

Chapter Three

Early History and the Contestation of the Venda *Vhuhosivhuhulu* until the early 1800s

This chapter gives a critical overview of Venda rulership disputes which must have played themselves out until roundabout the early nineteenth century. It is imperative in giving a proper background to the emergence of the Venda *vuhosivhuhulu*, to draw from the seventeenth century when the Masingo, or Vhasenzi, crossed the Limpopo River to the Soutpansberg. This chapter also offers a genealogy of Venda rulers under the Masingo people. However, I must emphasise that the thesis is not necessarily about the Masingo history as that was the focus of other scholars before me. The focus of the thesis is the issue of rulership disputes and this will be further elaborated on in the chapters that follow. *Vhuhosivhuhulu* disputes currently dominate the discourse in Venda public history as is evident from the response to the Mushasha Commission of Inquiry, the Ralushai Commission of Inquiry and the Nhlapo Commission of Inquiry appointed by successive South African governments. The response came in the form of legal action taken by the Vhangona, Tshivhase, Mphaphuli, Clementine and Charles Mphephu. The thesis will deal with this matter in the chapters focusing specifically on the commissions and the responses to their findings. As a point of departure, the thesis will now commence with highlighting the earliest recorded interference in Venda traditional politics.

Masingo/Vhasenzi or Vhangona

Professor Henry Nemudzivhadi, a prominent historian of the Vhavenda, had been of the opinion that Venda became a single community (to use his vocabulary of choice) when Dimbanyika established himself at Lwandali in 1688.¹ This is the view shared by various scholars² and they all agree that it was the Masingo people who first established a united Venda community under one *khosikhulu*. It is not the purpose of the thesis either to dismiss or to concur with this long-held scholarly view of the foundation of the Venda community.

1 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864 – 1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 1; D.N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900 – 1850: An outline of Shona History*, Heinemann, London, 1980, pp. 212, 260-261.

2 N.J. van Warmelo in collaboration with S.M. Dzivhani, M.F. Mamadi, M.M. Motenda and E. Mudau, *The Copper Miners of Musina and the Early History of the Zoutpansberg*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1940.

Yet it is important to acknowledge the fact that there are some people within the Venda territory, like the Vhangona,³ who had a different view to the one expressed above. According to them, the Venda polity existed long before the arrival of the Masingo in the Soutpansberg. Scholars have not disputed this, but, as I will illustrate, there is little evidence that a proper *vuhosivhuhulu* structure had existed in the Soutpansberg prior to the arrival of the Masingo. The Vhangona views on the Venda rulership and their claims to the *Vuhosivhuhulu* will be expressed in the chapters that follow.

The Vhangona never made any attempt to claim back their *vuhosivhuhulu* over the centuries even when the Masingo were no longer a feared community. It is unlikely that the Vhangona's current claim to *vuhosivhuhulu* will succeed. There are many factors contributing to this: firstly, the Vhangona themselves admitted that they were conquered by the Masingo and secondly, the Vhangona never tried to win back the Venda land from the Masingo through a battle.⁴

N.J. van Warmelo and his Interlocutors

Information on the more loosely structured Venda polity before the arrival of the Masingo, can be found in early anthropological studies conducted by N.J. Van Warmelo, and published in 1940. As the government ethnologist from 1930 to 1969, Van Warmelo's mandate was to collect information about the history of the black people in a way that would enable the government to order and control them. This knowledge was eventually at the disposal of the National Party regime, allowing them to justify the segregation of black people in South Africa, including the homeland policy.⁵ Van Warmelo relied mostly on local informants who were

3 The Vhangona are alleged by some amongst the Venda people to be the owners of the Venda land. However, it is disputed by the Masingo and others amongst the Venda.

4 See Ralushai Commission of Inquiry, 1998 and Nhlapo Commission of Inquiry, 2008.

5 In his book *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa's Anthropologists, 1920-1990* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1997), W. Hammond-Tooke gave the following account of N.J. van Warmelo's work: "Van Warmelo was no ideologue, his conception of anthropology was untheoretical and descriptive and the work he exacted from his colleagues was limited almost entirely to the recording of local tribal histories. It is no wonder that the Ethnological Section – at least during the period of Van Warmelo's reign – was looked upon as an Ivory Tower and left to pursue its leisurely and recondite way without interference." Nevertheless, as argued by Sekibakiba Lekgoathi: "Ultimately, his writing and collection of vernacular manuscripts were, politically, neither innocent nor inconsequential." See S.P. Lekhoathi, *Colonial Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants and the*

teachers and elders within the various African communities to get what he believed could be an authentic view of the history of the locals. It is very difficult for me to conclude that the findings of Van Warmelo about the Vhavenda were entirely correct, since there is no way to re-enact the historical moments in which the material had been collected. However, his work can be regarded as more reliable than many of the scholars before (and after) him, because he allowed people to speak in their own language and record the information in that same language.

Historian Sekibakiba Lekgoathi has argued that because Van Warmelo relied on African interlocutors and researchers' accounts, his texts were not simply his own 'inventions', but the result of what Lyn Schumaker called "the coproduction of cultural knowledge"⁶. Lekgoathi presented these arguments referring to Van Warmelo's writings and interpretations of Ndebele history and society. He was of the opinion that they were "fundamentally shaped by local informants' perspectives, which were themselves products of old traditions that had been recast in the context of contemporary struggles and changes"⁷ taking place in South Africa in the early twentieth century. This can also be applied to Van Warmelo's publications on the Vhavenda.

Based on his ethnographic knowledge of the Venda people, Van Warmelo was able to compile a genealogy of *mahosimahulu* of the Venda people under the Singo people from the time of Hwami until the time of George Mbulaheni Ramabulana. He was able to give a history of the succession of *mahosimahulu* of the Venda polity and his work was used by many scholars who came after him in their attempts to extend the history of *vuhosivhulu* of the Venda people to the more recent times. However, again, one must emphasize that Van Warmelo's accounts of the Venda history was mainly based on what he got from Venda interlocutors who were mostly members of the community and local teachers.

Making of an Archive on the Transvaal Ndebele, 1930-1989, *Journal of African History*, 50, 2009, pp. 61-80.

6 S.P. Lekhoathi, Colonial Experts, Local Interlocutors, p. 80. Lekhoathi's reference is to the book by L. Schumaker, *Africanising Anthropology. Fieldwork, Networks and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2001.

7 S.P. Lekhoathi, Colonial Experts, Local Interlocutors, p. 62.

Van Warmelo himself argued that interlocutors were the most suitable and reliable people to tell their own stories:

... the practice, in collecting ethnographical data, of allowing people to speak for themselves, is no doubt a sound one. One can then hear them state matters from their own point of view, in their own language and in the correct technical terms. This will have more value for later generations than the observations of a European, who cannot but see things from his own point of view.⁸

It will be very naive to conclude that what one gathers from interlocutors about the issue of African kingship can be regarded as totally reliable. More so, when one goes to community members for information; they will definitely give you what you want to hear, or what they want the scholar to elevate to truth-status, but it could also be that what they had given a liberal government ethnologist in good faith in 1940, could be re-read by a new generation of apartheid officials ten years later and reinterpreted and reemployed to justify their policy of apartheid. The same information can be recast by every new generation, which explains why we are still reading Van Warmelo today. As it is stated above, the thesis is about the Venda *Vhuhosivhuhulu* disputes and not about Van Warmelo's writings, but the context is relevant since I too draw on his work to make sense of the early history which is the focus of this chapter.

The Beginnings

Luvhimbi of the Vhambedzi and Hwami of the Vhasenzi / Masingo

S.M. Dzivhani was one of the local experts employed by Van Warmelo to record the Vhavenda's history. His account about the first Venda *khosikhulu* differs from the accounts of scholars who came after him. Dzivhani, in his contribution to a Van Warmelo compilation published in 1940, believed the first Venda *khosikhulu* who could be remembered, was Luvhimbi⁹ who was alleged to have come from Malungudzi Hill in what is today Zimbabwe. Dzivhani illustrated that Luvhimbi crossed the Limpopo River and settled at Ha-Luvhimbi at the eastern end of Tshivhase's "location", as it was known at the time Dzivhani had narrated

8 N.J. van Warmelo, *Transvaal Ndebele Texts (Ethnological Publications 1)*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1930, p. 32.

9 *Luvhimbi* was a king of Vhambedzi and he was neither from the Vhangona nor the Masingo communities. This implies that the first Venda *khosi* known was not from either of the two famous Venda communities, Masingo or Vhangona.

his account. According to Dzivhani, it was in this area that Luvhimbi established himself as a *khosikhulu* for many Vhavenda, and his popularity was claimed to have extended beyond the Venda borders. There were rumours amongst the Vhavenda that Luvhimbi had powers to make rain, which explains his dominance amongst his people, the Vhambedzi. According to Venda traditions and customs as recorded by Dzivhani, girls and other presents were given as a prize to this rainmaker. The fall of Luvhimbi's rulership came after the arrival of the Masingo under Dimbanyika, who is credited for having founded the long reign of the Masingo people in Venda.¹⁰ It is clear from the assertion of Dzivhani that Luvhimbi was accorded the status of a *khosikhulu* chiefly because of his rainmaking powers. Rainmaking is believed to be dependent on *mahosimahulu's* ties with the community's ancestors.

Dzivhani alleged that Luvhimbi was conquered by Dimbanyika, but that he was not killed because of his powers to make rain. The new *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity appointed the deposed *khosikhulu*, Luvhimbi, as their new royal rainmaker and he was also given responsibilities of the rites of *domba*, *vhusha* and *thondo*.¹¹ These developments ended the reign of the Mbedzi royal line and heralded the start of a prolonged Masingo dynasty in Venda. The Vhambedzi are just commoners today in the Venda community and they have also lost their trait of rainmaking.

The version of Dzivhani,¹² about Dimbanyika being the first Venda *khosikhulu* to rule the Venda after crossing the Soutpansberg from (what is today) Zimbabwe,¹³ differs from other scholars' versions. Dzivhani was confusing Dimbanyika with Dymbeu. According to Van Warmelo's another interlocutor, E. Mudau,¹⁴ Dimbanyika ruled after Dymbeu and Bele-la-

10 S.M. Dzivhani, The Chiefs of Venda, in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), *The Copper Miners of Musina and the Early History of the Zoutpansberg*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1940. p. 33.

11 *Domba*, *vhusha* and *thondo* are the Venda young girls' circumcision schools which helped them to progress to womanhood. The practices are no longer as prevalent as before because such traditions have been overtaken by Western ways of doing things. See the following study for three generations of Venda women's perceptions on these matters: L. van Averbek, Women of Dzindi: The Changing Perspectives on Tradition and Expression of Identity amongst Three Generations, c.1930-1915, M Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2018.

12 S.M. Dzivhani, The Chiefs of Venda, in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), p. 33.

13 The publication of 1940 refers to Rhodesia, the erstwhile colonial name of Zimbabwe that was discarded, soon after independence in 1980).

14 E. Mudau, Ngoma-Lungundu, in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), *The Copper Miners of Musina and the Early History of the Zoutpansberg*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1940, p. 30.

Mambo,¹⁵ but Dzivhani alleged that Dymbeu and Dimbanyika were the same person. Dimbanyika was the son of Bele-la-Mambo as it will be demonstrated in the coming chapters dealing with the government commissions of the twentieth century.

According to Mudau, Hwami was the first *thovhele* of the Vhasenzi to arrive in the Soutpansberg, the country of the Venda people.¹⁶ It is believed that he brought with him a small group of Vhasenzi and Vhalemba who had escaped the various “visitations of death” that had befallen the community while they were still in Matongoni and later in the Kalanga land on their way to the south of the Limpopo River. Mudau’s early account of Venda history suggests that the Vhasenzi were not ‘authentic’ Venda people, that they were outsiders who invaded Venda land and conquered the owners of the land, the Vhangona,¹⁷ and in so doing they created a new identity and assimilated the language of the locals.

Mudau also argued that despite ruling only a small group of people, Hwami was not in danger or threatened by the locals because they were scared of the magic drum and the ancestor spirits of the Vhasenzi and the Vhalemba, as they were known to be notorious as instruments of death. I hold the view that if it was not for the great drum *ngomalungundu* which made the Vhasenzi enemies peacefully disposed towards them, these people must surely have perished entirely and have been overcome by other groups that they came across on their way to the south.

The arrival of the Vhasenzi made the landowners, the Vhangona, very scared because of what they heard had happened to the Vhakalanga of Tshivhi, who had all been put to sleep by the magic drum of *Mwali*, “the ancestor spirit of the Vhasenzi”. Mudau held the opinion that the sound of *ngomalungundu* “made people other than its masters faint in fear and lie down as in death”. Mudau stated that when the enemies fainted the Vhasenzi were at liberty to do anything they liked to them, “whether it be to bind them or slay them, everything was in their

15 *Bele-la-Mambo* is known today amongst the Vhavenda as *Vele-la-Mbeu*. This assumption is supported by the fact that Dimbanyika is alleged to have succeeded his father Vele-la-Mbeu. Bele-la-Mambo according to Mudau (in Van Warmelo) was succeeded by Dimbanyika. It is therefore possible that Bele-la-Mambo and Vele-la-Mbeu refer to one and the same person.

16 E. Mudau, *Ngoma-Lungundu*, in N.J van Warmelo (ed.), *The Copper Miners of Musina and the Early History of the Zoutpansberg*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1940, p. 22.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

hands”.¹⁸ One should consider the fact that the awe with this supernatural power of the drum was entwined with the fear that the military power of the Vhasenzi would have instilled.

The news of the Vhasenzi’s southward march made many people in the Soutpansberg immediately vacate their land and flee. It was alleged that Hwami and his people settled on the mountain of Tshiendeulu in the land of the Makwinda after the Kwindu people had immediately subjected themselves to the Vhasenzi without throwing “a single spear”¹⁹.

A very important point regarding the discourse of *vuhosivhulu* of the Venda people was raised by Mudau about the *khosikhulu* of the Vhangona, something which had not been mentioned by any other scholar.²⁰ Mudau highlighted the fact that when Hwami and his people left the Kwindu land (where they had been staying on their arrival from Matongoni), they moved to the land of Tshivhula, the *khosikhulu* of the Vhangona. The disclosure of Tshivhula as a the *khosikhulu* of the Ngoni is something debatable, because no scholar has ever linked Tshivhula to the Vhangona and even today the Tshivhula people don’t associate themselves with the Vhangona. As the thesis will reveal later, the Tshivhula people did not even set up a claim for *vuhosivhulu* of the Venda polity. The explanation given for Hwami and his people leaving the Kwindu land for Tshivhula, was that he felt that the former were no longer threatened by *ngomalungundu*, and the latter were scared of the magic drum and would not pose a threat to him and his people.²¹

Mudau acknowledged that Hwami, who was also known to his people by the name of Mutumbuka-Vhathu,²² was the first *khosikhulu* to rule all the people in Venda. This assertion implies that the Vhasenzi were the first people to rule the unified Venda polity, with *mahosi* from other groupings being reduced to the status of subjects. It is alleged that *khosikhulu* Hwami lived to a great age, and he is said to have died after seeing his great-grandchildren.

18 E. Mudau, Ngoma-Lungundu, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 23.

19 *Ibid.*

20 M.H Nemudzivhadi and N.V. Ralushai never mentioned Tshivhula as the Ngoni chief. He is commonly known today amongst the Venda people as a Mutwanamba from the Twanamba community.

21 E. Mudau, Ngoma-Lungundu, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 23.

22 *Mutubuka-Vhathu* means creator of men and he was the first king to rule all the Venda people.

The Venda polity became great under him; it was being “feared far and wide”. According to Mudau no one amongst the Venda people lived longer than Hwami.²³ It is alleged that he had seen four successive spiritual priests hold office during his time and had seen them all die of old age. No date has been recorded for his death, but it is believed that he had no son to succeed him, because his children had also grown old and died during his reign. The long life of *Khosikhulu* Hwami had been attributed to the *vhadzimu* of Vhasenzi; they might have prolonged his life to protect the Venda polity from collapse as there were always threats from the conquered people. Mudau narrated that Hwami was succeeded by his great-grandson, Dyambeu.²⁴

Dyambeu

Early evidence from the Venda polity thus suggests that it was created by the Vhasenzi, or Masingo. It is apparent that there were some chief-based structures in what became the Venda land long before the arrival of the Vhasenzi. However, it is also clear that there was no single, united, *vuhosivhuhulu*. It was a very disjointed structure with the Vhangona having their own *khosikhulu* alleged to have been Tshivhula, who conquered some *mahosi* from other communities like the Vhalembetu led by Mutale, but all these *vuhosi* were small. It is also a fact that at the time it was accepted that the Vhasenzi were aided by their *vhadzimu* to conquer other Venda factions and create a new *vuhosivhuhulu*. They therefore succeeded in creating new identities for themselves and for the other Venda communities they found at the time of their arrival in the land of the Ngoni people.

This thesis will focus on how invented traditions were used by the Vhasenzi to assume the position of authority in the Venda land. It is evident that their traditional beliefs in their *vhadzimu* and *ngomalungundu* made them feared by their opponents. However, without actual military prowess to affirm their power, these traditions lost their impact and would prove to be unsustainable in the long term. The use of *ngomalungundu* and the Vhasenzi’s

23 While one could speculate about medical reasons for Hwami’s longevity, the mythical significance of his reign as an era of peace and prosperity, certainly also explains why the narrator described it as such a long period.

24 E. Mudau, *Ngoma-Lungundu*, in N.J. Van Warmerlo (ed.), p. 24.

reliance on invisible *vhadzimu* became outdated and useless to scare enemies in later periods.²⁵

It is widely believed that the death of Hwami signalled the beginning of this demise. His successor, Dyambeu, managed for a short while to scare his opponents by consulting *vhadzimu* and by beating *ngomalungundu*. It all changed when he decided to disobey the tradition of beating the magic drum during his attempt to conquer Vhatavhatsindi at Fundudzi. This proved to be his undoing. It is alleged that he boasted he could subjugate the Vhatavhatsindi without once beating the magic drum. The drum was hung up in the tree because it was a taboo for it to touch the ground.²⁶

It appears that the *vhadzimu* of the Vhasenzi were not happy about being disrespected by *khosikhulu*. They cast a spell on the Vhasenzi and an unfortunate incident happened when the drum fell on the ground, causing a crack that led one of the pegs made of a human bone to break off. Soon after this incident the Vhatavhatsindi fell upon the Senzi people, but they decided to spare the life of Dyambeu whom they later flung into the lake of their *vhadzimu*. Dyambeu perished in the lake and he was never seen by his people again. He was assumed to have been killed by the *vhadzimu* of the Vhatavhatsindi.²⁷

Mudau held the view that the defeat was the first for the Vhasenzi in Venda. It also heralded the era of Vhasenzi operating without their trusted *ngomalungundu* because it was seized by the Vhatavhatsindi after their victory. The disappearance of Dyambeu in *Dzivha* Fundudzi also left a power vacuum that brought a lot of uncertainty among the Vhasenzi, who had never tasted defeat before. Mudau noted that Dyambeu's grandson, Tshishonga, vowed to avenge the death of his grandfather by defeating the Vhatavhatsindi and recapturing the seized magic drum. Again, we see the involvement of the *vhadzimu* in protecting *vuhosivhuhulu* in the narrative. *Vhadzimu* offered Tshishonga a horn with powers like *ngomalungundu* to overcome the Vhatavhatsindi. These were the words of *Mwali*, *mudzimu* of the Vhasenzi, before he gave Tshishonga and the Vhasenzi a horn:

²⁵ *Matongoni* was the Senzi kingdom in Zimbabwe before they came to the Soutpansberg.

²⁶ E. Mudau, *Ngoma-Lungundu*, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Hear me, your ancestor. Those others scorned me, they let my drum hang in the sun and let it fall from the tree and get cracked, which enraged me very much. So, I cast them off, and all of them have died. I now give you a horn, which you must blow on the day you attack the Vhatavhatsindi. On that day, there must be none that eats sour porridge, for it weakens the limbs. You must not begin before you have heard me tell you that you must fight.²⁸

The voice of *vhadzimu* is being recited here by someone amongst the Vhasenzi who might have relied on oral traditions. It is arguable that the narration of Mudau might have come from an authentic witness to the event of Dymbeu's death and the circumstances thereafter.

The Vhasenzi avenged the death of Dyambeu by defeating the Vhatavhatsindi and reclaiming *ngomalungundu*. As a result of this victory, which brought pride back to the community, *Mwali* advised Tshishonga to appoint someone to replace Dyambeu, "as the people could not live without a king".²⁹ The appointment of a new *khosikhulu* would for the first time (in the recorded tradition) see a woman being involved in choosing *mulaifa* to *vuhosivhuhulu* (under the old tradition *vhadzimu* would use the high priests as messengers to the people bearing the name of the prospective *khosikhulu*).

This raises a very interesting aspect of the evolution of people's beliefs and customs in the process of shaping new forms of identity and tradition. However, I must stress that it does not mean that people regarded their old traditions as derelict, just that their new values were informed by changing trends in society that compelled their adaptation.

The start of *vuhosivhulu* disputes

***Makhadzi* and Bele-la-Mambo**

The era of Bele-la-Mambo marks the start of Vhasenzi disputes in Venda, as also the contradictions in the interlocutors' narrative indicate: Mudau alleged that *makhadzi* selected Dyambeu's eldest son, Bele-la-Mambo as a successor to his father, and that the crowning of Bele-la-Mambo brought joy to all the Vhasenzi people. This statement contradicts what Dzivhani had written in his narrative: he believed that Bela-la-Mambo was Dyambeu or

28 E. Mudau, Ngoma-Lungundu, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 26.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Dimbanyika. He alleged that Dimbanyika was Dyambeu who had come from the Vhukalanga to Venda, and he went on to say that in the Venda language Dyambeu is *Vele la Mbeu*, “*Dimba*” = *Rola, kana tiba, nhyika*, = *shango*. Dimbanyika *tiba-shango kana, Rola-shango*. This assertion by Dzivhani implies that all these three names belong to one person. However, it is likely that Dzivhani was just confusing things because Van Warmelo’s other interlocutors, and other scholars like Nemudzivhadi who have done extensive research on the Venda discourse, all hold the same view, that these were three different people.³⁰ Therefore Dzivhani’s views on the subject have to be dismissed because they are not supported by any other researchers.

The excitement around the inauguration of Bele-la-Mambo was attributed to the fact that during “those days rivalries over the chieftainship [*vuhosivhuhulu*] were not common and the princes [*vhakololo*] got on well with one another”, believing that *khosikhulu* was chosen by *vhadzimu* “and not by any person”³¹. Mudau also highlighted a very important point as to why no one would contest *vuhosivhulu* and win; he stressed that it was the sound of *ngomalungundu* which approved a new *khosikhulu*. However, these sentiments can be far-fetched because after Dyambeu’s death, *Makhadzi* decided on who should be the new *khosikhulu* without the sound of *ngomalungundu*.

This was indeed a very strange tradition which had bad consequences for people when they disobeyed *vhadzimu*. The Vhasenzi had succeeded in claiming the protection by *vhadzimu* for a very long time, hence their survival in the initial stage without succession disputes. *Vhadzimu* made people with aspirations to contest the choice of a *khosikhulu* afraid of what might befall them as a punishment from *Mwali*. Bele-la-Mambo continued with the tradition of using *ngomalungundu* to subjugate enemies. Mudau held the view that the spiritual powers of *ngomalungundu* did not last long and ascribed this is to the magic horn which was given to Tshishonga by *Mwali* when he went to recover *ngomalungundu* from Vhatavhatsindi.³²

30 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 2.

31 E. Mudau, *Ngoma-Lungundu*, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 28.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Tshishonga

Mudau argued that Bele-la-Mambo “was a good ruler, and the people loved him”. He also alluded to the fact that people feared Bele-la-Mambo on account of his “possession of the death-dealing drum”.³³ . The argument that *vuhosivhuhulu* disputes in Venda started during the time of Bele-la-Mambo is strongly backed by the tension that started between Bele-la-Mambo and his cousin, Tshishonga. The latter felt that he was no longer popular at *musanda* and as a result of that feeling of uncertainty he devised a plan to kill the *khosikhulu* by poison. According to Mudau, it was unfortunate because Bele-la-Mambo discovered the plot to assassinate him and he therefore decided to banish Tshishonga from the *musanda*.³⁴

The plot to kill him, made Bele-la-Mambo declare war on Tshishonga, because he realized that his *vuhosivhuhulu* was at stake and his cousin might become a powerful opponent. The war was unique in the sense that two blood relatives from the same *nndu ya vuhosi* were fighting each other for *vuhosivhuhulu*. Both Bele-la-Mambo and Tshishonga wanted to claim that their authority was sanctioned by *Mwali*. Bele-la-Mambo was relying on *ngomalungundu* while Tshishonga used the charm of the horn to counter his opponent’s powerful instrument. In this war *ngomalungundu* was rendered ineffective as Bele-la-Mambo lost to Tshishonga and he was eventually killed with his men. For the first time *ngomalungundu* was contested as affirmation of the ruler’s divine right. The death of Bele-la-Mambo was the culmination of a new era in the Venda rulership history which would stretch into the twenty-first century.

Tshishonga seized *ngomalungundu*, and by implication also the power associated with it, and so the death of Bele-la-Mambo also marked the end of Vhasenzi dominance over other *vuhosi*. Following this battle, the Tshishonga clan rose to prominence. Even today they are honoured amongst the Venda people.³⁵ A consequence of the battle was that the old tradition of spiritual powers was reshaped. *Ngomalungundu* had changed hands, and the power it symbolised was no longer as undisputable as before.

33 E. Mudau, *Ngoma-Lungundu*, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 29.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

Dimbanyika

The early history of the Venda clearly illustrates that old traditions which include customs and beliefs change over time to meet new circumstances. With their power diminished, the Vhasenzi could no longer display the same guidance from *Mwali* by the time Dimbanyika was installed as a new ruler of the Venda polity by Tshishonga. The installation of Dimbanyika saw the return of *ngomalungundu*, but now along with the charm horn, to the *musanda*. However, neither was as useful to the Vhasenzi as before in marking magical power, because this power had indeed been checked. The throne was no longer controlled by *Mwali*, but Tshishonga was the main man in the *musanda* and the *khosikhulu*, Dimbanyika, was just occupying a ceremonial position.³⁶ In the new era, with Tshishonga now shaping and restructuring the affairs of the Venda polity, supernatural practices would not disappear, but they had certainly been realigned in adjustment to the new order.

Before his death Tshishonga ruled Venda even though he was not *khosikhulu*, merely working through *Khosikhulu* Dimbanyika, who did what he wished him to do. Dimbanyika was popular with the people because he was alleged to be on good terms with Tshishonga's people, the Vhandalamo. Van Warmelo's interlocutor, Mudau, narrated that Dimbanyika travelled far and wide and subjected the people by means of *ngoma* and with the vulture bone flute given to him by Tshishonga. He was able to bring all the Vhangona under his control.³⁷ This assertion about the drum and the vulture bone flute used by Dimbanyika to scare enemies contradict what was highlighted earlier on in this chapter, that after the death of Bele-la-Mambo all these magic objects were rendered useless. The reference to the vulture bone flute is also not synchronous with the previous reference to Tshishonga's use of a magic horn. Such discrepancies clearly indicate that the information collected by Van Warmelo from Mudau and Dzivhani respectively, had their idiosyncrasies. The one constancy in the narratives is that the prominence of the magical objects changes in tandem with the waxing and the waning of the ruler's power.

36 The major influence of Tshishonga in Venda history has thus far not been properly acknowledged in historical scholarship. The role of Tshishonga in the crowning of the future Venda rulers after the death of Dyambeu was highlighted in detail by Van Warmelo's interlocutors in *The Copper Miners of Musina and the Early History of the Zoutpansberg*. However, scholars such as M.H. Nemudzivhadi, J.W.N. Tempelhoff and others failed to acknowledge the role Tshishonga played in the history of the Vhavenda rulership and they never mentioned his role in their works.

37 E. Mudau, *Ngoma-Lungundu*, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 22.

The death of Tshishonga allowed Dimbanyika the freedom to do as he liked. It also came out in Van Warmelo's research that Dimbanyika's high priest, Gole-la-Denga was also a feared man because he was alleged to have been looked upon as *Mwali's* servant and the possessor of much power. Dimbanyika lived to a very high age as his great grandfather Hwami had done before him. Many people amongst the Venda believed that Dimbanyika was the son of *Mwali* because he could work such amazing miracles. His supremacy was acknowledged even across the Limpopo by Vhakalanga and far away in the north and by all the people in the east and the Sotho people in the south. Tshivhula the "*Ngona*" ruler who had been driven out and had fled westwards to the Blauwberg also acknowledged the supremacy of Dimbanyika.³⁸

Dimbanyika's Sons

Mudau related that, with his days coming to an end, Dimbanyika decided to divide his *vuhosivhulu* amongst his sons Ravhura, Mandiwana, Munzhedzi, Tshivhase and Thohoyandou. He gave each one of them independent *vuhosi*. The senior amongst them was Munzhedzi of the house of Ramabulana while the youngest was Thohoyandou. After the death of Dimbanyika, the sole responsibility of installing a new *khosikhulu* at Dzata (the royal headquarters) was in the hands of the Vhandalamo. Their role in the installation of the Venda ruler was based on the fact that they possessed the magic objects as they were of the house of *makhadzi*.³⁹ After their meeting they decided to install the youngest son Thohoyandou as a new *khosikhulu* to replace his father Dimbanyika. This development did not sit well with his elder brothers who did not acknowledge their brother as *khosikhulu*. This was the culmination of the Venda *vuhosivhuhulu* disputes. *Vuhosivhuhulu* was already divided by the time Dimbanyika died.⁴⁰

It is alleged in Mudau's account that Thohoyandou was not given any hint that he had been chosen to rule before his installation as the new *khosikhulu*. Tshivhase was given Phiphidi, an area still under his jurisdiction even today, and his headquarters were at Phiphidi. Munzhenzi

38 E. Mudau, Ngoma-Lungundu, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 22.

39 *Ibid.*

40 It is my view that by the time Dimbanyika died, the Vhavenda polity was already divided as it was demonstrated that the polity was fragmented before the death of Tshishonga, there was contestation of power between Tshishonga and Vele-la-Mbeu as highlighted by Van Warmelo's interlocutors in this chapter.

was given a huge area, as he was the eldest of them all. Mandiwana was given the north from Tshiendeulu upwards. The chief priest, Gole-la-Denga,⁴¹ was also given land: he was to guard the area in the south-east against possible enemies who might attack the *vhakololo*, and his headquarters were at Tshitomboni. The headquarters of Munzhenzi were at Vuvha where the Vhangona used to live, but not exactly on the old ruins of their dwellings because that was taboo according to the Venda traditions. Dimbanyika also did a favour to another commoner, Magoro, by giving him the area of Mbwenda so that he could support Gole Mphaphuli – both were guardians of the royal sons.⁴²

Thohoyandou

Radzilani on Thohoyandou

The historical accounts of successions in the Venda *vhuhosivhuhulu* have been very complex and contradictory in the sense that most of the interlocutors or historians who contributed to the Venda historical literature have been confusing names of rulers. Their task has been challenged by the possibility that a succession of people could even have been conflated into a single character in the oral history. A good example of such confusion is the account of Van Warmelo's Venda interlocutor, O.S. Radzilani.⁴³ His account about Thohoyandou contradicts what Dzivhani and other Venda interlocutors have told Van Warmelo. Radzilani believed Vele-la-Mbeu (Vele-la-Mambo) was Thohoyandou's father. As indicated in the sources referred to earlier on in this thesis, Thohoyandou was the son of Dimbanyika and he was a grandson of Vele-la-Mbeu who was the father to Dimbanyika's father.

Motenda on Thohoyandou

M.M. Motenda also presented us with another version of the birth history of Thohoyandou. He alleged that Thohoyandou was the son of Mulozwi and that he had already been born when they came from the old country of Vhukalanga⁴⁴ (today Zimbabwe). However, Motenda stated that there were some amongst the Venda people who believed that Vele-la-Mbeu was

41 *Gole-la-Denga* should be Mphaphuli.

42 E. Mudau, Ngoma-Lungundu, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 31.

43 University of Pretoria Library Special Collections, Van Warmelo Collection (Hereafter UP Library Van Warmelo) 535, 44/15, 338. O.S. Radzilani, *History of Thjatema and Vhulaudzi*, 1937, p. 2.

44 M.M. Motenda, *History of the Western Venda and of the Lemba*, in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), *The Copper Miners of Musina and the Early History of the Zoutpansberg*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1940, p. 53.

the father of Thohoyandou.⁴⁵ Motenda's allegations cause more confusion about the identity of the father of Thohoyandou, but the general feelings amongst those within the Ramabulana *musanda*, is that Dimbanyika was the real father of Thohoyandou. Thohoyandou was regarded as a very powerful man and he was not scared of anything. Motenda alleged that Thohoyandou decided to stamp his authority by declaring a war with the Raphulu who were strongly regarded as the owners of the Venda land. This revelation by Motenda dispels the notion of Vhangona and Vhambedzi as the "real owners" of the Venda land. There was something similar in the war between Thohoyandou's people and Raphulu's people and the wars that preceded it involving the Vhasenzi.⁴⁶ The same instrument used by the Vhasenzi when they first arrived in the Venda land to scare their enemies was back in the picture again. However, this time the drum was no longer *ngomalungundu* but reinvented as a small drum with the same powers as the magic drum.

The drum used by Thohoyandou and his army was alleged to be coming from Vhukalanga and to have had the power to scare enemies. In a war with the Raphulu people a drum was beaten, and Thohoyandou's men started screaming, which led to the enemies fainting. All the Raphulu warriors were killed and their people were captured, and they became indebted to Thohoyandou and his people⁴⁷. The ascendancy of Thohoyandou to the throne was not smooth sailing as it did not make his brothers happy.

Radzilani claimed that Tshisevhe or Munzhedzi, who was the eldest brother, tried to assassinate his younger brother Thohoyandou with *vhura*, but his attempt failed after it was discovered that he intended to do so. However, Thohoyandou did not feel safe and he decided to evacuate the *musanda* with his people⁴⁸.

Motenda believed Thohoyandou did not rule for that long and claimed that Thohoyandou just disappeared in the evening with his people. In Motenda's version, this was the last time people heard of Thohoyandou.⁴⁹ Motenda argued that the death of Thohoyandou was a

45 M.M. Motenda, History of the Western Venda and of the Lemba, p. 52.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

48 UP Library Van Warmelo 535, 44/15, 338. O.S. Radzilani, History of Thjatema and Vhulaudzi, 1937, p. 2.

49 M.M. Motenda, History of the Western Venda and of the Lemba, p. 54.

mystery like the death of the Biblical prophet Moses. Thohoyandou's disappearance with his death and the disappearance of the people who left with him, remain a mystery even today, because no one amongst the Venda people knows where they went to. The reason for Thohoyandou's disappearance was his brothers' attempts to kill him, as will be discussed below.

Mudau on Thohoyandou

The installation of Thohoyandou by Vhandalamo and *makhadzi* made the older brothers to be angry and Gole-la-Denga was also angry, and they all refused to bow to Thohoyandou. It is alleged in Mudau's account that each one of them ruled as an independent *thovhele* and they both had many subjects under their jurisdiction. Gole-la-Denga, the chief priest, stayed peacefully with Magoro south of the Luvuvhu and Letaba rivers.⁵⁰ Munzhedzi had an area larger than that of his other brothers and his power was such that he conquered the Tshivhula and Raphulu people. The rejection of Thohoyandou by his brothers and the chief priest did not weaken his authority amongst the Venda people because it was alleged that his realm surpassed that of his brothers. The reason for that was the fact that it was he who possessed the sacred objects of the Vhazenzi. Mudau highlighted that *Mwali* spoke to him and that the Vhandalamo and most of the Venda people supported him more than they did his brothers.⁵¹

In contrast, his brothers did not have the support of *makhadzi* and the Vhandalamo. Their only support came from Gole-la-Denga and Magoro, but the support was not enough to unseat Thohoyandou from the throne. Many years passed without any disturbance to the throne of Thohoyandou and there was no scarcity at Dzata, but in his brothers' areas there was, while he was living with his people in plenty.⁵² Things changed when Gole-la-Denga and Magoro got the other brothers together and convinced them to attack Thohoyandou at Dzata with the help of some of the Vhangona people. Their intention was to install one of the brothers whom they felt to be the rightful ruler.⁵³ These developments are the first to indicate

50 E. Mudau, Ngoma-Lungundu, in N.J. Van Warmelo (ed.), p. 31.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*

the meaningful role the Vhangona people played in the *vuhosivhuhulu* of the Venda polity by getting involved in the Vhasenzi domestic rulership disputes.

Contradictions

Mudau's accounts above, of the plot by the chief priest, Gole-la-Denga, Magoro and the brothers to overthrow Thohoyandou, contradict the accounts of Radzilani about the plot to unseat Thohoyandou and how he finally left Dzata with his people. However, there are similarities in both stories in the sense that they all highlight an attempt to overthrow Thohoyandou. One must contend that one is making sense of various accounts of different interlocutors. It appears that in his quest to keep the authenticity of the stories narrated to him by his Venda interlocutors, Van Warmelo did not change anything in the articles given to him to compile the history of the Venda people. Van Warmelo's quest for authenticity presents us with a big challenge as the new generation of scholars such as Nemudzivhadi, Tempelhoff, Ralushai and Moller-Malan, writing about the Venda rulership discourse had to try to come up with a more sensible account of this history.

Returning to Radzilani's account: Thohoyandou heard of attempts on his life and the throne and he left Dzata with the sacred objects. By the time his brothers and their people arrived at Dzata, they found the area deserted and they tried to follow the track of Thohoyandou and his people, but they turned back for fear of a storm in which they thought was their *vhadzimu*. Radzilani also highlighted the fact that Thohoyandou and his people went down the Nzhelele River after they had left Dzata and nobody knew where he went to; whether he had died or where his grave might be. The evacuation of Dzata by Thohoyandou and his people destabilised the *vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda because all his brothers evacuated the palace as well and scattered all over Venda and went to different places⁵⁴.

After Thohoyandou

The events after the death of Dimbanyika highlighted the fact that the disputes which started during the time of Tshishonga and Dimbanyika were transferred to the next generations of

54 UP Library Van Warmelo 535, 44/15, 338. O.S. Radzilani, History of Thjatema and Vhulaudzi, 1937, p. 2.

rulers in Venda, which remain a major concern to *vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda even today. The disappearance of Thohoyandou left a vacuum in the leadership because there was no immediate successor at Dzata since nobody knew where he went to. Van Warmelo's interlocutor J.M. Mugivhi alleged that after Thohoyandou's death his two sons, Tshivhase and Ramabulana, fought for the rulership and that this led to the country being divided into two, the one brother ruling the one part and the other brother ruling the second part of the country.⁵⁵ Motenda believed that Thohoyandou left two sons: Ramabulana and Ramavhoya, not Tshivhase.⁵⁶ However, I need to emphasise that there is also a big confusion here because Nemudzivhadi stated that Ramabulana and Ramavhoya were the sons of Mpopfu who was the ruler before Ramabulana.⁵⁷ He argued that in about 1829, Mpopfu, the ruler of Western Venda at Dzanani, passed away. His death created a void and succession became an issue as his three sons Ramabulana, Ramavhoya and Madzhie fought for *vuhosivhuhulu*⁵⁸.

Mugivhi believed that Ramabulana replaced his father Thohoyandou on the vacant throne, that his headquarters were based at Tshirululuni, and that he ascended to the throne because he was the eldest son of Thohoyandou. Just like his father before him, Ramabulana was greatly feared by his people and others beyond his realm. His reign went beyond the borders of Venda because his father Thohoyandou was also feared by many people beyond the Venda borders and his reign also extended to Bolobedu.⁵⁹ Nemudzivhadi believed that Modjadji was given the land by the Ramabulana people.⁶⁰ Ramabulana also ruled Vho-Segwadi, Vho-Langa up to Lunanwa – that is how powerful his reign was.⁶¹ The thesis dismisses Mugivhi's perception that Ramabulana was the son of Thohoyandou and it also dismisses the notion that Ramabulana's reign also extended to the Langa who are Zulus by origin. This is backed by the fact that scholars such as Nemudzivhadi, Van Warmelo and others have concurred that Ravele Ramabulana was the son of Munzhenzi/Mpopfu.

55 UP Library Van Warmelo 539, 44/20, 16. J.M. Mugivhi, *Gwamasenga na vhana vhawe*, 1937, p. 16.

56 M.M. Motenda, *History of the Western Venda and of the Lemba*, in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), p. 54.

57 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 8.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

59 UP Library Van Warmelo 539, 44/20, 16. J.M. Mugivhi, *Gwamasenga na vhana vhawe*, 1937, p. 16.

60 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 8.

61 UP Library Van Warmelo 539, 44/20, 16. J.M. Mugivhi, *Gwamasenga na vhana vhawe*, 1937, p. 16.

The extension of the ruler's authority beyond the Venda borders highlights the fact that Vhasenzi aspired of conquering the whole of the far North of present-day South Africa and beyond. Moletsi was also in the middle of the Ramabulana area and the people there were also scared of Ramabulana. The reign of Ramabulana was soon to come to an end and the cause of this was not the enemy from outside the *musanda* but it was an enemy within. Ramabulana's mother was not happy with her elder son and she wanted the youngest, Ramavhoya, to take over. She started influencing and poisoning Ramavhoya's mind to go after *vuhosivhuhulu* and declare war on his brother. The two brothers went to war with each other and it was alleged to be one of the biggest wars involving two blood brothers. The war ended with defeat for Ramabulana and he was banished from the *musanda* by his younger brother, who ended up ascending to *vuhosivhuhulu*. The disposed *Khosikhulu* Ramabulana fled to Mafhitshi.⁶² The mountain there is still called the mountain of Ramabulana.⁶³

Tshisevhe and his Brothers

The lineage of the Venda rulers from Dimbanyika to Thohoyandou is a mystery to all Venda scholars and their interlocutors. Dzivhani held the opinion that Bele-la-Mambo was succeeded by Masindi, his son. He further claimed that Masindi did not live long as he died after he fell ill and he was succeeded by Tshisevhe, who was succeeded by his uncle Thohoyandou after his death.⁶⁴ The accounts of Dzivhani about the Venda rulership add more confusion because his allegations of Thohoyandou as an uncle to Tshisevhe is far from the truth according to previously discussed contributions to the discourse.

Nemudzivhadi held the opinion that the first four *mahosimahulu* of the Venda people Dimbanyika, Dyambeu, Thohoyandou and Tshisevhe, whose reign was from 1688 – 1800, ruled a centralised Venda state from Dzata.⁶⁵ During the reign of Tshisevhe as *khosikhulu* his influence extended from Vhuxwa, north of the Vhembe River to the Lumbelule River. Nemudzivhadi alleged that the population increased and Tshisevhe was no longer able to

62 UP Library Van Warmelo 539, 44/20, 16. J.M. Mugivhi, *Gwamasenga na vhana vhawe*, 1937, p. 16.

63 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 9.

64 S.M. Dzivhani, *The Chiefs of Venda*, in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), p. 35-36.

65 Dzata was the royal headquarters of Venda during the time of Dimbanyika, Thohoyandou and Tshisevhe.

exercise effective control throughout the whole Venda polity. His predecessors Dimbanyika, Dyambeu and Thohoyandou were able to maintain a strong centralised Venda polity but during the reign of Tshisevhe the Venda polity became too big for him to manage alone.⁶⁶

The main reasons given for Tshisevhe ceding powers to his brothers Mpofo, Raluswielo Tshivhase and Mphaphuli was transport and the communications problems of those days and it was therefore practical for Tshisevhe to decentralise the Venda polity. *Musanda* remained at Dzata where Tshisevhe was based and Mpofo, as *ndumi*, was given the responsibility to rule from Songozwi. The other brothers, Raluswielo Tshivhase and Mphaphuli ruled from Dopeni and Tshitomboni respectively. Mphaphuli later decided to move to Miluwani and he eventually set up his *musanda* at Mbilwi.⁶⁷ There seems to be some confusion regarding Mphaphuli's relations with the Ramabulana, because this assertion that Mphaphuli was a brother of Tshisevhe is highly distorted. The general view amongst the scholars on Venda history has been that Mphaphuli was a chief priest and a servant of the Ramabulana.

Khosikhulu Tshisevhe bestowed equal status on all three of his brothers and their territories consisted of lands with defined borders under *mahosi* and *magota* who had to pay homage to the newly installed *vhothovhele*. Tshisevhe remained *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity while his three brothers were *vhothovhele* with administrative and judicial authority. However, it is important to emphasise that the emergence of *vhothovhele* should not be seen as a division of the Venda realm into three separate states. Nemudzivhadi argued that the arrangement was peacefully introduced in order to face the challenge of external threats to the perpetuation of the Venda polity.⁶⁸ As a result of this arrangement Venda had to decentralise in order to survive. The turn of events in the Venda polity led to four centres of power: not

66 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 3. Nemudzivhadi cited S.M. Dzivhani and E. Mudau, *Mahosi a Venda na Vhadau vha Tshakhuma*, p. 25; L.T. Marole, *Makhulukuku*, p. 13; War Office, *The Native Tribes of the Transvaal*, p. 60.

67 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998. Nemudzivhadi cited L.T. Marole, *Makhulukuku*, p. 30; S.M. Dzivhani and E. Mudau, *Mahosi a Venda na Vhadau vha Tshakhuma*, p. 41; Oral information, *Khosi Tshikonelo Mphaphuli* (about 83 years then), Soni, 20-12-1979.

68 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 4. Nemudzivhadi's sources were L.T. Marole, *Makhulukuku*, p. 30; J. Flygare, *De Zoutpansbergen en de Bawenda Natie*.

only Dzata, but also Songozwi, Dopeni and Tshitomboni had sovereign powers. Practically, Tshisevhe had his authority as a ruler curtailed by his decision to cede powers.

Mpofu

Things were to change after the death of Tshisevhe in 1800. His successor Mpofu called for the evacuation of Dzata and he opted for his settlement Songozwi as *musandamuswa* of the Venda polity. In his writing Nemudzivhadi came to the defence of the decentralisation of the Venda polity by citing another example: England. He argued that the decentralisation was not unique to Venda because about 600 A.D. England had ten separate kingdoms which were not necessarily independent as they were nominally subject to one overlord – the King of Wessex. He pointed out that the kingdom of Wessex eventually unified the English monarchy during the reign of Egbert who was the first King of England between 802 and 839 AD⁶⁹. However, Nemudzivhadi conceded that the kingdom of Wessex was different to the Venda polity because *vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda started as a unified *vuhosivhuhulu* reigned by a single *khosikhulu*. It was only three generations later that *vuhosivhuhulu* decided to split the Venda polity into territories in which Tshisevhe crowned his brothers to rule and they continually aspired to greater autonomy⁷⁰.

In the next chapter I will look into the succession disputes between Mpofu's sons and the first interference of foreigners or outsiders in the Venda polity's internal matters.

69 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 4; Nemudzivhadi's source was E.R. Delderfield, *Kings and Queens of England and Great Britain*, pp. 13-14.

70 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Attempts by Makhado to Revive the Venda Kingdom 1864-1895*, PhD Thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1998, p. 4.