and interaction with members of the study population are also important components of the method and should be recorded in the field notes, in as much detail as possible.

Van Maanen (1996:264) argues that the central methodological problem of such participant observation research is balancing adequate subjectivity with adequate objectivity. Since a major aim of participant observation is to enter the subjective worlds of those studied, and to see these worlds from their point of view a method akin to the notion of understanding (or *Verstehen*), the problem of adequate subjectivity is posed directly. How can researchers know that they are accurately representing the point of view of the other, rather than imposing their own views upon the research subject? On the other hand, simply to stay with the subject's own view may risk the problem of conversion and 'going native', thus being able to see the world only from the point of view of the research subject or subjects. As a participant observer one needs to exercise caution when engaging in some activities (Rubin and Rubin 1995:64).

Here the problem of maintaining adequate objectivity is posed, namely, that of maintaining enough distance to be able to locate the subject's view in a wider theoretical and social context. Participant observers are forever trapped in this dilemma. "Too much detachment weakens the insights that participant observation brings, but too much involvement will render the data of questionable value for social science (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:14)." If one only observes, the researcher may not be able to get information on the interactions and dynamics that happen in the research area; on the other hand, if the researcher immerses himself fully the information may be biased.

4.3.2.1 The researcher's role

The researcher's role in this study was primarily observation and interviewing. There are other instances where participant observation was undertaken, for example, on Sunday mornings in the course of visiting a traditional household in order to sit in their courts or *khoro* to observe how offences were adjudicated. Permission to record and observe the proceedings of the *khoro* would be obtained. On one occasion, for example, Mrs Ntsundeni Mudau had accused Mrs Muano Mandiwana of witchcraft. The matter was deliberated by members of the *khoro* and the researcher was recording the proceedings. The *makhadzi* was not part of the *khoro* but, seeing that the proceedings were taking a lot of time, she came to ask about the delay. The chairperson outlined the deliberations to her and she said to him:

> Since you have heard both sides of the story why don't you make a ruling on the matter? This matter should not be brought before the court again for the third time.

The chairperson together with other members then ruled that Mrs Mudau must give Mrs Mandiwana a goat as compensation for libel. This illustrated the authority of the *makhadzi*. Her coming resolved matters because, by the look of things, the matter would have been postponed further.

One day at a particular *musanda*, the *makhadzi* and other females in the village were busy removing maize seeds from the husks. The researcher participated in the activity and at the same time was busy observing and conducting interviews. A lot of information about the *makhadzi* was obtained that day, while the mood was quite relaxed and the interview was conducted informally. In the course of these activities, permission to take photographs of the homesteads and of some of the informants was sought, and the permission was granted.

What was attempted in this study was a balance between observation and participation. This was quite a challenging task, but a technique was developed whereby the researcher would observe certain activities, and in other instances where it was proper to participate, the researcher would do so. For example, the mere fact that the researcher had attended puberty rites facilitated her participation in some of the activities in one *musanda*, but when attending a *thevhula* (thanksgiving) ritual, the participant only observed what was being done and recorded the proceedings.

Participant observation was beneficial because, by being with the target group, the researcher was provided with insights and clues necessary for developing interview questions and more specialized tools for data collection. According to Fetterman (1998:46), sometimes the negative effect of being a participant researcher as a prime instrument for data collection is that, because the participants are studied in their own setting, sometimes this setting could be too familiar and the researcher ends up taking events for granted, leaving important data unnoticed and unrecorded. It is often a great effort of will and imagination to stop the researcher seeing only the things that were conventionally there to be seen.

During fieldwork many things that were done in the traditional households were familiar to the researcher because she grew up seeing people behaving the way they did. For example, in talking to the elders, they were given all the respect they expected, but it was hard to follow proper protocol because the researcher was in a traditional household very familiar to her or where people were used to her. As she was documenting information, she tried not in any way to leave information which seemed unimportant. Whatever was done was carefully recorded. For

instance, one day a royal homestead was visited for an interview with the *makhadzi* where the researcher was familiar to most of the people present. When the team arrived she was already seated waiting for us. The researcher then bowed as a symbol of respect, and the *makhadzi* said, 'why do you bother bowing in your home ground?' That did not bar the researcher from showing the respect that the *makhadzi* commands as a royal. Proper protocol has to be observed, and things should not be taken for granted.

Most of the information recorded in this thesis was collected when travelling to different *misanda* (royal villages); sometimes the researcher stayed there from morning until late afternoon. The research team observed what happened in the *musanda* (royal village), interpreting what was observed and conducting interviews so as to establish what the inhabitants were doing and why they were doing it. Participant observation was challenging because even for those from the Venda culture conducting participant observation in the same culture, some things are done differently depending on the particular locality. One day, the researcher attended the *vhusha* (initiation rites for girls who have reached puberty) ceremony in one royal village. It was observed that things were not done in the way in which the researcher was used to. Commoners were treated better than in royal villages where she grew up. To her, the punishments seemed a bit lenient.

As a participant observer, the researcher needed to see through the eyes of the subject or the target group. The researcher spent much time in the traditional homesteads, and this prolonged immersion lent itself to better understanding the royal families. The researcher was able to have an in-depth contact with the people that formed the subject of her study. There was no need to learn the language, since the researcher was a Venda and had learned the informal aspects of the culture and how people interacted with each other. She was able to identify what was taken seriously and what was taken for granted. There were certain things that people would not always talk about, for example, who would be the next traditional leader and/or *khadzi*. By being in the royal village most of the time, time builds trust and some members of the royal village began to trust me and the researcher was able to see seemingly deviant and hidden activities. The time spent increased the researcher's ability to situate action in context.

The researcher tried to get as much trust as she could from people to make the research study a success. If informants do not trust the researcher they may hide information from her, and sometimes it becomes difficult for members of a community or interviewees to accept and allow probing into their lives for the sake of scientific knowledge. Anxieties about the research can influence decisions and affect the dynamics of the situation, and honesty as well as consent. The researcher must be able to handle circumstances with care, otherwise her role can become a point of controversy and her effectiveness as a researcher diminished. During observation the researcher tried hard to generate a high degree trust among the participants, so they might feel comfortable when she was around.

What the researcher learned from doing this fieldwork is that the information that one gets by asking questions from the interview schedule is not enough. It is true that one might get satisfactory answers, but the answers might leave some gaps which would perhaps be filled by conducting participant observation. For example, in the interview schedule a question related to the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership. Asking this question without being able to observe what *makhadzi* does and how she does it would have a negative effect on the responses. The question could be well answered, but a visit to the traditional homestead to observe what the respondent actually did could give a different picture altogether. One girls' initiation session attended led to a lot of questions that were not alluded to in the interview schedule. By conducting participant observation, the researcher was able to ask questions that were relevant to the study and could yield useful information.

The most important behavioural principle in participant observation is to be discreet. A researcher should try not to stand out or to affect the flow of activity. One way to do this is to behave in a way similar to the people around you, such as praying in a religious setting or attending a tribal court. It also helps to be aware of local meanings for particular body language positions and gestures, for example, and tones of voice, as well as what types of physical and eye contact are locally appropriate in different situations. A researcher engaging in participant observation always needs to use good judgment in determining whether to participate in certain types of activities. In this research, during a *thevhula* (thanksgiving) session there were certain

places prohibited to the researcher as they were for members of the royal household in question. As mentioned earlier, the researcher was given the opportunity of attending a puberty rite session. There was a verification process involved. The *makhadzi* catechized the researcher to establish that she was indeed acquainted with the puberty rites.

As also mentioned earlier, participant observation is used as a data-gathering device because participant observers generally believe that human behaviour is influenced in many ways by the milieu or setting in which it occurs. Accordingly, the researcher visited and spent considerable time in the respondents' natural habitats. This gave time to obtain a wealth of first-hand information on the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership and helped the researcher to make informed judgments about the observations made. In a ceremony where a *makhadzi* was performing a ritual to call upon the ancestors to protect a child who was supposed to become a chief, she said:

> This is an appeal to the ancestors; please listen to me as I speak to you the Singos. Here is your child, protect him from animals who want to devour him and take his life. You are fully aware that he is the one who will become our leader, please protect him.

Only participant observation revealed that this child had been taken to his maternal grandparents because the royal family was fearful that other royal members might collude and connive to kill him so that he should not become a chief, particularly if there might be a dispute over who the heir should be. This arrangement was facilitated by the *makhadzi*.

Observation was therefore used as a tool for gathering data in two ways: respondents were observed during interviews, that is, non-verbal cues were observed, as well as the making of general observations when visiting the respondents in their communities. The researcher was able to take cognizance of body language, and this was thoroughly recorded during the interview session so as to help during data analysis. After the respondents were selected, the researcher spent some time with them trying to observe them in their natural setting. This was done by

constantly visiting them in their communities. Through observation in the traditional households visited, the researcher was able to conclude that the *makhadzi* is accorded high regard.

In the conduct of field work, notes were made and the researcher wrote down how people behaved and, in certain instances, how those people reacted. There are different ways of doing things in different *misanda*. At the *khoro* (traditional court), for example, in some situations the physical presence of the *makhadzi* did not matter at all, whilst in others her physical presence was very important. That information was duly documented. The physical gestures of people who were observed were also recorded to complete the picture.

The taking of field notes in this research was sometimes easy, particularly if the researcher was not actually participating in the activity. For example, when the researcher accompanied a *makhadzi* who was conciliating a matter between a groom's family and a bride's family, the researcher was observing and so had a good chance of writing up the observation. But there were times when it was necessary to make notes after the activity. For example, when the researcher participated in the initiation session, she was not in a position to write. What she did was to do the writing up after participating. The challenge was to write things up immediately while the information is still fresh and before it faded away. In most cases a digital camera was carried to the observation site, and that was an advantage since replay helped to refresh any fading memory.

4.3.3 Life histories

In sociological and anthropological research, a life history refers to the overall picture of the informant's or interviewee's life. According to Berger and Quinney (2004:57) "life history" is an investigation of the past or present by means of personal recollections, memories, evocations and life histories. This is a systematic collection of voiced experiences of real people, kept for posterity. It is the interpretation of a person's life as a biography or career. It deals with data that is solicited rather than already present in existing documents.

Carr (1997:19) says that the purpose of taking life histories is to tap the knowledge of historical times of people still living, especially 'ordinary' people. A life history enables us to learn how people understand and make sense of aspects of social life. The research is participant-orientated and comes from an interpretive standpoint. According to Goodson and Sikes (2001:34) when one is conducting a life history interview, one needs to be prepared because the interview takes a long time. The researcher has to be friendly and show an interest. One has to be flexible in use of standardised research instruments. Sometimes in the collection of data by means of life histories, the interviewees may find some reminiscences distressing. As a researcher he has to be prepared on how he will deal with the situation.

Life histories do not require one to talk much. This is an exploration of the past life of someone else; as he talks the researcher should not interrupt the interviewee. It is also incumbent on the researcher to learn not to impose his or her own views on the interviewee. After the interviews the researcher may not rush away as soon as the interview ends because sometimes he might have evoked the interviewee's emotions. The interviewee might need time to work through the emotions with the assistance of the researcher. Life histories have some advantages, for example, they produce rich data and also capture experiences for posterity. When the researcher explored the life histories of her informants, the focus was on different generations: for example the great grandparents, grandparents, parents, siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, daily life in childhood, community and class, school, employment, leisure and courting, marriage and children, changing daily life as well current life.

This was an exciting experience. The researcher listened attentively without imposing any views as the respondents talked about their experiences. Some informants liked the process and they were able to give interesting information. For example, the *makhadzi* from one traditional homestead recounted how she grew up in the traditional household, and all the rituals she underwent as a child until she was installed. She was quite enthusiastic when she explained that. It was also interesting, because whatever she said added value to existing knowledge about the role of *makhadzi*. What was best about taking life histories is the fact that it seemed to be answering questions that were not asked in the interview schedule. For example, in the schedule

there is a question asking how far a *makhadzi* can trace genealogy to the present traditional leader. That question was not satisfactorily answered in the interviews, but when genealogies were written down as part of the life histories, that was captured very well. Rich information was gained by this means.

It should also be said that the writing of life histories may be a challenge. It takes a lot of courage for a respondent to give the researcher information, since this sometimes involves a lot of emotion. During the course of writing up the life history, the respondent might think of something that really makes her very upset. In that case, the researcher would intervene may be by addressing something that does not relate to the issue in question, so that the emotions could be worked through.

While the life history was being written of one *makhadzi* who is also a traditional leader, she thought of some occurrence that evoked her emotions. The researcher asked how it came about that she was chosen as a traditional leader. She first stammered and ultimately broke down, but after a while started talking again. She said:

> What made me a female traditional leader is the fact that two of my brothers died at an early age. After my grandmother died, my father was inaugurated. He died mysteriously. My elder brother succeeded him as well as the other one. They died without being sick and this was because our chieftainship does not allow a male to be inaugurated as a traditional leader that is why I ended up being a traditional leader.

4.3.4 Case studies

According to Yin (1989:30) a case study is one of several ways of doing research. It is an in depth study of a single individual, group, incident or community. Rather than using samples and following a rigid protocol to examine a limited number of variables, case study methods involve an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event: a case. They provide a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analysing information, and reporting the results. As a result, the researcher may gain a sharpened understanding of why the instance

happened as it did, and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research. Case studies lend themselves to both generating and testing hypotheses.

Basically, a case study is an in depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey. It is a method used to narrow down a very broad field of research into one easily researchable topic. Whilst it will not answer a question completely, it gives some indications and allows further elaboration and hypothesis creation on a subject. The case study research design is also useful for testing whether scientific theories and models actually work in the real world. You may come out with a great computer model for describing how the ecosystem of how a rock pool works but it is only by trying it out on a real life pool that you can see whether or not it is a realistic simulation.

According to Yin (1994:57) the advantage of the case study research design is that one can focus on specific and interesting cases. In the design of a case study, it is important to plan and design how one is going to address the study and make sure that all collected data is relevant. Unlike a scientific report, there is no strict set of rules so the most important part is making sure that the study is focused and concise; otherwise one can end up having to wade through a lot of irrelevant information. It is best if one makes oneself a short list of four or five bullet points that you are going to try and address during the study. If you make sure that all research refers back to these then you will not be far wrong (Abramson 1992:45).The results in a case study tend to be more opinion-based than objective. The usual idea is to try and collate your data into a manageable form and construct a narrative around it. Use examples in your narrative whilst keeping things concise and interesting.

In this research case studies were also used to help understand the role of the *makhadzi* better. The researcher would go to the villages to interview the *makhadzi* chosen as a case study, and questions were asked that related to the topic and also some that did not relate to the topic but that shed light on it. Case studies allowed the study of virtually everything about the phenomenon in question. Case studies enable focus on different issues as well as allowing some leeway in getting information without any restrictions. Interviewing *makhadzi* alone and letting

her vent whatever frustrations she has and sharing with the researcher joys was one thing the researcher liked case studies for. The researcher was able to get ample information.

In this study seven case studies were chosen which focussed on the role of the *makhadzi* in traditional leadership. It is true that, during the interviews, information relating to the study was obtained, but at the same time it was necessary to get the specifics hence the use of case studies enabled a more holistic approach to the subject. The basis of a case study is its subject and relevance. In a case study, a small study group, one individual case or one particular population is deliberately isolated. For example, interviews may show the different roles of *makhadzi*. A case study of one or two specific *makhadzi*s can show how those different roles are carried out or unfold, as well as revealing the socio-political pressures that drive the whole process.

The case study approach was chosen to provide an insight into the role of the *makhadzi* in traditional leadership, especially in terms of dispute resolution– that is, conciliation, negotiation, mediation and arbitration. A few points were written down to guide the researcher in her interview with the *makhadzi*. She was able to generate further questions based on the guiding questions, and this yielded a lot of information. In the course of the interviews the *makhadzi* could speak and explain whatever she wanted to, and the researcher could either make a follow up of the question or ask something else. Each case was handled differently, and some questions were not asked in a similar way; they were adapted to circumstances.

4.4 Data collection

The taking of notes and records is important. Kyale (1996:38) emphasizes the point that, after participating and observing is done, the information needs to be documented as well. Sometimes it is hard to write down everything that is important while in the act of participating and observing. A researcher needs therefore to be able to rely on her memory. Documentation of participant observation data consists of field notes recorded in field notebooks. These data are records of what has been experienced, what was learned through interaction with other people, and what was observed.

As soon as possible after collecting participant observation data, the researcher should expand whatever notes were made into a descriptive narrative. If participant observation is planned for late in the evening, enough time should be ensured the next morning to expand the notes. Field notes must have as much detail as possible. A researcher will not have been able to write down everything that transpired and was observed and maybe not anything at all if participation was quite active. It is necessary to be disciplined to write down and expand one's observations as soon and as completely as possible.

4.5 Ethical considerations

According to Marshall (2003:39), ethics refer to the application of moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects, in particular active acceptance of subjects' right to privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. Until recently sociologists and social scientists generally often displayed arrogance in their treatment of research subjects, justifying their actions by the search for truth. This trend is now being redressed, with the adoption of formal codes of conduct, and greater emphasis on ethical research procedures.

Participants in a research endeavour should be respected, and that requires a commitment to ensuring their autonomy and dignity. Where their autonomy may be weakened, they have to be protected from exploitation. The dignity of all research participants must be respected. Adherence to this principle ensures that people will not be used simply as a means to achieve research objectives.

Romm (2001:56) maintains that it is not necessary to obtain formal informed consent for participant observation. However, when talking to people informally about the research and ones role in it, it is important to underscore that they are not under duty to talk to one and that there will be no repercussions if they do not. If your involvement with an individual appears to be progressing beyond participant observation to a formal interview, it is necessary to obtain informed consent before beginning an interview.

One of the basic tenets is that subjects should normally have their privacy respected through the practice of informed consent. This would rule out any observation of private behaviour without the explicit and fully informed permission of the person to be observed. The researcher is also responsible for preserving the confidentiality of any information that could identify subjects. The protection of data, so that anonymity is assured, is an increasing concern and is now subject to certain legal requirements. Ethical principles guide not only the conduct, but also the presentation of research, and there are ethical implications concerning how the results might be used.

Researchers should also have respect for communities. Respect for communities cast on the researcher an obligation to respect the values and interests of the community in research and, wherever possible, to protect the community from harm. The researcher believes that this principle is, in fact, fundamental for research when community-wide knowledge, values, and relationships are critical to research success and may in turn be affected by the research process or its outcomes. Respondents' confidentiality must also be respected during eventual presentation of the data in public dissemination events, as well as in printed publications.

According to Pelto and Pelto (1997:151), informed consent is a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate. Informed consent is one of the most important tools for ensuring respect for persons during research. When conducting participant observation you should be careful to explain to the participants who you are and what you are doing. It is important, because participants may otherwise feel intimidated by a stranger's presence, and it is also important that one does not disturb normal activity. The people one observes and interacts with should not feel that his or her presence is compromising their privacy. In such situations, it is essential that the researcher openly identifies herself and states her intention.

As with all qualitative methods, researchers involved in participant observation must make a personal commitment to protect the identities of the people they observe or with whom they

interact, even if informally. Maintaining confidentiality means ensuring that particular individuals are not linked to the data they provide. This means that one must not record identifying information such as the names and addresses of people one meets during participant observation. If it becomes necessary to get such information – for example, if the person wants you to cell phone him or invites you to his home or workplace – it should not be included in the field notes. One should also make sure that the information is safe (Burgess 1984:80). At the same time, it may be required in some instances to record the names and locations of establishments if, for example, follow-up observation will be required.

These names and locations may be documented in field notes with limited access. Sometimes, one may develop informal personal relationships with key informants. In such instances, the researcher must be sure that no personal information given is ever included in the actual participant observation data. If you are not sure whether or not the information they provide is appropriate for your official field notes, you need to ask their permission to use it. Protecting participants' confidentiality also requires that researchers do not disclose personal characteristics that could allow others to guess the identities of people who played a role in the research. This dictates that one takes great care not only in entering participant observation data.

According to Lee (2000:21) respondents may test one to see whether he or she disclose information by asking questions about things you may have seen or heard. One's refusal to divulge confidential information reassures them that he or she would protect their confidentiality as well. One should never be secretive or deliberately misleading about the research project or one's role in it. If someone asks directly what one is doing, always provide a truthful response, using your judgment to gauge how exactly to handle a given situation. Be open, polite and cognizant of your position as a guest or outsider.

The researcher in this study explained to the respondents the purpose of the study. She also indicated that the research was going to be used purely for academic purposes. The right to privacy and confidentiality was ensured. It was also made clear that the identity of the participants would be concealed. They were told that they were not forced to participate in the

study, and if at any time they felt they would want to withdraw from the study, they were at liberty to do so. It was also explained to them that, after the write-up, they would free to ask to read the document. The University of Venda was asked for ethical clearance in the Research and Innovation Directorate and the researcher was given permission to conduct the research. The researcher alerted relevant gatekeepers (members of the royal household, community members in positions of official or unofficial authority, for example, and civic organization members) as to her presence and purpose.

There are no formal rules about disclosing ones involvement in a research project while in casual conversation with community members, but it is usually advisable to do so (Bogdewic, 1992:48). In one royal homestead, the researcher spent a significant amount of time chatting with other people. Some of them began talking about a topic related to the research, and the researcher continued to talk casually for a while. When the conversation got to the point where the researcher wanted to ask specific questions and direct the conversation, she revealed her identity and mission. In such a situation one must not neglect to inform the respondents of their right to refuse further discussion and of one's commitment to confidentiality if they decide to continue talking with you.

When this fieldwork was conducted, names of respondents were not disclosed. Pseudo names were used in order to protect their identity. For all the interviews conducted, there was informed consent. Participants knew the aim and objectives of the study and they agreed to be interviewed.

4.6 Problems encountered during the research and how they were resolved

It is common in the conduct of research that some problems will be encountered. Various problems were encountered during this study some of which were trivial while others were significant. Some of the respondents were expecting payment after being interviewed. Their assumption was that, after the information was collected, they would be given money as a form of compensation or reimbursement for their time. They had to be assured that the study involved no monetary gain; it was purely an academic study. Some murmured:

> We are tired of being gathered here for these people who do not even give us a cent while they are enriching themselves.

What the researcher did was to explain to the respondents the importance of the study in terms of knowledge dissemination and enculturation from one generation to another. It was also indicated that this information is of value, since the government is emphasizing issues of moral regeneration and 'African Renaissance'. An effort was made to persuade respondents to be cooperative, and it was indicated that the information collected would be important for future generations. In some cases the research assistant would intervene by asking respondents to cooperate for the benefit of the nation and nation-building.

Another problematic aspect of managing an interview is working within particular time constraints. Before beginning an interview, the researcher would ask the participants about any time limitations they might have. The interview conversation would be allowed to proceed more or less naturally, with a redirection of the focus if necessary. Ideally, the interview should flow like a conversation and end as expected, but this is often not the case. The respondent may be relaxed about time to the extent that the agreed time elapses before the interview can be concluded. To circumvent such a possibility, the researcher would suggest a break, and this may actually result in the participant providing additional information. However, in most instances there was a problem of time constraints.

As already mentioned, there was also a problem with regard to use of cell phones. During an interview session, a respondent could be called on her or his cell phone and speak for over thirty minutes or an hour. An interview that was scheduled to end after one hour may drag on for to two or more, depending on the number of calls the respondent received. It also sometimes happened that a participant interrupted the interview to attend to another matter. For example, the *makhadzi* may be called to attend to some important matter by the traditional leader. The researcher would have to wait until she completed the task she had been given. Sometimes it might take longer than was anticipated by all parties, but despite that it was necessary to wait,

because it would not have been proper for the researcher to leave without bidding farewell to the respondent. Protocol always needed to be observed.

On one occasion when an interview was being conducted with a particular *makhadzi*, she was called into the village because people there wanted her to reconcile two persons who were fighting over money collected for a funeral. The headman in that village had travelled away and there was nobody to intervene. The messenger indicated the seriousness of the matter, and the interview had to be terminated. The messenger reported that the plaintiff kept on saying that if this matter is not entertained today, he will kill someone. The *makhadzi* asked the researcher to accompany her, which is what she did. It was an opportunity to observe the *makhadzi'*s dispute resolution skills. This matter took longer than expected because of the evidence that was led by the plaintiff. It needed to be corroborated, and witnesses were summoned to put the matter to rest. This incident was treated as urgent because the money involved was supposed to be used in preparation for a funeral a couple of days later. On that occasion no interviews were conducted, and the appointment was rescheduled. However, the researcher was able to see at first-hand how a *makhadzi* may be called upon to act in the place of the headman in mediating in village quarrels and how her intervention is accepted.

Most of the information recorded was collected while visiting traditional leaders in their own homesteads. Because of contact with Europeans and their way of life, the *musanda* settlement pattern has taken on a new form and it was difficult for the researcher to capture indigenous ways of life. For example, in some *misanda,* the locus where the *makhadzi* used to have her residence is not where she is found now. When the researcher enquired, she was sometimes told that, in some *misanda,* the *makhadzi* is not even a resident there. If the *makhadzi* married, she will be resident with her husband, although the husband will be told that, if she is summoned to the traditional homestead, she has to be given the permission to go there.

Owing to the rapid changes that have occurred due to intensive settlement of white people in this country, many customs are now falling into decay– for example, initiation rites. In the olden days the *domba* (or snake dance) used to take up to twelve months, but with the introduction of

formal schooling the duration was reduced. These days, girls go to the initiation schools during school holidays and, according to one *makhadzi*, the training is no longer as intense as it used to be. She said in this regard:

> These girls come out from the initiation schools not mature yet; that is why there are a lot of illegitimate children whose mothers are not married. Even the treatment that was administered to the girls has totally changed.

Some of those treatments administered in the initiation schools were physical, and the informant *makhadzi* said:

> Can you really become physical these days? It is no longer possible in this new political dispensation since you can be arrested by the policemen for being inconsistent with the South African Constitution. These may be categorized as infringing the privacy clause in the Constitution and one can also be sued for physical and emotional abuse.

A royal *musanda* has its own unique language which is understood by people who frequently attend the *musanda* or who are from the royal household. The researcher had a problem because, although she could understand and speak the language, sometimes she forgot and would use conventional language where she was not supposed to. All the time, she would have to remind herself that she was in a royal homestead and should not use conventional language. For example, when referring to the death of a traditional leader, the royal Venda says: *"Mativha o xa"*, which translates as: "The lakes have dried up". They do not say: *"Vho lovha",* which refers to death of an ordinary person.

The first visit was made to Vondwe, where the researcher used to live with her grandmother. The researcher is well known in that village, and the female traditional leader, Vhamusanda vho Gumani, is related to the researcher's maternal grandparents, and so she was well received by members of the royal household. To other royal homesteads, the research assistant was helpful in negotiating entry. However, in some *misanda* the researcher encountered problems because

she did not know anybody; instead she had to rely on colleagues from the royal family, who could negotiate the appropriate entry.

There was also a challenge with transport to those royal homesteads that are situated on hills which are not easily accessible, particularly during rainy seasons. Some roads to the royal homes are slippery, and it became very difficult to reach them by a vehicle. Sometimes it is necessary to leave a car and go on foot. To compound that, those inaccessible areas often also do not have reliable network connections. Communicating with respondents in those circumstances was definitely a challenge.

In a royal home, one has to follow protocol, that is, there are specific ways of doing things. For this study, an appointment had to be made first for return on a specific day when the *makhadzi* or the traditional leader would be available for an interview. At times it became very difficult to get an appointment because, even when a date is given, the secretary of the traditional council might call to cancel the appointment due to some important engagement for the traditional leader. Sometimes there would not even be a phone call to cancel the appointment. The researcher could arrive and be told that the traditional leader is not available, she has to come back tomorrow or she would call you. This would be said very hesitantly. Normally it was better not to wait for them to call but to pay a visit again.

Some people at the traditional courts were not relaxed when interviewed, because they were not sure if they might be divulging information that they were not supposed to divulge. They were particularly tense when they saw the traditional leader pacing up and down the traditional court where the interviews were normally conducted. The researcher would then try to calm the respondent and maybe start talking about the weather or something else. When the leader disappeared it would be possible to continue with the interviews.

On the other hand, some respondents were so passionate about the subject that they continued to explain events and situations in a long-winded manner, and the interview ended up taking a long time. In such instances it was difficult to document the data, as it was hard to write down

everything of importance while in the act of participating and observing. The researcher often had to rely on memory and personal reminiscence of events.

4.7 Data analysis

According to Strauss (1987:10), qualitative research results in large amounts of contextually laden, subjective, and richly detailed data. This data usually originates from interview transcripts or observation notes and must be pared down to represent major themes or categories that describe the phenomenon being studied. Data reduction facilitates communicating findings simply and efficiently. This paring and sieving of data often is termed 'thematic analyses'.

McLellan *et al*. (2003:74), describe all qualitative research studies as being unique and thus demanding unique strategies for analysis. Qualitative data analysis consists of identifying, collating, coding, and categorizing patterns found in the data. The clarity and applicability of the findings, however, depend on the analytic intellect of the researcher. This dependence on the human factor can be the greatest strength or the greatest weakness of a qualitative research study. It is incumbent on the researcher to report and document his or her analytic processes and procedures fully and truthfully so others may evaluate the credibility of the researcher and his or her findings.

Data collected in a study through various data collection methods have to be analysed so as to conclude the study and come up with recommendations. According to De Walt and De Walt (1998:56) data analysis involves reading through your data repeatedly and breaking the data down and building it up again in a new way. This is done by elaborating and interpreting the data.

The purpose of analysis is to ensure that the data which the researcher got from the field, that is, observational notes are organized. The researcher has to be sure also that the data that is analysed is correct and this can be ensured by writing the correct information during the interviews. Before analysing it is imperative for the researcher to familiarize herself with the data.

The researcher used an inductive form of reasoning. From observing the respondents in the field in their natural setting, she moved on to develop more abstract generalizations. She listened as the respondents were speaking about the *makhadzi* in traditional leadership and was able to interpret and reason out in a meaningful way what had been said by the respondents. While listening to such conversations, the researcher tried to be as objective as possible so that whatever she concluded matched what she observed.

By analysing the content alone, the researcher could not have come to conclusions and made informed decisions. In order to understand and come to correct interpretation, non-verbal cues were also observed. The researcher looked at indicators such as facial expressions, gestures and other non-verbal behaviour.

It was quite common in this research, for example, that a respondent might test the level of confidentiality being used. One might say, 'since you are from X's royal household, what did they say about this aspect?' The researcher would try as hard as possible not to reveal the information she had been given.

The foregoing discussion highlights the methods that were used to obtain data in the study. A review of the methodology shows that data collection is no trivial task and requires to be conducted with utmost diligence and accuracy. It is a delicate process. Without a careful consideration of the data collection tools it would not be possible to succeed in obtaining information vital in answering the research questions. The subsequent chapter now discusses the findings of the study as it explains the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership

CHAPTER FIVE

ROLE OF THE *MAKHADZI*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates that *makhadzis* play a critical role in society. In so doing, it analyses the views of the Venda themselves on the place and role of the *makhadzi* as obtained in the field. The interviews were conducted in the Venda language but they were translated into English as accurately as possible. Having examined the role of the *makhadzi* since Dimbanyika's times, the researcher chose to look at the role of the *makhadzi* (paternal aunt) in traditional Venda society with a view to exploring the role of *makhadzi* in the present dispensation and also to establish whether the institution of *makhadzi* is still of relevance in the new political South African dispensation. The knowledge of how to live meaningfully and sustainably in our environment and with each other is still held by the elders, and the women *makhadzi*. Indigenous knowledge offers vast wisdom and has much to teach about how we live according to one another and to nature for the wellbeing of the whole. The relationships of individuals to their family, clan, community and society have regulated indigenous communities for many centuries and women have always played a central role.

5.2 Background to the field research

As specified in the background chapter, this research was conducted in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. Almost fifteen royal households in the Thulamela and Mutale Municipalities were visited, in which interviews were conducted with *makhadzi* both old, middle aged and even a young one who had recently been inaugurated. Villages' where interviews were conducted are shown on the map annexed to this study. Since those who were interviewed belonged to royal households, the data that was collected attempted to answer all the research questions and address the objectives of the study.

In sum, fifteen interviews with separate respondents, some of whom were interviewed on a number of different occasions, were conducted; some were particularly illustrative of aspects of the role of a *makhadzi*, and have been combined into case studies. Responses were mainly given in the form of life histories, which constitute the primary evidence for the current significance of

the *makhadzi* in modern Venda society, and illustrate some of the continuity behind the institution. Each case study is reported in narrative form, with the researcher as the first-person reporter. Where the information obtained was particularly important, the respondent's own words are used, with an approximate translation following. In each case, too, some back-up information is reported that was obtained from the late Professor Victor Ralushai, who granted a series of interviews to the researcher.

In the next chapter some interpretation will be provided that draws on a wider range of interviews as well as the researcher's personal knowledge, as the insider of a royal Venda household, of what a *makhadzi* can and should do, and how she is regarded. All fifteen interviewees were happy to talk about their experiences before they became *makhadzi* and what they do as *makhadzi*. Each of them has been given a pseudonym to protect their identity, but some were happy to disclose their names. The sites are also not mentioned, or are disguised, as a protection of identity. Their ages of the women ranged from twenty-one to eighty-nine years. That age difference gave the researcher the opportunity to compare what used to happen in the past with current practices and their role in the new democratic dispensation.

What is fascinating in this study is that not all the informants were elderly women; their stories resonate with the past. During the interviews, the researcher could sense some traditionalism even among those who are quite young. This caught the attention, and raised questions about what makes a *makhadzi* so conservative even when she is so young.

The marital status of the *makhadzi* ranged from never married, married, divorced, widowed and separated. Some of the informants could trace their descent up to the six generations, whilst others could only trace theirs for four generations. All were able to explain their genealogical link to their current traditional leader. When she married, a *makhadzi*'s in-laws were told about the special position that she had in the royal household. When she was needed, her husband would have to allow her to go to the royal compound to perform her duties. One *makhadzi* was married but did not live with her husband: she was staying in the royal compound because she was in a polygamous marriage and did not want to stay with the co-wives; instead she remained

in the royal household and her husband would come from time to time to visit her. The elderly *makhadzi* were widowed, and all of them lived with their sons not far from the royal compound.

One *makhadzi* had a dual status; she is simultaneously both a traditional leader and a *makhadzi*. What had happened was that when her brother was inaugurated, she was the *khadzi* and remained so for almost twenty-six years. When her brother died, a new chief was inaugurated and a new *khadzi* was installed, and she became the *makhadzi*. While she was still *khadzi* she was married to a nearby chief and had five children, two sons and three daughters. However, her mother was a traditional leader, and when she became a *makhadzi* she was given the headship of a village so as to succeed her mother. It was quite interesting to interview a woman who was both a *makhadzi* and a traditional leader at the same time.

The educational level of the *makhadzi* differed. Two of them had no formal education at all, three had basic education, and the other *makhadzi* were able to read and write. From what I have gathered the younger *makhadzi* are the ones who are fully literate. Two of them are school principals and two of them are nurses. All key informants were helpful during the research project and a good rapport was established with the researcher and her team.

The first case study illustrates the role of *makhadzi* in determining the choice of a successor and her role during the inaugurating of the chief. The second case study illustrates the role of *makhadzi* as a regent. The third role is *makhadzi* as a chooser of the bride and the fourth case study illustrates the role of *makhadzi* as a mediator and the next her role as the link with the ancestors. The last two case studies illustrate the role of *makhadzi* in choosing a bride for a leader, and her role in resolving conflict.

5.3 Thematic Case study

5.3.1 Case study one: The role of *makhadzi* in the event of death of a chief and the succession to traditional leadership

In the introductory chapter mention was made to the fact that the *makhadzi* plays an important role in succession. The following case study bears testimony to what was mentioned earlier.

The Venda customary law of succession applies to the status and property of the deceased. In this case study the focus was on the status of the deceased in terms of his successor. For example, after the death of a traditional leader, who will be his successor? The Venda people trace their descent patrilineally. This means that their members trace descent from an apical ancestor by known genealogical links. In a patrilineage, links are traced exclusively through the male line. In Venda traditional leadership the principle of primogeniture, or the right of the first born, is the basis for selecting a successor. Nonetheless, the *makhadzi* plays an important role during the determination of succession to traditional leadership, as illustrated in this case study. It relates the role played by a *makhadzi* during the determination of succession to a traditional leadership: when the chief dies, the *makhadzi* has the responsibility of choosing a successor.

My research assistant and I decided to visit a certain village at Niani, where the chief was a woman. The appointment had been made for 13h00 in the afternoon and the sun was quite hot. When we arrived we were welcomed and ushered into the chief's household (*musanda*). What has been said about the siting of a *musanda* was also true for this one; the site afforded a wide view of the surrounding country, while remaining itself practically invisible.

When we reached the chief's compound, we were welcomed by the *vhakoma* (chief's mother) who ushered us into the *khoro* where we were seated in order to wait for the chief to arrive. Then the chief sent word that we must go to the upper floor, where she was. We went there along a winding path. The chief, a woman her late forties, had already summoned her *makhadz i*in accordance with the appointment we had made. We introduced ourselves and indicated the purpose of our visit. The chief was happy that we had come to visit her place.

Before I could begin with the interview with the *makhadzi*, the chief related how she became a chief in a male-dominated area. I could see from the way she was talking that she was very relaxed and happy, as she narrated:

> My name is Nndwamato, which means that there was a fight. The fight was not physical but it was a fight through the eyes when I was installed as chief. It was by mere looking at each other without actually being verbose. People from the royal family disagreed about who should become chief.

This made me very curious, and I listened very carefully. She is the eldest daughter of the late chief Ramaremisa. Her father was a chief also deceased and her mother was his first wife. The chief's wife did not have sons. The chief had step mothers, who gave birth to sons and daughters. When the chief died, there was a dispute over who was to succeed. The family was divided into two factions: those who were in favour of her succession because she was the daughter of the first wife, and those who were against her merely because she was a woman. She recalled that she overheard one Naledzani Tshivhase, a *makhadzi* saying:

> Have you ever seen a woman becoming a chief in this community? Why did not you tell our brother, the chief, that because this woman has given birth to a daughter once the chief dies her daughter would not become a chief? This will not happen if I am still alive.

Such people preferred her brother from another maternal house to succeed. The matter was discussed by the royal council (including the *khotsimunene* and the *makhadzi*), but no consensus was reached. It was then referred to the Tshivhase Head Office, because the village is within the Tshivhase kingdom and any misunderstandings have to be solved by that higher royal court. The elders having listened to the case eventually settled it. The chief explained:

> After due consideration by the elders and the evidence adduced by witnesses, the order was granted in my favour. They gave a ruling that I am the rightful heir, and as a consequence of that I was then installed as a chief through an order from Tshivhase Head Office.

I then asked this Tshinakaho Mulugo, a *makhadzi* about her role when a new chief is inaugurated. She said:

> Let's begin when the chief dies, because that is where a *makhadzi* is needed most. Once we have addressed that, then the inauguration part will follow. We cannot climb a tree by its branches.

This is a Venda idiomatic expression meaning 'first things first'. I asked if the information she was about to give related to what she had actually seen, or whether she was told this by the elders. She said that an elderly *makhadzi* in a nearby village had told this to her. I asked her if we could go and see the *makhadzi* she was referring to and she agreed.

Fortunately we found the *makhadzi* who appeared to be in her late eighties. She looked very old and frail, but she was able to talk to me and could answer questions without any difficulty. Her name is Nyamunzhedzi Netshiungani, a *makhadzi*. She narrated the following: When she married, her husband's family knew that she was a *makhadzi* and should be treated as such. They held her in high regard. If there was a matter that needed her urgent attention as the *makhadzi*, her husband would release her so that she could attend to the matter. The relationship between the two royal households – that is, the royal one into which she was born, and her husband's on was harmonious. Based on royal principles, the marriage cemented the relationship that existed between her husband's father and her father.

She explained how she had become a *makhadzi*. She was the first-born daughter of her father, although her mother was the second wife. The chief, her brother, was the first born son of the chief wife who was also the *dzekiso* wife. She said:

> When he was inaugurated, I was told by my paternal aunt a new chief was being installed and she said: 'When the new chief is installed he has to be installed with a *khadzi* and a *ndumi*. You have been chosen to be the *khadzi*.' My brother whose mother is my father's third wife was earmarked to be a *ndumi*. That came to me as a shock but I was not asked for an opinion, I was being told that this is what the royal council had decided. That is when I became the *khadzi*.The chief was inaugurated and I was respected by everybody in the royal household until my brother's death, which I witnessed. My brother's first born son succeeded him. During the inauguration a new *khadzi* and a *ndumi* has to be installed as well. When a new *khadzi* was installed I became the *makhadzi* and the *ndumi*

> became *khotsimunene.* I was fully involved from the beginning when my brother's son was installed, and when the new *khadzi* and *ndumi* were inaugurated.

She then explained that, when the chief is seriously ill, the matter could not be disclosed to anyone. Rather, the illness is kept secret. She remembered how, when her father was severely ill, the sickness was kept secret even from some people who resided in the *musanda*. It was disclosed to the royal council, who would know that *musanda hunabiso*, an expression used only by royal people, which translates as, 'there is great heat in the royal household', meaning that the chief is ill. The *makhadzi* explained, 'we use the expression so that commoners will not understand what it means. The chief's illness cannot be disclosed to anyone except those who are very close to him.'

The *makhadzi* said that it was commonly known that, in the afternoons, the chief sat on his veranda. If the illness lasted a long time and people noticed the chief's absence, or if there are people who ask the whereabouts of the chief, the response would be that the chief had undertaken a journey. There were people chosen to look after the chief and attend to him. Close to him were his relatives and the members of the royal council. The royal council gave responsibility to someone to look after the chief, and this responsibility could not be entrusted to just anyone. The traditional healer who attends to the chief's health would inform them whether or not the condition of the chief is improving and there is still hope. In cases where he becomes pessimistic about the chief's health, only the closest relatives would witness the last days of the chief's life. If the chief dies, his death could not and cannot be announced. Official procedure must be first followed. The *makhadzi* observed further that:

> You know, I witnessed my brother's death. I remember quite vividly when he passed on, and the last words he murmured to me. The chief's death is an important occasion. In the royal household it becomes so quiet and calm. We are not allowed to talk loudly in and around the royal compound. We are not even allowed to cry because that would alert his subjects that he had died. The nearest kinsmen of the chief were told about the death but the information was not divulged to his subjects. A black bull was slaughtered and the chief was wrapped in its skin. Black is a symbol of sovereignty coupled with power. The

> *pfamo* (chief's house) was locked and the door was plastered for almost two months until the body had decomposed. The reason for plastering the *pfamo* is to avoid the bad odour from the decomposing body. The body should also be elevated because, according to custom, the chief is not allowed to lie on the ground. In the interim arrangements are made to bury the chief. There are rituals that are performed that relate to the chief's death.

She also said that it is a common belief that the chief among the Venda does not die alone. The chief requires a mat; his body is not supposed to be placed on the ground. When a chief dies, someone close to the chief would be killed, then the chief would have to be buried alongside him, on top of him as a mat. This person is considered the chief's friend. It might not be someone from the royal family but it could be anyone the chief is fond of. I know that when my brother was buried he was buried together with his friend. I would not mention his name, but that was a very sad moment for me. There was nothing I could do because that was a cultural requirement.

I asked my informant why the death of the chief was not disclosed for such a long time. She responded that one of the reasons could be that the royal council might still be looking for a person/s who will act as a burial mat *(tshileli).* This person/s would be killed by strangulation. If the death of a chief is announced immediately, those who are close to him will know about the practice and might suspect that they may be killed, so that they run away before they can be apprehended.

She further explained how the *tshileli* may be seized. The close friend would be lured to go to the royal homestead on the pretence that the chief wants to see him. Upon his arrival at the royal home there will be men waiting to strangle him. He would be ambushed unaware of the chief's death. Sometimes the friend might be called to the royal home and asked to go to a faraway place because that is the chief's instruction. The victim would be told to undertake his journey early in the morning or late in the afternoon, while some men are organized to kill him. They would be informed of time of the journey, and as he goes, as he is sent by the chief, his friend. He would not suspect anything, and on the way he would be killed. Sometimes he would

be asked to accompany some people allegedly at the request of the chief, and on the way he would be killed by those people. When they come back after a day or two they would ask if he has not arrived, while being fully aware that they have killed him. They will pretend as if they do not know what had happened. They may give the excuse that he took another route and they missed each other on the way.

To substantiate what the *makhadzi* said, Professor Ralushai indicated that a chief might have had more than one *tshileli* (singular) and *zwileli* (plural). In other royal households, the chief would be laid between his *zwileli*. One would be on top and the other one be at the bottom. This practice was quite common in former times, but these days it has changed. The father of a *tshileli* would be regarded highly at the *musanda* as a way of showing that his son had died with an important person, the chief. That information would not be disclosed to him in words, but would be shown by gestures and he would be respected by everyone who knows about the killing. Professor Ralushai made the point about royalty and ritual murder, 'when a chief is inaugurated, someone must die for ritual purposes. Ritual murder was thus performed in the national interest and not for enriching an individual, as is said to be happening these days. Rituals using human flesh are performed in order to strengthen the chief.'

According to my informants, after the *tshileli* has been killed they wait for the body to decompose at which instance the chief's burial would be organized. This burial is restricted to the inner circle of the royal family. Royal groups have their own graves. These graves are called *zwiendeulu* (plural) and *tshiendeulu* (singular). Only the chief's bones are taken to the *tshiendeulu*. To show the sacredness of the ground, commoners are not allowed to enter when a royal person is being buried, let alone be themselves buried in the sacred ground: it is taboo to bury a commoner in a *tshiendeulu*. There are rituals that are performed at the graveside, and those rituals are exclusively carried out by designated members of the royal family. After the chief's burial, there will be a time of mourning. During that time the royal council will meet to prepare for the inauguration of the new chief.

Another reason for not notifying people immediately about the chief's death is that the royal council could still be looking for the rightful heir and successor. The *makhadzi* responded:

> Chieftaincy in the royal family is encumbered by controversies most of the time; there are a lot of considerations to be taken into account. If a chief dies there have to be deliberations by the *makhadzi* and other members of the royal council. If that is disclosed early, the political vacuum may lead to fights and people might pre-empt the process. To avoid the situation, council members keep quiet about a chief's death until there is a rightful heir to be appointed.

Thirdly, as explained by my informant, delay is also meant to protect the rightful heir and successor. If the announcement is made immediately, some people who are jealous could eliminate the heir. This could be done in different ways, such strangling or poisoning the person. In order not to subject the heir to such danger, news concerning the death of the chief would be concealed. This will be done when everything has been put in place.

It should be noted though that this informant was describing the practice as it was about eighty years ago. She said that at that time it was not a requirement to register the death of a person, as is required now, and it was enough to report to other chiefs that chief so–and-so had joined his ancestors, and that was the end of it. She said that, because of the changing times, this is no longer applicable. A person cannot be left to decompose in a hut for even a day or two, let alone almost two months, because that constitutes an offence.

What happens now is that, when a chief dies, the royal council is immediately notified and his subjects are informed of the death. Some traditional leaders are not taken to the mortuary; they are buried shortly after a day. The burial of a chief is considered a private affair and, only those who are close to him often attend the burial. People would not know that the chief has been buried, because the funeral would be arranged as if nothing had happened, and a date for it would be set. A coffin will be bought, but there would be nothing in the coffin during the funeral. That burial will only be done as a memorial, while the chief has already been buried.

The *makhadzi* commented further on the issue of the 'mat'. In the olden days it was a cultural practice that the chief would not die alone, but these days it has changed. If anyone is found implementing such a ritual, he no doubt will be convicted of murder because the law prohibits killing for any reason whatsoever. Nowadays a chief is merely wrapped in a black cattle hide and buried without his right-hand man. The death of a chief may thus be announced immediately, because nobody will run away to avoid being buried with the chief.

I also sought to know the role of the *makhadzi* in the choosing and inauguration of a chief. My informant then began explaining the process of inaugurating a new chief. She pointed out that succession is based on a well-defined concept of royal blood, where the chief is directly drawn from royal descendants. The sacredness of Venda chiefs is expressed in a mystical link between the chief and the chiefdom; he is a 'living ancestor'. His health and strength influence the society's health, wealth and general well-being. When a chief is inaugurated, two new appointments are also made. These are the *khadzi* and the *ndumi,* his sister from a different mother and his brother who is also from a different mother. The reason for choosing a sister and brother from a different mother is that, if they are from the same mother they might not show him enough respect, as they are too close to him. If they are from a different mother, the *khadzi* and the *ndumi* will listen to chief when he talks. Besides, they are needed to advise him when he makes mistakes, whereas his closest sister and brother are likely to cover up for his mistakes. This arrangement is also made to maintain the balance of power between the maternal 'houses'. Chiefs are traditionally polygamous, and to maintain solidarity between the houses, children of other maternal houses have to be considered in the chieftaincy as well.

As my informant explained, when a new Venda chief is appointed, a special ceremony is performed to transfigure him into a living ancestor. This ritual is in the hands of the *makhadzi*, as the 'great aunt', the chief's official sister. The *makhadzi* works closely with the *khotsimunene*, paternal uncle of the chief, his father's official brother. These three form the sacred leadership which includes the chief, an official brother and official sister.

The *makhadzi* also explained that there are rituals performed by the traditional healer to strengthen the chief, when asked whether the ceremony is as intense as those described among the Shona. She replied:

> When he is inaugurated, the traditional healer for that specific royal household is the one that conducts the rituals. He mixes herbs that will strengthen the chief so that the chief becomes strong and when he talks people should respect him and that he should have command. He is also responsible for the handing over of the royal artefacts, because a chief is the custodian of the artefacts.

She affirmed that the *khadzi* is a very important person in the chieftainship. When the chief dies she becomes *makhadzi*, and when the chief is still alive she is called *khadzi*. Thus the *makhadzi* is the late father's sister, not from the same mother, and she is the one who selects the next *khadzi* and the *ndumi* during the inauguration of the chief, because they form part of the royal council. Among the Venda a *khadzi* is regarded very highly. The *ndumi*'s role is crucial, but it is not as prominent as that of the *khadzi*. During the inauguration the *makhadzi* is the one who performs all the rituals. The night before the crowning of the chief, the *makhadzi* arranges the place where the prospective chief, his *khadzi* and *ndumi* sleep, and under the chief's pillow there should be *zwitungulo.* These are the royal artefacts used in the royal court.

The power to designate a chief among the Venda was and is still vested in the royal council. The *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene* who were the *khadzi* and *ndumi* respectively of the chief who has just died play a decisive role in the designation of a successor. When the *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene,* as representatives of the royal council, designate the chief, they simultaneously designate one of his sisters or half-sisters as his *khadzi* and one of his brothers or half-brothers as *ndumi* who, eventually on the death of their ruling brother or half-brother, assume their positions as *makhazi* and *khotsimunene.*

Nyamunzhedzi, an informant *makhadzi*, said that the *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene* have a responsibility to nominate the new chief and the new *khadzi* and *ndumi* with due consideration to the prevailing rules of succession. These two exercise power on behalf of the royal council

during the interregnum between the death of the chief and the installation of the successor. The customary law of succession, based on a system of male primogeniture, states that the eldest male descendant of the deceased succeeds to the property, position, status and standing of the deceased, and within a polygamous marriage the particular status of a wife determines her children's succession to chieftainship. Not every first wife gives birth to the chief; the *dzekiso* wife, i.e. the wife whose *lumalo* (a set amount paid by a prospective husband to the bride's family) has been paid for by the royal family or with the cattle which came into the family on the marriage of the chief's sister (*makhadzi*), is the wife chosen by the royal family to bear the heir to the throne.

The members of the community have no say in the choosing of a king. It is only the royal council that is charged with such a responsibility. In a meeting of the royal family, convened by a *khotsimunene*, the *khadzi* nominates a successor within the royal family. When sufficient consensus is reached, the royal council communicates its decision to the members of the community. Normally the eldest son of the *dzekiso* wife is the one who succeeds unless there are some problems. If there are any conflicts, the tribal council deals with them and the *makhadzi* will have the final say. This role for the *makhadzi* is explored in the next case study.

One *makhadzi* informant mentioned that customary law contemplates for the possibility of the chief disinheriting his successor and excluding him from the right of succession. In such instances, also, the *makhadzi* plays a very important role. The royal council or the chief cannot disinherit an heir without the *makhadzi's* knowledge. She may even disinherit an heir if there is gross misconduct making the successor unworthy to succeed his father, for example, if he commits serious misconduct of a criminal nature, stealing repeatedly, prodigality, etc. A successor can be disinherited if he exhibits behaviour that is irreconcilable with being his father's successor for example, if he assaults his father.

My informant further said that amongst the Venda, specific circumstances such as an attempt at killing his father in order to expedite his succession, or adultery with the younger wives of his father would be grounds for disinheriting an heir. Disinheritance is not done haphazardly, but it

has to follow certain prescribed formalities. The chief has, for instance, to call a meeting to declare his successor's disinheritance and state the reasons for the decision. In some instances, however, the chief does not make the decision known before his death. He may only inform the *makhadzi,* the recently dead chief's paternal aunt who will protect the information as privileged information.

A woman is regarded as a *dzekiso* wife if the property that is used to formalize her marriage has been provided from the royal cattle herd by the father of the successor or other patrilineal relatives such as *makhadzi*. Depending on the royal household, there may only be one *dzekiso* wife, or more. The royal council makes a decision regarding the choice of the *dzekiso* wife, and she ranks highest of all the wives of the chief, even if she is not the first to marry the chief. One of the informant *makhadzi* interviewed noted in this regard that:

> What makes one a chief is whose son is it, that is, who is the mother? Another thing that is also important is the property that was used to marry the mother, that is who provided the property? There are certain things that are equally important, but these two rank highest. A chief is born to the *dzekiso* wife, and the property provided for the marriage should be cattle from the royal herd. This should be provided by the chief himself for the marriage of his son.

After the successor has been identified, he is not brought up in the royal household possibly for fear that he might be killed by those who are jealous or those who do not like the chief. To protect a successor from such people, he is taken to his maternal grandparents where he would be brought up like any ordinary child in that village. In most cases his identity is concealed; he is not given special treatment, but even sometimes treated like an outsider and manhandled to the extent of being given harsh treatment to shield him from those who suspect that he might be the future leader.

This arrangement of translocating the designated successor is done by the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene*. They inform the maternal grandparents of the child, who also keep this as secret and do not disclose it. The reason for choosing the maternal grandparents for this task is that

they can be assumed to still love their daughter and therefore will save their grandchild from harm.

It is also very important that when this child is staying with his maternal grandparents they prevent him going to the circumcision school. Chiefs do not undergo circumcision, because that is regarded as a foreign practice. If a boy is circumcised, he becomes disqualified from being a chief. It is thus crucial that a chief should not be circumcised because, during the rituals, the royal ancestors would not recognize anyone who has undergone initiation, which as noted is considered alien by royal Venda.

5.3.2 Case study two: The role of *makhadzi* in dispute resolution relating to succession

Mention was made in earlier chapters to the fact that *makhadzi* resolves dispute over succession matters. Disputes over chieftainship have existed since the inauguration of chiefdoms. In an interview with *makhadzi* Mavis Nedzingahe, it was observed that, when a chief dies, there are instances when there might be a conflict over the chieftaincy. For such an eventuality, there are strategies in place to resolve the conflict. In the olden days the *makhadzi* and the powerful *khotsimunene* would enter the late chief's hut *(pfamoni)* after his death. All possible candidates gather around, and they would go to the door one after the other and call out their names. They have to mention who they are and who their parents were. If one shouted his name and the chief's hut does not open, it would be interpreted to mean that one is not a successor chosen by the ancestors.

Inside the chief's hut the *khotsimunene* would arrange a huge log of wood against the door. When the chosen person arrives, the log would be moved and the door would open as he shouts his name. There would be ululations and the male traditional dance *(tshikona)* would start as would the beating of drums. This is an indication that the new chief has been found despite the conflict.

This was an accepted way of resolving succession conflicts. Those who were outside observing the process would be convinced that, indeed, the successor was chosen by the ancestors and the

community would trust their judgment. This information was corroborated by Ralushai, who observed that conflicts are brought about by the fact that, before a chief dies he might disinherit or disown the inheriting child for some reason – for example if the heir opposes the chief while he is still alive or makes an attempt on the chief's life. Traditionally, if someone has to be disinherited or disowned there are certain procedures to be followed. If the chief disowned or disinherited his heirs without following due process, problems of succession are bound to arise when he dies.

According to an informant, there are other criteria that disqualify a chief's son from succeeding him for example if his mother was a witch. According to Venda culture, witchcraft is inherited from the mother, which implies that, if a person's mother is considered a witch then it is quite possible that the son/daughter might also be a witch and must not therefore take on the chieftainship. A witch or a wizard does not make a good leader.

Ralushai did mention other disqualifying factors also described by my informant. For instance, if someone had been struck by lightning yet survived, he or she could not succeed to a chieftainship. The rationale is that, when lightning strikes, it is believed that the lightning bird leaves some eggs and it might come back to fetch them by lightning striking again in the same place. This is considered a bad omen. The royal council might be afraid that if a lightning survivor succeeds, there is a possibility that lightning might hit the royal family again, because there is a belief that when lightning strikes, the lightning bird lays eggs. After some time the bird comes back to fetch the eggs and it might destroy the royal compound and that could be a disaster. The royal compound is considered a sacred place where the sacred artefacts of the whole community are stored and protected, and their loss would be a disaster for the community. If one struck by lightning may not succeed, then his younger brother may succeed subject to the *makhadzi's* approval.

One *makhadzi* further mentioned that there are cases where a putative successor has fallen in love with the father's younger wife, or they were caught in a sexual encounter. Such a person could not become a chief, because sexual misconduct is abhorred and is grounds for

disqualifying somebody from being a successor. In certain instances he can even be killed or banished by members of the royal household, because it is interpreted that if he could fall in love with his father's wife, he has the potential of killing him. If members of the royal household organize the death of such a person, it must be sanctioned by *makhadzi*. The *makhadzi* is the one who drives the whole process, even if she is not directly involved in the killing or in the banishment; she gives the directives. In such a case she will also organize who becomes the successor. One *makhadzi* informant said that there are always exceptions to that rule. There are for instance, situations when, even if there has been such conduct between a successor and his father's wife, the successor could still be enthroned.

Sometimes the chosen successor might be mentally deranged. An insane chief is not preferred, and in situations such as those someone else will be needed to succeed to the chiefship. Insanity is considered as engineered or orchestrated by a person who is jealous; that is why the Venda find it imperative not to let people know the identity of the successor until the day of the inauguration. The successor does not even grow up in the chief's household because of fear of such behaviour. The informant *makhadzi* said:

> My role during the inauguration is to announce the chief; I get the directive for this from the royal council. When this chief was inaugurated, I remember that I was not feeling quite well. I had caught a dose of influenza, but I knew that my duty in the inauguration was so very important that I could not even delegate my own sister. I executed my duty of performing the inauguration rituals. I had been imbued with the power to perform all the rituals during the inauguration. I am the ritual head of the royal family.

She observed that, early in the morning, she would perform libation and tell the ancestors about the ceremony that is approaching. Before the inauguration the *khadzi*, *ndumi* and the prospective chief are secluded. During this seclusion they will be taught how to be good leaders and how to behave when they are in their respective positions. It is in effect a very private counselling session and the seclusion place would only be known to a few people.

I asked *makhadzi* if this is a common occurrence among the Venda that the chief may marry from another cultural group. Giggling she observed:

> What can one do if the chief wants to marry outside his cultural group? I do not know, one will just give up. If he does not listen to your advice as *makhadzi* and this matter is taken to the elders and he still insists, one will just give in. With the arrival of nurses and lady teachers we really were in trouble. Chiefs would always visit the hospitals where they would find their mistresses and decide to marry them. In some cases we will fight the idea of marrying such a person, but it is quite difficult. Some were married and brought into the royal household whilst others stayed in Thohoyandou, a town established in 1979 when the Venda attained independence.

It is common nowadays that a chief can marry outside his cultural group. Arrangements can be made for him to do this, but the negative implication is that it may have an impact on succession. Children born of such a marriage may not succeed their father. The practice used in this family was that the child that was supposed to inherit was born to a chief wife who comes from the royal family. These days, with the Constitution being the supreme law of the country, such a principle could be challenged on the basis of equality. Still on the issue of succession, the respondent *makhadzi* said that:

> When a child, is born, I will give a blessing and inform the ancestors about the birth of the child, since the child may become a chief. In the last analysis I am the one with a final say when the successor is chosen. In the royal family siblings can marry each other. In our culture, intra-marriage [meaning brother-sister marriage] is allowed as long as those marrying are not from the same mother." She explained that, in the royal clans it is not a taboo to marry a sister, and such a marriage is preferred, to the extent that the elders arrange for the marriage to take place. When I asked the reason for organizing such type of marriages, she laughed and said: "This custom cements the relationship of people who are marrying so that the bond that exists between them should never be weakened. It has to be stronger than before, because they have the same blood in their veins.

The respondent *makhadzi* was very proud of this arrangement and told us that such a royal marriage is not considered incestuous, but if practised by commoners it could be considered so. In most *musanda* the chief wife is the sister of the chief from another clan whose sole purpose is to come to bear an heir to the throne. When a chief wants to marry a *dzekiso* wife, the *makhadzi* is fully involved because she has to choose who is going to marry the chief in order to produce an heir to the throne. The chief is not entrusted with the decision to choose a *dzekiso* wife for himself; this is always done by the *makhadzi* in consultation with other members of the royal council.

The informant *makhadzi* paused for a while when I asked her what happens in a situation where the chief is not interested in the woman that has been chosen by the *makhadzi*. *S*he sniggered, and said to me, 'He might already have wives that he loves, but the *dzekiso* wife is not his wife alone but the wife of the community, since she is the one who will give birth to the successor.' More than this, she observed:

> What is love is not an issue here. Because we are elders, if we tell him to marry someone, we are doing that to protect our tradition and the fact that the ancestors will be pleased. When we choose a wife there are certain qualities we look for; it is not even beauty. If she is beautiful then that is a bonus.

She quickly remembered an incident, which she narrated. She affirmed that what we are talking about is quite true, because in most cases one would find that a woman who is married to bear an heir does not even stay with husband, namely the chief. She said that there was one chief for whom a *dzekiso* wife was organized. He did not object to the decision of the *makhadzi;* the wife was married and brought into the royal household. The chief let her stay in there while he stayed with somebody else. He only came when he needed to sleep with the new wife in order to procreate an heir, but he was not staying with her. The *dzekiso* wife was not jealous at all, because she was taught proper behaviour when she was growing up. The elders will impress upon a girl who is from a royal household that, if she is chosen to be a *dzekiso* wife, she has to understand what it means to live with other women in a polygamous household. This would not

be too cumbersome for her because she would also have been raised in a polygamous situation. These values are instilled when the girls are still young and they are taught initiation etiquettes.

Succession is not automatic, even if it is understood that a particular person will be the successor because his mother was the *dzekiso* wife and he is the first-born in the family; it is usually preceded by some struggle for succession. This may even lead to conflicts between royal family members. The *makhadzi* has to mediate conflicts. In a personal interview, another *makhadzi* who did not want her name to be disclosed said that in her royal family, there was once a dispute that took nearly two years to be resolved. In the interim a regent was appointed, as there was no consensus among family members.

The informant *makhadzi* said that her brother was married to a dzekiso wife and fortunately she was able to bear a successor. He was the chief's son and a putative successor. He grew up well looked after. His father had married a very young wife *(mutanuni).* One day the *khotsimunene* told *makhadzi* that he had seen a young man coming from the house of the chief's younger wife. That was between the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene*; "we made a pact not to tell anyone, including the chief because of the disgrace. Indeed we kept quiet, but we were trying to find a way of reprimanding the young man. It was unfortunate because apparently the chief also knew about this but he did not mention anything to us. One day he called me and said that he was leaving for Johannesburg; he would come back in a week's time. I told the young wife to prepare food for him and the wife prepared everything and the chief left the royal compound. To our surprise in the middle of the night she heard the dogs barking but she thought they were barking at someone else and she was not even bothered. After some time she heard someone yelling and the dogs were barking louder. When she went out, there was my brother's son and the young wife stark naked. The chief was angry. She went to him and reprimanded him and told him that we could not discuss this issue in the middle of the night; we needed to wait until morning. He acceded to my request and went to sleep.

In the morning the matter was treated very privately. She called the chief wife, his son and the chief's young wife and chastised them because apparently the chief's son was in love with the chief's young wife. The *makhadzi* also wanted the chief wife to know what her son was involved in that is why she called her. The chief was so cross that he sent word to say that the mother of the prospective chief, who is the chief wife, his son and his young wife should no longer stay in the royal compound. The three of them must go back to their maternal parents.

The inhabitants of the royal village were informed, but the reason why these particular people were chased away from the royal village was not disclosed. The chief died seven years after that incident. After his death we looked at the different houses to determine who was supposed to succeed, and there was no one who was suitable. Then someone decided that it would be best if we went and fetched his banished son from his maternal grandparents. There was a lot of debate and disagreement as to whether he should become a chief or not. The principle is that, if someone has slept with his father's wife, he automatically denies himself the opportunity of becoming a successor. In this case, an exception was made; we had to compromise and let him become chief. The *khotsimunene* was sent from the royal village to fetch him to take over his father's chieftainship."

This was a tough decision and it almost divided the royal family– but because the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* were in agreement, the decision was accepted. The researcher asked what prompted them to take such a decision when others were against it. Was there no one who could take over the chieftainship? She said that there was someone who was next, but he was from another house. She explained:

> What made us take such a decision was that I knew that the one that other people were comfortable with was not my brother's biological child. He was fathered by one *mukoma* in the village. The chief's second wife had an extra-marital affair with a *mukoma* in the village and the one who was second in line was the product of that relationship.

The *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* had in that case, thought it better for them to let the banished son succeed instead of letting a commoner occupies the royal space. My informant *makhadzi* said further that even if it was unacceptable, "we just went on to enthrone him. We convinced ourselves by saying that, in our chieftaincy, it is possible that if a chief dies and leaves a young wife, the wife may marry his successor. That served as a justification for us."

5.3.3 Case study three: The role of *makhadzi* as an advisor

The *makhadzi* among the Venda serve an important advisory function as will be elucidated by the response from informants. One of the significant roles of the *makhadzi* is to give advice. One *makhadzi,* Ms Thomani Singo, was interviewed on this subject during my fieldwork. She was then fifty seven years old and married but living apart from her husband and she had four children: two girls and two boys. She had her own household near the chief's. A residential area was specifically reserved for her, and she was consulted on all matters in the royal household. After she underwent *domba,* or girl's initiation, marriage arrangements were made and she was transferred to her husband's family. She lived there for five years without children, and her husband married another wife. When the new wife arrived her husband mistreated Thomani Singo. He did not provide for her, and when she needed something she had to go to her parents for what she required. She was willing to live with her husband until she could see that she was no longer welcome. The new wife gave birth to a boy, and that aggravated the circumstances. She could see that she was no longer wanted in that family, so she left and went back to her parents' home.

She said that she was very miserable during the first few months after her return, but fortunately her brother, who was the chief of that area, decided to send her back to school, and she welcomed the idea. She was the *khadzi* when her brother was inaugurated. She attended a secondary school, where she enrolled in Standard Eight, which is currently Grade Ten. She completed Standard Ten and went on to the University of Venda to study for a bachelor's degree in Education, and is now a teacher in a nearby school. While she was at the University, her brother, the chief died. After the inauguration of the chief's successor she became the *makhadzi*.

When she was at the university she remarried, a man who had a wife. She is the second wife. She decided not to go and live with her husband, but he visits her almost every day. She has four children. Nonetheless she is quite involved in her duties as *makhadzi*. She advises the chief and she supports him. She said:

> The chief respects me because, if he is doing something that is not in line with cultural etiquette, I tell him. I would also remind him that this chieftainship belongs to me. It is just a pity that I was born a female and that gave him the chance of becoming a traditional leader. If I was born a male I would have been a chief. Such statements encourage the chief to consult me most of the time when crucial decisions are taken. This makes the chief's work and my work easier, because the chief knows that I am there to rule with him. It also prevents the chief from being autocratic and taking decisions that are unilateral.

This informant *makhadzi* told us what was told to her when she was inaugurated as *khadzi* before she actually became *makhadzi*. She looked down and her facial expression changed. She looked at me and said that I reminded her of her late aunt, who was her mentor when she was still a *khadzi*. She explained how to behave when I am in a position of power, and I listened to her carefully. Before she could tell me about her aunt, she kept on saying, "I would never forget my aunt; she was my pillar of strength."

According to Ms Thomani Singo, a *makhadzi*, her aunt often told her about a chief who did not listen to the *makhadzi* and other members of the royal council. She said that:

> If the chief is disobedient and disrespectful towards his elders, they could just leave him alone. Even if he needs help, they may turn away from him and would just look at him without reprimanding him or giving him any advice. Sometimes, if they see that people will be divided by his deeds, they might decide to poison or kill him. This happens if it is observed that his bad deeds will have a negative impact on the people and how they relate to each other.

5.3.4 Case study four: The role of *makhadzi* as a regent

It is quite common that in some instances when a chief died the successor could still be too young to take over the chieftainship. In such cases, the *makhadzi* took over as a regent. This is one of the prominent roles that are played by the *makhadzi*. There were some royal villages visited in the course of this study where *makhadzi* was acting as a regent. In others I was told that that the *khotsimunene* is the one that acts as a regent.

When we arrived we were ushered by the *musanda*'s secretary into one of the modern houses, where we made ourselves comfortable. This secretary exchanged greetings with us and told us to wait for the *makhadzi* and the *vhakoma*. The *makhadzi* was in her late sixties but one could tell that she was still healthy. She had adorned herself with a very beautiful *nwenda* (Venda traditional dress) and a crocheted hat. I was curious to know the *makhadzi's* level of education and asked her if she had gone to school. She said that she had not been to school at all. When I asked her why, she told me that she had married when she was still very young and after the *domba* she was placed in the care of her prospective in-laws at their home. She also mentioned that education then was considered a male prerogative, and not meant for girls. After a girl had gone to the initiation school she had to marry to practice what she was taught at the initiation school.

This *makhadzi* was married to a close cross–cousin, and this marriage was arranged by the *makhadzi* of her own family. Her parents wanted her to go and cook for her *makhadzi*. Her *makhadzi* was also the mother of her husband. After five years of marriage her husband decided to marry a second wife. She was consulted and did not object to the idea, because she knew that in a traditional homestead polygyny was expected. She said:

> I grew up in a polygamous family where there were many wives. Even when I was told that they were looking for a second wife for my husband, I did not mind. Even if I was a bit jealous I did not show those who were informing me as I was a chief wife. I showed that I supported what has been decided.

She has six children: one daughter and five sons, though now she lives in her own household with her youngest son. Her husband is still alive, but he stays with his younger wife. They communicate very well as a family. Her husband acknowledges the fact that she is a *makhadzi,* and when she is summoned to attend to royal family issues, he gives her leave. When her brother' son, the chief, was sick, she went to the royal village for almost three months and her husband did not mind because he knew the duties that she had to perform as someone close to the chief. When her brother's son recovered she went back to her husband's home. When there are conflicts among wives, she would also be called to mediate or arbitrate on the issue so that life can be harmonious in the royal household. She said to us:

> During the inauguration I was told that if the chieftainship does not go well during your reign, the chief would not have failed, but you would have failed. When you are in this position you make sure that you do your work diligently so that the ancestors are happy.

When I asked this *makhadzi* how she had become a regent she said that when the chief died there was nobody to take over the chieftainship because the designated successor was only fifteen years old. When the family looked at him, they could see that he still needed guidance. Besides that, he was still in secondary school and not then even aware that he was going to be the chief. When he was in Standard Two he was taken to his maternal grandparents as a way of protecting him from evildoers. This *makhadzis* chiefly brother only had this one son, and four daughters, and this brother had died relatively young after a short illness. Rituals relating to the burial were performed, and then the political vacuum had to be filled. The tribal council convened and the matter was deliberated on. My informant said in this regard:

> They were all in agreement that the heir to the throne was still too young and a regent had to be appointed until he was old enough to take charge. The question that remained was, 'who is the right person?' They asked me if it would be possible for me to take over the reins until the rightful heir was ready. I was not comfortable at first, but I thought that I would rather act as a regent because if the job was given to someone else it would cause conflict if he or she developed an interest in the succession. I thought that this solution would be good for the chieftaincy because I did not have an interest in the matter. Besides me there was a *khotsimunene* who was very adamant that he should get the position, and if the

> position was given to him that would put the chieftainship in jeopardy. I then decided it would be best for me to take over the regency while my brother's son was in school and in time became more emotionally and physically mature to handle the chieftainship.

She explained that, among the Venda, the royal council is very careful when choosing a regent. People are afraid to appoint someone as regent because of the conflicts that may ensure**.** Some regents decline to relinquish power. When a regent is chosen the royal council choose somebody who does not seem to be rebellious. They are able to recognize a person who is rebellious and cannot choose him even if he is the one who is fit for purpose; there is a mistake or something that will make them not prefer him. This also holds true for *khotsimunene;* if they perceive that he might not want to relinquish the position he will not be given the privilege to act as a regent. There is a Venda saying: '*Vhuhosi a vhuthetshelwi'*, which literally means that chieftaincy should not be tasted. If *khotismunene* becomes a regent he would not easily want to relinquish the position. This potentially brings hostility and division among members of the royal family.

5.3.5 Case study five: The *makhadzi* as a link between the living and the dead – she acts as a priestess

In the preceding chapter one of the roles of the *makhadzi* identified was that of mediating between the living and the dead. In the interviews that were conducted that also became evident. When I conducted the interview with Nyamutshagole Rammbuda, a *makhadzi*, it was not easy because she was 97 years old. In the middle of the interview she often felt restless and I would have to adjourn. I wanted to know about the role of the *makhadzi* as a link between the living and the dead. What prompted me to look at this was that often during fieldwork, references were made to the power that *makhadzi* derives from her ancestors.

This informant *makhadzi* performed her duties well, according to a grandchild who assisted me during the interviews. She was born at Harammbuda, and grew up there. Before she reached puberty she went to live with her maternal grandparents at Tshandama, and so she passed many of her formative years with her cross-cousins. She did not know who her father was until she returned home, and as she grew up she considered her maternal uncle as her father. She said: "In

the olden days individuals were called by first names. One would be called Vho Jack or Vho Musumuvhi. No one would call his mother 'mummy' or his father 'daddy'. This was done so as to protect a child whose parents had died and was orphaned, when he or she was playing with others. A child who is orphaned would not be distinguishable from others. This practice hides the fact that they are orphaned.

After puberty Nyamutshagole Rammbuda, *makhadzi* went back home where she enrolled in the *vhusha.* She observed in the interviews that that this was quite interesting to her, because that is where she learnt that she was a royal and that commoners should be submissive to her, as the treatment given to 'royals' was different to the treatment of commoners. She realised how important she was, because she was being referred to as *mukololo.* She asked her mother why she had not been raised in the royal household. Her mother said that, because her brother was a sickly child, her father had decided that she must go and stay with her maternal grandparents so that her mother would be able to care better for the ailing brother. She was told that she was brought back in order for her to be initiated, and that due process was followed on how a *mukololo* should be initiated.

She was married after the *tshikanda* ceremony. She said that when she was married she was not yet inaugurated as a *khadzi* and she moved to her husband's homestead. Years went by before her father died and his elder brother became chief. By then she had two children. A messenger was sent to her in-laws to ask her to come back home so that she could be inaugurated with her brother as chief and herself as his *khadzi.* She said in this regard that:

> My in-laws were supportive and a ceremony to take me back home was arranged. During the inauguration my husband was also present, but after a month I returned to my in-laws. Whenever there was an event or something that needed my attention, I would be summoned to the chief's royal kraal. When my brother died, I was responsible for orientating the new *khadzi* into her new role.

I wanted to know how the *makhadzi* acted as a link with the ancestors, and whence the *makhadzi* derives her powers. She was very quick to answer by saying that the *makhadzi*'s powers are not

hers; she derives her power from the ancestors. Makhadzi are but mere agents. She narrated that when she was growing up, if somebody died in the family, she was told that that person has undertaken a journey. It is believed that upon death it is only the body that dies, but that the spirit stays alive, so that in Venda culture the dead are said to have undertaken a journey, and that is what children were told when sought to know where the dead person was.

This point was confirmed by Prof Ralushai who also observed that when his grandmother died with whom he used to sleep every evening, he was told that she had gone on a visit and that she would be back after a month. He waited for her to return, in vain. When he asked his mother about this, she would say that the grandmother had just sent a message to say that he should behave well; when she comes back she will bring him nice food and a pair of trousers. That comforted him until he grew up and came to understand that this was a simplistic way of informing children about death. It was also a way of showing that the dead are not wholly dead; there is a part that is immortal and that is the part that has undertaken a journey.

The *makhadzi* said that, although the ancestors had positive functions, they could also exercise destructive powers. Ancestors are like human beings and they need to be recognised, through making sacrifices. If they feel negated, they could be very dangerous, and so ancestors had to be appeased all the time. Ancestors reveal their annoyance in a number of ways. They can kill, cause grief or inflict trouble. Accidents may in fact result from the discontent of the ancestors. Ancestors may expose the family or a family member to illnesses, alternatively they may become very passive when they are supposed actively to protect a family member, or they may totally withdraw their protective function. It is therefore important that one gains the favours of ancestors. This is where a *makhadzi* has a role to play, by appeasing ancestors through sacrifices. As the informant *makhadzi* explained how ancestors can be potentially dangerous, she talked of an incident that happened in the royal household, thus:

> I had a brother who did not listen when he was being advised. When he came back from Johannesburg, my aunt asked him to come to her place so that they could pour snuff for the ancestors [this being a way in which one connects with the ancestors] to indicate his absence from home. He was supposed to do that

> when he came back from Johannesburg and when he was to return to the city. He did not do it because he said that he was now a Christian. One day, returning from work, he was nearly beaten to death by thugs. They left him lying in the street, believing that he was dead. This is an indication that one has to listen to the ancestors; the *makhadzi* is a representative of ancestors. When the *makhadzi* advises and reprimands, she has to be listened to; if not, then the ancestors may bring misfortune to the family.

The informant *makhadzi* indicated that the ancestors are communicated with in different ways. Not all forms of libation are poured. Offerings are sometimes made at the instructions of the traditional healer of the royal village. In the case of certain libations, they would sometimes have to be sprayed from the celebrant's mouth, sometimes onto the earth ancestor shrine. This carries much weight and strength, and is not done carelessly. In contemporary times people do not always have a consecrated shrine or actual earth beneath them on which to pour a libation. But since a *makhadzi* is endowed with special powers, she is able properly to direct the spray, and can do so without making a mess. The informant *makhadzi* said:

> I remember when I was still young and I was being prepared for initiation school. My aunt took me to a secluded area early one morning. She was carrying a small clay pot and a calabash. When we reached the place, she said that I must bow down because she wanted to inform the ancestors about me going to the initiation school; and she spewed the libation of beer. As she was doing this, she was murmuring some words to the departed. She said: "here is your child, look after her; let her be happy when she is with others. Even if she does the unacceptable, pardon her because she is still young.

The *makhadzi* talks to the ancestors if there is sickness in the family that is also done by pouring of libation.

The intrusion of foreign objects was a common explanation by Venda people for body pains such as headaches and stomach aches. The presumed foreign objects could be rocks, bones, insects, arrowheads, small snakes, or even supernatural objects, and it was believed that they were intentionally put into an individual's body by witchcraft or by some other supernatural means. The fact that there was no wound in the skin for the entry of the objects reinforced the

belief that supernatural actions were involved. The *makhadzi* had to appease the ancestors by performing a ritual that might drive the malevolent spirit away, or she could initiate a process whereby the one who is sick would be taken to the traditional healer in order to cure this class of illness.

In one of the interviews with a female traditional leader, she was really proud of her *makhadzi*. She said to me that if something is not going the way it should or if there is something wrong and she informs her paternal aunt, "the sun does not set before she comes. She is the one who serves as a link between us and the ancestors; if she did not care about us, the ancestors also would not care about us either, and that would be a disaster."

One informant *makhadzi*, vho Nyamutshagole, indicating certain artefacts, also stated that she is the one who is the custodian of royal artefacts that represent important people who have passed on in the family. As in the royal village, there are spears that represent all chiefs and *makhadzi* who are dead. Those artefacts are considered crucial in the *musanda* because those ancestors are the ones who protect the *musanda* as well as people who are resident there.

One informant *makhadzi* emphasised the fact that, if one does not respect a *makhadzi* and things are not going the way they should, one will hear people saying, 'maybe his *makhadzi* has used warm water during libation'. Hot water is not good for libation since it makes a noise when it boils. Using warm water might thus mean that after the libation has been poured, all will not be well and if the person concerned was sick, he will not be healed.

According to a respondent *makhadzi*, the nature of the liquid used plays an important role in libation. Water is for cooling and healing, and creating or reconciling relationships. Alcoholic liquor is fiery, and is usually used to rouse, cement, ignite, protect and perform strong purification. This is an important matter, because when a *makhadzi* performs libation she is awakening the ancestors and it is only the first part of the process. After awakening the ancestors, she would discuss the matter with the ancestors or she performs a further ritual. Libation is not for instance complete without thanking the ancestors or requesting something like

support, stability, clarity, spiritual cleansing or protection. Ideally, once the *makhadzi* has poured libation, she talks to the ancestors as if she were talking to a living person. She converses, and builds a relationship. Overtime, she hears messages in distinct ways. When she pours the libation she is sometimes accompanied by a person who needs ancestral intervention. Occasionally those who are in the company of *makhadzi* could hear the message or hear parts of the message that then can be pieced together to make one complete communication from the ancestors.

One informant *makhadzi* seemed very proud as she told us that she believed that she knew the intimate secrets of every member of the family, and that her rights over her brothers' children were even greater than those of the children's own mothers. She said that when something good or bad happens, she would be the first one to know. Before a child told its own mother and/or father, it would first tell her as *makhadzi*. I also talked to the informant *makhadzi*'s brother's daughter, who confirmed this thus:

> My *makhadzi* is my father because she is the one who serves as a link between me and my ancestors. If I do not respect her and she is the last one to hear anything that has to do with me, she might use hot water for libation and things would not be good. My mother has her brothers' children, who she is supposed to look after. My most important relative is my *makhadzi*".

She was very proud of her aunt, and as she was talking I looked at her and noticed that she was very serious about what she was saying.

This *makhadzi* pointed out that women's powers extended well beyond their marriage, as they exercised guidance authority over their brothers' households. She said:

> I have authority over my brother's household in matters such as rituals and marriage. It is believed that paternal ancestors will listen to me before anyone else. For example, it is common knowledge that, when things are not going well, the first person to be asked to perform rituals will be the *makhadzi*. Today, early in the morning, I was performing a ritual for my brother's son who has found employment in Mpumalanga. He is going to start work on Monday. He did not go to his mother to ask her to perform the ritual for him, but he knows that I am

> the one who links the dead and the living in his patrilineage. I will be able to talk to his ancestors and ask for fortune and goodwill from them. I have also asked for good luck from the ancestors. When he comes back, I know that he will have been promoted. When my brother's sons come back during the holidays, they deem it necessary to present a gift to me, since I played an important role when they went to the city to look for employment. Upon finding employment they always think about me. I am the one who can perform rituals for them and ask for benevolence from the ancestors."

The informant *makhadzi* further explained how a *makhadzi* approaches the ancestors also at a national level. This does not involve one family or a number of families; it involves the whole society and might be needed when there is an outbreak of an epidemic, or when things are not going as anticipated. The *makhadzi* would in such instances perform a special ritual that will pacify the ancestors and ask for exoneration wherever things did not go right, and to this end she communicates with the ancestors to find out what might have caused the catastrophe. This informant *makhadzi* explained:

> A person cannot just wake up in the morning and decide to talk to the ancestors. One has to inform some elderly people that today I will be visiting the ancestors in order to ask about the disaster. One has to alert the family members before engaging in the practice.

She mentioned that libation is also used for public gatherings. The *makhadzi* pours a libation prior to a public event to ask for blessings for that event or for those in attendance. Among the Venda, young people do not normally pour a libation in the presence of elders unless their youthful energy is identified as a necessity for that particular ritual or ceremony. The person officiating at a libation must possess the spiritual force to open the way to spiritual communication, and so the person chosen for this has to be identified by a traditional healer. My informant makhadzi observed that, because the *makhadzi* is imbued with the powers she needed, she would do it very well.

There is in this regard also another very important ritual that is performed by the *makhadzi*. My informant *makhadzi* said that she conducts a crucial ritual ceremony among the Venda which

coincides with the agricultural cycle. After the harvest and before the new farming season begins, the royal family carries out one of the most sacred ritual, *thevhula*, to honour the royal ancestors.

The *makhadzi* explained the *thevhula* ceremony. She noted that the agricultural cycle begins after July and the ceremony has to be performed at the end of the cycle, after the harvest. Harvesting takes place in winter, around June and July. Firstly, the royal field known as the *dzunde* would be harvested, and thereafter other people harvest their fields. Some of the grains from the *dzunde* are kept for national functions. After the harvest, some of the produce is taken to the royal compound. This is a means of ensuring that the chief receives the tribute amounts of grain, which may be redistributed back to the people. The chief has then to organise and prepare for *thevhula*. Thevhula often takes place in July or September, but it cannot take place in August. August is known as *Thangule*, formed from the word *"tangula",* which means 'to take away'. August is considered a sacred month, during which no activities are undertaken whether they are ceremonies or construction. If *thevhula* is not organized for July, then it has to be take place before the next planting though this practice is no longer practised as it was done before.
The traditional healer will be consulted to prepare and lay out the procedures for the ceremony in consultation with the chief, the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene*. The healer would indicate the person designated to lead the ceremony, but most of the time the ceremony is led by the *makhadzi*, who is called the *tshifhe* (priest). Whenever this ceremony is conducted beer is often required. The *makhadzi* organizes elderly women, together with young girls who have not reached puberty, to prepare *mphambo* (ritual beer), made not from just any sorghum but from a specially selected variety. When this beer is made, there are special rules to be followed.

On the day of the *thevhula*, people would gather at the *khoro* in the chief's village. The *mphambo* will be placed in the ritual pot, and *zwitungulo* will be placed in the *mufaro* (traditional basket). Not everybody is allowed to carry the *zwitungulo.* Only the *tshifhe* (priest) carries them. Ritual drums are also carried and brought to the *khoro*. Members of the royal family are called upon to form a procession. The procession heads for the *tshiendeulu* (royal burial place). Access to this is also restricted: it is meant only for the royal elite. The beginning of the

ceremony will be announced by the *khotsimunene,* and the *makhadzi* will explain to the ancestors the reason for the call and why the thanksgiving ritual is being performed.

The priestess *makhadzi* with the *tshifhe* (traditional healer) carries a ritual calabash, a ritual beer pot and the royal paraphernalia. The *makhadzi* would afterwards lead the procession back to the *khoro* and move to the *zwifhoni,* another ritual site in the *musanda*. At the *zwifhoni* there are two stones, one represents a man and the other one a woman. These stones are considered sacred. The ritual beer and the royal insignia are placed next to the stones. Thereafter the ritual leader takes the ritual beer in a calabash, and introduces himself or herself to the ancestors by addressing the sacred stones. The *makhadzi* would pour the libation while talking to the royal ancestors, particularly thanking them for the good harvest and the rain which brought it about.

The royal *makhadzi* takes the opportunity to address the ancestors on various issues and to request a favourable new farming season. This is the way of giving thanks to the ancestors who are considered to have guided people through the farming season. It is assumed that the ancestors have looked after the chief's people very well and that the harvest has been very good; now they are asking to have a good harvest in future. After the *makhadzi* has addressed the ancestors, she would drink some beer and give the calabash with the ritual beer to the *khotsimunene,* who would then give it to the chief. It is after the chief has drunk the beer, that all members of the royal clan would also drink the ritual beer. It is possible that wives of the chief who are commoners will be present, but they do not take part in the ritual because the ritual beer is reserved for the royal family only. Children who are from royal families also take part in the ritual, and they are supposed to drink the ritual beer.

The *khotsimunene* who has announced the beginning of the ceremony is also the one that closes the ceremony. He declares it complete after the drinking of the ritual beer. The procession heads back to the *khoro* where the *tshikona* dance has started. The *makhadzi* would announce proudly that the year has begun, and that people could start preparing their fields again. In some cases the traditional leader may indicate that an animal needs to be sacrificed. This is however, not a mandatory requirement, as it varies from one *thevhula* to another. In some *thevhula*

celebrations a black bull is sacrificed, while in others it could just involve the preparation, pouring and drinking of ritual beer. If a bull is sacrificed, it has to be presented to the ancestors first before it is slaughtered.

I asked my informant *makhadzi* how often *thevhula* is celebrated these days. She said that, because 'things are no longer the way they used' to be in the old days, there may be four to five years between one *thevhula* and another. In the olden days it was done every two years. I have witnessed the ceremony myself, and what this *makhadzi* was describing is what used to happen some ten years ago. The ceremony I witnessed was not the same as what she described. Times have changed; people are now employed and would ordinarily have the time to participate in the ceremonies.

To mark the beginning of the ploughing season, when the next agricultural cycle begins, the chief sets aside a special day when all the headmen lead their people to work in the chief's agricultural land, or *dzunde*. Under ideal circumstances the chief would organize a beer feast for the workers that day. After ploughing and planting the *dzunde*, villagers work in their headman's *dzunde* and thereafter in their own fields.

The seed 'doctoring' ceremony is another important Venda ritual. During this ritual, the *khotsimunene* plays an important role in communicating with the headmen of the village. The *makhadzi* instructs the *khotsimunene* to take the initiative over the ritual. Venda people also perform rain-making rituals. When such rituals are complete before planting begins, all family heads bring samples of seeds to their headmen, who in turn take the seed to the chief's *musanda*. The chief appoints a ritual specialist to 'doctor' and bless the seeds. In every royal compound there is a traditional healer who 'doctors' the seeds, and this is called *"u tonda mbeu"* (to pour medicine over the seeds). The seeds would obviously be of different kinds, and they will be placed in a large pot and mixed with the medicines. According to Ralushai in the past this medicine was mixed with human flesh. When the seeds are taken from the pot, no-one is supposed to look inside the pot. The seeds should not even go home, but they have to be taken to the field. The reason for this 'doctoring' is to make sure that the seeds produce a high yield.

There is a Venda expression: "*Mbeu yo tondwa ho ndi mukuku wa mavhele*." This translates as: "The seeds that are doctored make the grain big." The farmers may also decide to use medicine from the traditional healer to safeguard and protect their fields.

Such practices are however rare these days, because of the existence of agricultural extension officers who sell seeds and fertilizers. Use of fertilisers' results in good yields, therefore the ritual is obsolete. The informant *makhadzi* said that some individual farmers however might decide to protect their fields further from potential bad forces. The Venda people believe that there are some devious individuals who use magic to affect the crops of other people ominously. Such farmers privately hire a traditional doctor to protect their fields.

5.3.6 Case study six: *Makhadzi* as the chooser of the bride

Among the Venda the *makhadzi* plays an important role in choosing a bride for the chief. Venda chiefs are traditionally polygynous and marriages to more than one wife are common. In order to establish the role of *makhadzi* as a chooser of the bride, I asked *makhadzi* Maemu from Guyuni on how the chief gets his *dzekiso* wife. Maemu grew up at Guyuni, she is now in her late fifties, divorced and with two children. She told me that she went to the *vhusha* initiation ceremony just after puberty, when doing sub-standard 2, currently grade 4. She was enrolled for the *domba* dance and while she was attending it she was also enrolled for standard 3. After she completed standard 8 (grade 10), she went to the then Vendaland Institute to train as a teacher. By the time she returned home, most of her peers were already married. She observed:

> I was not married to a royal according to the practice that a royal will always be married to a royal. Instead, I married a teacher at Tshipise. My marriage was not acceptable to many in the royal household.

However, she was adamant on the point that the man she married was the man she loved. She gave birth to two children and ten years down the line, "we got divorced." She is now living at Guyuni in her father's village and always she would remember her father's words before he died that a royal cannot marry a commoner. He would say that education makes people mad. After

she divorced, her father would say "look, a commoner has made a mockery of you." I asked her how the *makhadzi* chooses a bride for the chief. She replied first saying:

> That is a very good question. A makhadzi looks for the dzekiso wife in the family. A *dzekiso* wife is not any woman. She has to have chiefly blood. A woman who is not from the royal family cannot bear a chief.

A *makhadzi* thus decides who is to be married to the traditional leader. When a wife who is to bear a successor is required, the *makhadzi* directs where such a wife can be found –that is, which family should be approached to provide a bride. Normally, the chief does not choose but is told by the royal council who to marry and this decision is affirmed by the *makhadzi*. The chief wife is sometimes ill-treated by the chief and other members of the household so that people should not be aware that the son/daughter of this wife will be the successor.

My informant mentioned that the *makhadzi* organises people in the traditional compound to arrange the marriage of the chief. She is the one who orchestrates the whole process. The wife that is chosen is responsible for giving birth to the heir to the throne, but there are instances where the chosen wife might be unable to give birth. In such instances her blood sister is married in order to bear children on her behalf. The children are considered as hers and not those of the biological mother.

The *makhadzi* is also charged with the responsibility of negotiating *lumalo*, sometimes translated as bride price, for the royals. This is a traditional southern African custom whereby a man pays the family of his bride for her hand in marriage. The custom is aimed at bringing the two families together, fostering mutual respect, and indicating that the man is capable of supporting his wife financially and emotionally.

In this interview with one makhadzi, I was also interested in knowing the number of wives the chief could marry and also at what age he cannot marry. I was informed that the chief can marry even if he is old. She said:

> The chief can marry until he is quite old, but he should get someone younger to hold his stick *(lufarathonga)* [according to the interviewee 'the stick' in this sense is the penis] so that she tries to please the chief. After he marries this young one, he is supposed to go to the traditional healer who gives him medicine that makes him unable to bear children again, because if she falls pregnant this could lead to conflict with the other heirs. The practice is called *"u pembela"*.

Since the young wife might still be sexually active, it is possible that one of the chief's relatives, either the *khotsimunene* or the chief's brother may have intercourse with the chief's wife, as long as this is done discreetly. The chief is not supposed to know about the affair. The *makhadzi* is the one responsible for organising the *khotsimunene* or one of the chief's relatives to impregnate the wife.

A *makhadzi* would not normally select a woman whose family practises witchcraft. If she does not know the family, she would investigate until she is satisfied that the chief is not going to fall into trouble by marrying someone without good cultural standing. If the *makhadzi* is not from the same village, she will send someone to investigate on her behalf– it could be someone from the royal council or somebody else she trusts. After thorough investigation, if she is interested and the woman and her family are 'cleared', she will then send emissaries to ask for the chosen woman's hand in marriage. The investigation is quite rigorous and crucial and is aimed at protecting the sacredness of royalty. One *makhadzi* said that if a family does not practice good conduct, even if they are from royal family, the chief would not marry the girl.

Some chief's wives do fight if they think the *makhadzi* prefers one over another. This potentially brings chaos in the family. For example, *makhadzi* may prefer a formally employed wife over an unemployed one. One *makhadzi* was quite open and frank about this, and she said to me in this regard:

> If a chief's wife is employed she is able to buy whatever I need, and the truth is I will always be on her side. This does not bar me from loving the unemployed one who I only love because she is my brother's wife. Loving someone who is not employed is not beneficial for me. What will she give me? The one who is employed if she sees that there is something I need she will give it to me. Even if there is nothing that I need during Christmas and Easter holidays she may buy me

> some meat. These days there are days that are designated for women; I surprisingly get something as a gift. Even during one's birthday one might get a present.

From the interview, and also from the non-verbal cues from this *makhadzi*, one could tell that she was biased in favour of employed women who earned money. One could easily see that if an employed woman had done something wrong and the same was done by an unemployed woman and this *makhadzi* were to adjudicate the matter, the case would be determined in favour of the working woman and that could weigh heavily against the unemployed woman. The *makhadzi* categorically said: *"Muthu u yahu re namulo",* which translates as: "A person will go where there is something to eat". Considering our economic situation it is true that one will always be in favour of those who are able to feed her. That is the reality of life.

In the same vein, there are some *makhadzi*s who say that they are not influenced by the employment status of the wife. One observed in this regard that**:**

> Classifying women is not a good thing. One should know that these women came to the royal household because of her. I, in my capacity know how these women came about in the royal household. What is the point of classifying them? They are the same. What distinguishes them is not whether they are employed or not but whether they are royals or commoners. A commoner will always rank second to a royal even if she was married before the royal. There will be discussions that are strictly for those who are from the royal kraal. If you are commoner you should just accept that reality because you got into the royal household by default.

In some royal compounds, unless one is told who is from a royal family and who does not come from a royal family, there is no difference in status, people are treated similarly, but this is rare since the distinction between royalty and commoner in Venda culture is mostly emphasized.

What the informant *makhadzi* said was that categorizing chief's wives on the basis of whether or not they are employed, is not fair. A *makhadzi* should know that all those women are here because of her; she knows how each of them ended up in the chief's household. She said that

they should not be discriminated against because these women are the same; what makes them different is not that they are employed or unemployed, but their status, that is, one may be from a royal family whilst another is a commoner. Even if a royal is married to the chief after a commoner, she will be given preference over that commoner. There could be some issues that will only be discussed by the royals, where participation by commoners would not be solicited. A commoner needs to come to terms with that, because one should acknowledge the fact that one has trodden on royal ground.

To most of the *makhadzi* informants no one wife is better than any other. They are all equal in the eyes of the *makhadzi*. The fact is that they are going to bear children for their brother's son, thereby increasing the patrilineage. The *makhadzis* are aware that, if they begin to differentiate between wives, they will be creating problems for themselves and that could lead to a division in the family. It might also lead to an acrimonious relationship which might have a negative impact even on the chieftaincy and after one has died. One should be very cautious in dealing with sensitive issues like this one. To the *makhadzi* it is a given that, despite everything, a royal has to be treated as royal and a commoner as a commoner.

As already mentioned, traditionally the chief is potentially polygamous. Sometimes a man becomes a *gota* (headman) before he is inaugurated as chief. As a headman, he might also have many wives with children. After he is enthroned as chief, he may marry as many wives as he wishes provided he has ample cattle and conducts *domba* from which he will be given a nubile virgin as a present. Once there is good number of children, the chief might be told that he needs to undergo a ritual that will limit his ability to procreate children. He is told that the ritual will make him strong and he will have a long life.

The practice of *pembela* was emphasised by Professor Ralushai, who said that the *makhadzi* may choose a bride for the chief even if he is quite old. There are specialized traditional healers among the Venda who know how to prolong male longevity by removing possible cancerous gonads called *lulidzavhakalaha* and render them impotent. This most secret rite, performed away from home, is performed on the chief to enable him to rule and live longer. The Tshivhase

clan does not perform this ritual, but the Mphaphulis perform it at Tshitomboni, where it is believed that the chieftaincy of Mphaphuli began. There is also a custom practised in some royal households, such as among Mphaphuli clan and those in Lwamondo, known as *pembela*. It is a most painful operation to prolong life, similar to castration and done in winter to enable the wound to recover and to respond to medicine. Ritual beer is prepared and cattle are slaughtered in preparation of the ceremony.

The chief does not undergo this ritual alone; there are two elderly men who also participate in the ritual. At Mbilwi the two were vho Maphutha and vho Sotshaya, who were the chief's father's elder brothers. The traditional healer gives the two elderly men medicine to drink, before the chief drinks his share. After the ritual is performed, it is believed that the chieftaincy is not contaminated; people will live in peace and order. After the three men concerned have drunk the medicine, people will gather in the *khoro* and start to celebrate. The average Venda person will not know what has been done, except in terms of the dancing *(u pembela)* and the celebration.

In my interview with Professor Ralushai I was curious to know the rationale for this ritual. He observed that it is performed to make the chief lose interest in sex and render him impotent. Professor Ralushai mentioned that this ceremony does not preclude the chief from marrying another wife if he wants to. He remembered a chief who was quite old and who had undergone the *pembela* ceremony. Subsequent to the ritual, he married a young wife. There was a practice which was done if somebody older married a younger wife. An arrangement would be made whereby the young wife would be given to someone else, preferably the close kinsmen of the chief for the purpose of procreation. This young wife would be taken to the *pfamo* (chief's hut). It is possible that she might not sleep with the chief. In this instance what the chief did was to put his hand on the young woman's pubic area and say to her"*"Ndo ni fha nwana, ni songo lala na mulemba kana na mutshangana"*.This translates as: "I have given you a child but do not have sexual intercourse with either a Lemba or a Shangaan man." (It was taboo in the royal household to have a love affair with a Lemba or a Shangaan).

In the morning the new wife would inform the *makhadzi* what the chief had said. The *makhadzi* would then arrange for someone close to the chief's lineage to father children on his behalf. If it is difficult to get someone from a royal family, the services of a commoner would be procured. The *makhadzi* is privy to such information, and it cannot be disclosed to anyone. The young woman should also not disclose this to anyone even if she is very angry with a member of the royal household, because this might cause a conflict. She would not dare disclose such an arrangement as she would not want to see any scandal in the royal household. Those who might know would have such information by default.

Henceforth, after the girls' initiation, when a nubile young woman is brought to him for her first sex encounter, the chief could place his hand on her pubic area and all would be well. Once that is done, the *makhadzi* would arrange for the young woman secret love. The chief's young wife is allowed to take secret lovers, since the chief is now impotent but the children she bears will be regarded as the chief's. This is considered extremely secret. The other motive is that if the chief has a sufficient number of children, there is no reason for him to have other children. In my research an anonymous informant told me that this ritual is done in order to reduce conflict during succession. It might happen that, when the chief marries late in life, he might fall very much in love with a younger wife. This young wife may influence the chief to make her child an heir to the throne, leading to conflicts with the other children. To avoid that, the chief has to undergo the ritual and thereafter the chief will not be able to bear children. Professor Ralushai's argument was corroborated by Sara Ramadolela who said that a child who we might consider a royal may not be a royal biologically but a royal by social means, which means that a child might be a royal through socialization and not through blood because he or she might not have been fathered by a royal or the chief himself.

5.3.7 Case study seven: The role of *makhadzi* as arbiter

The *makhadzi's* role among the Venda is also to act as an arbitrator in most family conflicts. In the following case the *makhadzi* arbitrated when there was a succession dispute. The *makhadzi* who was my informant is seventy years old, widowed ten years ago, and lives at a certain village. Her brother, who was the chief, was married to a lady teacher who ended up hanging herself

because she did not accept that her husband intended to marry another wife. The *makhadzi* was a *khadzi* then. The *makhadzi* grew up in a polygamous family. She had three siblings younger than herself from the same mother. She had to leave school early to get married. She has four children from her marriage.

When her father, the chief, died she went home for the funeral. When all the rituals had been conducted and the mourning period had passed, the chieftainship position had to be filled. The royal council decided who was to be the chief and the suggestion was accepted. My informant said: "My brother, whose mother was the chief wife, and the *dzekiso* wife took over the reins." My informant's *makhadzi* called her and the brother whose mother was his father's fourth wife. They were summoned in front of the royal council and they were told that the royal council had decided that the informant makhadzi would be the *khadzi* and her brother the *ndumi*. "We accepted the positions and we were inaugurated together with the chief. It was a momentous occasion."

My informant makhadzi said:

> My brother, the new chief worked for Lever Brothers [a company based in Johannesburg] as a sales agent. After the death of his wife, his children went to live with their maternal grandparents." She said that the children's maternal grandparents blamed the husband's family for their daughter's death and did not want the children to visit their paternal grandparents. According to the *makhadzi*, the fact that the two girls were not allowed to visit the royal household was quite disturbing. She said: I tried to persuade them to go and visit their father in Johannesburg during school holidays even if they were not allowed to go to the royal village.
>
> My brother remarried, and his second wife gave birth to three sons and two daughters, but that did not make our brother forget his two daughters from the previous marriage. He would call me to say he missed his children. The *makhadzi* would go to the maternal grandparents to inform them, and they would reluctantly release the girls. When rituals in the royal compound were performed, they would take part and the *makhadzi* would also be called to attend the rituals. This would be arranged by the *makhadzi*. She approached the children's maternal grandparents and asked them to allow the children to go to the royal compound. They would not agree at first, but they would eventually

> give in to the *makhadzi*'s persuasion. In order to protect the children, the maternal grandparents would arrange for an elderly person to take them to the royal compound. When the ritual was over, somebody would be asked by the *makhadzi* to take the children back to their maternal grandparents.

My informant also said that, since her brother worked for Lever Brothers during school holidays, the *makhadzi* would organize with him for the girls to pay him a visit. Their maternal grandmother would be disappointed because she did not want them to know and to get used to the people in their paternal line. They still blamed the chief for their daughter's death. The *makhadzi* told me that one day she went there to plead for the children to visit their father, and she overheard their grandmother saying, 'where is she taking my daughter's children' and the *makhadzi* replied these children have royal blood running in their veins they cannot be raised like commoners, they have to be raised like royals. The children's maternal grandmother eventually gave in, and they went to Johannesburg. My *makhadzi* informant said that she also took care of them while they were in Johannesburg. The *makhadzi* would, according to her, tell those they were visiting, including the chief that they should not tell people that they were children from the royal family. The *makhadzi* played an important role in concealing their identity. This was a way of protecting them from those who can harm them knowing that their mother was the first wife and could make attempts to kill them or do something bad to them.

In 1974, the informant *makhadzi* told her brother that it was time that the children come back home. She went and fetched them from their maternal grandparents and took them to the royal compound. The grandmother did not accept the fact that they were supposed to stay with the people who had killed her daughter, but the *makhadzi* was very influential and arbitrated on the issue; she told them that it was time that the children went home This was unacceptable to the maternal grandparents. Often the grandparents would send the grandchildren drinks and other goodies, and they had spies who would tell them how they were treated. However, the children reported that the *makhadzi* looked after them very well and members of the royal family were thus to respect them.

The *makhadzi* said that the children were not used to their paternal grandparents, but she reconciled the situation and through her persuasion they became very close to other children in the royal household. The *makhadzi* also arranged for the elder daughter to go to the initiation school, held during the winter vacation as is customary. She said that she often visited the royal compound to see if the girl was treated satisfactorily. The *makhadzi's* own daughter was also part of the initiation process, and she taught the girl how to become a good novice and taught her the formulae. The *makhadzi* said that after the vacation the girl went back to school. In 1975, the *makhadzi* suggested that there should be a *domba* and her brother's daughter was also part of the *domba*. It was and still is common practice that *domba* cannot be arranged in the absence of a daughter from the royal family, so the *makhadzi* said that the *domba* was organized for her brother's daughter and it was given her name. She went to the *domba* and in 1976 she passed Junior Certificate which is now grade 10 and thereafter went to Tshisimani Teacher's Training College.

In 2004, the *makhadzi's* brother's health deteriorated, and in 2004 he became seriously ill and died. After his death the leadership vacuum had to be filled, and his daughter was seen as a threat by other people in the royal family, as her mother had been the *dzekiso* wife. When the chief died he had three wives. The *makhadzi* mentioned that her brother was buried on Wednesday, and the public funeral was on Saturday. When people were leaving after the public funeral, the *makhadzi* could sense that something was wrong. She resolved that, when the royal council met, she would remind them to call her brother's elder daughter.

Some two weeks after the funeral, on a Thursday, the paternal uncles had a meeting without even inviting her. Somebody told her about the meeting and she reprimanded them. She indicated that what they are doing should not be done because it brings conflict in the royal family. She could see that the paternal uncles had someone in mind who they wanted to inaugurate as chief. She went directly to the prospective chief, who was her brother's daughter and said that she must not make herself 'visible', because she could sense that the royal family members were beginning a fight for succession.

The informant *makhadzi* said that she could see that her brother's daughter was no longer wanted in the royal compound, but she knew that she was the heir to the throne and was not comfortable with how the situation was handled, but she was quite subtle about the whole thing. The *makhadzi* kept in close touch with her brother's child. She said that she told her brother's child not to eat anything given to her by anybody in the royal household but she did not give her a reason.

A battle for succession ensued, and the paternal uncles had their candidate who they claimed that their late brother's son, the chief told them should be his successor. They told the *makhadzi* that the chief's second wife's son is the one who was to be the chief. The makhadzi objected saying that she was not aware of such an arrangement. She said that that what you have been told in secret would not happen here. My informant *makhadzi* told the present chief:

> The chieftainship belongs to you; if you do not give it to any other person it is yours. There is no other way; you just have to keep quiet and watch the game that is being played.

The *makhadzi* objected to the chieftainship, and that led to a dispute. The incumbent could not be crowned until the dispute had been settled. A committee of six people was formed. It included the *makhadzi*, the *khadzi*, the *ndumi*, the *khotsimunene* and two elders from the royal compound. The meeting was quite tense; the paternal uncles were very adamant that their brother's son, the late chief instructed them to consider the one they had chosen as the rightful heir. After deliberations by the committee, the *makhadzi* was asked if she had any questions. She agreed that she had some questions so that she could be clear about certain issues.

She asked them who the *dzekiso* wife was. They all agreed that the chief's wife who hanged herself was the *dzekiso* wife. Then she said if she had been the *dzekiso* wife, why was her daughter not the rightful heir? They all looked down. The *makhadzi* said to them, 'why do you not answer; answer me so that I become satisfied. You are the ones who asked me if I had a question.'

The paternal uncles said that it was true that the girl's mother was the *dzekiso* wife, but because she gave birth to only two girls, another *dzekiso* wife was found to replace her mother. The one that replaced the candidate's mother fortunately gave birth to a boy, and that boy was supposed to be the chief's successor. My *makhadzi* informant mentioned that she had objected to that, saying that there should only be one *dzekiso* wife. One *khotsimunene* concurred with the *makhadzi.* The Khotsimunene made a recollection that the bride wealth for the dzekiso wife was paid in cattle derived from the cattle that his grandfather got when the *makhadzi* was married. The *khotsimunene* thus agreed and compounded the whole argument by saying that he was with the other boys in the royal compound who took the cattle to the prospective chief's maternal grandparents. He said vehemently that the chieftainship belongs to her.

The other khotsimunene was still discontented. He called a meeting of about thirty-five people and only elderly people were invited. The incumbent and the contender were not part of the meeting. My *makhadzi* informant told me that the same issue came up about the two *dzekiso* wives. The *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene* still objected, and she said, 'I want to speak the truth before I die. If you do not want a woman to be a chief you have to ask her politely and convincingly to give the chieftainship to someone else.' Another thing is that she has to give the chieftainship to one of her sibling**s.** The paternal uncle knew about this arrangement, but he did not want that to happen because he already had some other arrangements.

The second meeting did not yield any resolution, and a third meeting at Mukumbani– that is, the Tshivhase head office –was arranged. The paternal uncle had his candidate, and *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* had their own candidate. It was a closed door meeting. The *makhadzi* went to the headquarters and arbitrated on the matter. After some time the chief, the one that the *makhadzi* was arbitrating for was called to bring her identity document and she filled in the necessary forms. She was then told that she had won the battle to be the successor to her father's throne.

The informant *makhadzi* told me that the candidate was considered a successor because she was the first-born daughter of the late chief, and her mother was the *dzekiso* wife. She told them that if she did not want the chieftainship she has to be convinced to give it to someone *(u tsigela).* The requisite papers were processed in 2006, and the current chief was inaugurated on 27 October 2006. She faced some opposition, but with the support of her younger sister, the informant *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene* her fears were quashed. In the whole scenario the *makhadzi* played a significant role, being an arbitrator from the new chief's childhood up to the present day.

Many *makhadzi* are bold and have a strong command when they speak or when they give directives. During my interviews I went to one royal compound where the *makhadzi* told me that there were always problems and conflicts between the *khotsimunene* and the *ndumi* and some members of the royal family. She decided to use a strategy that would disarm those who always brought havoc into the royal household. One evening, when a fight had erupted, it was becoming quite late and the matter was nowhere near any resolution. She sat silent until the *khotsimunene* became concerned about her silence. The *khotsimunene* said, 'we are talking and we are not respecting the *makhadzi* amongst us, let's hear her opinion on the matter'. She said to them:

> There is nothing I could say about the matter because of all those who are talking, some do not have royal blood in their veins and some came to the royal compound when they were already walking. Royals such as I am are taught not to be rebellious, hence I was silent.

This really defused them and they were no longer vocal. She did not mention names, but simply told the story.

I interviewed a man, about forty-five years old. He has a bachelor's degree and is employed in the higher education sector. I wanted to know his attitude towards the royal *makhadzi*. He said:

> I really respect the royal *makhadzi*. Nothing can go well if a *makhadzi* is not party to it. The *makhadzi* is important regardless of one's education. Whether one is literate or illiterate, the *makhadzi* is important. If one does not respect the *makhadzi*, who is going to perform rituals for the nation, when rituals such as *thevhula* are performed who is going to talk to the ancestors?

To him, the *makhadzi* has relevance even today. He presented also a comparative analysis of the *makhadzi* in the past and the *makhadzi* in the present. He said that the *makhadzi* in the past played a crucial role in a succession dispute. Her word was final. "If she says that someone is the rightful heir, nobody would dispute that –but these days, because of the new Constitution, succession disputes may end up in court. This process tends to disarm the *makhadzi*. The court may listen to her, but it undermines her powers, unlike in earlier times." With some sarcasm, he said that "we will end up having white traditional leaders." If interpreted, he meant that, if the equality clause is applied in a scenario where a child inherits his father's chieftaincy, and the chief marries a white woman, the son of the white woman will eventually become the heir to the throne if he invokes the equality clause.

I was also interested in the views and attitudes of women on the role of *makhadzi*. Many women respondents agreed that the royal *makhadzi* still has a place in the royal household. I even asked if they saw this institution as outmoded or one that should be done away with, or if they were still in favour of it. From their answers, I could see that they agreed that the institution is still recognised. One woman even went on to observe in this regard that:

> Being *makhadzi* from the royal household is not so different from *makhadzi* from an ordinary household. The protocol is the same; the difference is that the *makhadzi* from the royal household is the ambassador of the whole nation while an ordinary *makhadzi* does that for a specific family.

5.4 Conclusion

The preceding chapter was a discussion of the role of makhadzi as was identified by the respondents in the field study. There was unanimity in responses concerning the role of makhadzi. This role was underscored by the respondents to whom it was inconceivable that there can be a structure of traditional leadership without makhadzi. The traditional leader cannot

discharge his or her mandate without the support and facilitation of makhadzi. As mentioned elsewhere in this study a makhadzi has the capacity to an end the reign of a traditional leader if the leader is oppressive or if he or she acts contrary to established customs. On the other hand it is not possible for the traditional leader to dispense of *makhadzi*, meaning the traditional leader is neither the appointing nor dismissing authority to the *makhadzi.* The next chapter summarises the study particularly the role of makhadzi and also addresses the issue of their relevance in a democratic society as it concludes and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This gives a final reflection on the study. It revisits not only by summarising the major findings of the study but also by revisiting the gender discloses and how they rationalise the socio-legal place of the institution of *makhadzi* today. It first does so by summing up the study by highlighting key findings of the study. Preliminarily, it could be noted that traditionally, the *makhadzi* occupied a more prestigious and perhaps revered position that they do today. That is the central theme of this study, that the place of the *makhadzi* in Venda has been reduced to almost irrelevance because of a change in the socio-legal orientation of the society. An important socio-legal phenomenon is gender, which as shall be showed, has been ordained and informed by other factors that have also had a far reaching implication on the place and role of *makhadzi* in Venda today. The fourth chapter gave an analysis of the context of the study in terms of the institutions that characterised the Venda. In its concluding paragraphs, this study poised that there has indeed been a re-orientation of the traditional leadership mostly through the effect of the colonial administration. The sixth chapter demonstrates though that even though the institution of makhadzi has undergone changes in various respects, it still is of relevance, in reality, despite the fact that it has been ignored. These will be revised in a subsequent discussion which shall give a gender explanation of the place of *makhadzi* today but first, this chapter begins by giving some overview of the importance of the role of makhadzi as was deduced from the field.

6.2 Summary of key findings on the role of makhadzi

As hinted in the introductory part, the term '*makhadzi'* refers to the senior paternal aunt who plays certain roles in Venda cultural life in general and in a royal family in particular. The chief can have many sisters, but only one becomes a *makhadzi* if chosen by the royal council. The test applied is that she must not have the same mother as the chief. Sometimes though, it does happen that the chief's eldest sister may not be a suitable candidate for the position, in which instance another sister may then be chosen to perform the role. This could be due to a number of factors considered by the royal council, including certain characteristics that should be possessed

by the makhadzi. If the expected *makhadzi* does not possess those attributes, then those who are making the choice themselves have the choice to deviate from the norm and appoint another sister. The choosing of a *makhadzi* is closely scrutinized, because she is also considered an assistant ruler with the chief. She has to be aware of virtually everything that happens in the *musanda* (the royal household).

A *makhadzi* is highly regarded because of this position which she occupies. Among the Venda people there is arguably no *musanda* without a *makhadzi*. The *makhadzi* in the *musanda* is a symbol of power. It is, for instance inconceivable that the traditional leader can be inaugurated without *makhadzi* who unveils him. She is supposed to perform rituals for the traditional leader. Without the *makhadzi* the traditional leader would not be recognized by the subjects.

From the interviews conducted, royalty was associated with the Singo clan and those who were non Singo are regarded as commoners. This differential status matters among the Venda. Due to the special customs surrounding royalty, the terminology used in a royal capital (*musanda*) was also highly symbolic, and differed from the terminology used by commoners. Because the king was considered semi-divine, everything he did was praised, even his most common, everyday behaviour, for example, eating and drinking. Some of the essentialised roles of the *makhadzis* include the following:

6.2.1 Control over the use of traditional powers

The powers of the traditional leaders like any other human leaders are subject to checks and balances. There existed checks and balances in the system of traditional leadership in Venda. If the traditional leader was despotic or if he oppressed his people, it is the *makhadzi* that would rescue the community from such a tyrannical and oppressive ruler. In extreme cases, this even took the form of poisoning the traditional leader. No doubt in the current society she would have to devise a different approach since poisoning would invite criminal prosecution.

6.2.2 Facilitating access to the chief

Access to chiefs by those who are not family members is difficult, and subjects with problems have to work their way through a hierarchy of councillors before being granted audience with the chief. This is a feature of the system used to guard leaders in the past, who were often seen as divine. A *makhadzi* has a say as to who may visit the chief and when. She also has to be notified of the purpose of the visit. The *makhadzi* therefore acts as a gatekeeper to the chief, and this is an important source of her power and influence.

6.2.3 Dispute resolution

The *makhadzi* also plays some roles in the traditional court *(khoro).* These days, in many of the *misanda* I visited, the *khoro* takes place every Sunday. Here chiefs and elders get together and discuss community matters. In the *khoro* they adjudicate disputes, allocate land and discuss ideas about how to develop the community. A *makhadzi* forms part of such a group and she is accorded a high status because she can make a ruling that can be binding if there is a dispute heard. One interviewee said that the *makhadzi* may go to the traditional court if she wants to; she is not coerced to go and attend the *khoro* all the time. If she has not attended the *khoro* all the proceedings need to be communicated to her and all the decisions taken have to be made known to her. She must not be taken by surprise by some of the decisions taken in the *khoro* without her knowledge because she will say that that is embarrassing. One of the members of the *khoro* should come and explain to her what had transpired after the *khoro* meeting has ended.

The *makhadzi* is also the one who mediates disputes within a family. Her main role is to mediate the issues of her family and come to a decision acceptable to all the parties concerned and affected. One responsibility that she has is that of acting as a family counsellor in cases where a couple may have trouble getting along but do not want to get divorced or they are on the verge of divorce. She mediates when there is grief over the loss of a child and witchcraft is suspected. In these cases, she will listen to the complaints of those who are concerned, speak with others in the family, and most likely recommend what needs to be done. The mediator, being the *makhadzi* in this case, facilitates communication.

If there is a dispute or a conflict that is related to traditional leadership, the *makhadzi* also assists in its resolution. In one interview I was informed that if there is a subject who seems to be rebellious the *makhadzi* could lobby support from the royal household with a view to protecting the chief. This strategy has to be used tactfully because, if it is not, the chieftaincy may be divided and it could be very difficult to gain the confidence and trust of the people again. A *makhadzi* has to encourage co-operative problem-solving and discourage the parties from taking entrenched positions and sides.

6.2.4 Acting as a regent

One informant mentioned that the position of the *makhadzi* is more important than the *khotsimunene,* because the former may act as a regent when the chief is not feeling well, during the interregnum or in his absence, and that position is rarely given to the *khotsimunene*. The rationale for making the *makhadzi* a regent is that she will never yearn for the chieftainship. The chieftainship cannot also be transmitted to her children because they are not of the same patrilineage as her: they cannot become chiefs in her lineage given they belong to their father's patrilineage. If she were to become a regent, it would not therefore be difficult for her to relinquish the position. The *khotsimunene* is avoided as a regent as much as possible because, if he stays for a long time in the position, he might think of taking over permanently.

Sometimes if the chosen successor to a chief is too young to assume the position of leadership, someone will be chosen by the royal council to be a regent. If the heir is too young to become the chief, his *makhadzi* fulfils that role in her capacity as a regent, although in some families the *khotsimunene* or paternal uncle may also act as a regent. Regency is also provided for in the *Traditional Leadership Act Section 13(1),* where the successor to the position of king, queen, senior traditional leader, headman or headwoman identified in terms of section 9 or 11 is still regarded as a minor in terms of applicable customary law or customs. In this case the royal family concerned must, within a reasonable time, identify a regent to assume leadership on behalf of the minor.

A makhadzi may act as a regent while the family is for some reason waiting for the chief to be enthroned, but this varies with households. According to the *Traditional Leadership Act*, a regent derived from the Latin *regens*: 'one who reigns' – is a person selected to act as head of state (ruling or not) because the actual ruler is a minor, not present, or debilitated. In traditional leadership, a regent usually reigns due to one of these reasons, but may also be elected to rule during the interregnum when the royal line has died out.

6.2.5 Upholding of collective societal morality

The findings of this study showed that Venda people still believe in traditions which sustain them and gives them a good grounding in morality. That is why they still strongly believe in the concept of traditional leadership as the custodian of their morals. Their tradition or belief is that chiefs are installed by the ancestors and that makes them to a certain extent still obey the orders of the chief and respect him. The Venda people are characterized by a belief in group welfare and filial piety, and so the notion of traditional leadership is still central in their lives.

6.2.6 Communication with the ancestors and gods

Women are said to be religious specialists, and this also holds true concerning *makhadzi* among the Venda. Although the majority of Venda people profess Christianity, there is an equally strong belief in ancestral spirits and a supreme deity known as *Raluvhimba*, equivalent to the Shona deity *Mwali*. This deity is seen in the forms of eagles soaring aloft during the day; a shooting star is *Raluvhimba* travelling at night; his voice can be heard in the thunder, and he is at rest when Tswime Mountain is covered by clouds. During thunderstorms *Raluvhimba* appears as fire that can never be reached, and makes demands known to the chief in a voice of thunder. *Raluvhimba* controls the rain. It is an important function of the chief to bring rain, which is achieved through appropriate sacrifices and rituals to the tribal ancestors as well as to the supreme deity (Van Warmelo, 1948).

The *makhadzi* in Venda is considered the ritual head of the royal family and community. She performs libation for royals to the ancestors. If need be she asks for forgiveness in some wrongdoing the royal family might have committed and want to appease the ancestors and gods.

According to Munyai (2007:109) libation is a traditional African form of prayer. It is not only found among the Venda but in other African cultures which reflect their earlier, ancestral connection and can be compared to 'holy communion'. The ritual of pouring a libation is an essential ceremonial tradition and a way of paying homage to the ancestors. Ancestors are not only respected, but also invited to participate in all public functions. A prayer is offered in the form of libations, calling the ancestors to attend and communicate the religious function to the omnipotent god.

This ritual is generally performed by the *makhadzi* using water or alcohol and the libation ritual, which is accompanied by an invitation (and invocation) to the ancestors and gods. A *makhadzi* would communicate to the ancestors at life cycle rituals, for example, when a new baby is born in the family the *makhadzi* informs the ancestors by performing libations. The *makhadzi* would be involved in all the rites of passage of her family members. When someone goes to the initiation ceremony, if s/he is getting married and if someone has died she is the one who conducts the ritual. Even where a traditional healer is needed, the cleansing is done in consultation with the *makhadzi*.

6.2.7 Officiating at rituals

The importance of the *makhadzi* in a royal household is thus not only private; she also plays a role in the public domain. In this regard she acts as a priestess in both the private and public ceremonies for the community. In every Venda household the *makhadzi* performs rituals for family members, but the *makhadzi* from the royal family is charged with the responsibility of performing public rituals. One of these is the *thevhula* (thanksgiving) ritual. This is a national ritual to thank the royal ancestors for the previous growing season and ask for rain in the next season.

During this ceremony the *makhadzi* tells the chief of all the arrangements that have been made, and he has to make a proclamation to the community regarding the offering ceremony. The members of the royal family are led to the gravesites by the *makhadzi.* While the ceremony is being performed, everybody refrains from talking, except the *makhadzi,* who must speak, calling

names of deceased people in the royal clan. This ceremony is very important, because through it also, those who are not on good terms have the opportunity to reconcile with each other. The ceremony acts as a unifying factor, and 'eating with the ancestors' revitalizes the pledge of oneness.

There is also an earlier and separate ritual of 'first fruits' in February and March, towards the end of the rainy season, when the first harvests are being brought in. It is performed in the royal household, when the chief tastes new farm produce from villages. This produce needs to be ritually cleansed by medicines before the chief tastes them and offers them to the ancestors. The *makhadzi* is central in both these rituals.

Traditionally, the Venda people do not believe in a natural death or a misfortune that occurs by chance. Everything is attributed to the ancestors, witchcraft or both. In the case of misfortune or a long illness, the *makhadzi* is consulted so that she can prepare for the pacification of the ancestors. During the pacification ritual the *makhadzi* appeals to the ancestors to heal the sick, destroy the evil spirits that are causing the illness, and to protect the sick from being killed by evil forces.

If a marriage is not blessed with offspring, *makhadzi* has a duty to ask the ancestors to assist in such situations. She will have to find out what has happened to the ancestors and plead for forgiveness and appease them if they are perhaps angry about something. The chief or anyone else in the royal compound is not supposed to perform any rituals without the *makhadzi's* presence. She is the one who deals with the royal ancestors in all ritual matters. She is the one who communicates with the ancestors.

6.2.8 Role in initiation accompanying ceremonies

Nearly every culture in the world ritualizes the important rites of life. Birth, marriage and death are typically marked by special ceremonies. The final passage from childhood to adulthood also figures prominently among various ethnic groups worldwide. In Africa, initiation ceremonies are rooted in traditions. Initiation rites remain the oldest tradition practised by a variety of

cultural groups across South Africa and Africa at large. Formal education, initiated by the missionaries, has now become an established part of tribal culture in many parts of Africa, but people have clung to their culture. Initiation schools are institutions which are deeply embedded in the history of the Africans. A major developmental task for teenagers is learning how to fit in and be accepted socially by their peers and this is often accomplished by their participation in initiation schools.

The Venda people see the development of the individual as a series of phases of which puberty and marriage are the most important. They believe that external forces such as the ancestors and good and evil spirits can exert good or bad influences over people. To guide people through these potentially difficult phases, initiation schools are used to help adolescents handle the responsibilities of the next phase in their lives. Through dances and ceremonies, the initiates are afforded the opportunity to embrace the future. The ceremonies are also designed to obtain the support of the ancestors and to strengthen the initiates. The chief wife, together with the *makhadzi,* prepares girls initiation in the royal family.

In the process of initiation, royal girls in particular are taught to be secretive and not to divulge information. For example, no one in the royal family may have sexual relations when the chief is seriously ill because it is thought that such behaviour will worsen his illness and this may also aggravate the condition of other patients within the village. If a girl is menstruating she is considered to be 'hot'; married people who are engaged in sexual intercourse may not touch a baby to protect it from unclean body contact as a precautionary measure but a woman who abstains from intercourse is safe. These customs are taught to young adults during the rites of passage. It is very important to adhere to them, since otherwise one would not be considered as exhibiting acceptable behaviour. The *makhadzi* is looked upon as providing the moral ground for both young and old. She teaches the young cultural etiquette, for example, Kriel (1971:181, citing Junod) mentions that etiquette or correct behaviour is passed on from one generation to the next through the process of enculturation.

6.2.9 Ensuring cohesion and continuity of the royal family

In Venda society the *makhadzi* also play a role in most aspects of family life that ensures its cohesion. They are influential in family dispute resolution and are responsible for the conduct of its members. They arrange meetings for the adult members of the family in order to discuss the matter with them when there is a dispute. Such meetings are usually held indoors, since family matters are regarded as private. During such meetings, the conflict is discussed thoroughly and openly. The aim is to discover ways of reconciling the parties involved, and strong emphasis is placed on restoring relations. The makhadzi will come up with a solution, and it seldom happens that the disputing parties do not accept it.

Keeping a family knit together would even require that a traditional leader marries a woman who is from a category of his sisters. The best example is when the traditional leader is from the Singo dynasty, and his wife is from the same dynasty. That would mean that she is married to her 'brother'. When the principal wife is proposed, one condition is that she must be from the royal family, so she might be his 'sister' from another house. These types of marriages are arranged. When I asked one informant about the assertion that Stayt (1931:180) made concerning the *makhadzi*, she confirmed that it is true that the bride wealth that is paid when a *makhadzi* marries is used to procure a wife for her brother. The informant referred to this practice as '*muvhuye',* applied to someone who was married after bride wealth of the husband's sister had been paid. If an elder brother wants to get married, he has to wait until the younger sister gets married in order for the family to pay his *lumalo* from the *lumalo* of his sister. The objective of these marriages of the chiefs is to ensure that the lineage continues so the *musanda* is full of princes who know the manners and the rules to be observed in the villages of royalty. The real reason is probably a remnant of the 'sacred kingship' which can find spouses fit for the king only amongst his closest relatives, for example, his sisters. (Stayt:1931:82-83)

It was noted during the study that when there are decisions that need to be taken by the royal family, children whose mothers are not from the royal family are sometimes not consulted, particularly if the mother of that child is not on good terms with the *makhadzi*. If there are women not from the royal families who seem to be close to the traditional leader, he might be

discouraged from having a close relationship with them. They might influence each other to hate the one that appears to be closer to the traditional leader, and this hatred may also affect the children.

6.2.10 The arrangement of marriages

Although, as has been described, a *makhadzi* plays a central role in choosing the *dzekiso* wife for a chief, and is instrumental in other marriages within the royal households, it is opportune here to look at the arrangement of Venda marriages in general. In virtually all Venda marriage negotiations, it is invariably the young man's parents and relatives who take the initiative and open negotiations and go to the prospective bride's place to discuss betrothal. A person who is central in marriage negotiations among the Venda is the young man's *makhadzi,* and the process also involves his *khotsimunene* (paternal uncles). A messenger, called the *nendila* or *zhendedzi,* is sent to the home of the chief woman in the prospective bride's family and becomes the conduit of information from one family to the other, needing to travel to and fro. A non-relative is commonly employed, lest later on, if there is a dispute, sides are taken.

According to (Van Warmelo & Phophi 1948:63), the *nendila* can be a man or a woman, but must be an important person and must be well known to the woman's people. Such a person may be a resident of the village without being a relative, or just a neighbour. A *nendila* should preferably live near the people with whom he is to negotiate and will ask the woman's family if he can be allowed to enter through the *khoro* and 'laugh with the inmates' (a delicate phrase denoting the making of marriage overtures). The elders in the woman's family will tell *nendila* to come again on a certain day or he will be promised that word will be sent to call him to give him an answer. If the bride's people agree, they will say: "It is well that the elders consent to their entering the *khoro* of that homestead. Let them enter so that we can see them." Once the *nendila* enters the homestead, everything is negotiated until the bride or the woman is transferred into the man's homestead

The social position of the *makhadzi* in the Venda society is different from that of other females. This is apparent in the choice of a marriage partner for her, for instance. There are special

marriage restrictions that she has to adhere to, and these restrictions do not apply to her sisters. Her sisters can marry any commoner, since they do not have any particular status in the society but are only respected because they belong to the royal family. The *khadzi* must marry a royal or a son of a neighbouring chief. Marriage alliances with foreign chiefs are encouraged and approved. One reason for this is that people who are brought up in a *musanda* have learned to be secretive. They do not easily divulge the secrets of the *musanda.* If a *makhadzi* is married to a royal person, sensitive information will not be easily divulged to anybody, whereas if she had married a commoner who is not accustomed to the rules of the royal family, secrets may effortlessly get out. This is further confirmed by Van Warmelo and Phophi, (1948:27) who said that marriages between royals were preferred because they strengthen the alliance between the two families.

Another reason for marrying within a royal family is that the *makhadzi's* power does much to remove enmity between the realms of her brother and that of her husband. A chief would not wage war on the husband of his *khadzi* unless the provocation was unusually great. The husband will be equally disinclined to fight against his wife's brother or nephew, knowing the powerful position his wife holds in her own family. The *makhadzi*'s household is in the chief's capital, and her husband will be allowed to visit her from time to time, staying as long as he wishes. The *makhadzi* may also visit her husband's home, where she may have her own hut and kitchen. In some cases she might stay with the chief wife of her husband if she proves to a good-natured wife (Stayt 1931:196).

According to Venda custom, a man can marry his cross-cousin (children of siblings of different sexes, for example, a sister's child may marry a brother's child) and such marriages are preferred. This is a marriage between special classes of relatives. The reason for marrying a cross cousin is to prevent the dispersal of the 'blood'. Preferred marriages are usually undertaken to honour one or the other parent, and incidentally to keep the marriage cattle in circulation in the kinship group. A *makhadzi*'s daughter is also a cousin whom a *makhadzi's* brother's son may marry. Should a man marry such a patrilineal cousin, it is she who will be the mother of his heir. She ranks higher than a cousin who is a maternal uncle's daughter, because

she makes sacrifices to the same spirits as her husband. However, the marriage of a man to his *makhadzi*'s daughter is most common in most royal families.

6.3 Concluding remarks

6.3.1 Exclusion of *makhadzi* by the laws

The *Traditional Leadership Framework and Governance Act* appears explicit on the place of traditional leadership in a democracy. Its preamble states that the state seeks to set out a national framework meant to 'define the place and role of traditional leadership with the new system of democratic governance'. The preamble also states that the state seeks to transform the institution in line with constitutional imperatives with a view to restoring the integrity and legitimacy of traditional leadership in the customary law practices.

This preamble affirms the findings of this study that the institution of traditional leadership, including *makhadzi,* has been assaulted by colonialism and apartheid. It is imperative that their legitimacy be restored. Granted the people of Venda generally accept the traditional leadership as an integral aspect of their lives and not as an imposed institution. But there also does not appear anything democratic about traditional leadership. In the preambular section of the *Traditional Leadership Framework and Governance Act* there is already a concession by the state that traditional leadership has a role in a new system of democratic governance. Under that Act the general framework that is provided is that first the institution of traditional leadership must promote freedom human dignity, the achievement of equality and non-sexism. Secondly, traditional leadership must also derive its mandate from customary law and practices. Thirdly, it must try to enhance traditional culture. Fourth it must promote the principles of cooperative governance in its interaction with other spheres of government.

The institution of traditional leadership must also, according to the laws, promote nation building, harmony and peace among people and must also further promote efficient, effective and fair dispute resolution system as envisaged by the law. Some of the ideals of traditional leadership as portrayed by this Act are actually what the *makhadzi* undertake in Venda. For instance, it is the *makhadzi* that promote peace among people; it is they who facilitate dispute

resolution. It is also they who enhance traditions and culture. The Act defines traditional leaders to mean persons who in terms of customary law of the traditional community concerned hold a traditional leadership position and are recognised in terms of the *Traditional Leadership Framework and Governance Act.*

This Act sets out two tests of determining traditional leadership positions within the institution of traditional leadership. In terms of Section 8, kingship, senior traditional leader and headman ship are recognised leadership positions. The framing of section 8 is such that the list is exhaustive. The *makhadzi* do not fall under anyone of those recognised positions. If therefore the Act was meant to restore the legitimacy; room should have been made for important persons in the traditional leadership like the *makhadzi* whose role and place has suffered an affront by the legacies of the colonial and apartheid regime.

The other principle legislation that was recently enacted is the *National House of Traditional Leaders Act of 2009.* No doubt since the Act provided a general framework on traditional leadership it could be contrary to expectations to anticipate that the *National House of Traditional Leaders Act of 2009* would make reference to the *makhadzi*. If the Act was merely to provide for the establishment of the *National House of Traditional Leaders Act of 2009* and to provide for their duties and responsibilities and their attendant matters.

One of the key functions of the *makhadzi* was to facilitate dispute resolutions. There are two kinds of disputes they handled. One, disputes relating to succession and the second relating to interpersonal disputes between members of the community. If there is a dispute on who becomes an heir, the aggrieved party may take the matter to court. Once that is done, it is no longer in the hands of the *makhadzi* and the royal council. The court of law now has to deal with such a dispute and the *makhadzi* may only be called as a witness. Both of these two roles that *makhadzi* played have now been taken over by the courts of law except for some peculiar aspects of succession. These include rituals that are conducted during the inauguration of the traditional leader. While for example *makhadzi* would deal with cases involving assault, most of these cases are now referred to the police and prosecuted by the courts. She now deals with cases such

as those that would have cultural connotations, like when someone has pronounced a curse on someone else. In this regard also, the practice of *makhadzi* compelling people to pay compensation if found guilty of an offence, would be of dubious justification in a democratic society.

This does not however mean that the *makhadzi* have no role and place in the new political dispensation. While some of the traditional aspects of her role may be of dubious justification or legality, direct interviews with the *makhadzi* in this study have revealed that the institution plays a central role in succession, dispute resolution, regency, being advisors, links between the living and the dead, choosers of the bride and being an arbiter.

6.3.2 Impact of the new laws on the position of *makhadzi*

Most makhadzi are displeased with the new laws that appear to have stripped them of their powers and duties. Most of those interviewed observed that while it is true that the traditional leader is the one who will be the presiding officer at khoro meetings, he needs wisdom from the *makhadzi* and the *khotsimunene* because absolute power may corrupt him. They also stated that nowadays people love money very much and that traditional leaders can be bribed. If the *makhadzi* was also included in the *Traditional Court Bill* as an advisor that would be better. Secondly, the traditional leader may be still very young; he or she still needs to be nurtured into the leadership but where the *makhadzi's* help is not solicited anywhere in terms of the law, he or she cannot include the *makhadzi* and ask for assistance. Because of the so-called democratic laws, traditional leadership status is now weakened.

In an interview with another informant *makhadzi*, after we had discussed the *Traditional Court Bill*, she noted regarding this neglect that:

> The chief told me what we are discussing, and I told him in no uncertain terms that the government has stripped us of all powers. Firstly it was the Traditional Leaders Act, the *makhadzi* were not written anywhere but we are the custodians of traditional leadership. We are in possession of the sacred artefacts. Now President Jacob Zuma has come up with the *Traditional Court Bill*.

She wondered what could have gone wrong for them to come up with such a Bill, because prior to the bill people were content about the way issues are handled. She said that people will no longer respect makhadzi as they are really 'naked' (that is, stripped of their long held powers). When a person went to the *khoro* in the past, people would keep quiet as a way of showing respect. These days, if the Bill is passed, the traditional leader will be the only one who will be respected. She was adamant that the way the *khoro* will be conducted would not be the same as before the bill. She said that traditional leaders need to be guided because some of them are still young.

According to these two *makhadzi*, the *Traditional Court Bill* has weakened the institution of the *makhadzi* socio-politically. The *makhadzi* will not be accorded the same status as she used to have. If the *makhadzi* attended the traditional court their presence was felt because they were also part of decision making but with this new development this will no longer be the case. The *makhadzi* are accusing the government of letting them down. If this *Traditional Court Bill* is passed as is, the traditional courts landscape will be altered.

6.3.3 A Gender based explanation of the place of m*akhadzi* today: The influence of the Western notions

In the first and second chapter, this study highlighted gender debates and the place of women generally in society. In the context, of Africa in general, while the differentiation in society gender existed before the colonial rule, the gender dynamics on the socio and political lives have been complicated by colonialism, religion and western influence. That there was equality in African societies since socio-cultural beliefs had entrenched patriarchy in most African societies. These beliefs had a dictating impact as to who possessed power and for whose advantage. This study does, to an extent, agree with Amadiume that sex and gender did not necessarily concede and that in Africa (though he illustrates this using a particular group in Nigeria), there was so much flexibilities. The arrangements that were in place did not however seek to displace the existent socio-religious beliefs which had afforded a patriarchal ascription to the society through roles, rather than sex. This could possibly be the reason why institutions such as 'female husbands' and 'male sisters' could have a place in the traditional societies. That may also explain

why women, *makhadzi*, would occupy a seemly indispensable position in the Venda traditional leadership structure. This is not however to be interpreted that, in the context Venda, that the *makhadzi* sought to weaken patriarchy. It is to be noted that in the structure of traditional leadership, men overshadowed women to a greater extent. There are incidents when a *makhadzi* would be a traditional leader and for a limited purpose act as a regent.

If she could perform such significant roles as the ones highlighted, there can be no explanations as to why she would merely act for a short while in the event of a vacuum except for patriarchal ideologies. Second, a *makhadzi* is a paternal aunt. One may pose a question as to why it has necessarily to be a paternal aunt and the answer to this could be that the power they actually wielded was for the advantage of men. While for instance, as Oyewumi argues that gender is a recent organising principle (he uses Yoruba to explain this), in Venda the position is different in that men often overshadowed women and everything that the *makhadzi* to an extent furthered patriarchy. Why for instance would they hold a position temporarily and then bequeath the power to a new male person? The point of agreement however in terms of this thesis with Oyewumi is that the advent of colonialism and western influence have complicated the erstwhile position of men and women in African society which was not influenced mainly by sex but by role and perhaps age. To that extent, the institution of *makhadzi* has been complicated by these two phenomena which have influenced the way society views women and their place in society.

As noted from Oweyumi (1999:90), gender, has been an organising principle in Western societies and the conceptualisation of gender as a division between men and women has its origin from western norms as is explained by western theories. Among the Yoruba Oyewumi illustrates that gender was not an organising principle before colonisation by the West. Categories of men and women are social constructs which derive from Western assumptions. Gender is a social construct which is historical and culture-bound. It is not agreed entirely with Oyewumi that subservience of women to men was ordained by colonialism. The agreement with her however is that the understanding of male dominance has been re-orientated, partly by colonialism and also by Christianity, which is a Western influence.

The settlement of Europeans in South Africa certainly influenced the social construct of women (based on the western understanding of male/female differentiation as a basis for gender). The colonial rule legitimised politics by mainstreaming men in politics. Women were relegated into the domestic and as a result, the domestic/public divide based on gender became more real than apparent. Certainly this had to have a negative impact on the position of an institution that had a woman at its core, *makhadzi.* Evidence of this is seen in the exclusion of women in many social spheres of life. Even the constitutional requirement for equal treatment does not seem to dislodge these seemingly, now entrenched perception of the role and place of women generally in socio-political life of a society. It can be argued thus that unconsciously, parliament (male dominated) declined to afford an explicit recognition of the *makhadzi.* An argument may be posited that the *makhadzi* is peculiar to only the Venda people and therefore parliament would not have recognised them in legislation giving a general framework in a multicultural diverse South African society. However, an acknowledgement of the critical place of the *makhadzi* would have demanded that mention be made of this important role to traditional leaders who would prescribe to those who constitute the lawmakers. In the case of the Venda, a general framework should have been given that would have permitted the *makhadzi* to be recognised.

Christianity also as a western influence has complicated the institution of *makhadzi*. In gender perspectives, Christianity draws a male female distinction and while associating men with leadership, it associates women with obedience and service to men. According to Mutua (2005:38), Africans are notably religious and the two messianic faiths, Islam and Christianity have consumed the continent like forest fire, de-legitimising traditional religion and aspects of traditional life in a phenomenon that Mutua describes as being akin to cultural genocide. As per this proposition, Venda cultural life has been fundamentally altered by Christianity, the predominant religion. Few people today thus would submit themselves to the ritualistic practices officiated by *makhadzi* as most of them would rather deal with their Christian religious leaders. Most of the *makhadzi* indeed confirmed that "things" have changed, which can be interpreted to mean that Christianity has altered the cultural orientation of the Venda people perhaps even more than the law. For some the impact of Christianity is more real than apparent. Some of the *makhadzi* for instance confessed that they are now "saved" implying that they have been

"delivered" from some of those ritualistic practices that they sanctioned, ordained and participated in.

An interesting perspective that was noted in the interviews however that was for some people in the villages, the fact that they are Christians does not take away their respect for the *makhadzi*. An informant at Thohoyandou taxi rank, a staunch Christian, observed in this regard:

> The fact that I am a Christian is true but it does not give me the leeway to disrespect the chief. The chief is installed by the love of God; if God was not behind his installation he would not be where he is today. If you were to read King of Kings in the Bible you would know that the institution of traditional leadership needs to be respected. If there are certain rituals that need to be done, I will gladly perform those rituals because even in the Bible rituals were performed. So my being a Christian does not bar me from respecting the *makhadzi* and the chief.

From the interviews conducted, there seem to be differences in how traditional leaders are regarded by the elders and the youths. In the rural areas the elderly people respect the traditional leader as their leader, irrespective of his or her capabilities and skills. The fact that he has been chosen by the ancestors suffices. They do not question whether he is able to read or write or has any formal education. One elderly woman said:

> Misfortune befalls youths these days because they do not respect the traditional leaders because they have not gone to school. Being literate is immaterial in traditional leadership. Traditional leaders are chosen by the ancestors. Once one is inaugurated he becomes the chief. The traditional leader does not lead alone, he rules with the *makhadzi* and the khotsimunene. They equate traditional leadership with democracy. It is not like that. Some youngsters have the predisposition to move away from tradition; they usually would like to adopt western culture. When they come back from the city they do not go to the chief with tribute, while in the olden days migrant labourers would go the chief's place to provide him with gifts that they had brought from the city.

A contributory factor to youths' lack of consideration for traditional leaders is that throughout South Africa the chiefs tended to comply with the demands of the Nationalist apartheid

government as way of holding on to power. The institution of traditional leadership saw traditional leaders who were perceived by the colonial government to be uncooperative, being non–conformists, and those chiefs who toed the government line were called 'puppets'. Chiefs were thus defamed as the dummies of Bantustan rule. According to those who were fighting for liberation, it was generally assumed that chiefs would not survive into the post-apartheid era. In an interview, an elderly chief said:

> If you did not belong to the Venda National party, Mphephu would even dethrone you. Because you would have convinced yourself that chieftainship is from the ancestors and one is born to be a traditional leader, one would find it better to conform to the Nationalist government. I also belonged to the National Party in order to protect my father's chieftaincy. But I could see that the youths did not like us because they were opposed to the Apartheid ideology. They felt that we were letting them down by adhering to Verwoerd's policies. This also contributed to lack of respect or diminished respect for traditional leaders.

This may arguably be why women are not included in the enacted legislation. Concerning the first aspect an example comes from some of the traditional practices such as the phenomenon of the burial of the king in which the makhadzi played an important role. Some of the respondents observed that when a traditional leader died in times gone past he was not buried on the ground. Somebody would have to be killed who would then act as a 'mat'. The *makhadzi* played the role of identifying this victim, yet in the modern South Africa it is inconceivable that somebody can be killed to secure the burial of a traditional leader, regardless of how important the traditional leader is. If the *makhadzi* were to perform this role they would be charged before the courts of law.

Some ritualistic practices that the makhadzi previously officiated certainly would receive condemnation in a liberal society that believes in human dignity. An example is one that concerns the *"domba",* a ceremony which involves girls being initiated and the chief having an opportunity of selecting one of them as a spouse. In modern South Africa there are no circumstances where one can be forced to enter into a marriage and to the extent that the *makhadzi* plays a facilitative role, in this ceremony, these aspects of the *makhadzi*'s role have no place.

In conclusion therefore, the institution of makhadzi has been profoundly influenced by social phenomenon from different perspectives with gender having a more prominent impact. Present day conception of women, as defined by western influences have to a large extent defined the societies perception of women and has ominously impacted on the role and place of the *makhadzi* in leadership in Venda.

6.4 Recommendations

6.4.1 Explicit recognition of peculiar aspects of traditional leadership including makhadzi

Based on the conclusions of this study it is a strong recommendation that law reform should be undertaken with a view to underscoring the role of the peculiar aspects of traditional leadership that were left out in legislation that sought to give effect to traditional leadership. This study has revealed that there are peculiar aspects of traditional leadership but the existing legislation sought to suppress a phenomenon that has far reaching implications on the structure and role of traditional leadership in South Africa.

The *Limpopo Traditional Leaders and Institutions Act* also sought to provide for the recognition of traditional leaders. The Act also sought to provide for financial issues as well as code of conduct for traditional leadership. The Act also, like the *National House of Traditional Leaders Act* of 2009, defines traditional leaders in a manner that excludes *makhadzi*. The Act defined traditional leadership to mean any person who in terms of the traditional community concerned holds a traditional leadership position and is recognised by this Act. Again, this Act while alluding to the functions that are performed by *makhadzi* like regency, it does not mention the word *makhadzi*. There appears to be an attempt by the Limpopo legislation to recognise the *makhadzi* as part of the regency or as part of the royal family but granted that the role of *makhadzi* is exceptional, the makhadzi ought to have been singled out.

6.4.2 Inclusion of the role of *makhadzi* in legislations

Furthermore, while Section 19 of the *Traditional Leadership Framework and Governance Act* provides that traditional leaders are to perform functions provided for in terms of customary law and customs of the community concerned, this study has demonstrated that the *makhadzi* play a

number of roles some of which cannot be performed by kings, senior traditional leaders or headmen that are recognised under the Act. Salient roles include, performance of *"thevhula",* a thanksgiving ritual, another is the role they play in inauguration of a king. The Acts need to be reviewed so that they can accommodate some of these important aspects of institutions such as that of *makhadzi*. This is because even if the *makhadzi*s are recognised but their roles are not explicitly set down in legislation they would be redundant.

6.4.3 Remuneration of makhadzi

One of the privileges that is enjoyed by the recognised traditional leaders is that they are entitled to an allowance from the government. Recognition of the *makhadzi* would mean that they will also be entitled to such allowances from the state. This will have a motivating effect on them considering that most of them now have lost the reverence they wielded in the days of yore because of non-recognition of their role in the present democratic dispensation.

6.4.4 Need for further research

The specific recommendation in this regard is that the *makhadzi* should be recognised explicitly as a part of traditional leadership. There could be other similar institutions in traditional leadership in other cultural groups in South Africa. For that reason it is a strong recommendation of this study that research be conducted on those other exceptional institutions that were not covered by this research. As observed, law reform should seek to recognise *makhadzi*. Recognition of the *makhadzi* means that they will have confidence that the state is legitimately appreciative of their role in society. This would also mean that their role is not obsolete; the failure to explicitly mention them either in both the National and Provincial parliaments could arguably be interpreted to mean that they are of no relevance in the democratic South Africa.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Abraham, D.P., 1959. The Monomutapa Dynasties. *NADA* 36: 59-84

Abramson, P.R., 1992. *A case for case studies: an immigrant's journal.* Newbury Park, USA: Sage Publishers.

Adesina J., 2013. A paper read at UNISA on "innovative thinking and research in social policy" University of South Africa: Pretoria

Agar, M., 1996. *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (2nd edition). New York: Academic Press.

Akintoye, S.A., 2000.*The democratic foundations of traditional Yoruba government*, http://www.yorubanation.org/pdf/ Accessed 12 March 2010

Amadiume, I., 1987 *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* London: Zed Books Ltd

Amadiume, I. 1997. *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture.* London and New York: Zed Books

Babbie, E. 1992. *The Practice of Social Research, Belmont,* Wardworth: Bless C, and Hidgson-Smith

Babbie, E., and Mouton, J., 2001. *The Practice of Social Research*. Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.

Bank, L. and Southall, R., 1996. *Traditional Leaders in South Africa's New Democracy.* Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law, Number 37-38

Banister, P. Burman, E, Parker, L. Taylor, M. and Tindal, C 1994, Qualitative Methods in Psychology, A research guide, Buckingham: Open University Press

Beach, D. N., 1980. *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900-1850*. London, UK: Mambo Press

Beattie, J., 1958 *Nyoro Kinship, Marriage and Affinity.* London, UK: International African Institute.

Beattie, J., 1960.*Bunyoro, An African Kingdom*. New York, USA: Holt Rinehart and Winston.

Bernard, H.R., 1995 *Research Methods in Anthropology* (Second Edition). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Bekker, J.C., 2002. *Introduction to Legal Pluralism in South Africa, Part 1: Customary Law*. Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa

Bekker J., 1997. The role of chiefs in a future South African Constitutional Dispensation. *Africa Insight*, 23(4): 200-204

Benso 1979. *The Independent Venda*. Pretoria: RAU

Blacking, J. 1974 *How musical is man?* Seattle: University of Washington Press

Bloch, M., 1976. *Symbols, Song, Dance and features of Articulation.* Is religion an extreme of traditional authority? Monographs on Social Anthropology, no 58, London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone Press

Bogdewic, S.P., 1992. Participant observation. *In* Crabtree, B.F, and Miller, W. (eds.) *Doing Qualitative Research.* Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications.

Bohannan, P. 1963, Social Anthropology, New York: Holt and Rinehart

Bourdillon, M.F.C., 1973.*The Shona*. Cape Town, South Africa: Juta

Brink, H.I.L., 1996, *Fundamentals of Research Methods for Health Care Professionals*, Kenwyn: Juta

Buijs, G., *Female Chiefs and Their Wives: Tradition and Modernity in Venda, South Africa* KwaDlangezwa, South Africa: University of Zululand Press.

Buijs, G., 2002. Gender and person in African Societies: the role of Hermeneutics. *Alternation*, 9 (1): 57 -73

Buijs, G., 2002. Sisters and their brothers: an examination of the traditional ritual. Roles of makhadzi in Venda, Northern Province, South Africa.*in* Lebeau, D. and R.J. Gordon (eds.). *Challenges for Anthropology in the African Renaissance.* Windhoek, Namibia: University of Namibia Press.

Buijs, G., 2007. *Stranger – Queens:* a discussion of some aspects of the ritual and executive roles of women rulers and court officials in pre - colonial empires in East and Southern Africa, Unpublished paper, presented in Jakarta, Indonesia, 5-7 June, 2006

Bundy, C., 1990, *Land, Law and Power: Forced removal in the historical context, No Place To Rest, Forced removal and the Law in South Africa* London: Oxford University Press (vols.5 and 6)

Bullock, C., 1927. *The Mashona* Cape Town: Juta
Burgess, R. G., 1984. *In the Field. An Introduction to Field Research*. New York, USA: Routledge

Brynard P.A. and Hanekom S.X. 1997 *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, New York, USA: Routledge

Carr, D., 1997. Narrative and the real world: an argument for continuitypp.7-25 *in* Hinchman, L.P. and Hinchman, S.K., (eds): *Memory, Identity and Community: the idea of narrative in the human sciences*. New York, USA: State University of New York

Clarke, W.H. 1972. *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858* Ibadan University Press, p. 237.

Chinweizu, L. 1997 "Gender and Monotheism: The Assault by Monotheism on Africa gender Diarchy" in Sophie Oluwole (ed.) *The Essentials of African Studies* General African Studies, University of Lagos, 1997, p 16.

Creswell, J.W., 2002. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches* USA: Sage Publications.

Coetzer, P.W., 1991, *The Era of Apartheid, 1948-1961, a new illustrated History of South Africa* USA: Sage Publications.

Coombs, G. (1980). "Variant Usage in American Kinship: The Nomenclator Effect." In *The Versatility of Kinship,* ed. L. S. Cordell and S. Beckerman. New York: Academic Press

Daneel, M.C., 1970. *The God of the Matopo Hills* The Hague: Netherlands: Mouton.

Dazinger, C., 1983, *A History of Southern Africa*. Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.

Davenport, T.R.H., 1987.*South Africa – A Modern History* (3rd Edition).London, UK: Macmillan.

Denzin, N.K., 1989. *Interpretive Biography*. Illinois, USA: Sage Publications

Denzin, N.K, and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.), 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

De Vos, A.S. 2005, Research at Grassroots, 3rd (edn), Pretoria: Van Schaik

DeWalt, K.M., DeWalt, B.R., and Wayland, C.B., 1998. Participant observation. *In* Bernard, H.R. (ed.): *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. Walnut Creek, CA, USA: AltaMira Press.pp 23-41

Fetterman, J., 1998. *Ethnography* (2nd edn.), Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publications.

Fokwang, J.T.D., 2003. *Chiefs and democratic transition in Africa: an ethnographic study in the chiefdoms of Tshivhase and Bali*, Unpublished MA thesis, University of Pretoria, South Africa.
Forbes, J.D. 1994, *Indigenous women and traditional leadership.* Stamford, CT, USA: Ethnic News Watch.

Fortes, M. 1969. *Kinship and the Social Order: The Legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

Gardner, G.A., 1963. *Mapungubwe* (Vol. 2). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik

Garlake, P., 1966. *Iron Age Archaeology. Shashe Expedition*.Bulawayo: Zimbabwe Publishing House

Gelfand, M., 1959. *Shona Rituals: with special reference to the Chaminuka Cult.* Cape Town, South Africa: Juta.

Gelfand, M., 1962. *Shona religion*. Cape Town, South Africa: Juta.

Giordano, M., O'Reilly, M., Taylor, H., and Dogra, N., 2007. Confidentiality and Autonomy: The Challenge(s) of Offering Research Participants a Choice of Disclosing Their Identity.*Qual. Health Res.,* 17(2): 264 - 275.

Goodson, I., and Sikes, P., 2001. *Life History Research in Educational Settings*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press

Gomona, G.H., 1998, *Culture and leadership*. Jerera, Zimbabwe: Belmont Press Printers.

Gifford, K., 1929.*Role of women in Tonga society.* Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 61: i-iv

Gonzales, P. and Rodriguez, R., 1998.*Women's leadership is re-emerging in Indian country* hwwp.com/archives/41/135.html

Hammond-Tooke, W.D. 1974.The Bantu Speaking People of Southern Africa. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hammersley, M., 1990. *Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide.* London, UK: Longman.

Hart, C. W. M., and Pilling, A. R. (1960). *The Tiwi of North Australia.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Haviland, W.A., 1996. *Cultural anthropology* (8thedn). FortWorth, USA: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
Herskovits, M.D., 1937, *A note on woman marriage in Dahomey*. Africa 2(3):335-41

Hodza, A., and Fortune, G., 1979.Shona *Praise Poetry.* Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

Holden, C.J. AND Mace, R., 2003. *Spread of cattle led to the loss of matrilineal descent in Africa:* a co evolutionary analysis. London: The Royal Society

Houston, G.F., 1996. *Traditional Leadership and the Restructuring of Rural Local Government.* Paper presented to the Internal Conference on Traditional Leaders in Southern Africa, Umtata, 16-18 April

Huffman, T., 1996. *Snakes and Crocodiles: Power and Symbolism in Ancient Zimbabwe*. Johannesburg, South Africa: University of Witwatersrand Press.

Junod, H.A., 1927. *The life of a South African Tribe* (Vol.2). London, UK: MacMillan.

Khangala, P.B., 1999. *A study of political leadership in the twentieth century South African society,* Thohoyandou, South Africa: University of Venda.

Khorommbi, N.L. 2001, *Lutherans and Pentecostals in mission amongst the Vhavenda – A comparative study in missionary methods*, Pretoria: University of South Africa

Khuba, A.E., 1993. *The significant of the musanda language in Venda: a Diglossia*. Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa

Kriel, A., 1971.*An African Horizon*. Rondebosch, South Africa: Permanene Publishing House.

Kriel, A., 1989.*Roots of African Thoughts.* Pretoria, SouthAfrica: University of Pretoria.

Krige, E.J., 1950.*The social systems of the Zulus*. London: UK: Longmans Green.

Krige, E.J., 1974, Woman marriage with special reference to Lovedu: "Its significance for the definition of marriage", Africa 44: 11-37

Krige, E., and Krige, J.D., 1943 *The Realm of Rain–Queen, a study of the pattern of Lovedu society*. Cape Town, South Africa: Juta

Kuper, H. (1950). "Kinship among the Swazi." In *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage,* ed. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kuper, H., 1963. *The Swazi A South African Kingdom*. New York, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston/ University of California.

Kvale, S., 1996.*Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing.* London, UK: Sage Publications.

Lee, R.M., 2000. *Unobtrusive Methods in Social Research.* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Leedy, P.D., and Ormrod, J.E., 2001. *Practical Research: Planning and design* (7th edn).New Jersey, USA: Pearson Educational International and Prentice Hall.

Leedy, P.D., and Ormrod, J.E., 2005. *Practical Research: Planning and design* (8th edn).New Jersey, USA: Pearson Educational International and Prentice Hall.

Maiter, S., Simich, L, Jacobson, N., and Wise, J., 2008. Reciprocity: An ethic for community-based participatory action research. , *Action Research* 6(3): 305 - 325.

Malacrida, C., 2007**.** Reflexive Journaling on Emotional Research Topics: Ethical Issues for Team Researcher**s.** *Qual. Health Res.* 17(10): 1329 - 1339.

Maloka, T. 1995. Traditional Leaders and the current Transition. *African Communist*, 2nd quarter, Spring

Maloka, T. 1996. Populism and the Politics of Chieftaincy and Nation-building in the new South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 14 (2)

Mamdani, M, 1996 *Citizen and Subject, Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism,* Uganda Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

Marshall, P.A., 2003. Human subjects' protections, institutional review boards, and cultural anthropological research. *Anthropol. Q.*76 (2):269-85.

Matshidze, P.E., 1988. *The Role of the Female Ruler in Traditional Venda Society with particular reference to Vondwe*, Unpublished BA Honours dissertation, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa.

Matshidze, P.E., 2005, *The universal church and Pentecostalism in Venda.* Unpublished MA thesis, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Stellenbosch

Mavhungu, K., 1999. *Witchcraft beliefs, practices and institutions in Venda, Northern Province* Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Stellenbosch: South Africa.

Mavhungu, K., 1999……*of Witches and "Witchdoctors".* Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Maylam, P.A., 1986.*History of African People of South Africa.* Cape Town, South Africa: Creda Press.

Mbiti, J.S., 1971. *The New Testament Eschatology, In African Background*. London, UK: Oxford University Press.

McLellan, E., MacQueen, K.M., and Niedig, J., 2003. Beyond the qualitative interview: data preparation and transcription. *Field Methods*,15(1):63-84.

Mndende, N., 2000. *Kutheth' ithongo*.South Africa: Dutywa, Icamagu

Monnig, H.O., 1967. *The Pedi*.Pretoria, South Africa:J.L van Schaik.

Moller-Malan, D., 1953. *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*. South Africa: Central News Agency.

Mouton, J., 2001. *How to succeed in your Master's and Doctoral Studies, A South African Guide and Resource Book*. Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Mudau, E and Motenda M.M., 1958 Ngoma Lungundu na Ramabulana, South Africa: Government Printers.

Narayan, K., 1993. "How native is a "native" anthropologist?" American Anthropologist no. 95 (3): 671-686.

Ndebele, S.J., 2007. Unpublished address by the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal on the occasion of the International Conference on Traditional Leadership held at Inkosi Albert Luthuli, International Convention Centre, Durban, South Africa.

Nettleton A.C.E.,1984. *The traditional woodcarving of the Shona and Venda.* Harare, Zimbabwe: University of Zimbabwe.

Nkwi, P., Nyamongo, I., and Ryan, G., 2001.*Field Research into Social Issues: Methodological Guidelines.* Washington, DC, USA: UNESCO.

Nthai, S., 2005.Unpublished paper delivered at the seventh conference on traditionalism, political parties and democratic governance in Africa, Department of Political Sciences and the Centre for African Renaissance),UNISA, Pretoria

Nthai, S. 2005, *A critical Analysis of the Traditional Leadership Act*. A paper read at a traditional leadership conference, South Africa, Durban

Ntsebeza, L., *Democracy Compromised.* Chiefs and the politics of land in South Africa. 2005. HSRC: South Africa

Nwoko, K. C 2012 Female Husbands in Igbo Land: *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.5, no.1, March 2012 pages 69-78

Obbo, C., 1976, Dominant male ideology and female options: three East African Studies, Africa 46 (4): 371-89

Oboler, R.S. 1980. Is the female husband a man? Woman to woman marriage among the Nandi of Kenya, Ethnology 19: 69-88

O'brien, D. 1977, *Female husbands in Southern Bantu societies. In sexual stratification.* A cross cultural view (ed.) Schlegel, 109-26, New York: Columbia University Press.

Ohnuki-Tierney, E., 1984. "Native" Anthropologists." American Ethnologist no. 11 (3): 584-586.

Olivier, W. H. and Bekker, J.C. and Olivier N.J.J., 1995. *Indigenous Law*. Durban, South Africa: Butterworth.

Oomen, B. 1996. *Talking Tradition.* The position and portrayal of traditional leaders in present day South Africa. Leiden: University of Leiden, unpublished M.A. thesis

Oomen, B. 2000. *Tradition on the move: Chiefs, democracy and change in rural South Africa.* Amsterdam: Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa

Oweyumi, O. 1997. *The invention of Women.* Making an African sense of Western gender discourses. University of Minnesota Press: USA

Oyewumi, O. 2005. *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Patton, M.Q., 1987. *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. Newberry Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications.

Pelto, P., and Pelto, G., 1997. Studying knowledge, culture and behaviour in applied medical anthropology. *Med. Anthropol Q.*11 (2):147-63.

Piddington, R., 1950.*Introduction to Social Anthropology*. Volume 1, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1950. "Introduction." In *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage,* ed. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde. New York: Oxford University Press.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1965. Structure and function in primitive society. USA: Free Press

Ralushai, N.M.N., and Gray, J.R., 1977. Ruins and Traditions of the Ngona and Mbedzi among the Venda of the Northern Traansvaal. *Rhodesian History*: 1-8

Ralushai, V.N.M., 1977. *Conflicting accounts of Venda History with particular reference to the role of mutupo in social organization.* Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Queens University Belfast, UK.

Ralushai, V.N.M., 1978. Further traditions concerning Luvhimbi and the Mbedzi.*Rhodesian History*: 1-12.

Rambau, V.J.,1999. *Role of Venda women in formation of operation of women in burial societies*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Venda, South Africa.

Romm, N.R., 2001.*Accountability in Social Research.* New York, USA: Kluwer Academic.

Rubin, H.J., and Rubin, I.S., 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. London, UK: Sage Publications

Schapera, I., 1956. *Bantu speaking tribes of South Africa* .Cape Town, South Africa: Maskew Miller Publishers.

Schapera, I., 1939. *Married life in an African tribe*. Whitstable, UK: Sheridan House, University of Michigan

Schusky, E. L. (1983). *Manual for Kinship Analysis*, 2nd edition. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Seale, C., 1999. *The Quality of Qualitative Research*. USA: Sage Publications

Seale, C., 2003. *Social Research Methods: A Reader*. USA: Sage Publications

Seale, C., 2004. *Researching Society and Culture.* USA: Sage Publications

Seiler, J., (ed.) 1980. South Africa since the Portuguese coup, Colorado: West New Press

Sithole, M.P. 2009 *Unequal Peers*. The politics of discourse management in the social sciences, Africa Institute of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Spradley, J., 1979. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Spradley, J., 1980. *Participant Observation*. New York, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stake, R., 1995. *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage

Stayt, H.A., 1931. *The Bavenda*. London UK: Frank Cass/Oxford University Press.

Strauss, A. ,1987. *Qualitative analysis for social scientists.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J., 1990. *Basics of qualitative research: theory procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, USA: Sage.

Teevan, J.J., 1989.*Basic sociology* (3rd edn).Scarborough, Ontario, Canada: Prentice-Hall.

Thompson, L. 1990. *A History of South Africa.* USA: Yale University Press
Theal, G.M., 1898-1903. *Records of Southern-Eastern Africa* (vol. 9) London, UK: Government of the Cape Colony.

Tshiguvho, T., 2008 Sacred traditions and biodiversity conservation in the forest montane region of Venda, South Africa, An unpublished doctoral thesis at Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts

The *Bantu Administration Act 38 of 192,* Government of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printer

The *City Press* 2007

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996,* Government of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printer

The *Customary Marriages Act of 1998,* Government of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printer

The *Limpopo Traditional Leaders and Institution Act*

The *National House of Traditional Leaders*

The *Traditional Court Bill,* Government of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printer

The *Traditional Leadership and Governance Act 41 of 2003,* Government of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printer

Thompson, L., 1975.*Change in Contemporary South Africa*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, USA: University of California Press.

Turner, V. W., 1970. The forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual. Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University Press.

Van Maanen, J., 1996. Ethnography. pp 263-265*In:* A. Kuper and J. Kuper (eds.).*The Social Science Encyclopedia* (2nd ed).. London, UK: Routledge.

Van Warmelo, N.J. (ed), 1932. *Contribution towards Venda History, Religion and tribal ritual.* Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

Van Warmelo, N.J., and Phophi, W.M.D., 1949b.*Venda Law, Part 2 (Married Life).*Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers

Van Warmelo, N.J., and Phophi, W.M.D., 1949a.*Venda Law, Part 4 (Inheritance).*Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

Weiss, C.H., 1998. Evaluation methods for studying programs and policies (2nd edn). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Wentzel, P.J., 1983. *The relationship between Venda and Western Shona.* Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa.

Wessmann, R., 1908. *The Bawenda of the Spelonken.* London, UK: The African World

West, M., and Morries, J., 1976. *Abantu: an introduction to the Black people of South Africa.* Cape Town, South Africa: Struik.

http://www.sanparks.org/parks/mapungubwe, Accessed 26 August 2011

Wilson, F., and Ramphele, M., 1989b. *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge*. New York, USA: W.W. Norton and Company.

Wilson, F., and Mamphele, R., 1989a. *Children in South Africa, Part I: A Crisis of Caring.Children on the Front Line* (3rd edn). New York, USA: United Nations Children's Fund.

Wilson, M., 1969. The Sotho, Venda and Tonga. *in*: Wilson, M. and Thompson, L. (eds).*The Oxford History of South Africa*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, pp. 132-82.

Yin, R.K., 1989. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Newberry Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R.K., 1994. *Case study Research: Design and methods* (2nd edn). Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications.

Yai, O., 1999 "*In praise of metonymy: the concepts of tradition and creativity in the transmission of Yoruba artistry over space and time*" In the Yoruba Artist: New theoretical perspectives on African Arts. England, Birmingham University Press

Yin, K., 2009. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (4thedn). Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications.