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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

There appears to be no unambiguous definition or description of the scope of ethnobotany, a relatively new and neglected field of study. Ethnobotanical research over the years has given rise to a number of definitions: Malan & Owen-Smith (1974) studied the ethnobotany of Kaokoland with the main objective of "...discovering the dispositions of botanical folk classifications encountered among the Herero-speaking peoples of Kaokoland in South-West Africa". According to them, it involves a study of all the significant features in a folk taxonomy of plants, including the relevant information about the utilization of the flora in the culture of a people. Kokwaro (1976) uses the term "ethnosystematics" to describe "a folk knowledge of botanical classification".

Ethnobotanical information has made appearances in a number of publications such as Quinn (1959), Watt & Breyer-Brandwijk (1962), Kokwaro (1976, 1983), Liengme (1981, 1983), Sofowora (1982), Coates Palgrave (1983), Coates Palgrave *et al.* (1987), Cunningham (1985, 1987, 1988), Cunningham & Gwala (1986) and Rodin (1985). For references reflecting the state of ethnobotanical research in southern Africa, Liengme (1983) and Cunningham (1989) may be consulted.

It is evident that most researchers in this field tend to restrict their studies to one or a few aspects, notably the medicinal utilization of plants. In fact, it has been estimated that in intertropical Africa traditional plant medicines accounts for about 80--90 % of the medicinal needs of the population (Aké Assi 1983). It has the advantage of being near at hand and provides medical treatment at low cost. This is also the case in Venda where, despite all the advances in modern and orthodox medicine, traditional medicine still plays a significant role in the lives of many people.

Relatively little has been published on the ethnobotany of the Vhavenda (Liengme 1983). In addition to the scattered ethnobotanical information contained

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in anthropological works (e.g. Van Warmelo 1960, Stayt 1968), information on plant usage by the Vhavenda is supplied by, amongst others, Netshiungani & Van Wyk (1980), Netshiungani (1981), Netshiungani *et al.* (1981), Arnold & Gulumian (1984), Arnold & Musil (1983), Crous & Borchardt (1986) and Odendaal *et al.* (1988).

The present study involves an investigation of the utilization of indigenous plants by the Vhavenda, with particular reference to their significance as sources of food, medicine, firewood, art and building materials. Principles, cultural and religious restrictions, and norms that regulate the use of plants, as well as the traditional systems of nomenclature, classification and conservation of plants, are also included.

Factors that have prompted the present study, include the following:

1. The role played by indigenous plants as sources of food for the Vhavenda, remains relatively unknown to the outside world. With a rapidly increasing population, it becomes more and more important to find new and efficient ways of feeding the people.

2. Traditional medicine has, and continues to play, an important role in the health of the Vhavenda, and there are many traditional medical practitioners who claim to be as capable of treating certain diseases as modern physicians. Such claims have never been tested efficiently. In the event of rising medical costs and frustrations caused by the unavailability of treatment for certain diseases such as AIDS, some forms of cancer and venereal diseases, it becomes necessary to explore all possible sources for solutions. Previous research has proved that traditional medicine is an important source of discoveries for new remedies and chemicals.

3. There is a rapid deterioration of the natural environments in rural areas in many parts of Africa, possibly as a result of over-utilization of plant material by people for firewood, building and art material, medicine and food.

4. Much of the folklore related to the utilization of indigenous plants by the Vhavenda is unpublished. The only means of transmitting this knowledge has

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been through oral communication from generation to generation. Part of it has probably remained unchanged through several generations, but much is likely to have become distorted, or even lost. The influence of Western civilization has resulted not only in the loss of this vital information, but also in the widening of the communication gap between the older generation who possess the knowledge, and the younger generation to whom it should be imparted. Therefore, unless this knowledge is recorded in time, it is bound to be lost for ever.

5. The culture of a people is an important part of its historical and spiritual heritage. For this reason alone the documentation of the ethnobotany of the Vhavenda forms an important part of their rich and proud legacy.

The main objective of this study is the documentation of all information encountered with regard to the utilization by the Vhavenda of indigenous plants as food, medicine, firewood and source of materials for building and art. An analysis of such uses will be made in order to discover social or religious patterns and principles that influence the interaction between the Vhavenda and their natural environment. This also includes a broad study of their systems of plant nomenclature, classification and conservation.

In this thesis, information on the study area as well as the material and methods employed is given in Chapter 2. It is important to realize that one cannot truly or meaningfully evaluate the cultural, social and psychological facts about the ethnobotany of a people unless it is done in the context of their environment, culture and society. Therefore, a broad outline of the geography of Venda, as well as a concise review of the history and culture of the Vhavenda, is supplied in Chapter 3. Original information on plant usage recorded during the course of this study, and supported by voucher specimens of the species concerned, is reported in Chapter 4. Additional information (largely original, but also derived from the literature) and a discussion on the use and cultural significance of mainly indigenous plants by the Vhavenda, are presented in Chapter 5. Finally, an attempt has been made to combine the information on plant usage by the Vhavenda derived during the present study, with that already recorded by other authors in the literature. This is presented in the form of a comprehensive inventory in the Appendix.

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CHAPTER 2

STUDY AREA, MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 STUDY AREA

The peripheral regions of Venda have been strongly influenced by the neighbouring cultural groups. The western and southern areas were in contact with the Pedi for a long time, while the southern to south-eastern parts later exchanged cultural habits with the Tsonga. The northern region has always had contact with the Shona and Ndebele of Zimbabwe, and the easterners could not escape the influence of the neighbouring Tsonga culture. Today it is the Nzhelele, Tshivhase, Mphaphuli, Thengwe, Rambuda and Khakhu areas that has remained the least influenced by other cultural groups. It is for this reason that these areas have been chosen as core study area for this research (Figure 1). However, it was found necessary to gather information from all the other regions of Venda to allow for meaningful generalizations and identification and comparison of the directions of change at these border areas.

2.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Firstly, all knowledge acquired through being a Vhavenda by birth and upbringing, was recorded, and specimens of the relevant plants were collected for subsequent identification in the herbarium. Friends, relatives, and neighbours confirmed and added to the information recorded during this stage.

Much information has also been gathered by means of interviews. Villagers were questioned about the names and uses of certain plants growing in their areas. During such interviws, the plant in question was always illustrated by means of a branch or twig or a specimen growing nearby. Often the interviewee did not know the name, but could provide information on the use of the plant, or its edibility, the parts that are utilized or its locality, for example. This approach does not only help in finding the names of plants, but also their cultural uses, habitats, periodicity and

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much more information. In many cases an argument would ensue when several people were involved, making it possible to gather valuable information on the diagnostic features of the plant, its uses, other plants used for the same purpose, or names used for the same plant by other people.

Some individual plants presented themselves as relevant material to be recorded as they showed signs of being used in one form or another, for example, the roots having been dug, or the trunk debarked. This obviously serves as a good starting point for enquiring about the use of such plants.

A discussion on the various common and rare diseases, as well as problems related to their treatments proved not only to provide information on remedies, but also on names of people who are more informed and capable of treating them, other names used to refer to such diseases, as well as their most important symptoms.

Several plant collection trips were undertaken with traditional medicinal practitioners of various ranks and specialities. Most traditional practitioners do not have own transport to some of the places where they can find the plants that they utilize. They are delighted to be offered free transport. There are, however, some traditional practitioners who have never seen some of the living plants that they have used for the better part of their practice as they rely on buying or exchanging plant parts or prepared medicines from those who are fortunate to have some. Such practitioners become excited and are most grateful when shown these plants, for two obvious reasons. Firstly, they get the opportunity not only to know the plants in such a way that they would be able to identify them in the future, but also to know where they can find them. Secondly, it is more economical to obtain the plants free of charge, with the possibility to become dealers in the materials themselves.

The cameraderie of collecting trips creates a peaceful atmosphere of mutual trust conducive to learning and sharing traditional knowledge, its limits and taboos. Good intentions and a fair attitude towards traditional practitioners make an outsider acceptable so that it becomes no problem to be allowed to enter their storage huts and inspect their medicines (surgeries), to observe their methods of preparation, compoundment and application of drugs. In short, the company of

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traditional practitioners provided authentic information regarding the plants, their uses, collection methods and principles, preparation, application and storage of medicines.

During the course of the research it was realized that not every traditional practitioner, if there are any, knows about all the medicinal plants and their uses, and that it is to the researcher's advantage to know something about Vhavenda medicinal culture for at least two reasons. Firstly, it enables him to distinguish between what is likely to be the truth and what is guesswork and hearsay. Secondly, he is then in a position to exchange information for information. From the above it is clear that in order to obtain the true facts, the researcher has to apply more than formal interview approaches.

Much of the information was obtained accidentally. By observing the actions of the people closely, it was possible to learn about relevant cultural activities such as the gathering of wood, vegetables, fruits, art and building materials. The attitude of not judging interviewees by their appearance, rank, or reputation yielded a substantial amount of cultural information on plants. During the research some people were interviewed while busy carving wood, weaving baskets, thatching huts, among other things.

Some information was initiallly obtained from the literature and from herbaria. This type of information was subjected to confirmation and verification during interviews.

Herbarium specimens of all the species on which information was obtained, were collected by the author. These voucher specimens are deposited in the herbarium of the Department of Botany, University of the North, and the herbarium at the Department of Botany, University of Venda. Information presented in Chapter 4 is based on these collections, and in many instances represents the first recording of the particular plant usage in the literature. Original observations are also recorded in Chapter 5. Information collected by the author was combined with that in the literature and is summarized in the Appendix.

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VENDA
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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1. KUTAMA IRRIGATION
2. SINTHUMULE/KUTAMA SISAL
3. GOGOBOLE IRRIGATION
4. MAGAU IRRIGATION
5. REDWING (VENDA)
6. CAPES THORNE IRRIGATION
7. V L B MANNAMEAD
8. MULIMA F S P
9. MODDERVLEI
10. MULIMA SISAL
11. VLEIFONTEIN/MUNUNZWU
12. MASHAMBA SISAL
13. MASHAMBA F S P
14. MASHAMBA COFFEE
15. MASAKONA SISAL
16A. LA ROCHELLE COFFEE
16B. MASHAU COFFEE
17. DE HOOP SISAL
18. DAVHANA IRRIGATION
19. TSHIMBUPFE SOUTH IRRIGATION
20. TSHIMBUPFE IRRIGATION & SISAL
21. TSWINGA
22. DIDIDI IRRIGATION
23. BAROTTA FRUIT FARM
24. TSHAKHUMA FARMER ESTABLISHMENT
25. TSHAKHUMA PACKHOUSE
26. TSIANDA FRUIT FARM
27. AGRIVEN TRAINING CENTRE
28. LWAMONDO SISAL
29. TSWIMBEDI
30. TSHIVHASE TEA ESTATE
31. DZINDI F E
32. MUKUMBANI TEA ESTATE
33. TSHINANE F E
34. TSHINANE PEPPER ESTATE
35. KHAKHU F S P
36. RAMBUDA RICE
37. TSHIOMBO RICE
38. TSHIOMBO IRRIGATION
39. DAMANI C E & F E
40. MAKONDE IRRIGATION
41. MUTALE ESTATE AND AGRITOX
42. MALAVULE F E
43. PHASWANA COFFEE ESTATE
44. TSHIKONELO IRRIGATION
45. TSHAULU IRRIGATION & EXTENSION
46. LAMBANI IRRIGATION & EXTENSION
47. MASETONI IRRIGATION
48. MALONGA FLATS
49. NWANEDI DATES
50. NWANEDI NURSERY
51. NWANEDI FARMER ESTABLISHMENT
52. LAURA IRRIGATION
53. FRIPP FARMER ESTABLISHMENT

MESSINA
Limpopo river
Nwanedzi river
MANENZHE
MUTELE
Masisi
Nwanedi National Park
TSHIKUNDAMALEMA
MAKUYA
Makuya National Park
Levuvhu river
Nzhelele river
Cross dam
Nwanedzi dam
Lupepe dam
THENGWE
RAMBUDA
Mutale
Mutale river
Nzhelele Nature Reserve
Nzhelele dam
Mutangudi river
MPHAPHULI
Mphaphuli Cycad Reserve
KHAKHU
Mbwedi river
MPHEPHU
Mphephu
Lake Fundudzi
TSHIVHASE
Makhado
Tshirovha dam
Mutshindudi river
Phiphidi dam
Thohoyandou
TSHIKONELO
Vondo dam
Levuvhu river
Zimbabwe
Botswana
Transvaal
Mozambique
Swaziland
OFS
LOUIS TRICHARDT
WAMONDO
TSIANDA
TSHAKHUMA
ITSHA
Dzindi
MULENZHE
Tshikwarani
Thohe dam
Dorp river
KUTAMA
SINTHUMULE
Madombidzha
Sand river
Mahovha
Albasini dam
NBSENGANI
Nuwani
Doornspruit
MASIA
MASHAU
SINTHUMULE
TSHIMBUPFE
DAVHANA
Mashamba
MASHAMBA
Little Letaba
NTABALALA
Nwandi
MULIMA
Ramuela
MASAKONA
MUKA

LEGEND
- 600 m
- 600-900 m
- 900-1200 m
- 1200 m
- International Boundary
- K N P Boundary
- Identified Projects
- Community Development Projects
- Agriven Projects
- Railway Lines
- Sisal Projects
- National Roads
- Secondary Roads
- Rivers
- Dams

10 5 0 10 20 km

N

Compiled and drawn by
Paul J van der Merwe
for
VENDA AGRICULTURAL CORPORATION
Sources:
Dev. Proposals for Venda; Inst. for Dev. Studies; R A U
D B S A
AGRIVEN

Figure 1. Map of Venda

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CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO VENDA AND THE VHAVENDA

3.1 GEOGRAPHY OF VENDA

Venda occupies the northeastern corner of the Transvaal, south of Zimbabwe and west of Gazankulu (Figure 1). It lies between 29°--32° E, 22°--24° S. The country comprises three units, with the largest one between the Limpopo in the north and Louis Trichardt in the southwest. The other two units are to the west and southeast of Louis Trichardt. The surface area of Venda, according to the consolidation proposals of 1975, is 6 500 km² (650 200 ha). These proposals also indicated that the area on the western side of Louis Trichardt would be exchanged for white farmland adjacent to the western borders of the other two blocks.

3.1.1 Topography

Venda comprises a broken to mountainous terrain with the Soutpansberg range stretching east-west through the country. The highest points in Venda are represented by the Tshiendeulu Mountains (1561 m) separating the Nzhelele Valley from the Limpopo basin in the north, followed by the Thathe Vondo Mountains (1439 m) to the east of Nzhelele which gently slopes into the Sibasa region. The southwestern border of the larger block is characterized by a portion of the main section of the Soutpansberg range that stretches from about Entebeni State Forest towards Louis Trichardt. The mountains north of Nzhelele slope gently northward into the Malonga Flats (586 m), ultimately ending in the lowest area of the northeastern part of Venda (below 400 m). The eastern side of this mountainous region also undulates into the hilly areas of the Thohoyandou/Mphaphuli Districts, and end with the lowest region along the eastern border of this large block (400--600 m). Much of the western block (west of Louis Trichardt) is a flat area with an the altitude of between 800 and 1200 m. The

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southern block is also largely flat on the southwestern part at 800 to 1200 m and slopes down irregularly to between 600 and 800 m in the northeast.

A number of rivers flow through the country. The major ones are the Nzhelele, Nwanedzi and Mutale. They originate in the mountains of the southwestern part of the larger block, from where they flow northward to empty into the Limpopo River. All these rivers have numerous tributaries that form a network of streams throughout the country. The Luvuvhu River starts around Louis Trichardt, flows through the Albasini Dam and into the southern part of Venda (Vuwani District), from where it flows along the eastern border towards the Limpopo to the north. The Luvuvhu receives much water from its tributaries flowing from the high lying areas of Venda, chiefly from Mutshundudi, Tshinane, Ngwedi, Dzindi and Dzondo.

3.1.2 Climate

Venda has a subtropical climate with the rainfall ranging from 300 mm in the northern and western part to over 2000 mm on the eastern slopes of the Soutpansberg. Mean summer temperatures vary between 24° C and 26° C while mean winter temperatures exceed 15° C. The highest rainfall is in summer and Venda hardly experiences any frost (Weather Bureau 1986).

3.1.3 Geology

A number of geological systems are found in Venda (South African Committee for Stratigraphy 1980), and these are very briefly described below.

a) The Waterberg System

This covers much of the southern and western parts of the largest block of Venda and includes the Nylstroom Series of lava, sandstone, conglomerate, siltstone and greywacke. It occurs in the Nzhelele valley in the west, Tshakhuma and Sibasa in the south, and stretches northeastward to just

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south of Klein Tshipise. The western and central portion of this system are heavily faulted in various directions. Within the Nylstroom Series an island of Tertiary to recent unconsolidated surface coolings of conglomerate, limestone, sandstone, marl and terrace gravel is found. This includes the Madala, Tshiendeulu, Dzamba, Tshixwadza, and Dzimauli areas.

b) The Archaean Complex

This complex includes the northern Cape and Transvaal region of metamorphism and granitization and covers the southern Vuwani District of Venda. It comprises migmatite, gneis and ultrametamorphic formations. Interspersed in this complex are islands of the Phalaborwa Igneous Complex and related regions of carbonitite, pyroxynite, syenite and forskorite. The Archaean Complex also extends through the Sinthumule and Kutama areas of Venda, west of Louis Trichardt, and here and there, are found islands of ultrabasic and basic intrusions as well as their metamorphic derivatives.

c) The Karoo System

The Karoo System occupies the northern part of Venda and can be divided into two portions. The Ecca Series which forms a belt bordering the Waterberg system in the south and the north-east. It includes areas around Klein Tshipise and Mukunude. It comprises shale, sandstone, coal and grit.

The Stormberg Series which stretches along the northern border of the Ecca Series and comprises sandstone, shale, mudstone, marl and coal. The northern part of the Stormberg Series also contains basalt, limburgite and pyroclast in the Masisi area.

d) The Limpopo Belt of metamorphism and granitization

A part of the northern region of Venda juts into the Limpopo belt of metamorphism and granitisation which comprises migmatite, gneis and ultra metamorphic formations.

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A more simplified, geological map of Venda (Macmillan-Boleswa 1986) distinguishes four geological regions which largely coincide with the systems described above.

3.1.4 Geographical Regions

The inhabitants of Venda see their country as comprised of a number of regions. These regions appear to have been originally politically demarcated. They also tend to coincide with different vegetation types. The Vhutavhatsindi region is the land that originally belonged to the Vhatavhatsindi tribe and covers a greater part of the present Mutale District.

On the northern, north-eastern and western sides of the Vhutavhatsindi region is the Niani region that is characterized by mopani veld and is occupied by the Vhania. This region extends westward and ends in islands bordering with the Linzhelele in the west near the Rabali area. Here the mopani veld occurs only at low lying areas. The region east of Nzhelele and south of Vhutavhatsindi is referred to as Vhuphani and covers the area that was once ruled by the Vhaphani of the Tshivhase clan. In the northeast it borders with the Vhumbedzi region that forms a border with Gazankulu in the east, and Niani in the northeast.

South of the Vhuphani region is Vhuronga, which includes the Vuwani District and the area around Tshakhuma.

No clear boundaries appear to exist between these regions and no attempt has ever been made to draw them. The region referred to as Linzhelele appears to be the one ruled by the Vhanzhelele.

From the ecological point of view, the Niani region is characterised by the Mopani Veld of Acocks (1953). The North Eastern Mountain Sourveld occurs over the greater part of the Vhutavhatsindi and southern Vhuphani regions. The Sibasa area, which is part of Vhuphani, is covered by the Lowveld Sour Bushveld. The sourish Mixed Bushveld is characteristic of the western Nzhelele region and also occurs around Makuya, parts of Vhuronga and in the Sinthumule/Kutama areas.

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3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE VHAVENDA

The name Vhavenda refers to all the people who live in the country called Venda, the centre of which lies around the Soutpansberg. These people speak Luvenda and live according to Venda customs and traditions. This description of a Muvenda may, however, seem to exclude those Venda people who live in other countries, or migrant workers who have left their country in search of work in other areas. For the purpose of this research, the name Vhavenda is taken to refer to those Venda people who live in Venda, as well as all those who maintain a reasonable contact with Venda or the traditions of the Vhavenda. For more detailed accounts on the history of the Vhavenda the following publications may be consulted: Wessmann (1908), Van Warmelo (1960), Stayt (1968), Mullan (1969), Ralushai & Gray (1977), Flygare (1979) and Beach (1980). The present account may not necessarily agree with some of the opinions expressed in these publications.

Homogeneous as the Vhavenda nation might appear to be, it is common knowledge that this nation comprises a number of subgroups or tribes with different origins and customs. Among these tribes are the Vhagona, Vhambedzi, Vhalembethu, Vhatavhatsindi, Vhatwanamba, Vhalovhedzi, Vhakwevho, Vhaluvhu, Vhalaudzi, Vhasenzi (Singo) and Vhalemba.

Information on the Vhavenda has appeared in a number of publications in which historical aspects are given as part of research in anthropology, ethnology, economics, and others. Moreover, much of what has been written on the history of the Vhavenda is restricted to one or a few tribes. This is supported by Ralushai & Gray (1977): "Research into their history has tended to concentrate on what has been termed the 'Venda tribes proper' in contrast to the aboriginal Mbedzi, Lembethu, and Ngona of the mountains, conquered by them and now largely assimilated". Furthermore, most writers have adopted what Beach (1980) calls the "old-style South African History: that the history of Africans was one of successive waves of people following each other from the north". This does not apply to all Venda groups. In short, the available historical information on the Vhavenda is not only incomplete and one-sided, but also highly fragmentary. A brief account of the historical background of each of the most popular groups among the people of

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Venda could serve to highlight their relationships with one another and with others the world over.

According to Beach (1980), there is a tradition that the original inhabitants of Venda "were few and scattered with a great deal of country between their settlements". These were groups under many rulers and of different customs and clan names (*mitupo*). Their country was referred to as the Thovhela state, ruled by Thovhela, who was also known as Lavhelani or Machiwalaune. This state existed up to around the 1720s. Today the name Thovhela remains as an ordinary title for local rulers and as a greeting among the Sotho-speaking groups.

One of the aboriginal groups of the Thovhela state, the country that was from time immemorial known as Venda, was the Vhangona. It is uncertain where these people came from, but judging from Thovhela's residence, which was "a Shona-style Zimbabwe made of local stones" (Beach 1980), one may conclude that they came from the north, or at least had very close links with the people to the north. It is, however, also not known whether this Thovhela was a Ngona. One of the most popular rulers of the Vhangona was called Raphulu, who lived on the mountain Vuvha and ruled over Tshirululuni. He is also reported to have "extended his rule eastwards over the Mbedzi and Lembethu" (Ralushai & Gray 1977). Some of the Ngona proper areas include Damani, around Tshakhuma (in the Lutanandwa Valley), Thenzheni, Tshaulu, around the hill known as Tshitumbe, and Nzhelele.

The oldest remembered ruler at Damani is Radzaga I. He was probably succeeded by his grandson, Mphadza-a-Dovhoni, who was then succeeded by Ratshiuvhu. It was during Ratshiuvhu's long reign that the Masingo first settled in Venda. After his death, Radzaga II who married a Ndalamo woman ruler, Mutumbe, took over. Then came Rundani and thereafter, Raluthaga. Raluthaga was "a contemporary of the Singo ruler, Ramabulana, who died in 1864" (Beach 1980). He also died not long thereafter.

The founding ancestor of the Ngona group at Thenzheni was Ratshikuni, who was also known as Goko (the creator of people).

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At Tshaulu it was probably Mabidzha, grandfather to Diwase, who was the first ruler. According to Ralushai & Gray (1977) he is the one who built the Ngona stone walls at the hill of Tshitumbe. It was during Diwase's reign that the Bohwana Dynasty was established at Tshaulu. Diwase was probably succeeded by Netshitumbe, whose name appears to be more dynastic than that of an individual.

The Ngona ruler in the Nzhelele Valley was Tshiwedzelele, who was conquered by the Vhatavhatsindi of Netshiendeulu.

Madzhadzhi was the first Ngona ruler to settle at Makoloni (Ralushai & Gray 1977), while Ramphaga ruled next to Mauluma hill and was probably under Raphulu. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the valleys surrounded by the small hills of the same size on the mountain called Zwavhumbwa, which is further to the west of the Nzhelele Valley, was the home of the Vhangona (Ramulongo, personal communication). Some Ngona people also settled at Tshiheni and Luheni.

The Vhambedzi occupied the Thovhela state to the east around Tshaulu and as far to the west as Mianzwi. Other areas of the Mbedzi include Matangari, Makonde, Zwaluvhimbi, Tshilavulu, Mukununde, Ha-Nemasetoni, Tshikweta tsha Luvhimbi, and Ha-Luvhimbi (where Luvhimbi was based at one stage). There is a tradition that the Vhambedzi came to Vhumbedzi (land of the Mbedzi south of Limpopo) from Malungudzi, north of the Limpopo. Their most popular ruler at the time was Luvhimbi, a rain-maker and priest. According to Ralushai & Gray (1978), Luvhimbi left Malungudzi probably as recently as the early 19th century. It is not known how long the Mbedzi stayed at Malungudzi, but there is evidence that they came to Malungudzi from south of the Limpopo. They arrived with their ruler, Mafukanoro, who led them "across the Limpopo and reached the great mountains of Marungudzi... They took with them a rain-cult derived from the Raluvhimba cult of that area " (Beach 1980). Malungudzi was formerly occupied by the Shona-speaking Pfumbi under the leadership of the Chikada dynasty. The Pfumbi were defeated and driven out of Malungudzi, leaving Mafukanoro to found a state that eventually became known as the Matibi dynasty. This name was probably derived from that of some ruler at one stage, Matibi, who was also known as Nemalungudzi. Luvhimbi left Malungudzi with his wife and his daughter, Tshubalale and Tshiembe, and probably some of his followers. "He settled first at Tshilavulu, where he found the

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Vhatavhatsindi in the area of chief Nethengwe " (Ralushai & Gray 1977). From there he moved to Ha-Luvhimbi and then to Tswingoni, where he died.

At one stage Luvhimbi's granddaughter, Mufanadzo, left Ha-Luvhimbi to become chief at Mianzwi. There she had to request the help of Ligegise Tshivhase to chase out and kill her brother, Manikiniki Mantsha, who, like Mufanadzo, was a powerful rain-maker. From that time onwards, succession at Mianzwi became matrilineal and rulers used the title of Tshisinavhute.

The Vhatavhatsindi also lived in Venda from very early times. Their settlements were distributed all over the country. Some of their rulers were Nethengwe (Shakadza), Netshiavha (Khalavha and Tshiheni), Netshiendeulu (Tshiendeulu), Matidza (Luonde), Manenzhe (Ha-Manenzhe), and Nemaungani (Luvuvhu Valley). The Vhatavhatsindi claim to have found the Vhambedzi already living in Venda, but the latter also say they found the former. This uncertainty, according to Ralushai & Gray (1977), implies that these two groups had been in Venda for so long that they cannot remember who came first.

The Vhatwanamba lived at Vuvha, alongside of the Vhangona of Raphulu. There they were driven out, probably by the Ngona, and fled to the Blouberg-Saltpan Mountains. According to Beach (1980) their ruler at that time was known as Tshivula. After staying for some time at Blouberg, they migrated northwards across the Limpopo and founded the Chitawudze dynasty on the Tshabezi and Bubye Rivers.

Still in the Soutpansberg, a group of Lemba moved northwards "and occupied the area south of the Belingwe Peak not long before the fall of the Changamire state" (Beach 1980). These are probably the Vhalemba mentioned by Beach (1980): " One such group had evidently tried to oppose the Changamire conquest of the south-west in the 1680s, had failed and fled to the Thovhela state and was granted shelter." According to him they were probably the first group of the Vhalemba to migrate south of the Limpopo River as at that time the Masingo were still part of the Changamire state and the Thovhela state still existed.

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Finally, there is the Vhalembethu who, according to Prof. Ralushai (personal communication), are the Vhanyai. If this is so, they are the Ghoya people reported by J.E. Mullan (1969) as the first to make contact with the Lemba Arabs when they arrived at Sena for the first time. They occupied the far north-eastern part of the Thovhela state, around Ha-Mutele, and probably occupied the areas on both sides of the Limpopo River. Some of them are reported by Beach (1980) to have been ruled by Mambo of the Changamire state, with their local ruler known as Nimakwali. They left Mambo to become the Kalanga during a civil strife.

The last and perhaps the most significant group of people who came to Venda was the one comprising the Singo dynasty and the Vhalemba. The history of the Vhalemba is traced back to a time when they lived as the Israelites. According to Phophi (unpublished), at the time when Abraham lived with his wife, Sara, they had a helper by the name of Hagara. During this time, Abraham and Hagara had a son called Ishmael. Sara was not pleased and she chased Hagara with her son from their home and out of the country. They left and landed in the desert, without food or water. As Ishmael was about to die of thirst and hunger, water came up from the ground next to him. He drank and survived. It became a permanent source of water, a spring that became known as Sen-sen. From that moment Ishmael grew up suprisingly fast. People who lived there then had a permanent source of water for drinking and agriculture. They therefore respected Ishmael and considered themselves as his people. They hated the Israelites, who had left him to die, and ambushed and killed them whenever they passed by. The Israelites, in return, hated the desert people and called them Arabs (i.e. people who waylay others and kill them without provocation). It was amongst these Arabs, or the people of Ishmael, that Mohammed, the prophet, was to be born. Mohammed had no surviving sons, but he adopted a boy called Za'id from close relatives, to become his heir. Mohammed died in 632 A.D. and Za'id remained a prince who was later removed from Yemen to Oman. According to Mullan (1969) " ...the Sheiks Sulaiman and Said of the house of Azd, who were removed from Yemen to Oman, rebelled against the overlordship of the caliph Abdul Malik ibn Marwan ...they failed as they were out-numbered ... they fought bravely ... rather than submit they fled to the land of Zanj on the East African coast". This is supported by Van Warmelo (1974): " In 696 A.D. the two princes of Oman, Sulaiman and Za'id were attacked by the strong forces Khalif Abd. al-malik ibn. Marwan of Damascus and forced to flee to the land

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of Zanj. There we also find the tradition of the coming of the Arabs, who settled along the coast, and the name of their chief who was Haji Sa'id". These Arabs once again left Zanj because they felt insecure after the caliph had sent his Syrian followers after them. They built some towns along the East African coast, from where they could trade with the people inland. Africa was favourable for trade because it had raw materials, such as gold, copper, cotton, and clay. They were the masters of the art of smelting and working with iron, copper and gold, and they were skilled potters. The Arabs made regular visits to find customers inland and accepted grain, livestock and anything that they could use or sell for their products. Van Warmelo (1974) states:"...the Lemba came from a huge town somewhere across the seas, where dwelt many craftsmen in metalwork, pottery, textiles, and ship-building. They came to this country to trade their goods, especially for gold. They began leaving their men behind with unsold cargo and thus established trade posts. They moved further and further inland and became known to the natives, but did not mix with them as they deemed themselves superior. Then, one day came shattering news: the town had been taken by the enemy. They could not go back home. So they began taking native wives...". In Africa they finally settled at Sofala, where they built their capital and called it Sana, the capital name of their home country, the Yemen. This town later became known as Sena. When the Vhalemba (then known as the Emozaid) arrived at Sofala, they found the Ghoya or Ngoya living there. They conquered them and, according to Mullan (1969), made them their subjects -- the Ngoya had to work in their mines. According to Mullan (1969) the Ngoya probably moved into Sofala from the great lakes of Africa. Their capital at Sofala was referred to as Zumubany, Zunhauhy, or Sa Nhoya, later to become known as Sinoia. It was probably during this time that some of the Ngoya crossed the Limpopo into Venda, to become known as the Vhalembethu or Vhanyai. At this time the ruler of the Vhalemba was referred to as the Ameer (from *Amir* = Arab title for "governor").

The Vhalemba remained in a strong position up to around 1300 A.D. During this time, some group of people moving "on their journey to the Belingwe area" found the Vhalemba and Vhanyai (the Ngoya). They established good relations with the Vhalemba and their chief, Mposi. The name Mposi was corrupted from Kazi (chief of lesser status than the Ameer), to Mbozi, and eventually to Mposi. The Vhalemba called these new-comers the Vhasenzi (from Arab term *Zenj* =

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derived from the attitude of Arabs and Mohammedans towards heathens, towards anybody whom they wish to treat with the utmost contempt). This was probably because they found them culturally different in so many fundamental aspects, especially religion.

The Vhasenzi were displaced by Tshombe, chief of Malawi who had moved from Congo. They left their home called Matongoni with their drum called "Errhohim". " Matongoni is identifiable as a place called Mtengula -- on the eastern side of lake Nyasa" (Mullan 1969). " Errhohim" (the drum that thunders) was given to them by Nwali, their supreme God. There is a tradition among the Vhavenda that when this drum was beaten, all those who are not Vhavenda fell asleep or became unconscious, thus giving the Vhavenda an opportunity to decide whether to kill or capture them. This drum later became known as Ngomalungundu.

It was around 1450, when the Vhalemba, with their Vhanyai and Vhasenzi lived relatively peacefully together, that the Bakalanga and Batonga came to Sofala. They came from the lake regions of central Africa where " their founder was Wat'hongwe Kapana ... their land extended northwards to Ukaranga ... and the Malangaradzi River " (Mullan 1969). These two groups conquered the people at Sofala and divided the Ameer's kingdom into two: the Vhalemba and Vhasenzi who left and went to live at Vhuhwa or Vhuxwa (the place of dying -- because their king, the Ameer, and many of their people had died there), as one group, and the Vhanyai who remained under the Batonga and Bakalanga, later to be incorporated into the new state, the Monomotapa. Vhuxwa was Mambo's country that formed part of the Changamire state. The Vhalemba and Vhasenzi were permitted by Mambo to stay in his country, although he was afraid of them because they were said to possess a very strong medicine. The people of Mambo referred to them as the " Haka " (from Congo: *haka-manga* = to make a powerful medicine. Hence *Bwanga* or *manga* = medicine). It is probably from this term that the word "ṅanga" (traditional medicinal practitioner) came into the Venda language.

The people of Mambo had come to Vhuxwa from the north. They were "fleeing from their original homeland -- Zambia or Congo ...fled from the wrath of their chief, Mwata Yamvo, chief of the Ba-Lunda, after collapse of a tower which he commanded them to build to bring the moon down from the sky for him " (Mullan

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1969). The wooden tower had fallen, killing many people. The collapse angered the chief, who then killed many people in retaliation.

The local ruler of the Vhalemba at Vhuxwa was J. Mutenda, also called Mulemba or Nkalahonye. " He had his great place on the hill Belingwe " (Mullan 1969). His son, Ngwedzi, succeeded him and was later succeeded by Shimbani whose daughter became Mambo's wife. War broke out between the Vhalemba and Mambo's people. The Vhalemba wanted to seize Mambo's kingdom, but they were overcome and some fled to the Thovhela State, as explained earlier.

As a result of intermarriage between the Vhasenzi and Mambo's people, two sons were born to Mambo of a Musenzi mother. One was called Rozwi or Rozvi, and the other " Dyembewu (or Dyambeu), Chikura, Chikurawadyembewu, or Velelambeu". The two sons fought for succession after their father's death. Mambo's people supported Rozvi, and called themselves Barozvi (people of Rozvi), while the Vhasenzi and the remaining Vhalemba supported Dyambeu. The Barozvi were defeated and driven out " to the Mafungabusi Plateau and the Deka River " (Beach 1980). As a result of conflicts in the state and shortage of land, the Vhasenzi and Vhalemba left the Changamire state (Mambo's country) under Dyambeu's leadership. After staying at Belingwe, they crossed the Limpopo River and reached a place called Tshiendeulu, in the Nzhelele Valley of the Thovhela state. They built their first capital there and called it Dzata -- a resting place and a refuge. Netshiendeulu, a Mutavhatsindi chief was subjugated. It was from Dzata that the Vhasenzi and Vhalemba conquered the rest of the aboriginal tribes of the Thovhela state and assumed the name of Vhavenda.

It is not clear who succeeded Dyambeu, but Phophi or Masindi and his son, Tshisevhe, are all mentioned as rulers of the Vhavenda at Dzata. One of them adopted the title of Thohoyandou -- it was "probably Masindi or Phophi" (Beach 1980). Thohoyandou is the one who brought the Singo dynasty to its greatest glory. There is a belief among the Vhavenda that Thohoyandou did not die, but merely disappeared like Dyambeu. A split developed after his disappearance from Dzata. The Ramabulana house moved to Tshirululuni in the south-western flank of the Soutpansberg. Tshisevhe and his people settled at Makonde, while the Tshivhase house headed for the south-eastern flank of the Soutpansberg and settled north of

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the Luvuvhu River, with their base near the Phiphidi Falls. A young ruler, who probably was supposed to be a Singo leader after the last Thohoyandou, "was defied by the houses of his brothers and uncles, in spite of the aid of the Mphaphuli house, he was beaten ... His disappearance was symbolised by the Venda myth of Thohoyandou's mysterious disappearance" (Beach 1980).

During their stay at Dzata, Singo rulers tried to counterbalance revolutions by other groups by intermarrying with them. Examples are the Ndalamo (Rozwi origin) and the Mphaphuli house, which were closely associated with the Singo dynasty but of different origins.

Hundred years after the fall of the Thovhela state and the subsequent establishment of the Singo dynasty in 1820, the first whites appeared, namely Coenrad Buys and his brothers. " They were half-caste sons of an Eastern Cape frontiersman of some notoriety in the generation before the Great Trek" (Marks & Atmore 1980). In agreement with Ramavhoya, they were allowed to establish the Mara settlement, now popularly known as Mara Buys. This marked the beginning of the end of Venda rule over their country. In 1836 the Buys family was joined by the first Trek of Louis Trichardt, who settled at the village they called Schoemansdal, named after Stephanus Schoeman, the last full commandant-general of the South African Republic. They were later joined by the trekkers led by Hendrik Potgieter, who arrived in the winter of 1848. They were groups of "Boers ... who had been unable to adjust to the pattern of affairs evolving in the white settlements further south" (Marks & Atmore 1980). Then came hunters, traders, and adventurers among whom were English, Scots, Irish, Dutch, Belgians, Germans, Portuguese of European and Asian extractions, Cape Coloureds, and Shangaans. They brought with them the gun, the Dutch-Afrikaans language, Calvinist religion, and Roman-Dutch law, as well as characteristic patterns of social relations and economic practices.

The relationship between the Boers and the Vhavenda had, from the beginning, been sour and based on the slave-master relationship. A Berlin Society missionary, Bernhard Beyer, who passed Schoemansdal in 1872 had the following reflection: "... the dorp itself now makes a gloomy impression on the visitor. No wonder too, for wickedness formerly had its residence here in the highest degree.

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Here drunkenness and gluttony were the order of the day with the buyers and sellers of many valuable African products, among which slaves too were numbered. The market and the site of the town hall were manured by the thousands of tears and the blood of poor blacks who were lashed unmercifully, and of these doubtless a good many gave up the ghost under the beating. The Lord scented this offense; to that the ruins of the formerly prosperous spot now testify " (Marks & Atmore 1980). The Boers interfered in the succession disputes of the Ramabulana house at several occasions. In 1836, a so-called weak candidate of the house, Ramabulana, was assisted by the guns of Doris Buys and Louis Trichardt to kill his brother, Ramavhoya, who was then chief of the Venda group in the area, to become chief. He passed away in 1863 and, according to Marks & Atmore (1980), was succeeded by another weak candidate, Makhado. Makhado was supported by the Ramabulana's *makhadzi* called Nyakhuhu, his uncle Madzhie, and the landdrost, Jan Vercueil. The successor was supposed to have been Davhana, the eldest son of the first or great house of Ramabulana. His strongest supporter was Joao Albasini, a white trader from Delagoa Bay, who became superintendent of Native Affairs (*Superintendent van Naturellen*) from 1859 to 1868. Albasini brought along a large Tsonga following, among whom were the Maswanganyi of Munene.

Although it was not allowed to arm blacks with guns for security reasons, this was finally done for them to assist profitably in elephant hunting, where they were employed as *swart skuts* (black shots). In June 1864, Makhado, assisted by some *swart skuts* (mostly Tsonga) and his friend, Tromp, raided Davhana at Goedewensch, where he was then staying with Albasini. In 1865, the Boers demanded their guns back, and Makhado, formerly also a *swart skut*, refused to return them. He was supported by his friend, Tromp, and employee, Fleur, in this defiance of the white authorities. Wars ensued and the Boers were beaten at Schoemansdal. They came back in the 1890s and beat Mphephu, who had succeeded Makhado, at Tshirululuni -- driving him out of his country. Mphephu, with most of his followers, fled to a place in southern Zimbabwe called Vhuxwa, where some Vhavenda were still living. This marked the final stage in the subjugation of the Vhavenda, with the other Venda chiefdoms surrendering without fighting.

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Mphephu was reinstated at his second Dzata in the Nzhelele Valley, a place now called Dzanani, after the Anglo-Boer war, probably around 1902. The Vhavenda tribe was, according to Wessmann (1908), the last to surrender its independence. From that time onwards, the Vhavenda were gradually transformed into being part of a westernized type of government until, on 13 September 1979, Venda was declared an independent state by the South African Government. This independence is presently being rejected by the majority of the Vhavenda in the form of passive resistance, youth unrests and boycotts.

3.3 DEMOGRAPHY AND POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

Venda has a small population estimated at 459 986 in 1985. The greatest density was found in the Thohoyandou District with 195 740, while the most sparsely populated district was Mutale with 45 299 people. The greater population in the Thohoyandou District can be attributed largely to the recent urbanization and industrialization after Independence. Most Venda people are employed in South Africa and neighbouring white farms.

3.4 SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Vhavenda have always maintained a clear and unquestionable social hierarchy. At the head is a chief who rules the whole nation, like a king. The country comprises a number of villages under the leadership of headmen (*dzinduna*), usually brothers or close relatives of the chief. The number of villages depends on the number of people who deserve to be headmen and on the size of the country.

In the past the villages formed a borderguard all around the Chief's kraal. From these positions they detected any invasion before it could affect the Chief's kraal. Frequent invasions, especially during the period of the flights (*mishavho*), made the Venda people choose inaccessible places such as the mountain sides or hilltops. Mountain sides mostly preferred were those which enemies could approach from only one side, which was then heavily guarded.

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Depending on the size, each village could be divided into subvillages under the *vhakomas*. Each subvillage then comprised of a number of homesteads. Apart from being sheltered and secured against invaders, a village also had to be as close to the source of water as possible because all the water needed for domestic use was carried by women on their heads, in heavy claypots. To secure the safety of women and children on their trips to and from the water, the land all around the source and along their way was used for agricultural purposes and livestock grazing. Precautionary steps were always taken so that the village people would never find themselves trapped between their homes and their sources of water or lands. Herdboys were always instructed to be on the lookout for intruders and usually had songs to warn their people. Older people spent much of their time either in the mountains and bushes collecting materials they needed for building, fencing, art and medicine, or in the lands, at the same time watching the surrounding country.

It was the duty of every *mukoma* to settle disputes in his village, allocate arable lands to individual homesteads, organize social, ritual and work parties, and ensure that the natural environment was well preserved. Owing to their responsibility to protect important indigenous plants, especially fruit-producing and medicinal ones, they came to be known as *zwilinda-mifula* (i.e. guardians of *Mifula* trees), probably because the *Mufula* tree (*Sclerocarya birrea* subsp. *caffra*) was regarded as most important. It supplied edible fruits from which the marula beer (*Mukumbi*) was also made. The *Vhakoma* received privileges in the form of gifts of beer, meat and other foods from villagers. They, in turn, made similar offers to the headmen, and the headmen to the chiefs.

A typical Venda homestead includes a number of families living together (the word 'family' is used here in the sense of a married man, his wife and children). Each homestead (*muḓi*) is surrounded by an impenetrable fence of poles, saplings and brush. Thorny branches are commonly preferred and many of them are required for an average sized homestead. The fence has a main entrance and a private one. The main entrance is used by everybody who enters the homestead, inmates and their livestock. The private entrance is always at the back and is used by inmates for their private trips such as escaping if necessary, wood gathering by women, returning with other materials gathered from the veld or with meat from hunting, and for various other matters that should customarily not be made public.

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The living quarter is at the centre of the fenced area and grows centripetally. It is usually divided into sites (*masia*). At the centre, and in line with the two entrances, is the site that belongs to the head of the homestead (*ṅemuḓi*). It commonly comprises a hut, which may be decorated with pillars (*thondwana*), and a cooking hut known as *tshiṱanga*, which may be the largest but always the first to be built (*themamuḓi*). This hut is customarily used for cooking and for sitting in the evening by women, girls and young boys. Sometimes it also accommodates small livestock (*khungwanḓuni*) such as goats or sheep. It is in this hut where one finds most of the household utensils especially kitchenware such as plates, stirrers, cooking spoons, pots and containers for water, sleeping equipment, etc. On one side, a raised platform may be erected and bigger containers, such as bags of grain, placed on top. The *thondwana* is a sleeping hut for *nemudi*. Unused or reserve materials, religious artifacts, weapons and other goods are safely kept in this hut. A platform may be made for hanging those materials rarely used, beautiful baskets reserved for trips, medicines for protecting the family and homestead, extra clothes, etc. One or two similar huts may be built for older boys who have been initiated and/or visitors. These are somewhat smaller and less decorated than the *thondwana*. The hut for boys is termed *tshiimamuḓana*. The area between sleeping huts and cooking huts (courtyard) is enclosed by either mud walls (*maguvha*) or walls of poles and saplings (*mipfunda*), and is called *muṱa*. The courtyard is kept clean by regular sweeping and polishing with cow dung. A shade tree, planted or left during clearing, provides shade in the courtyard. This is used as a reception area for visitors, as well as for resting, thrashing grain crops, spreading harvests and mealie meal for drying, traditional and religious dances, and other domestic activities. Similar sites are built on either side (sometimes only on one side) for other married peoples such as brothers, close relatives and friends (*vhasendelelwa*).

All cooking huts face to the side opposite the main entrance, while sleeping huts face the cooking huts. Walls may divide courtyards into two parts on each site. The courtyard in front of the sleeping huts are commonly raised higher than those in front of cooking huts (lower courtyards or *miṱa ya fhasi*). There are usually only two entrances (on opposite sides) into each courtyard. Passages are often left between any two sites.

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A cattle enclosure is built on one side of the main homestead entrance. It is built from poles and saplings, and may be continuous with the outside fence on the outer wall. Further away from the main entrance a smaller enclosure for calves is built against the larger one. Still another enclosure, the *khoro* is commonly constructed next to the cattle enclosure. This is where men and older boys spend much of the evening discussing issues that affect them only and that cannot be shared with women, and where young men learn more about their adult roles. Here the older people make their braais, prepare their medications, assess the health of the younger men, count and admire cattle as they enter or leave the kraal, and guard them. Women and children spend much of their time in the cooking huts, enjoying folk tales, fables and playing various indoor games.

The back of the homestead is reserved for other permanent and temporary structures such as granaries (*maḓulu*), temporary grain stores (*zwiṱaṱari*), pounding huts (*magoha*), resting places and workshops. Grain pits may be made anywhere in the homestead, but preferably inside cattle kraals.

Among other duties, the leader of the homestead is responsible for the distribution of arable land, marula trees, anthills for collection of mushrooms, flying ants, etc., allocated to his homestead, among his inmates. He settles disputes in his homestead, organizes and presides at religious ceremonies as priest, reports visitors to the *mukoma*, attends traditional courts, etc., on behalf of his inmates. He is responsible for the doctoring of the homestead, inmates, livestock and their lands. He in turn enjoys gifts from his inmates.

Similar homesteads are scattered all over the village in an irregular way, but at some distance from one another to allow for privacy and control of neighbouring veld. Community and national celebrations and ceremonies are performed at the headmen's or chief's kraals, depending on the status of the ceremony. In such villages cultural norms are observed at all levels from the community, down to the families. Members of the various villages under one chief co-operate in work, religious and ritual celebrations and in wars with other tribes.

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3.5 RELIGION AND EDUCATION

The traditional religion of the Vhavenda is basically the same as that of the other African tribes. They believe in one Supreme Being who is above all known gods and ancestral spirits. They call him by various names, the most popular one being *Ṅwali*. *Ṅwali* is believed to be able to control the fate of all the Venda people irrespective of tribe. He is reported to have been able to show his presence in various ways such as storms, earthquakes, as well as other unusual sounds. Some people claim to have met him unexpectedly in various forms. Whenever people experience problems beyond their control, they have to perform rituals to appease him. Problems such as droughts, floods, tribal warfares and epidemics need *Ṅwali*'s attention.

Ritual ceremonies related to national problems and disasters are performed at the Chief's kraal with him presiding as the priest. The Chief in such cases is considered to be a living representative of *Ṅwali*'s heavenly gods. His ancestors have chosen him to lead the people and they are the ones who are closer to *Nwali*. He therefore worships *Ṅwali* through them. The Vhavenda also perform other rituals such as the good harvest celebrations and first-fruit ceremonies when *Ṅwali* and the ancestral spirits have their share of the newly ripened fruits. During such ceremonies beer and other alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages are made and placed at sacred places for the ancestral spirits to drink.

The individual clans, however, do not only depend on the rituals described above, but each kin-group also has an infinite number of other subordinate gods, represented by their ancestral spirits. When a family member dies, he is believed to have been taken by his ancestors to become a god with more power and influence over the living. Kin-group ancestral spirits are concerned with the well-being of that group only. They bring peace or trouble for kin-group members as a whole, but they do not kill group members. They are not concerned with the individual's day to day struggles for survival.

The ancestral spirits of a particular family represent that family only and influence kin-group ancestors in favour of that family within the kin-group. A person is believed to have maternal as well as paternal gods. Maternal gods are

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understood to be more lenient and protective, while paternal ones are strict and enforce legal and moral obligations. When a person is bewitched, it is believed that witches first persuade his gods, through magical performances, to hand him over. Divination bones are used to ascertain the handing-over before bewitching. This also confirms a successful undertaking without harmful consequences.

The various Venda tribes differ in the details of their ritual performances. The two popular rituals among the Venda are *malombo* possession dances (for Vhasenzi and most other tribes) and *mbila* and *tshanu* (for the Vhalemba). Reasons for the performance of these rituals range from tribal or kin-group misfortunes to death of a group member. In all these cases the ancestral spirits are invoked amidst singing, drum beating or mbila playing, dancing, and magical performances. Mostly women are possessed but sometimes men are also involved, especially when it is a man for whom, because of his illness or curses, the ritual is performed. Possessed people are considered as gods and are called *midzimu* or *vhakalanga*. They speak *tshikalanga* (a language related to Shona) and are asked about their names and complaints in that language. They also instruct the people on what to do to please them. Women possessed by male ancestral spirits are dressed in men's clothes. The *vhakalanga* may spend from one to ten days dancing to the accompaniment of drums, rattles and ululations and will then be sent back. Their food has to be strictly traditional, otherwise they would refuse to eat. Some of them require dagga (*Canabis sativa*) before they dance, especially those who used to smoke it during their lifetime. Venda ancestor cults are normally held during winter, when everybody is free from agricultural occupations. It is a convenient period after the harvests and people can brew large quantities of the various beverages required for religious ceremonies and celebrations. Initiation rituals for boys and girls also occur during this period. These, as well as the fact that it is the best period for building, collection of medicinal plants, migrations and resettlements, make winter as busy a season as summer for the Vhavenda.

Traditional education begins in early childhood and is largely informal. During the early stages the child learns mainly from the mother and baby-sitters. The child learns to respect and greet elders, listen and carry out instructions, and that misconduct is punishable.

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The child's learning is facilitated by folktales, fables and folk songs, the tale often illustrating the wisdom of obedience and proper behaviour. Most folk stories are about the existence of supernatural forces and their powers. Animals are often impersonated in such stories, with the most popular figures being *Sankambe* (the hare) representing a wise person, and *Muzhou* (the hyaena) the slow-witted one. Lions, tigers, elephants and snakes also feature prominently in folktales. The child gradually comes to understand the use and meaning of proverbial expressions, similarities and comparisons, e.g. *mapfura a ṅwana ndi u ruṅwa*, meaning that a child grows well when he or she readily agrees to being sent around by elders, *Muṱali u ḽa kanwe, tsilu ḽi ḽa kanzhi*, meaning that a person who robs others often succeeds once. At these early stages children learn to count, memorise, recite, praise and sing songs. Later, when the child is able to follow elders, he meets others of the same age and makes friends, with whom he will later go out to play. Children play *ndode, tsetsetse*, hide-and-seek, *nkhetheni* and touch games (*bune*) in the vicinity of homesteads. Boys and girls mostly play together in the early stages but later separate. They imitate elders by cooking mud (porridge) and leaves (vegetables) and building miniature huts and baby-carrying smaller objects.

From about age eight to eleven children are introduced to some form of formal education by attending a series of initiation schools. Boys and girls are initiated separately. The first initiation school for boys is *murundu*, followed by *tshiṱambo* (or *thondo*) and, later, probably also by *domba*, a ritual normally known to be popular for girls.

Girls attend their first initiation ritual just over school-going age. Their earliest initiation is known as *u fumba musevhetho*. In the past this ritual was, however, attended only by the Vhasenzi girls. At puberty, all girls go to a puberty ritual known as *vhusha*, followed by *ludodo* and *tshikanda* and, lastly, by *domba*, the initiation ritual for girls leading them to marriage.

At all these rituals, boys and girls are taught separately. They learn laws of life, their sexual roles and responsibilities, playing manners and, most importantly, obedience to and respect for the elderly. They are taught and trained to observe the culturally accepted laws of love and marriage.

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The ritual tone of initiation schools is always acknowledged and maintained. It is the responsibility of every initiated person to make these institutions an issue of primary importance through relentless participation, moral and material support. To ensure this, all people within the vicinity of *murundu* must avoid heavy and demanding activities such as ploughing, weeding and building when the initiation ritual is in progress, but may guard cattle, irrigate their winter crops and weave. No celebration of any other type may take place during this period. People must refrain from quarrels and fights. The only song allowed to be heard publicly is *hogo*, one of the many *murundu* songs that can be sung outside the initiation schools. Contravention of any of these restrictions is punishable and may carry a heavy fine. In case of such a violation of *murundu* laws, initiated boys and young and older men visit the home of the transgressor during the night. On arrival they would dance and sing *ngosha* for a whole night if no payment is made. In the process they may cause considerable damage to courtyard floors, mud walls and huts. The only way of getting them to leave, is to make an admission of guilt payment that will satisfy them, but they reserve the right to demand more than is offered. A verbal plight is insufficient and there is no opportunity for arguments, excuses or accusations. These missions are popularly known as *u tshinela*. During such missions to the villages, uninitiated men and boys who are over the initiation age, are captured and taken in for initiation. As a result of this legalized abduction, most uninitiated men go to areas outside the sphere of influence of *murundu*. Nowadays the urbanized areas are preferred for this purpose. Women must stay away from sites where men's rituals are performed and, similarly, men are not invited to those of women, except for *domba*.

Magical doctoring of all ritual institutions is a prerequisite. Venda ritual institutions are characterized by specific laws which are memorized and then used to prove that a person has been initiated. Uninitiated people are generally despised, isolated and looked down upon. They are referred to as *mashuvhuru*, a derogatory term, and are considered unfit to participate responsibly at tribal courts, and to marry. Initiated people generally do not feel free to discuss some of the most sensitive issues in their presence and express their irrelevance by saying: "*hu na makole*", literally meaning that it is cloudy.

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A fully initiated person is regarded as a grown-up, man or woman, and may enjoy a limited company of adults. Boys and girls at this stage are gradually introduced into adult life. They are expected to appreciate adult roles and responsibilities, understand their country's economic ups and downs, national security position and, depending on availability and association with skilled elders, may learn such adult tasks as building, thatching, weaving, wood carving, etc. at a larger scale. Marriage is the next important step. It normally opens the doors to participation in most national issues such as tribal courts and religious ceremonies. A hierarchy of power and authority, based on age difference and year of initiation, continues to exist and young people are expected to listen to elders even after initiation.

The Venda culture is rich in music and games. There is music and games for certain age groups and some that are enjoyed by all. Some songs are sung only at specific occasions. There are songs related to ritual ceremonies, initiation schools, fist fighting, grain pounding, cattle herding, work parties, war parties, general entertainment, drinking get-togethers, *etc*. There are games of numbers for children and some for adults, the most popular ones being *ndode* (for young girls), *mutoga* and *tshimea* (for boys) and *mufuvha* (for men). Some games require strength and endurance while others employ tricks of different kinds. Swimming is done at pools in the rivers and includes touch games (*bune*), *tshinwi* (submersion), and other activities. Most of these games and songs are largely informal and based on voluntary participation.

3.6 VENDA MEDICINE, DIVINATION AND MAGIC

It is true that the Venda people have, for ages, depended on the natural environment for their health and survival. This dependence continued with modifications for many years up until the 19th century, when western civilization with its inherent Christian nature challenged its credibility, particularly with respect to the medicinal, magical, ritual and religious aspects that are part of it.

Almost all the medicines used by the Venda people are derived from plants and, to a lesser extent, also from animals. Everybody brought up in a traditional

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Venda culture has a limited knowledge of those medicines used for the most common ailments such as colds, diarrhoea, colic, most sexually transmitted diseases, treatment of wounds, toothache, sore eyes, etc. This applies particularly to women, who tend to specialize in children's diseases.

3.6.1 Traditional medicinal practitioners, diviners and magicians.

Among the Vhavenda, some become distinguished as specialists in certain fields of medicinal practice. Such people may be referred to here as traditional medicinal practitioners. They pay special attention to the use of herbs in treating various diseases and rely on symptomatic diagnoses of diseases. Among these practitioners we find some who specialize in children's diseases, women's fertility problems, enemas and emetics, aphrodisiacs, sprains and fractures, fits, incurable ulcers related to cancer, or sexually transmitted diseases. There are also general practitioners who claim to treat all diseases, without specialization.

Diviners are people who normally do not treat diseases but who use their divinatory powers to determine causes and sources of people's health and social complaints. Generally, a set of divination dice made from bone and/or wood is used for this purpose. Each divination dice has two dissimilar sides with inscriptions which distinguish them from one another. It is the side on which a dice falls that is important in the interpretation of a throw. All the different types of dice make up a *mutavha*. Four of these together represent some sense or sentence termed *ḽiwa* (pl. *mawa*), the meaning of which depends on the combination of sides that show up. A complete set of divination dice must have eleven *mawa's* at a throw, i.e. it comprises 44 elements. Generally most people have less than this number and the divination set must be thrown down more than once to make up the required number of moves.

Some specialists do not use a divination set, but divine by means of a process known as *fembo* (meaning to smell). Those diviners who do not treat people usually direct them to other practitioners. The relevant practitioner is mostly also determined through divination or personal knowledge.

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Magicians are those specialists who make use of natural objects, usually plant and animal products, to produce amazing effects. They mostly engage themselves in the doctoring of people, homesteads and other properties that may have been tampered with by witches, sorcerers and ancestral curses. Most Venda practitioners, however, combine some or all of the specialized fields mentioned above, and it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to tell whether any one of them is a medicinal practitioner (herbalist), diviner or magician. The Venda people still attempt to distinguish them by using loose terms such as *ṅanga* (medicinal practitioner), *mungome* (diviner) and *maine*. It is an honour to be called by the title of *maine* which is used to refer to a family 'doctor'. Traditional practitioners remain respected members of the community and are frequently called upon to render their services in rituals and religious ceremonies.

To become a fully fledged practitioner in the traditional sense, a person must undergo some formal training under the supervision of an experienced practitioner. Anybody may train for this occupation, but mostly practitioner's children of their parent's choice are trained. In such cases a child is trained from his early childhood until he is old enough to practice on his own. Men usually choose sons, while women prefer to train daughters. There are also some who enter the profession after a long illness, particularly when it could not be treated by all known practitioners. This normally happens by way of advice by a diviner, and hinges upon a belief that ancestors may choose any family member to train for the practice, especially when there was somebody in the earlier generations of the family, who practiced with their support but had no successor.

Training involves registration for a period of a few months to more than ten years. During this time the trainee stays with the supervisor. He is not allowed to go home except for reasons of serious health problems, death, or other misfortunes affecting close relatives. The training process is termed *u bikelwa* or *u thwasa*. The latter term appears to have been borrowed and assimilated from Xitsonga.

Most people spend much of their time in the homes of their supervisors during training, while others are said to stay under water in pools of local rivers for long periods. Some of these are said to come out after many years with reeds growing from their backs.

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At first a trainee is basically taught to understand the ethics of the profession, diagnose illnesses from symptoms and interpret a set of divination dice. Initially a trainee accompanies his senior on medicine collection missions where he learns about medicinal plants their identification, geography and collection. At a later stage the initiates are sent out to collect required medicines on their own and, on returning, to prepare and have them ready for use. Towards the completion of the course, trainees are given an opportunity to treat patients, first those with minor complaints and later those suffering from complicated diseases.

When a patient arrives, it is the trainees who are expected to do all the spade work of collecting medicines, preparation and sometimes even its application. On completion of the course, the trainee is returned to his family in ceremony where animals are ritually slaughtered and people eat, drink and dance. At this stage he is equipped with enough medicines and experience to stand on his own, even though he may frequently have to seek advice from his trainer.

The traditional practice involves the identification of the problem (usually with the help of divination) first, and then treatment.. The divination set will not only inform the practitioner about the nature of the disease, but also whether he will be able to treat the patient. If he cannot do it, he should send him to somebody else.

In most treatments witchcraft is suspected, and medicines are included that will deal with that side of the illness. The same applies to cases where a person is believed to have been cursed by his ancestors, where medicines are used to remove the curse before the symptoms are treated. The role of ancestral spirits of both the practitioner and the patient is highly regarded in the successful treatment of patients.

The practitioner is paid for every treatment or consultation. The first payment to be made is the invitation fee termed *lutakuso*, the amount of which varies from one practitioner to another, followed by *luputululathevhele*, which allows the practitioner to open his bags of medicines and divination bones. This used to be half-a-crown (now 25c), but later changed to become R1.00. Practitioners may demand different amounts, but never less than R1.00. After divination and/or

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treatment is finished, a payment known as *luphaso* is made. There is no excuse for not paying *luphaso* as it is a share for the practitioner's ancestral spirits. Lastly, the payment known as *tshidzimu* is made. This may be paid later, even long after the treated patient has recovered. He is not expected to make this payment before he is satisfied with the results of the treatment. Local customers are, however, allowed treatment without payment of the amounts as mentioned above, but must still pay in the end. Close relatives are exempted from these payments. This also applies to close friends and neighbours, who may thank the practitioner by offering whatever they have.

It is more expensive to divine for a dead person (termed *thangu dza nnḓa*) to find the cause of death than for a person who is ill or feeling insecure (*thangu dza ngomu*). It is even more expensive to divine for people accusing one another of witchcraft. The payments for divination in cases of death or accusations of witchcraft range from R200.00 to R1000.00, or even more, depending on the consultant's status and goodwill.

3.6.2 Witchcraft

Witchcraft is understood by the Vhavenda to be an evil act performed by people through the use of medicines of plant and animal origin. The term *muloi* is used to refer to any person who uses magical powers to do evil acts. It also refers to anybody who has ill wishes towards others, e.g. one who wishes to see others suffer, plans to make them suffer or die, or poisons others. Witches who use magical medicines or other supernatural powers are understood to be more active during the night, when people are asleep. The reason for bewitching others is not clear, but it is probably done out of jealousy, to eradicate any form of competition, or to get some superhuman beings to help with the day-to-day struggles for existence.

Witches employ various techniques in their practice, some of the most popular of which are described below:

a) *U shelela*: This is one of the most common and popular witchcraft acts. Any form of poison is put in another person's food or drink. This technique

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is sometimes called *u l̂isa*. The most popular poison among the Vhavenda is *tshiganame*, which is rumoured to be a crocodile's brain or some other tissue obtained from that animal and is understood to be very poisonous in reasonably low concentrations. A small amount scraped under the finger-nail is reported to be able to kill a number of people by just dipping that finger into their cups of water or beer. It is sold at a reportedly very high price by people who were fortunate to obtain it at a reportedly very high price. It is therefore traditionally recommended that a dead crocodile must be burnt, not buried or it is insufficient to bury it. A poisoned person dies from uncontrollable vomiting but, if diagnosed quickly, may be saved. Medicinal practitioners claim to have potent medicines to treat poisoned people.

b) *Tshil̂iso*: A person is forced to swallow a piece of meat mixed with magical powders. On reaching the stomach, the meat is said to change into a living organism or object which controls the functioning of the body. It may cause vomiting, diarrhoea or pain. It may also cause undesirable discharges, either liquid or gaseous. Ultimately it may block the windpipe in such a way that the affected person is unable to breathe. After establishing itself in the body, it may show itself as an itchy skin rash, referred to by the Vhavenda as *mulilo*. A person is made to swallow this magically treated piece of meat when asleep at night, usually unaware of it the following morning as magical performances putting him/her into deep sleep are reported to be made before the meat is given.

The Vhavenda believe that a person has a central 'organ' in the body, possibly located in or very close to the stomach, that controls the whole functioning of the body -- strength, thinking, excretion, reproduction, etc. They call this 'organ' *n̂owa* (it means snake). Once this *n̂owa* can swallow the magical piece of meat or any "magical" medicine introduced into the stomach, it starts to behave under its influence. A person bewitched in this way cannot be treated successfully as he will vomit the medicines, or the medicines will pass through the alimentary system without being absorbed. Treatment involves application of medicines that will 'intoxicate' the *n̂owa* to allow for treatment, or those that will affect it in such a way that it returns to

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normal functioning. This is why practitioners advise a patient during treatment to take a dose of medicine before meals, which would then be the first thing that the *ṋowa* will swallow. Absorption of food and medicines will then return to normal. It is believed that this 'organism' will swallow the medicine and die after a number of doses. With the 'organism' killed, it becomes necessary for the patient to take medicines that will remove it from the body. Venda practitioners claim to be able to treat this type of illness and others claim to have medicines (emetics) that can remove it instantly through the mouth, in such a way that the patient will be able to see it.

c) *U doba*: This is a "magical" practice in which a person is bewitched by making use of any discharges from his body, including sweat, hair, urine or faeces. In the extreme end also objects with which a person has had contact are also used, e.g. soil from a place where he was seated, 'fingerprints', foot prints, etc. Some people are said to have become crippled after stealing others' property. When this is done by a practitioner to retaliate against a thief, it is known as *u sikela*. People have come to learn that if one steals another's domestic animal, the stomach and intestines should not be eaten, because the one who *sikela* will make use of the manure from the kraal or enclosure where the animal was kept. When medicines are used to "doctor" some property in order to discipline anybody who illegally tampers with it, the practice is known as *u dzivhela*. Traditional practitioners most probably employ this technique in the magical protection of their countries, homesteads, property, and countrymen.

d) *U livhanya*: Here "magical" performances are made by witches to get others into trouble. Various techniques may be employed to bring about the effect that the victim appears to have met with an accident.

e) *U rea*: Medicines are applied on some stick or thread that is put across a person's frequented path, mostly one from his homestead or garden, in such a way that he will unknowingly touch it. Sometimes merely stepping over it is enough to produce the desired effect. If, by touching this object, a person develops some unbearable pain or an incurable ulcer in the leg, he is said to have been *pfulwa* (i.e. to be struck, as with a spear). Some people simply

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sprinkle their medicines across the path to *rea* (trap) another person. It is said that the application of medicines in this way is always accompanied by other ritual performances and incantations to make sure that the medicines will affect the specific person, and nobody else who happens to come along. This technique is also reported to be used to make a passing or specific person lose his sense of direction and go to a place of their (witches') choice, where he will be at their mercy. He could be the victim of a ritual murder, converted into a *ḓuxwane* (see later in the section), or merely ill-treated. The latter is also known as *u kata*.

f) *U posela*: This involves throwing treated objects into other people's homestead in order to cause trouble. All or some selected people in the homestead may start to quarrel, fight or even kill one another. It may also cause a serious illness to some or all inmates of the homestead.

g) Most witches are believed to use familiars in their evil practice. Their familiars are reported to include polecats (*thuri*), baboons, owls, snakes and hyaenas. They may ride on some of these and use them as transport. They may even send them to go and bewitch others during the night. These familiars may have sexual relationships with unsuspicious persons of their choice. Some people think that witches make use of their "magical" medicines to change themselves into these familiars and that familiars are not real, but imaginary objects presented by the magic. The most popular familiar nowadays is *tokoloshi*, believed to have been imported from the Nguni tribes.

h) The use of "magical" lightning strikes is so popular among the Venda people that nobody is free during thunderstorms. Almost every homestead is treated against magical lightning, and in most of them lightning conductors are now fitted to protect families. Witches are believed to be able to strike a whole herd of cattle. Some forms of lightning are rumoured to snatch bags of mealie meal, furniture, or other property before burning the huts, or even without setting them alight. It is said that witches magically fly to their target, quickly complete the task, and return in one lightning strike. Some are said to smear the medicine on the target so that it will attract lightning,

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while others direct the lightning to the target by other methods. In all cases it is believed that they make use of natural lightning as they operate only during thunderstorms. It is believed that after a strike the witch does not go home, but quickly runs or flies to the nearest river to wash off the medicines. This is why after every strike, some people run to the river, hoping to catch the culprit red-handed.

There are rumours of some people who got caught trying to strike other people's homesteads. At one occasion a man was killed at the river. He is said to have run to the river after striking a hut in which a woman was hurt. On arrival at the river he found women washing clothes, and boys playing by the river. They were amazed by his attire and his confusion on finding them there. They shouted at him mockingly. People from neighbouring villages on either side of the river converged to the area. It is said that he tried to scare them away by producing lightning flashes from his hands, followed by thunderclaps, but people scattered in various directions only to gather again. This drama attracted more attention and was terminated by an angry villager who snatched the man's axe and killed him. His body was anointed with red, black and shiny medicines, and he wore feathers on his body.

i) Lastly, it is believed that some witches take people to make them superhumans called *maḓuxwane*. A person bewitched in this way is said to have been healthy when taken, leaving behind his replica who is ill. This replica ultimately dies and is buried. The replica is believed to be an imaginary figure presented by magic. Some people simply disappear without a trace. *Maḓuxwane* are said to be used in any occupation including cattle herding, ploughing, weeding and fencing fields. Nowadays educated people are said to be sent away to get jobs with different names, where they work for their masters. Stories of some people coming back from death after they were buried, other people meeting them in towns, sending goods or money to their masters, and some 'witches' threatened with death or killed to bring back the people they took, are very common in Venda today.

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Witches are believed to form clubs or societies with strong leaderships. They collaborate in their nightly errands. Some people are said to buy witchraft medicines, while others inherit them from their parents. Women are reported to make incisions around their daughters' waists and apply medicines that will automatically make them witches when they grow up. Witches are also diviners, or have diviners who determine the mixture to be used for specific homesteads or individuals. They are also believed to have magical mixtures which they use to appease other people's ancestors or gods and influence them to relax their protection so that they can be bewitched more easily.

The witch's identification is based on divination or circumstantial evidence. Practitioners are faced with the task of doctoring homesteads, people and their property, to protect them against all forms of witchcraft. Their medicines are said to operate in such a way that they make witches forget to visit their target, lose their way, be gripped with fear, or lose courage. Witches who are inmates of homesteads are made to oversleep. Some homesteads are doctored in such a way that witches will enter the homestead but will neither complete their tasks nor leave the premises. When found the following morning, they may be reported at the tribal court, or treated with "magical" mixtures that will kill them at their own homes, one by one. In most cases failure to overpower some people's magical protection may have fatal consequences. A person suffering as a result of retaliation is forgiven and made to pay a heavy fine, mostly an ox or two, if he goes to beg for clemency. Some traditional practitioners are also witches and go around testing other practitioners' strength. The loser must then pay heavily, usually secretly. Witches and practitioners who practice witchcraft are hated and isolated by the community. Many such people are killed or driven out of the country.

When a person is suspected of being a witch, the complainant goes to the headman to report the matter. This report must be accompanied by a payment. The headman or chief will then call his people, who will gather at a *khoro* and select representatives to accompany the complainant and the defendant to a *mungome* (diviner). This is called *u bva mungome*. In Venda the most popular diviners are found in the neighbouring Gazankulu homeland. The diviner will use his methods to confirm or refute the allegations. A person who is found guilty of being a witch must be made a *bemu* (removal of hair over a large part of the head) to help other

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people identify him on arrival back home. People will gather at the headman or chief's kraal to wait for the outcome. Angry community members may do anything to a witch, but the traditional step is to drive the witch across a river. This is done because of the belief that a witch cannot cross a river on his/her way to bewitch people. Hence, a person who lives across the river will not bother them again. Nowadays community members take it upon themselves to discipline a person who is suspected of being a witch, because, according to the present law, it has become a serious crime to suspect or accuse another person of being a witch.

3.7 SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

The Vhavenda have for long depended on subsistence economy where they produced only enough to support themselves for a few seasons. They ploughed fields, reared domestic animals, hunted and trapped game, and gathered food from the veld. They also made various types of artifacts from clay, iron, grasses and wood. These articles were, and still are, either kept for domestic use or exchanged for other domestic requirements.

3.7.1 Soil cultivation

It is not known how long ago the Vhavenda started with agricultural occupations. Evidence from folktales, fables, proverbs, and ritual practices suggests that they have been agriculturists since the very remote past. Some of the crops mentioned in tales and proverbs, as well as those closely related to ritual practices of unknown antiquity, are still found growing in most agricultural holdings of the Vhavenda.

As mentioned before, agricultural land is traditionally allocated to homesteads by chiefs through their headmen and *vhakomas*. These lands are inherited from generation to generation originating from the first families and have always experienced centripetal expansion as a result of growing families. The number of fields per family depended to a large extent on determination, manpower and commitment to agriculture.

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Agricultural holdings ranged from smaller plots along river banks, known as *miṱanga* and exposed to a semi-permanent supply of water drawn from these rivers, or seasonal flooding, through *zwikovha*, semi-dry areas on river valleys and larger than *miṱanga* to the largest *masimu* on the dry plains where dry farming is practised. until some few decades ago, any one family was entitled to receive all three types. Then conventional irrigation schemes were introduced, and river banks were declared buffer zones and fenced.

It is not known which crops are the oldest in Venda agriculture, but in the recent past grain crops such as maize, peanuts, groundnuts and beans were planted in *miṱanga* and *zwikovha*, while the drought-resistant cereals such as sorghum and various types of millet were grown in the larger and dry *masimu*.

The tilling and sowing in *masimu* took place seasonally and depended on rain. When no rain fell, rain doctors were consulted. These doctors "ordered for the extinction of all fires in the land ....followed by the doctoring of the land with medicines that purified the soil and finally attracted the fall of rain. If this failed, an expedition was taken to Malungudzi, Hatshinana, Hatshingoma, Hatshikwelengwe and even to Mubvumela and Matovha (Matopo Hills), places which could only be reached by the Manyusa who are Nwali Raluvhimba's High Priests. "The Manyusa, upon explaining the situation to Nwali, rain then did fall..." (W.M.D. Phophi, unpublished). Ancestral spirits also play important roles in ensuring good harvests.

Agricultural occupations were preceded by the ceremonial tilling of the Chief's special plot known as *gorosi*. Villagers also tilled special gardens known as *zwireṅwa-reṅwana*, for their headmen, while kin-groups or clans tilled gardens for their ancestral spirits in ceremonies known as *swonḍa*, to ensure good harvests. During the tilling of royal fields people also received small amounts of the doctored seeds, which they mixed with theirs to make them hardy and high-yielding.

The most important agricultural implement used was a hand hoe, followed by the recently acquired animal-drawn ploughs, spades, digging forks and rakes. Those who could not obtain rakes drew branches over tilled soil to level and to plant seeds sown after tilling. Tractors are also frequently used nowadays, but are still found too expensive to buy or hire by most subsistence agriculturists.

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The Venda calendar year is divided into months, the length of which is equal to the period between one new moon and the next, and seasons represented by regular changes in weather conditions, especially by the fall of rain. It appears as if the Venda people did not know of things such as weeks and weekends. Their first season is *Luṱavula* (spring) which is marked by the first rains known as *mvula-tseuli* and development of new leaves and flowers in certain plants. It is a busy season characterized by grading and doctoring of seeds, clearing of lands, tilling and sowing. This season is followed by *tshilimo* (summer) and *tshifhefho* (autumn). *Tshifhefho* is marked by the first ripening of wild fruits and some vegetable crops in agricultural plots. Consumption of these first fruits and vegetables is prohibited until the performance of first fruits and vegetable ceremonies for the ancestral spirits, known to the Vendas as *u tungula* or *u lumisa*. After these ceremonies all fruits and vegetables may be eaten. Lastly, there is the season known as *Mavhuyahaya*, which coincides with winter and is characterized by the ripening and harvesting of all summer crops. During this period a further ritual ceremony known as *thevhula* is performed to provide the ancestral spirits with their share of the new harvests. It is a period of much eating, drinking, building, migrations, attending of initiation schools, traditional games, art etc., while people are waiting for the new tilling season.

Nowadays, relatively few people remain loosely attached to some agricultural sites, many of these being dry lands. The possibility of any reasonable number of people acquiring irrigated lands, without others losing some, is remote. People seem to be overgrowing their prescribed environmental occupations and tend to spread their settlements into what used to be their main sources of agricultural products. At first the Vhavenda moved from the hill tops and mountain sides to settle in the valleys in compliance with the new, more systematic and civilized settlement pattern of stands, wards and districts. For reasons of accessibility these blocks of stands (each with its own headman) always had a tendency to spread into the valleys and flat plains. Each village experiences centripetal growth and every time new stands are added, some families lose arable land. Through population increase and migration, some settlements have expanded so much that agricultural production in a civilized sense is impossible. In most areas the shortage of arable land is so serious that people are once again allowed to plough along river banks, calling these plots *zwidimana* or *ngade* (garden). Most Venda people who initially

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relied on agriculture have lost interest in the practice and try to get employment in towns, shops or farms. Some people attempt to combine agricultural occupations and civil employment, attending their agricultural interests after hours or over weekends. Still fewer, those who have larger and fertile lands, either as a result of long standing commitment, political influence or financial assistance by government-subsidized institutions, remain to produce enough for subsistence and sometimes even for marketing.

3.7.2. Animal husbandry

The Vhavenda are semi-pastoralists and have practised animal husbandry side by side with agriculture. They reared cattle, goats and sheep. All these domestic animals are collectively referred to as *thakha*, something which gratifies, or brings some relief or well-being. Cattle are referred to as *thakha ya mutsindo* (heavy-hoofed animals), while goats and sheep are known as *thakha i sina mutsindo* (light-hoofed animals). At times these animals are referred to as *muhungo*, meaning what one owns at hand, that might be pointed at while fastened to a pole. Goats and sheep are also known as *khungwaṋduni*, because they are sometimes accommodated inside huts, where they are fastened to short poles. They are also called *zwibatanganyanga* because they are mostly handled by their horns. The Vhavenda never appear to have reared fowls.

Domestic animals, particularly cattle, are treated like human beings. They are also treated by medicines that protect them against witches and other evils. Their enclosures are provided with their own magical protections apart from the ones for the whole homestead. It is a very strict taboo for women who are still in childbirth to enter cattle enclosures. Every domestic animal (except sheep) is given a praise name while still young. Such names as *Thitkwa, Khwara, Phonze, Tshivhai* etc., and *Matsangaluwa, Maphongo, Mutshena, Tshiṋangatshivhi* etc., are common for cattle and goats respectively.

Cattle, goats and sheep play important roles in the religion of the Venda people. They represent a link between the living and their ancestral spirits. Some animals, usually black, are chosen to represent the ancestral spirits and are even

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named after them. Such animals are called by the names of *Makhulu* or *Malume*. Cattle usually represent paternal ancestors while goats represent maternal ones; a male animal for a male and vice versa. During ritual performance these animals are taken from their enclosures and brought into the courtyard where people are gathering. Here they are poured with religious beverages, their reactions having much meaning: when they shake the liquid from their bodies, people become happy and ululate, saying the ancestors have responded.

A person's livestock represents his capital and is valued as a medium of exchange. It is important as a bride price during marriages and can be used to pay fines or make offerings to respected people like chiefs. Cattle are rarely slaughtered, and then only at the Chief's kraal for respectable visitors, especially those who come in organized groups like *tshikona*, *matangwa*, and *zwigombela*, as well as upon death or inauguration of a Chief. Commoners sometimes slaughter their cattle during food shortages, when meat is exchanged for grain, upon the death of an adult family member, and during ritual ceremonies. Goats and sheep are usually slaughtered to provide relish for visitors, work parties and initiates returning from rituals institutions.

Apart from meat, cattle and goats also provide milk (sheep milk is used only for medicinal purposes). Milk is used to relish porridge when fresh or sour. Horns of cattle, goats and sheep are used for various purposes such as drawing water, as trumpets and for holding medicines. Hides are processed to make clothes, mats, ropes, shoes, etc. Plumes from the tails of cattle are used as a framework for bangles and anklets for womenfolk. Fresh cow dung and sometimes that of goats and sheep is used to smear floors in courtyards and huts. When lightning strikes a place, the curd of sheep's milk is used for doctoring such a place. Newly built homesteads are doctored with medicinal preparations mixed with the curd of sheep's mlik, and sometimes also that of a goat to scare away all evils brought by witches and wizards. "The skull of a sheep is used ceremonially in the case of someone who died away from home. When his spirit gave trouble in that it wanted to be brought home amongst its people, this was used in proxy when a miniature grave was made to lay his remains, represented by the skull of a sheep" (Phophi, W.M.D., unpublished).

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3.7.3 Hunting and trapping of wild game

The Vhavenda hunted wild game as a part-time occupation in times of peace and when other activities, especially agriculture, were at a standstill. They hunted large and small game, including birds, and used poisoned arrows, clubs and spears, as well as dogs. They often used snares of different types to trap and kill game. Birdlime was used only to trap birds. From game they obtained meat, hides, horns and fats. Carnivorous animals are not eaten but also supply hides for making clothes and fats for mixing with medicines. Nestlings and eggs of birds are also collected and used to supplement food.

3.7.4 Collection and gathering of fruits, vegetables, locusts and other insects, and extraction of bee-hives

"In all necessities for subsistence, the collection of fruit and berries preceded agriculture and hunting" (Phophi, unpublished). This probably also applies to the gathering of wild vegetables, insects and their products.

As the various fruits ripen at different seasons, they are gathered throughout the year. Fruits are classified as those that are gathered from mountains and mountain sides and those found in the valleys and along river basins. Some are considered as important famine foods and given more attention when they become available.

The Vhavenda also depend on gathering vegetables, mushrooms, locusts and insects such as "mopani worms" and other edible caterpillars found on plants such as *Burkea africana, Ekebergia meyeri, Diospyros pallens, Peltophorum africanum* and others (known variously as *mashonzha*, *mafhulu, mafhera,* etc.). They also gather termiterium and flying termites (known as *madzhulu, nṱhwa,* and *ṋemeṋeme* respectively) and also extract honey and other products from bee-hives as well as from hives of other insects known as *monga*, *done*, and *mbani*.

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3.7.5 Miscellaneous requirements

Apart from obtaining food from their natural environment as mentioned above, the Vhavenda also harvest considerable amounts of medicines from the veld. They use these medicines to treat themselves relatively free of charge, but other patients pay varying amounts in the form of livestock, grain or money. Some medicines are exchanged for other valuable articles or medicines, especially with peoples from other parts of the country where these are unavailable or unknown. The natural environment also serves as the only source of firewood and materials for building, art and recreation (see also in Chapters 5 and 6).

3.7.6 Production

a) Role of magico-religious aids in production

The role of magic in the economy of the Vhavenda is illustrated by the doctoring of livestock, arable lands, seeds and crops by individual family groups, and of the land with its wild fruit-bearing plants and water bodies as a national responsibility. Performance of family and national rituals in relation to the ripening of wild indigenous fruits and agricultural crops indicates the recognition of the role played by the ancestral spirits.

At the burial of a family member, the Vhavenda sow seeds of various types of crops and "tell" the deceased that they have exhausted their seed resources and that he or she must remember that in the next season when they plant their corps.

Magico-religious powers are also believed to affect the people's luck during their hunting, gathering and trading trips. It is considered partly an ancestral curse if most of the clay pots break during burning, or if wooden crafts crack prematurely. The ancestors are always reminded to help make this art a success. There are some people who always catch more of everything (e.g. birds, fish, or game) than others who are trapping with them and using the same materials. Such people are despised and said to have a

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magical medicine that attract these animals to their traps only; such medicine is called *mutzimbe*. Others generally avoid working with them.

b) Division of labour

Division of labour exists among the Vhavenda and is based on sex, age and, sometimes, also specialization. Duties such as cooking for the family, fetching water from rivers and streams, sweeping, plastering and polishing the homesteads, gathering of vegetables and firewood, sowing, weeding, harvesting and washing clothes have always been left to women. Men perform relatively heavy tasks such as construction of fences, thatching, ploughing with cattle, cattle herding, hunting and trapping as well as war. Within each of the two groups there also exist responsibilities for specific age groups, e.g. boys first look after goats and then later, cattle. Thatching is a responsibility only for adult men, but men never collect locusts and caterpillars. Certain individuals in the community enjoy the status of being specialists, especially those who excel in metal works, wood carving, weaving, etc.

Some tasks are done by individuals, e.g. weaving, woodcarving, iron smelting, thatching, trapping of game, etc., while others such as gathering of vegetables, wood and insects, cattle herding, hunting and tilling, weeding and harvesting of royal fields, are communal activities. The Vhavenda in villages co-operate in a variety of jobs and, in many cases, organize work parties where the people are rewarded with porridge, meat and beer.

c) Distribution of wealth

As mentioned before, the wealth of the Venda family is represented by livestock and arable lands. Cattle, goats and sheep are inherited from parents or acquired from marriage of daughters in the family. These are frequently exchanged for other domestic requirements, especially grain and artifacts made from wood, fibre and metals.

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The marriage of any one woman has always been accompanied by the transfer of eight heads of cattle, known as *mamalo*. Livestock could also be acquired after some exceptional performance of duties for wealthy families such as building or medical treatment of members. They are sometimes farmed out to relatives or friends and, for looking after them, a person responsible may be given one animal after every two or more years. The Chief or Headman frequently receives offers from his subjects, and during periods of shortage or during national celebrations these are sometimes returned to some citizens. It had been a primary objective for most Vhavenda to work for many years towards the acquisition of livestock, and there was a time when very few Vhavenda did not have cattle, goats or sheep.

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