

## Chapter Four

### Nineteenth-Century Interferences in the *Vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda

The previous chapter provided this thesis with a critical analysis of the disputes of the Venda rulership from the time of Dimbanyika in 1688 to that of Mpofu in the 1800s. This chapter provides the nineteenth-century context which will be crucial for understanding the twentieth and twenty-first century commission reports on *vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda that will be analysed in subsequent chapters. The aim with this chapter is to extract the theme of rulership disputes from the existing scholarship on the period, and to highlight the foreign interference in the internal affairs of *vuhosivhuhulu* of the Venda people.

Building on the work of his interlocutors, Van Warmelo managed to give a good account of the succession battles for the *vuhosivhuhulu* of the Venda polity after the death of Thohoyandou. He recorded that, after the death of Thohoyandou, some royal elders appointed Tshivhase, who was a brother to the late *khosikhulu*. However, the ascendancy of Tshivhase to the throne did not sit well with some other elders, who raised concerns within *nnduni ya vuhosivhuhulu* that, as a *muzwala* to the late Thohoyandou and a son of *makhadzi*, Tshivhase could not ascend to the throne ahead of the sons of Thohoyandou.<sup>1</sup>

#### Tshivhase and Mpofu/Munzhedzi

Those who were supporting Tshivhase planned to assassinate the *mulaifa* to *vuhosivhuhulu*. They made it clear that only Mandiwana could be called amongst the sons of Thohoyandou and that Munzhedzi, also known by the name of Mpofu, had to be killed. Tshivhase's supporters were afraid of Mpofu because they knew that their positions in the *khoro ya musanda* were not safe and they also feared that he would dethrone their chosen *khosikhulu*, Tshivhase.

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1 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual, together with Three Reprinted Essays on Venda Affinities; Venda Political Organisation and Venda Marriage Laws* (1932) (*Ethnological Publications* 3), Government Printer, Pretoria, 1945, p. 12.

The plot to assassinate Mpofu brought an old man named Musekwa into the picture. Van Warmelo alleged that Musekwa overheard the conspiracy to kill Munzhedzi (Mpofu) when he visited Nzhelele. He went back home and devised a plan to save the *mulaifa* to *vuhosivhuhulu*. He sent an old woman as a messenger to Munzhedzi. She was given a very clear message: to go and sit by the roadside where Munzhedzi and his people would pass. She had to warn him not to go to Nzhelele because the elders there had conspired to kill him because he was regarded as a threat to Tshivhase's ascendancy to *vuhosivhuhulu*. The old woman did not manage to deliver the message directly to Munzhedzi, but she got the chance to convey the message to Davhana,<sup>2</sup> a relative of Munzhedzi.

On hearing the news of the plot to assassinate his relative, Davhana summoned some *magota* to a meeting and told them the shocking news. Together they decided that Munzhedzi should use illness as a pretext not to go to Nzhelele. The elders decided to go to Nzhelele instead to hear the reason for the summons.<sup>3</sup> There they learnt about the death of Thohoyandou, and the elders from Nzhelele made it clear that they did not want Munzhedzi to succeed his father as ruler. It is not clear what made them as resentful towards Mudzhedzi as *mulaifa* to the *vuhosivhuhulu* of his father.

The death of Thohoyandou and the ascendancy of Tshivhase claimed a major victim, the Vhandalamo: Munzhedzi and his elders became suspicious of the Vhandalamo of Khavhambe. They assumed that they had known about what was happening in Nzhelele and that they deliberately failed to inform Munzhedzi. For that mistake they had to pay with their lives. Van Warmelo believed that Munzhedzi went out to kill all Vhandalamo, including infants. Thereafter, Munzhedzi set his sight on Nzhelele, where he dethroned Tshivhase and forced him with his people to seek refuge in Dopeni. They finally settled at Lwaname because of its strategic security. Apparently, this place was so difficult to access that people had to crawl in there on their hands and feet like animals.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Davhana* mentioned here must not be confused with Davhana the son of Ravele Ramabulana.

<sup>3</sup> N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

The invasion of Nzhelele by Munzhenzi and his people was not enough to induce Tshivhase to concede defeat. He still aspired to return to the throne one day and for that to happen, he had to defeat his younger brother. It was while he was at Lwaname that he decided to organise his warriors to stage another war with Munzhedzi in Dzanani. Their attempt to win back Nzhelele and the throne was in vain. They were decisively defeated by Munzhedzi in the first battle. Many men who fought on Tshivhase's side were killed, turning the river red with blood. Hence, the river became known as "*Kwivhula*" on account of the blood of Tshivhase's men. The massive victory paved the way for Munzhedzi to become the *khosikhulu* of the Venda people.<sup>5</sup>

While in power, Munzhedzi had three sons, namely Ravele Ramabulana, Ramavhoya and Madzhie. This was according to Venda custom which prohibited *nndu ya vuhosi* from having more than three living sons. Custom dictated that a fourth son had to be killed. Munzhedzi decided to send his second-born son, Ramavhoya away to Muraleni because he was widely regarded as a fool by the royal family. Munzhedzi was left with two sons, Ravele Ramabulana and Madzhie. Madzhie was alleged to have been from another house. Munzhedzi's intention was to strengthen Muraleni, the village of Ramavhoya, and in order to do so he paid strong young men with cattle in exchange for protecting his son. This was an attempt to make Ramavhoya a strong and powerful man.<sup>6</sup>

### **The beginning of intervention**

#### ***The Bloody Battle of Munzhedzi's Sons and the Involvement of the Batlokwa***

Munzhedzi died and left two sons, Ravele Ramabulana and Ramavhoya, fighting for the *vuhosivhuhulu*. Ultimately Ravele Ramabulana would get the upper hand. This was justified because Venda tradition and custom demanded that the eldest son should succeed his father as ruler. Ravele Ramabula was thus installed as the new *khosikhulu*. However, his ascendancy did not go down well with his mother, Nyamulanalwo, who said "I am called

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5 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 15.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 16. It was unheard of in the Venda tradition and customs that cattle would be paid for men. In contrast, tradition and customs demanded that a man had to pay for a woman - "*u mala*" - with cattle.

‘mother of Ramavhoya’, not ‘mother of Ravele’. I live with my son who is a fool”.<sup>7</sup> She resented her eldest son, Ravele Ramabulana, because he was loved by his father and he was also *mulaifa* to the *vhuhosivhuhulu*.

It was for this reason that she influenced her youngest son to take up arms to challenge his brother for *vhuhosivhuhulu*. In response, Ravele Ramabulana assembled his warriors and instructed them to come with him to Muraleni where they were to attack Ramavhoya. Van Warmelo’s interlocutors maintained that Ravele’s plan backfired because his younger brother and his young men who had been bought with cattle by his father were prepared for them. In the end Ravele and his men were defeated and Ravele Ramabulana was forced to go into exile in Moletsi, where he was alleged to have settled at Rita Mountain.<sup>8</sup>

After the departure of Ravele Ramabulana, his younger brother Ramavhoya became the new *khosikhulu* and ruled the whole of Venda with an iron first. After many years in exile, Ravele Ramabulana’s hopes of returning to reclaim *vhuhosivhuhulu* were raised when Ramavhoya killed Mma-Mugudubi, *kgosi* of the Batlokwa.<sup>9</sup> Van Warmelo provided the following version of this incident: Mma-Mugudubi conferred with Ramavhoya in confidence about his intention to go on a cattle raid in Vhukalanga. Ramavhoya gave Mma-Mugudubi his blessings and requested that the latter inform him when he was about to visit Vhukalanga. Mma-Mugudubi and his people thought Ramavhoya was a friend and he meant well. However, they were not aware that Ramavhoya had ulterior plans to kill Mma-Mugudubi and his warriors before they reached Vhukalanga. Mma-Mugudubi, unaware of the plot to kill him, assembled his warriors and sent a message to Ramavhoya to let him know that he was ready to invade Vhukalanga. Under the pretext of coming to brief Mma-Mugudubi on the forthcoming invasion, Ramavhoya arrived with his warriors, their spears broken in half so that Mma-Mugudubi and his warriors could not see that they were armed. Ramavhoya came with his man known as Mathegu, who was instructed to stab the *kgosi* of the Batlokwa, Mma-Mugudubi, while they were busy chatting. Mma-Mugudubi was eventually killed by Mathegu and on seeing this, the Batlokwa scattered in fear of their lives.

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7 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 16.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

### ***The Revenge of the Batlokwa and the Return of Ramabulana***

The assassination of *Kgosi* Mma-Mugudubi had caught the Batlokwa, who are a Sotho speaking group, by surprise because there was no known enmity between them and the Venda people. They started thinking about a plan to avenge the slaying of their *kgosi*. In their minds Ravele was their best option as they knew the latter still harboured ambition to seize *vuhosivhulu*. Ravele Ramabulana was summoned from Moletsi to help them get rid of Ramavhoya.<sup>10</sup>

Batlokwa told Ravele that his younger brother had killed *Kgosi* Mma-Mugudubi and they wanted him to go back home and seize *vuhosivhulu*. Ravele was not convinced; he thought it was a plot to kill him and so he asked them to leave him alone. In the end the Batlokwa managed to convince him when he asked them to go and burn the village of Lunoni or Muthadzheni to prove their seriousness. He promised them that he would stand on Rita Mountain and wait to see the smoke. Batlokwa called together a strong armed force and in a great rage burnt down two villages. Van Warmelo alleged that Ravele saw the smoke and said "Indeed, they spoke the truth; they have set fire to those villages". The next day the Batlokwa went back to Ravele with many cattle captured from those villages and told him that he had to go back to Venda. He agreed on condition that they went ahead of him and drove Ramavhoya out of the forest of Tshirululuni.<sup>11</sup>

The historian Mphaya Nemudzivhadi was of the opinion that the exile of Ramabulana to Moletsi and the assassination of Mma-Mugudubi coincided with the arrival of the Voortrekkers in the Northern Transvaal.<sup>12</sup> He believed Ravele Ramabulana might have heard about the arrival of the white men in the area and used this development to his advantage by sending a messenger to Louis Trichardt in the Eastern Transvaal with instructions to ask for help in exchange for land.<sup>13</sup>

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10 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 18.

11 *Tshirululuni* was the royal palace of Venda until the reign of *Mphephu* who moved to *Dzata* later on.

12 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and The South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 13.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

In Van Warmelo's account Louis Trichardt was alleged to be staying at Mmamabolo and he was later alleged to be in Botlokwa, which is not far from Venda land. The reason for asking Louis Trichardt for help was because he was known to have a gun. Trichardt came with his wagon to offer his assistance to the Batlokwa and Ravele. They called him *Luvhisi*, meaning "fresh milk". It is important to emphasise that Louis Trichardt was not asked to kill Ramavhoya with his gun, but he was asked to scare him. Trichardt agreed but asked Ravele and the Batlokwa to levy a large force of men.<sup>14</sup> The involvement of the white men in Venda succession disputes was unheard of at the time, as was the involvement of the Batlokwa in Venda domestic affairs.

Nemudzivhadi maintained that Ramabulana declared, as a token of gratitude to Louis Trichardt, that all "this land you can see with the eyes; and much further, right up to the Limpopo belonged to my father and I will make over to you any part you may choose for you and your people to dwell in as your very own."<sup>15</sup> The role of the Batlokwa in dethroning a Venda ruler was understandable because they were angered by the senseless killing of their ruler Mma-Mugudubi. Louis Trichardt's involvement might have been influenced by the huge land offer. It could not have been easy for him to turn it down because he needed land for his people to settle after their long journey from the Cape Colony. In the end Louis Trichardt opted for Schoemansdal for his people where they built a small town, Soutpansberg, which was later changed to Schoemansdal. The area was fifteen kilometres from the current town Louis Trichardt in Limpopo. This development gives the thesis insight into how the *khosikhulu* of the Venda people gave away land in exchange for the blood of his younger brother and it can also be argued that the presence of the Voortrekkers in Schoemansdal was historically legitimate as they did not force out the indigenous inhabitants when settling the land. It is my view that it was also a strategic move by Ravele Ramabulana to offer Louis Trichardt land. Ravele Ramabulana might have thought that the presence of armed white men in his land would help protect his *vuhosivhuhulu* from possible attack in the near future.

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14 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 19.

15 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of The Ramabulana*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 74; M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mpephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 15.

The three partners in alliance reached the land of Ramabulana and it was planned that a messenger could be sent to Ramavhoya to tell him that there was a white man who wanted to see him. Nyamulanalwo was very suspicious about the intentions of the white man and at first she convinced her son not to meet the stranger.<sup>16</sup> He heeded the advice of his mother and sent his younger brother Madzhie to meet the white man, but when he arrived, the Batlokwa had already whispered to Louis Trichardt that not Madzhie, but his elder brother, was their target.<sup>17</sup>

They sent Madzhie back to call his elder brother. Ramavhoya finally came with his men to meet the white man. They were surprised to see a crowd of people but because they were already there, they had to sit down. Ramavhoya and his people made a plea to the white man and his people not to come closer to them armed.<sup>18</sup> But Louis Trichardt and the Batlokwa concealed their weapons and were armed when they approached, so Ramavhoya and his men, who had put their spears away, were caught in a trap.

In Van Warmelo's account, Trichardt presented himself as a peace maker to Ramavhoya and his men and spoke about peace in the Venda land, advising Ramavhoya and his men to cease the deeds of spilling blood. According to Nemudzivhadi's sources, Ravele had been hidden in a wagon covered by canvas belonging to Louis Trichardt, and then the Batlokwa removed the canvas when Ramavhoya arrived.<sup>19</sup> Also, according to Nemudzivhadi's account, as soon as Louis Trichardt recognised Ramavhoya, he fired over his head and Ramavhoya's men scattered in fear. This was a signal for the Batlokwa and Ravele's men to attack. Ramavhoya tried to run and hide under a *mudzwiri* tree but he was later found by Ravele's men. The Batlokwa asked Ravele to slay his brother, but he replied that it was against the Venda tradition and culture because it was a taboo to murder the son of his mother. In the end he told them he could not do it and the Batlokwa threatened him with death if he failed

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16 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of The Ramabulana*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 74; M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 15.

17 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 20.

18 *Ibid.*

19 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 15. Information obtained from L. Nesengani in an interview on 14 June 1971, as well as from Mudau and Motenda, p. 89.

to obey their instructions. They were very clear and assertive in their demands and threats to kill him. This left Ravele with no choice but to throttle Ramavhoya with his belt and thus, by choking his brother to death, he killed him without breaking the taboo of spilling royal blood.<sup>20</sup>

Ramavhoya was given a funeral befitting of a *khosikhulu*. An ox was slaughtered and the corpse of Ramavhoya was wrapped in *mukumba* as tradition demanded.<sup>21</sup> Ravele instructed that his younger brother's corpse be taken to the *zwifhoni* Tshirululuni. Men were summoned for *tshikona* and instructed to blow their horns as a sign of respect for the slain *khosikhulu* and more animals were slaughtered to provide food for the horn-blowers. They also got a black sheep without a spot to accompany the corpse to its final resting place and Ramavhoya was buried as if he had died a natural death. The royal protocol followed during the burial of Ramavhoya offers a clear indication that Ravele was not vengeful, and that he had respect for his brother and the Venda tradition.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ravele Ramabulana as *Khosikhulu* again**

The end of the war saw the elders install Ravele Ramabulana as the *khosikhulu*, to the satisfaction of the Batlokwa, whom the interlocutor referred to by the derogatory Venda name of *Maguvhu*, probably to downplay their role in the ascendancy of Ravele, and not to affirm that the Venda were not subservient to the Batlokwa. There was general acceptance of Ravele amongst his Venda followers in contrast with Ramavhoya who was feared and despised by his own people and his enemies. Thus it seems that the intervention by outsiders to enable Ravele to ascend to power was not perceived by Van Warmelo's interlocutor as foreboding the deterioration of Venda autonomy over time. Ravele's domain stretched from Moletsi and Magwabana where the Batlokwa lived, up to the River Mogalakwena. Van Warmelo's interlocutor maintained that Ravele was still alive when the

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20 L. Trichardt (ed. T.H. le Roux), *Die Dagboek van Louis Trichardt, met inleiding, aantekeninge en glossarium*, Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1966, p. 5. According to Louis Trichardt's diary, Ramavhoya had been dead by 11 December 1836.

21 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 21.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 20.



white settlers came to settle in the Soutpansberg.<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, the whites were brought to the Soutpansberg by Ravele Ramabulana as a token of appreciation after Louis Trichardt had helped him to win back his *vuhosivhuhulu*. Nemudzivhadi acknowledged that it would have been impossible for Ravele Ramabulana to have been reinstated without the aid of Louis Trichardt.<sup>24</sup> It is here where we see a white man taking centre stage in the Venda succession disputes. These events also illustrated the good diplomatic relations that existed between the Venda and the white settlers. This can be further supported by extracts from Louis Trichardt's diary of 1836 and 1837.<sup>25</sup>

Nemudzivhadi warned, however, that the intervention had serious repercussions in the history of *vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda. He felt that the advantages gained from this deal were rather personal and short-lived. Although a *khosikhulu* could reign, the situation was fraught with danger for his progeny. He highlighted the danger that in the future, weak Venda rulers might call for the assistance of white men to safeguard *vuhosivhuhulu* if things were not going well. In effect the whites held the balance of power in the *vuhosivhuhulu* of the Venda polity.<sup>26</sup> The influence of the whites in the Venda polity lasted for years as it was the case during the pre- and post-independent Venda. Nemudzivhadi's concerns were justified for it did not take long before Ravele Ramabulana was at loggerheads with the whites. This is because Ravele's eldest son, Davhana, was staying with a Batlokwa subject who stole a cow from the whites. They tracked him to his master's place in Tshiriluluni and then arrested Davhana, but he escaped and managed to run to his father Ravele's place. This incident led to turmoil in the *vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda. The arrest of Davhana by the Voortrekkers and the fact that the town established by the new settlers in Oudedorp (Ravele had welcomed a group led by Commandant Hendrik Potgieter there in 1849) was flourishing, resulted in fear and insecurity. This led Ravele to abandon his *pfamo* at

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23 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 22.

24 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, pp. 15-16.

25 See inscriptions about their collaborations in the diary on 19 November, 20 November, 23 November, 5 December, 6 December, 9 December, 11 December, 13 December, 14 December, 19 December, 20 December, 22 December, 24 December. L. Trichardt (ed. T.H. le Roux), *Die Dagboek van Louis Trichardt, met inleiding ...*, pp. 2-9.

26 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 16.

Tshirilulumi and flee to Nngwekhulu, and then to Mauluma with Davhana. They ultimately settled in Vuvha, but Ravele's powers were curtailed by the Voortrekker presence in the area.<sup>27</sup>

While in Mauluma, Ravele suggested that his other son, Makhado (and his mother) should go and stay in Luatame, in the "kraal of *Vhutuwa-nga-dzebu* (Hangklip) at the place of Hans in the neighbourhood of Tshirilulumi".<sup>28</sup> In Van Warmelo's account we read that Makhado began to work on a farm while still a youth. Later on, he joined the European elephant hunters and he was under the guidance of Funyufunyu and Stuurman, the two Venda men who knew how to handle guns. Makhado reached adulthood while working for the white men. Van Warmelo also hinted at the bad relationship between Makhado and his brothers Davhana, Ramanala and Rasikhuthuma. His brothers realised that their father had a soft spot for Makhado and for that they did not like him.<sup>29</sup> Ravele knew that his other sons did not like Makhado. The old man decided to give Makhado an axe in the presence of his brothers. The instruction was: "here is a battle-axe for you to chop down trees with at your home, for you live down amongst the undergrowth". What Ravele meant by this was that his son could use the axe to defend himself against his own brothers.<sup>30</sup>

According to Nemudzivhadi, Vhakwevho advised Makhado and his nephew Nndwayamiomva to enter *murundu* at Doli in order to put him in a good position for the succession to his father's *vhuhosivhuhulu*. This incident incensed Ravele Ramabulana and Davhana.<sup>31</sup> Despite the concerns of his father and his brother Davhana, this did not deter Makhado's ambition to go to the circumcision school and become a man.

In the meanwhile, the Voortrekkers in Schoemansdal made several attempts to convince Ravele to return to Tshiriluluni, but he refused despite assurances that he would not be killed or arrested. They told him the one they were looking for was Davhana because he had

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27 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 23.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

31 M.H. Nemudzivhadi. *The Conflict Between Mphaphu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 17.

escaped unpunished for alleged theft. The Venda *vuhosivhuhulu* was thus in turmoil with their fugitive *khosikhulu* because of the deeds of his son, Davhana. When Makhado returned from *murunduni*, Funyufunyu and Stuurman (who had taught him how to handle a gun), convinced him to call his father out of hiding. The two men devised a strategy to take the old man out of his hiding place. They advised Makhado to send some elephant tusks to the forest of Mauluma. The tusks were to be used by the old man as a gift to the white men. It is important to note that the white men were never interested in the old man and they would have let him come back to his land without a problem even without the gift of tusks.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the tusks helped to convince Ravele to move out of hiding and live in the open at Vuvha Bambalani.

Van Warmelo's interlocutors added that Ravele had broken away from tradition by having many sons: Rasikhuthuma, Davhana, Ramanala, Nthabalala, Ramalamula, Liswoga, Matamela and others, the last one was Makhado.<sup>33</sup> Makhado was the son of Limani and he was not *mulaifa* to the *vuhosivhuhulu* of Ramabulana. This was explained by the fact that Ramavhoya had paid cattle for Limani's paternal aunt, who was married to him. The aunt remained childless and Limani was promised to Ramavhoya to have children for her aunt. Ramavhoya was killed before he could marry Limani and she was therefore taken by Ravele Ramabulana as his other wife. It will not be a distortion of fact to assume that Makhado used *dzekiso* (cattle) to claim legitimacy to the *vuhosivhuhulu* because according to cattle he was the son of Ramavhoya, the late *khosikhulu*.<sup>34</sup> And yet, Makhado's claim to the *vuhosivhuhulu* was baseless on two grounds: In the first instance: if he claimed to be a legal *mulaifa* to Ramavhoya's *vuhosivhuhulu*, the counter-argument was that Ramavhoya had become the ruler by default because he was a younger brother to Ravele Ramabulana. In the second instance: If Makhado's claims were based on the fact that, biologically, he was the son of Ravele Ramabulana, that would not help his aspirations either, because he was

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32 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 28.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

34 The tradition of the Venda people when it comes to marriage is very complex for an outsider to grasp. Ramavhoya's great wife was the daughter of *Matumba* and he allegedly used the cattle paid for his daughter's marriage to marry a wife. Ramavhoya's great wife died without a child and thus Matumba was compelled to provide a substitute for her and he chose his granddaughter Limani, Makhado's mother. Ramavhoya did not pay another set of cattle because he has already paid for Limani's aunt's marriage. Therefore Makhado was seen as a child of Ramavhoya's great wife.

far off the succession line as a son of *nndu thukhu*. Ravele Ramabulana died in 1864 of old age.<sup>35</sup> He died while Makhado and his comrades were away hunting elephants.

*Vhakololo* of the Venda polity with experience of labour on white farms and employment as *skuts* for white elephant hunters, are two very clear indications that, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the Venda polity had become entangled in a colonial economy. Ravele Ramabulana's diplomacy may in hindsight be read as affirmation that already under his rule Venda sovereignty had become increasingly compromised.

### **Ravele's Death and Davhana's short-lived rulership**

The death of Ravele Ramabulana brought more disputes between his sons. As was customary in Venda politics, the succession to *vuhosivhuhulu* was disputed among Ramabulana's sons Davhana, Rasikhuthuma, Khangale, Nthabalala and Makhado.<sup>36</sup> Van Warmelo noted that the other sons of Ravele Ramabulana decided to install Davhana, who was the eldest son of the late *khosikhulu*, as the new *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity. However, this action was met with some strong disapproval by elders *nnduni ya vuhosivhuhulu*. They argued that neither Madzhie, who was the younger brother of the late *khosikhulu*, nor his sister, Nyakhuhu, were consulted about the decisions taken by Ravele Ramabulana's other sons. The protest led those who were involved in the installation of Davhana as a new *khosikhulu* to call both *vhavenda*, or *khotsimunene*,<sup>37</sup> and *makhadzi* to a meeting to end the disputes.

Nyakhuhu and her brother Madzhie were under the impression that they were called so that Ravele Ramabulana could be buried with dignity and therefore advised Ravele Ramabulana's sons to summon horn-blowers for *tshikona* to be performed, as a sign of honour and respect to the deceased *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity. Nyakhuhu and Madzhie

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35 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 18.

36 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 35. Also see J. Tempelhoff & H. Nemudzivhadi, *Riding the Storm of Change: Makhado, Venda and the South African Republic (1864-1895)*, *New Contree*, 45, 1999, p. 106.

37 *Vhavenda* here is a title given to the ruler's younger brother, but it also means "the Venda people". *Khotsimunene* is also a word used in his context.

had no inkling that they had actually been summoned to the meeting in order for them to endorse the installation of Davhana as the new *khosikhulu*.<sup>38</sup>

The rites were performed and after they were done, the sons of Ravele and the elders seized the opportunity to ask Nyakhuhu about who she thought should be crowned as a new *khosikhulu*. Her answer was very honest, and she responded by telling them that it is beyond her as a woman to make such a decision. She also raised her concern about the absence of some of her late brother's sons. This came after she realised that Makhado was not present at the burial of his father. Nyakhuhu's question angered Davhana and he asked if she was referring to Makhado. Before Nyakhuhu could answer, Davhana answered himself by saying Makhado was no longer one of them. Nyakhuhu was further told that Makhado had lost his mind and therefore had no right to pretend to have legitimacy to *vuhosivhuhulu*. All who were in the meeting, except Madzhie and Nyakhuhu and the few who were supporting them, confirmed that Davhana should be the new *khosikhulu* of the Venda people. This implies that the installation of Davhana as a new *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity was supported by the majority *nnduni ya vuhosivhuhulu* and it made him legitimate *khosikhulu* by birth and by the support he had from his people.

Nyakhuhu protested the decision to crown Davhana as the new *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity. She was concerned that Davhana had committed a lot of atrocities and that he was also suspected of having killed his father.<sup>39</sup> She therefore, advised that they should crown Rasikhuthuma instead, not Davhana. However, she was told that Rasikhuthuma could not be crowned as *khosikhulu* as he had committed adultery with *vhatanuni* of his father<sup>40</sup> It is my view that the concerns and arguments presented by *Makhadzi* Nyakhuhu are genuine. However, it is also important to emphasise that Davhana was by birth the legitimate heir to the throne. It was his misconduct that made him unpopular with Nyakhuhu, Madzhie and

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38 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 30.

39 J. Tempelhoff & H. Nemudzivhadi, *Riding the Storm of Change: Makhado, Venda and the South African Republic (1864-1895)*, *New Contree*, 45, 1999, p. 106. The sources cited are oral information obtained from A. Ramabulana (then about 70 years) of Makwarela, interviewed on 29 October 1986. Also: E. Gotschling, *The Bavenda: A Sketch of Their History and Customs*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 35, 1905, p. 367.

40 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 30.

other elders *nnduni ya vuhosi*. At the end of a long, difficult family meeting, Nyakhuhu washed her hands on the matter but made it clear to Davhana's supporters that she was not endorsing him to become a new *khosikhulu*.

The action of *Makhadzi* Nyakhuhu was understandable considering that the late *khosikhulu* was a man of honour and he brought dignity to *vuhosivhuhulu*. She did not have any favourite, but she wanted to preserve the honour and dignity of *vuhosivhuhulu*, hence her suggestion that Rasikhuthuma would make a better candidate than the tainted Davhana. I cannot substantiate claims made by Davhana's supporters against Rasikhuthuma. The installation of Davhana proved, however, to be short-lived, because Nyakhuhu and Madzhie refused to let the matter go without a fight. The return of Makhado from his hunting expedition with Funyufunyu and Stuurman presented Nyakhuhu and Madzhie with an ideal opportunity to unseat Davhana. Makhado and his friends were saddened by what had happened to his father in their absence, and surprised by the events which took place after the burial.

Venda tradition demanded that when there had been death *nnduni ya vuhosi*, all members of the family had to perform the rite of *u swenda*. Makhadzi discovered that Makhado and his friends were afraid to visit *pfamo* because they were scared of Davhana. The rites had to be performed where the deceased had died, namely at the *pfamo*. Nyakhuhu knew that if they visited *nnduni ya vuhosi*, Davhana might kill them to protect his power. She suggested that Makhado, Funyufunyu and Stuurman perform the rites at her place because she had brought with her from the *musanda* the *thovho* (mat) which Ravele Ramabulana had died on. Thus Makhado was able to perform the rites of *u swenda* for his late father at *makhadzi's* place without Davhana knowing about it.<sup>41</sup> Thereafter, according to Van Warmelo's account, Funyufunyu and Stuurman remained behind to get information from Nyakhuhu and learned that Davhana had been installed as the new *khosikhulu*. She also emphasised that she opposed Davhana as successor to his father as she had Makhado in mind.<sup>42</sup>

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41 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 31.

42 *Ibid.*

### ***Vhuhosivhulu* of Makhado**

*Makhadzi* Nyakhuhu's narration about her part in the installation of the new *khosikhulu* was flawed in as far as she did not tell them that she had suggested that Rasikhuthuma should take over *vhuhosivhuhulu*. She had never mentioned her interest in Makhado becoming the new *khosikhulu* at the family meeting. However, her actions might have been influenced by what Davhana had told her about Makhado. It is not a secret that Nyakhuhu preferred any other candidate to Davhana. The confession of Nyakhuhu that she wanted Makhado to be the new *khosikhulu* helped Funyufunyu and Stuurman to devise a plan to dethrone Davhana and install Makhado as the new *khosikhulu*. Part of their plan was to use guns they had stolen from the white men to help scare Davhana off the "throne" and out of Tshirululuni. Again, here, one finds that the mere presence of white agents under Stephanus Schoeman in the vicinity increased the potential and the means for increased volatility in the Venda leadership. Funyufunyu and Stuurman also wanted Nyakhuhu to assure them that she would not betray them. She agreed with the plan and requested them to call Madzhie.<sup>43</sup>

When Madzhie was informed by Nyakhuhu that Makhado was back, he responded by saying, "Makhado is *khosikhulu*".<sup>44</sup> The strong assertion of Madzhie that Makhado was the one who should ascend to the throne should not by any means be seen as implying that he was a legitimate *mulaifa* to *vhuhosivhuhulu*. One can assume that the stance taken by Nyakhuhu and Madzhie was clouded by their personal feelings towards both Davhana and Makhado. It had also a lot to do with Davhana's unbecoming conduct which was not considered suitable to the highest position in the Venda polity. It is apparent to me that both Nyakhuhu and Madzhie did not like Davhana and that they had also shown that their loyalties were with Makhado. The stance taken by Nyakhuhu and Madzhie to support Makhado demonstrates that the powers to anoint a successor to the *vhuhosivhulu* of the Venda polity lay with the two powerful figures *nnduni ya vuhosi* and that the views of the majority did not matter. This is still the case even today. *Makhadzi* and *khotsimunene* are very powerful in deciding who should be the new *khosikhulu* in the Venda polity. In most instances they get it wrong, as their choices are not based on custom and the traditions of

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43 N.J. Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 31.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

the Venda polity, but on favouritism. If the legitimate *mulaifa* is not their favourite, he or she would not ascend to *vuhosivhuhulu*.

Madzhie promised Nyakhuhu, Funyufunyu and Stuurman that he would stand by them in their quest to dethrone Davhana. He advised them to call their supporters together to take on Davhana. As was the case during the fight between their father Ravele Ramabulana and their uncle Ramavhoya, the whites were called upon to help to dethrone the legitimate Venda ruler.<sup>45</sup> Makhado had the support of some whites in Schoemansdal including *landdrost* Jan Vercueil. They offered him moral and material support in his quest to topple Davhana from the *vuhosivhuhulu*.<sup>46</sup> This is not to say Davhana did not have his own supporters amongst the whites in the Soutpansberg. He got the support from the Native Commissioner, Joao Albasini, who had already recognised Davhana as *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity on behalf of the Republic in May 1864. Davhana also got the support from *veldcornet* Jan Hendrik du Plessis.<sup>47</sup> For the second time, the Venda had assigned white agents in Schoemansdal a role in resolving their own disputes. The difference in the involvement of the outsiders this time was that the Batlokwa were not invited at all.

The invitation to white men to come and participate in *vuhosivhuhulu* disputes with a gun can be interpreted in different ways. Whether this can be considered as innovative exploitation of opportunities at their disposal, or a lack of confidence on the side of Madzhie, Nyakhuhu, Funyufunyu and Stuurman to resolve the issue themselves, this commissioning of white assistance boded problems for the future. The time would soon come that the Ramabulana would no longer be able to solicit and terminate white involvement on their own terms. The division amongst the whites in the Makhado war against Davhana clearly indicates that the former did not have all the support from the whites in Schoemansdal despite spending years working for them.

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45 N.J. Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 32.

46 L.F. Braun, *Colonial Survey and Native Landscapes in Rural South Africa, 1850 – 1913: The Politics of Divided Space in the Cape and Transvaal*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2014, p. 255.

47 *Ibid.*; J.C.A. Boeyens, Die Konflik tussen die Venda en die Blankes in Transvaal, 1864-1969, *Argiefjaarboek vir Suidk Afrikaanse Geskiedenis II*, Staatsdrukker, Pretoria, 1990 pp. 7-10, 52-53.



On hearing the news of the pending attack by Makhado and the whites, Davhana fled to Tshivhase with the intention of seeking refuge. However, Davhana and Tshivhase were not good friends and the latter did not grant him asylum. It is alleged in Van Warmelo's record that Mphaphuli came to Davhana's rescue in this regard. Davhana's stay in Mphaphuli land was very short-lived as Makhado heard about his hideout and sent a message to Mphaphuli, threatening to attack him if he continued to allow Davhana to stay in his land. This event prompted Davhana to be a fugitive again and he finally fled to an area occupied by white people to get protection from Joao Albasini and his people.<sup>48</sup> It was while Davhana was at Mphaphuli that he heard the news that Makhado had been installed as a new *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity.

In his first years as the *khosikhulu* of the Venda polity, Makhado was always on good terms with the white people in his land. Things changed when Makhado began to listen to his uncle, Madzhe. The latter advised Makhado to start a war with the Europeans because of their labour demands on the Venda people. It is important to maintain that Makhado was very sceptical about their chances because he was of the opinion that his people were outnumbered by the whites.<sup>49</sup>

There were a number of causes for the deterioration of the formerly cordial relationship between Makhado's Venda people and the Boers: The Voortrekker settlement of Schoemansdal rapidly started thriving as a Boer town. Makhado's men gained confidence as they obtained the same weapons as the whites, guns; and then the whites granted Makhado's nemesis, Davhana, refugee status. Makhado and Madzhe regarded the Schoemansdal settlement as a big challenge to the *vuhosivhulu* of the Venda polity. Matters reached an alarming stage when Makhado and his men refused to return guns to the Boers after elephant hunting in winter. Makhado told the Boers that the guns were the

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48 L.F. Braun, *Colonial Survey and Native Landscapes in Rural South Africa, 1850 – 1913: The Politics of Divided Space in the Cape and Transvaal*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2014, p. 255; J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die Konflik tussen die Venda en die Blankes in Transvaal, 1864-1969*, *Argiefjaarboek vir Suidk Afrikaanse Geskiedenis II*, Staatsdrukker, Pretoria, 1990 pp. 7-10, 52-53.

49 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 32.

reward for the services rendered by his people.<sup>50</sup> This was clearly a sign that war between the two groups was inevitable. The Boers asked the Pretoria government to intervene. In 1867 the central government bowed to pressure and decided to send the army to Schoemansdal under Commandant-General Paul Kruger.

On arrival, the army sent from Pretoria by President Marthinus Wessel Pretorius was met with Makhado's disdain, and he showed this by sending small boys when summoned. In response, Kruger decided to send a group of his men to meet Makhado at the *musanda*, but Makhado imposed conditions when requested to return the guns to the Boers. He asked the Boers to hand over Davhana to him in exchange for their guns. This shows that Makhado was determined to get Davhana, dead or alive. It is very important for this thesis to mention that when the war between Makhado and the Boers was imminent, Davhana had already established himself as a *thovhele* and his *musanda* was at Mpheni, where he exercised control over an area reaching as far as Madzibanombe<sup>51</sup>. It is evident that Davhana was not ready to be just a *mukololo* (prince) without authority and the area he ruled was autonomous from Makhado, meaning that the Venda, by that moment, had two rulers.<sup>52</sup>

However, it will be fair to highlight the fact that Makhado was the most feared and most powerful of the two as he reigned over a much larger area and had more followers, as well as support from powerful people *nduni ya vuhosi* such as *Makhadzi* Nyakhuhu and *Khotsimunene* Madzhie. The request by Makhado for the Boers to hand over Davhana, was not granted. The outcome was that Makhado warriors forced the whites to retreat and evacuate Schoemansdal, but it did not happen without a fight. Makhado and his people failed in their first attempt and three of his men were killed. Their failure did not deter them in their mission to drive the white people out of Schoemansdal.

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50 J. Tempelhoff & H. Nemudzivhadi, *Riding the Storm of Change: Makhado, Venda and the South African Republic (1864-1895)*, *New Contree*, 1999, 45, p. 108. Sources consulted by Tempelhoff and Nemudzivhadi include Flygare, *Zoutpansbergen en de Bawenda*, p. 11; W.L. Maree, *Lig in Soutpansberg: Die Sendingwerk van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord-Transvaal 1863-1963* (Johannesburg, 1962), p. 66.

51 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and The South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 20.

52 There are scholars who are sceptical about the historical authority of the Ramabulana rulers over all Vhavhenda and they would argue that, rather than two rulers, the Vhavenda now had three "greater *mahosi*" and a number of lesser *mahosi* and *magota*.

Makhado knew that his people had no chance against a formidable white army during the day, so he devised a plan for a night attack.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly the Venda warriors entered Schoemansdal at night and caught the whites by surprise in a successful assault. The whites decided the next day to evacuate Schoemansdal. In attacking Schoemansdal, Makhado failed to obey the advice of his Irish friend, Terence Fitzgerald, who had arrived in the Soutpansberg with Hendrik Potgieter in 1849. Fitzgerald advised Makhado to live in peace with the Boers who had offered him support in his struggle for succession.<sup>54</sup>

The Boers launched an attack on Luatame, Vhulorwa and the chief instigator of this war, Madzhe,<sup>55</sup> in June 1867, but they were not successful because an ammunition wagon from Pretoria failed to arrive. In his research Nemudzivhadi had established that a Boer shortage of ammunition, an outbreak of malaria, ill-discipline amongst the Boers, thickly wooded forests, horse sickness and the prowess of the Venda army, had all compelled Commandant Paul Kruger to abandon the mission in Schoemansdal on 15 July 1867.<sup>56</sup> The Boers were distraught because for more than eighteen years Schoemansdal had been regarded as a “centre of civilization” in the Northern Transvaal. Kruger’s decision was met with opposition by many who felt betrayed by it; they wanted to fight to the bitter end. The evacuation of Schoemansdal did not result in all the whites leaving the Venda people’s land. A few white families, such as Joao Albasini, who was a Portuguese immigrant and an independent warlord, and others like Koos Botha, Terence Fitzgerald and a certain Grieve remained, but the presence of these four families in the land was strictly on Makhado’s terms. Makhado’s victory in Schoemansdal earned him a new name: *Tshilwavhusiku-tsha-ha-Ramabulana* (one who attacks at night). His accomplishments at the helm of his forces, secured his status as *khosikhulu*.<sup>57</sup>

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53 N.J. van Warmelo, in N.J. van Warmelo and G.P. Lestrade, *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, p. 33.

54 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict Between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 20.

55 J. Tempelhoff & H. Nemudzivhadi, *Riding the Storm of Change: Makhado, Venda and the South African Republic (1864-1895)*, *New Contree*, 45, 1999, p. 108.

56 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *Conflict Between Mphephu and The South African Republic, (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 22.

57 J. Tempelhoff & H. Nemudzivhadi, *Riding the Storm of Change: Makhado, Venda and the South African Republic (1864-1895)*, *New Contree*, 45, 1999, p. 108, p. 109.

It is important to note that the evacuation of Schoemansdal did not leave Makhado at peace. He was of the opinion that the Boers would one day return to avenge the demolition of their town. This made him restless and insecure and as a precautionary measure he tried in vain to get *mushonga* from Vhukalanga that he hoped would leave him bullet proof.<sup>58</sup> Makhado's attempt to use supernatural powers was a demonstration that his prolonged reign was based on support from *vhomaine*. The fear of a Boer backlash was soon realised when President Pretorius called for volunteers to recover Schoemansdal. The response was very negative as only 53 men heeded the call and they were led to Soutpansberg by Stephanus Schoeman. The force was too weak to challenge Makhado and his warriors. The force was finally disbanded on 23 December 1867.

In July 1868, President Pretorius paid a visit to Soutpansberg and met with all the people who were resentful of Makhado's reign. He was accompanied by *Landdrost* Nispen to meet with Davhana and his followers, the Shangaans, as well as the descendants of Buys, at the farm Welgevonden. Pretorius told those present that the government had decided to relieve Joao Albasini of his duties as diplomatic agent and replace him with Stephanus Schoeman. The news was welcomed by the blacks who promised to be obedient to the new diplomatic agent. After the meeting Pretorius also met with several *vhothovhele* and an alliance was formed to bring down Makhado.

It is not surprising that Davhana was part of this meeting as he still harboured ambitions to get back *vuhosivhuhulu* of the Venda polity. Both Davhana and the Boers felt betrayed by Makhado. Davhana felt that Makhado conspired with Nyakhuhu and Madzhie to steal his birth right, while the Boers resented Makhado for refusing to return their guns and for forcing them to abandon Schoemansdal. The meeting between President Pretorius and *vhothovhele* led by Davhana, and the remaining white families, paved the way for the return of the farmers who had left after Makhado's attack on Schoemansdal.

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58 Such references to a wish to be made bullet-proof, frequently surface in southern African accounts of resistance against white settler intrusion and should thus be treated with caution. Julia Wells, for example, argues that such accounts only gained currency after the first written accounts of the 1819 "Battle of Grahamstown". See J.C. Wells, *The Return of Makhanda: Exploring the Legend*, UKZN Press Pietermaritzburg, 2012.

The meeting was followed by the arrival of German missionaries in Venda. Rev. C Beuster established a number of mission stations at Maungani in 1872; Rev. E Schwellnus one at Tshakhuma in 1874; and Rev. K Kuhn another at Mavhola in 1877. These missionaries from the Berlin Missionary Society were followed by others from the Swiss Mission, who established their mission stations at Lwalani in 1875 and Vari in 1883.<sup>59</sup>

The coming of the church to Venda was the start of the evolution of the long-held beliefs amongst the Venda people. It is important to acknowledge the role played by Davhana in bringing these changes as it was his peaceful engagement with President Pretorius which allowed the missionaries to operate in the Ramabulana land. It is important to mention that Makhado and his people did not receive the news of the arrival of the missionaries well, because he saw himself as the only *mudzimu* of his people. Things changed in 1877 when Sir Theophilus Shepstone and his men annexed the Boer Republic on the instructions of the British government. As the new ruler, Shepstone wanted to meet all prominent *magota* and *vhothovhele* of the Venda polity, including *Khosikhulu* Makhado. His aim was to settle the local disputes and thus he called *Thovhele* Ligege Tshivhase, *Thovhele* Ranwedzi Mphaphuli, *Thovhele* Rambuda and Makhado himself to a meeting at a store owned by a white man known as D. Gill at Commandoboom.<sup>60</sup>

In this meeting an agreement concerning the boundaries of their authority was reached. It must have been very surprising for Makhado to attend a meeting where an agreement was made to cede some of his control. The agreement itself meant that Makhado's powers were curtailed. However, the boundary agreement did not last long because the Boers seized control back from the British in the Anglo-Transvaal War and the Pretoria Convention was signed soon after that in 1881.

Piet Joubert succeeded Paul Kruger as the new Commandant-General of the Boer forces. His first mission was to the Soutpansberg to address the complaints of the Boers there. He

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59 D.W. Giesekke, A Hundred years of Christianity in Vendale, A paper presented at the Centenary Celebration of Mission Work in Venda, 1972, pp. 1-2, in M.H. Nemudzivhadi, The Conflict between Mphaphu and the South African Republic (1895-1899), MA dissertation, Unisa, 1972, p. 23.

60 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 169; M.H. Nemudzivhadi, The Conflict between Mphaphu and the South African Republic (1895-1899), MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 24.

invited Makhado to a meeting but the latter refused to see him and confirmed what he had said earlier, that Muhohodi should be the southern boundary of his territory. This did not please Joubert. Makhado meanwhile had the ambition of regaining his power as the most powerful ruler in Venda. To achieve that, he started meddling in succession struggles in other *misanda*. He sent an army led by two of his eldest sons, Mphephu and Sithumule, to Dzimauli in the land of Rambuda to fight for Tshikosi, who was being challenged to for his title as *thovhele* of Rambuda people by his brother Siphuma<sup>61</sup>.

### **Mphephu**

Mphephu led another army of Mavhegwa into Tshivhase land and they successfully attacked Tshifhire and Tshifulani and captured cattle. These cattle were, however, recaptured by the Tshivhase army as Mphephu and his army were returning home. Some of the warriors with Mphephu were killed by their opponents. This was a misfortune not well received by Makhado and he was very disappointed with his son, feeling it would have been better if Mphephu had died in a battle rather than returning a defeated man. He also felt that his eldest son had brought dishonour and disgrace to the Ramabulana.<sup>62</sup>

Makhado banished Mphephu to Gogobole which is currently the area of Sinthumule, and it is while he was there that Mphephu decided to leave for Kimberly in 1886 to work in the mines. Makhado informed his counsellors and the elders that Maemu the fifth child of Nwapunga and his youngest son should succeed him when he dies, violating traditional rules which dictated that the eldest son should be the successor. Many people *nnduni ya vuhosi* were not in agreement with Makhado that Maemu should replace him. It is this group of people who were willing to support Mphephu to become a new *khosikhulu* as and when *mativha oxa*.

Makhado was well respected by many, including the whites. After visiting the *khosikhulu* of Venda in his *pfamo*, G.G. Munnik, the Boer *Landdrost* of Zoutpansberg District, attested that

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61 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, pp. 169-170; M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, pp. 24-25.

62 *Ibid.*

Makhado “proved himself to be a proud native aristocrat who rules his tribe with an iron rod, but fairly. As *Landdrost* of Zoutpansberg I often came into contact with him, and always found him dignified, but extremely courteous, and although he silently ignored the Republic’s authority, he never openly defied it”.<sup>63</sup>

The impression Munnik gave of Makhado shows that he was a ruler who wanted the Boer Republic to respect his people and give full recognition to his authority which he felt was independent to the Republican authority.

The year 1888 ushered in a new era in the politics of the Soutpansberg when Joao Albasini died. Albasini’s son Anthony was supposed to take over from his father, who was both “Shangaan chief” and Republican government official (Native Commissioner) at the time of his death.<sup>64</sup> The Republic did not want the Albasini family to continue in this dual capacity and they decided to appoint a new Native Commissioner by the name of Adolf Schiel, who was a German. General Piet Joubert was sent by the Republic to Soutpansberg to introduce the new Native Commissioner to the black communities there. Makhado did not attend the introduction ceremony and he made it clear that as long as Schiel had the two positions of Native Commissioner and “Shangaan chief”, the Venda people would not give him their co-operation.

According to Nemudzivhadi, Makhado’s warning was not a surprise to the Republic as they were aware that the Venda people had no respect for the Shangaan people<sup>65</sup>. Also, it was not expected that a black community would be ruled by a white man and call him their “chief” without resistance. Möller-Malan’s book presents the thesis with a different perspective about Joao Albasini’s death and his succession: The news of his death was taken up in different ways by different people. Makhado and his people were overjoyed by the news of Albasini’s death. It was really expected that Makhado and his people would be happy because they regarded Albasini a thorn in their flesh. The animosity between

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63 G.G. Munnik, *Memoirs of Senator the Hon. G.G. Munnik*, 1971, pp. 101-102, in M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict between Mphaphu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 25.

64 T.A. van Ryneveld, *Remembering Albasini*, MA dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1998, p. 141. Van Ryneveld investigates the role of Albasini and his legacy in the area in its full complexity.

65 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict between Mphaphu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, 1977, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 26.

Makhado and Albasini might have been caused by the latter's role in collecting taxes for the government from the Venda people and other black polities in the Soutpansberg. Their differences were further fuelled by Albasini's aid to Davhana who was a refugee running away from Makhado. Davhana was offered refuge in Albasini's area and he also gave him protection from Makhado.

The Shangaan people reacted with shock and anger at the news of the death of their "chief". The death of Albasini brought many changes in the Soutpansberg; it gave Makhado more powers. People were not able to pay taxes to the Republic because there was no money. They had to pay tax in labour but this only affected those tribes (as the Boers and the British were labelling them) who had already submitted to the Republic.<sup>66</sup> I have to emphasise that Makhado was not willing to pay tax to the Republic. During that time the majority of young Venda men were working in Kimberly. Each time they came home they brought with them a pound in gold as a gift to Makhado and sometimes they would also bring with them guns and liquor. Möller-Malan alleged that Makhado was very fond of liquor. With all the gold and other gifts, he was receiving. Makhado became a very wealthy *khosikhulu* and that made him feel strong and secure. He started boasting about his power and wealth.

Makhado's already-mentioned friendship with Fitzgerald, who was on the other side of Doorn River, showed that he did not resent all the white men. He allowed Fitzgerald and his family to hunt and trade in his land without a problem.<sup>67</sup> Another friend of Makhado was a Mr. Cooksley who had a licensed bar to which Makhado was a frequent visitor. His people were surprised that their *khosikhulu* left his *pfamo* on the mountains to go as far as Lovedale Park, the residency of Mr. Cooksley. However, when he left his protected *pfamo*, he was always with Funyufunya and Stuurman, Makhado's right hand men who had played such a major role in him ascending to the throne. Besides these two men, Makhado always had four coachmen in the entourage. The four were dressed in European clothes and were carrying brand new guns. This shows that Makhado was a more modernised *khosikhulu* than those who came before him, like his grandfather and father. He had European influence in

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66 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 176.

67 *Ibid.*



how he conducted himself, but at the same time he was very protective of his independence and was always looking for new opportunities to expand his *vuhosivhuhulu*.<sup>68</sup>

To ease the tension between Pretoria and himself, Makhado gave the new Soutpansberg Commissioner, Captain Schiel, a very handsome present to be passed on to President Paul Kruger, whom *Khosikhulu* always referred to as “Paul”. Makhado also offered to give Captain Schiel his most beautiful horse, named Funny.<sup>69</sup> The status of Captain Schiel in the Soutpansberg was soon to improve in a dramatic way. This was helped by the crisis between Shangaan people living under the Modjadji<sup>70</sup> (towards the Drakensberg) and Shangaan people living under the son of the late Albasini. The crisis spread to other communities in the Soutpansberg and to make matters worse, Anthony Albasini died and this again left his Shangaan followers without a “chief”. With these developments, Captain Schiel used the unrest and the sudden death of Albasini’s son to position himself as a new Shangaan “chief”.

Möller-Malan had noted that the government was not aware of the unrest and all things happening in the Soutpansberg because captain Schiel decided to keep it to himself until he had asserted his position in the “chieftainship” of the Shangaan. The developments in the north caught Makhado and his people off guard and they did not know how to react. In addition to this, the forces of Cecil John Rhodes were invading the lands of the Kalanga for Britain; soon they would change the name to Rhodesia. The invasion of the Kalanga land by the British made Makhado feel insecure because Venda was separated from Vhukalanga by just the Vhembe (Limpopo) River.

It was because of the confusion caused by the British that Makhado and Captain Schiel’s relationship deteriorated to its lowest point. The Native Commissioner was barred from visiting the *pfamo* and Makhado told him that he would not be sending his yearly present to Pretoria. His motive was to provoke the government to react to his insults with force, but the government did not take him seriously. This prompted Makhado into thinking that the government was indeed becoming weak. The intention of Makhado was to cut all ties with

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68 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 177.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Modjadji* was the Rain Queen of Bolobedu in Limpopo who was alleged to have the powers to make rain. The rain making ritual was passed from one generation of Modjadji to another, but it seems the powers of making rain is gone since the death of Modjadji not long ago.

the government in Pretoria. He heard that Cecil John Rhodes had sent some men to Mmaleboho at Blouberg to offer him protection against the Republic. On hearing the news, Makhado was very excited and he invited Rhodes' men to visit him to talk about a pact between the Vhavenda and the British.<sup>71</sup>

The head of Rhodes' delegation, Captain Alfred Taylor and two other men heeded the call of Makhado and paid him a visit at his *pfamo* in Tshurululuni. The meeting ended with Taylor agreeing to help Makhado if he and his people should experience an invasion from the Republic or any other enemy. Taylor left for Rhodesia and brought back with him thirteen more soldiers to add to the two he had left behind at Tshurululuni. They showed Makhado how to build fortifications across the plateau above Hangklip in case the enemy attacked them from the rear.

Not all the Venda people were happy about this new-found military ally. The elders and councillors called Makhado a fool to associate himself with the white men from Rhodesia. It cannot be far from the truth for one to assume that the Venda elders and councillors might have thought the foreigners were intent on annexing their land as they had done in Vhukalanga.

When Captain Taylor felt that his work at Tshurululuni was done, he agreed with Makhado that Sinthumule, the second son of Makhado, should visit Rhodesia by ox wagon to trade with mealies and also to bring back a cannon piece.<sup>72</sup> The diplomatic relation between Tshurululuni and Rhodesia was a demonstration that Makhado was a very ambitious and astute leader and a good diplomat. It is important to note that the Republic was not aware for a very long time that Makhado had reached a pact with their enemy north of the Limpopo.

The secret pact between Makhado and the British eventually reached Pretoria and they decided to act decisively against the "stubborn Makhado" who had been undermining their authority for a very long time. Towards the end of 1893 General Piet Joubert sent a letter to Reverend Wessmann of the Berlin Mission near Sibasa. He was instructed to go and read the

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71 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 177.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 181

letter to Makhado in two languages and explain three times so that Makhado would be able to understand.<sup>73</sup> On hearing that Pretoria had sent a very strong warning letter to him, Makhado told Reverend Wessmann that he would only be welcome if his visit was on personal terms but that he would not consider any diplomatic matters because he was too ill to listen to anything from Pretoria. This did not stop Reverend Wessmann visiting Tshirululuni with the letter. Makhado took offence when the Reverend was reading the letter and he protested angrily: "... calls himself a friend of mine! He who desires to cut my throat!"<sup>74</sup>

The attitude of Makhado towards Pretoria had a very strong influence on the neighbouring communities who also started rebelling against the Republic. General Joubert was very concerned about the behaviour of Makhado and it prompted him to visit the Soutpansberg towards June 1894, because he took the case as very serious. He brought with him some important men and they arrived at Fort Hendriena not far from Tshirululuni. They wanted Makhado's friend Fitzgerald to be their interpreter but he refused because he did not want to meddle in Makhado's affairs even though he was a friend and, in the end, Mr. Gill who owned the store agreed to go with them<sup>75</sup>. However, they never had an opportunity to meet with Makhado because he asked *imbi* to stop them after they crossed Doornrivier. The white people in Soutpansberg felt that this was the last straw in the relationship between Makhado and the Republic and they assumed his fate might have been sealed by his latest action.

While back in Pretoria, the editor of the Pretoria newspaper the *Press*, Mr. Leo Weinthal,<sup>76</sup> who was part of the General Joubert's previous delegation to Soutpansberg, proposed to General Joubert to allow him to visit Makhado perhaps to interview the *khosikhulu* of Venda. This was a way to get Makhado to open up about his dealings with the British and to get his clear position on his loyalty to President Kruger and the Republic. Makhado did not have a problem with the interview and he eventually offered Mr. Weinthal an invitation (through Mr. Cooksley) to visit his *pfamo*. When the interview took place, Makhado did not

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73 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 182.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

76 Weinthal would soon move on to become the first editor of the *Pretoria News*.

receive the visitors at the foot of Hangklip where he normally welcomed visitors, but rather the second village where Makhado's favourite *mutanuni*, Maholi reigned. This was a different Makhado to the one who humiliated the Reverend and refused to meet General Piet Joubert.

Makhado 's tone was very submissive and peaceful when he was interviewed by Weinthal. He told the editor that he acknowledged President Paul Kruger as his father and he was ever willing to pay taxes. The interview also revealed that Makhado did not trust the Native Commissioner as he maintained he would never collect taxes and give them to Captain Schiel. He assured the Republic of his military support against the rebellious Mmaleboho of the Bahananwa and he denied ever sending his warriors to help Mmaleboho.

It is apparent that Makhado was very scared of the Republican forces because he also denied that he had called for the help of the British. In the interview Makhado was very firm that he did not want war and he declared his loyalty to President Kruger and the Republic.<sup>77</sup> However, what Makhado was saying was contrary to what he was thinking. This was true because he was expecting five hundred new guns from the coast the night of the interview and he did not disclose this information. It is very clear that Makhado was always ready for war, but he did not want to provoke the Republic to take up arms against him.

Weinthal and company were given royal treatment by Makhado who, before this visit, was very strongly against the government or anything that had to do with Pretoria. His behaviour was recorded by Weinthal as dignified and courteous, although he sometimes showed flashes of impatience and excitement as his councillors interpreted the questions. The interview was wrapped up with a photo shoot which Makhado was reluctant to participate in, and it took some convincing from Mrs Cooksley for him to oblige. Six photos were taken along with single shots for both Makhado and *mutanuni* Maholi and another one with "*Vhalindi*". The editor wanted to take one single view shot of the mountain stronghold but this was thwarted. The reason for this action was to prohibit Pretoria from finding out about the security details of the *pfamo*.<sup>78</sup>

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77 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg. 1953, p. 185.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

## Death of Makhado

Tragedy befell Venda when their *Khosikhulu* Makhado, the great Bull Elephant of the North, who had led his herd to the height of their strength and power of resistance, was wounded and killed in 1897.<sup>79</sup> Möller-Malan alleged that Makhado was betrayed within *nnduni ya vuhosi* by his own flesh and blood, like most of the *mahosimahulu* who came before him. He would go down in popular memory as the bravest, the strongest and the kindest, more cunning than all the *mahosimahulu* who came before him. Möller-Malan believed that Makhado died a lonely man with no one to trust, having lost faith in his *maine* and his white friends having been too far away to come to his rescue.<sup>80</sup> The circumstances surrounding Makhado's death remain a mystery even today. Some scholars who wrote about the Venda history held a different view to the one presented here by Möller-Malan. They believed that he died of poisoning while visiting his old white friend, who was not mentioned by name.

Nemudzivhadi shed some light on the poison story in his MA dissertation. He alleged that Makhado died of poisoning in his brandy and the poison was reported to have been found from white men's farms across the Mohohodi River by Rasivhetshele and his fellow residents from Malimuwa.<sup>81</sup> Nemudzivhadi held the view that the death of Makhado was a conspiracy between his own people and the white men. In fact, the story surrounding the death of Makhado remains distorted even today because there are so many versions to the story.<sup>82</sup>

In the end Makhado's reign as *khosikhulu* of Venda can be summarised as the period of resistance to white encroachment. Makhado died fighting to consolidate his power and resenting the control of the Republic over his land. His reign did not start, like that of his father's, with assassination within *nndu ya vuhosi*, but it ended with him being the victim, probably of the royal politics. The next chapter will look at the disputes between Makhado's sons and the dethroning of Mphephu by the Republic.

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79 D. Möller-Malan, *The Chair of the Ramabulanas*, Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1953, p. 187.

80 *Ibid.*

81 M.H. Nemudzivhadi. *The Conflict Between Mphephu and the South African Republic (1895-1899)*, MA dissertation, Unisa, 1977, p. 31.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 31.