

Chapter One

Venda Historiography

In this introduction to the study I give a critical analysis of the anthropologists, historians and other scholars who played the most important role in creating what is known today as Venda history. It is important to note that before the arrival of the Berlin Missionaries in the Soutpansberg (as the geographical area has been commonly known since the nineteenth century), not much was written or known about Venda history outside of the communities themselves.

Early Writers on the Vhavenda

Wessmann

Reinhold Wessmann was one of the first persons to write about Venda history and folklore. He was a German missionary who worked in Venda from 1885 to 1905. He spent most of his time in the Northern Transvaal¹ observing the general life of Venda communities in the area, looking at laws, traditions, beliefs and customs.² In his book *The Bawenda of the Spelonken*, he paid attention to their origin, their rulers, family structure, social laws and social life, administration of justice, their beliefs, languages and customs. Wessmann noted that the Vhavenda at that time comprised about one-third of the entire population of the Soutpansberg area. It is very clear from Wessmann's perspective that the Vhavenda were difficult to conquer and observed that it was the last "tribe"³ to surrender its independence

1 Transvaal: Literally, the area 'trans', or across, or 'north of' the Vaal River (and south of the Zambesi River. During the nineteenth century the name became associated with the Boer Republic (the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republic, or South African Republic). While under British occupation, it was referred to as the Transvaal Colony, and after unification in 1910, it became one of the four provinces of South Africa. The Soutpansberg was the northern-most district of the Transvaal, and this district together with its broader surrounding area, was commonly referred to as the northern Transvaal, which became the Northern Province of the post-Apartheid South Africa in 1994. Its name had subsequently been changed to Limpopo Province.

2 Reinhold Wessmann worked on the mission stations Georgholtz and Tshakhuma in Vendaleland. He wrote the book *The Bawenda of the Spelonken* after his suspension from the service of the Berlin Missionary Society. L. Zöllner and H. Heese, *The Berlin Missionaries in South Africa and their Descendants*, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1984, p. 462.

3 Although the term "tribe" was and is still widely used in scholarly as well as in popular literature, and in spoken language, the concept is used sparingly in this study because of the way it has been appropriated by colonial governments as a means of subdividing, subjugating, and administering communities and restricting their movement as well as their access to land. For an extensive discussion of the use of the word in South African

to European colonisers in South Africa.⁴ He was of the opinion that the Vhavenda were probably only a part of a greater “tribe” whose dwellings were looked for in the Congo, where, according to the oldest Portuguese maps, there were still people of the same name still living in that area.⁵ It was thought that as the Matabele had separated from King Shaka and settled in Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) after their trek through the Transvaal, so the Vhavenda migrated to the south during the course of their wars.

The Vhavenda, like nearly all sub-Saharan African communities, had no literature written on them until their encounter with Europeans in the nineteenth century. At the time Wessmann’s recording commenced, their oral traditions confirmed the existence of more than 450 proverbs.⁶ Wessmann attested that the Vhavenda have been monarchists from time immemorial.⁷ Kings have descended by direct line which is still the practice today. Wessmann’s assessment of the Venda people was based on his daily interaction with them while he was doing his missionary work. His perspective of the Vhavenda was based on his intention to study the history of the Bantu-speaking peoples of the Northern Transvaal to be able to make a distinction in terms of their beliefs, customs, traditions, languages and other aspects of daily life. I noted that Wessmann decided to use the name Bawenda (Vhavenda) in his study rather than using any very specific clan names such as Singo, Ngoni or Lemba. Whether it was deliberate or not, I cannot ascertain. This was quite contrary to what most scholars writing on the Venda discourse have done ever since. In most cases scholars such as L.P. Lestrade, N.J. van Warmelo, N.V. Ralushai, M.H. Nemudzivhadi and J.W.N. Tempelhoff made a distinction between Singo, Ngoni and Lemba before they put them into one ‘Vhavenda’. Wessmann’s analysis of the Venda communities will help me in this thesis to deal with the question of rulership in the present day and understand the notion of spiritual beliefs in the Venda tradition which played a role in prolonging the lives of some of their *mahosimahulu*. Wessmann also helped to unpack the evolution of the Vhavenda’s beliefs from people who relied more on tradition, customs and some other ‘superstitious’ beliefs to

anthropology, see the various contributions to E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds.), *South African Keywords. The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1988.

4 R. Wessmann, *The Bawenda of the Spelonken*. The African World, London, 1908, p. 9.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

6 *The Bawenda* Wessmann is referring to here are the Singo people. As for the claim that they have been monarchists from time immemorial, this study is not sure about that.

7 R. Wessmann, *The Bawenda of the Spelonken*, p. 11.

a community that was able to adjust to western norms. This change had to do with the interaction with white missionaries and other ethnic communities in the Soutpansberg.

Lestrade

Then there were the successive colonial governments who had their own plans to control the black people of South Africa. While subjugation of all the independent African polities had been concluded by the end of the South African War in 1902, continued subjection and control required some knowledge, and became increasingly challenging once the former Transvaal, Free State, Cape and Natal Colonies unified in 1910 and industrialisation accelerated. In 1925 the Department of Native Affairs of the Union of South Africa established an Ethnological Section. Gerard Paul Lestrade was the first anthropologist to be appointed as the Head of the newly created Section. The government might have thought that his knowledge in the study of humans would help the department in formulating a policy of racial segregation. In his assessment of the history of anthropology in South Africa, W.D. Hammond-Tooke acknowledged that there have been a number of studies about the part played by the South African Department of Native Affairs in the formulation of first the segregation and later the apartheid policy⁸. It was also reiterated that reference has occasionally been made to the possible role of the Ethnological Section of the Department under Lestrade and later, under N.J. van Warmelo, in promoting the racial policies of the then government of South Africa. As a specialist section and supposedly with expertise on 'the native', there were always questions of the involvement of the section in advancing the plan of the government to control the black community of South Africa through racial segregation.

In the 1920s some articles were beginning to be produced by anthropologically trained scholars and Letsrade was one of them. In 1927 he made his first publication on Venda ethnic history and in 1930 he followed up with two useful publications on the Venda people, their political organisation and their marriage customs. It can be argued that, after the earliest missionary writing, the work of Lestrade forms the basis of the Venda history written by other scholars who came after him. For his publication "Some Notes on the Political Organization of the Venda-Speaking Tribes" he relied mostly on information collected by himself from the

⁸ W.D. Hammond-Tooke, 1997, *Imperfect Interpreters*. South African's Anthropologists 1920-1990, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, p. 109.

nndu ya vuhosi of the Mphaphuli at Mbilwi in Sibasa and he also collected some information from members of the *nndu ya vuhosi* of the Madzivhandila in Tshakhuma and supplemented the information with what he obtained elsewhere in Venda. Lestrade's work paid more attention to the Venda customs, laws and marriages than to their history.

In trying to give credence to his work, Lestrade tried to trace the origins of the Venda people to the area north of the Limpopo River. From his interaction with his interlocutors it came out that the original nucleus of the people forming the distinctive element in the present Venda-speaking group, had its home probably somewhere in the region now constituting Malawi.⁹ This revelation is a very interesting one considering the long-held view that the Vhasenzi people are originally from central Congo. It is, however, important to note that the Vhasenzi might have settled in what is today Malawi on their way to the south. From there they would have moved southwards in a series of migrations, incorporating members of several other communities on the way, and settling for some considerable time amongst Shona-speaking peoples in what is today Zimbabwe. It was there, according to Lestrade's research, where the Vhavenda absorbed a certain proportion of Shona blood and a considerable amount of Shona culture, more especially, the language¹⁰. Lestrade was of the opinion, that the Vhavenda left for the Soutpansberg after a short interaction with the Shona-speaking people. It is very clear that the Venda people easily adapted to a new environment and the new people they met while on migration. On their arrival in the Soutpansberg, they found some semi-independent groups in what is now called the Limpopo Province and they stayed mainly in the Soutpansberg and Nzhelele valley. The Sotho-speaking people, the Ndebele, the Shangaan and the Lemba people were amongst those the Venda people lived with in the Soutpansberg. The Lemba came to the Soutpansberg with the Vhasenzi, who are today part of the Venda community.

Lestrade held the view that the Venda political organization was somehow influenced by the people they interacted with while they were on migration. Lestrade argued that there were Nguni influences which seemed to appear in Venda culture and may be more readily ascribed

9 G.P. Lestrade, 1927, Some Notes on the Political Organization of the Venda-Speaking Tribes, *South African Journal of Science*, 24, p. 306.

10 *Ibid.*

to later and stronger Nguni influence, e.g. that of the post-Shaka Ndebele raiders, and even though perhaps not so certainly, to that of the 'Shangaan' element which lived close to and in constant contact, whether of peace or war, with the Venda people.¹¹ It may be said that in general, according to Lestrade, the political organization of the Vhavenda is very similar to that of adjacent communities while leaning more towards the Sotho than the Shona, Ndebele or "Shangaan" model. Lestrade believed that the same fundamental distinction was made between the political unit, the tribe (*lushaka*, pl. *dzitshaka*), and the various social units, the family (*shaka*, pl. *mashaka*), and the clan (*mutupo*, pl. *mitupo*), just as there was a distinction between these social units and the various ritual and ceremonial symbols with which they were connected – the food and other taboos (*tshiila*, pl. *zwiila*).¹²

Lestrade's research at the Ethnological Section provided the Department of Native Affairs with more insight into the political organization of the Venda communities regarding their language, customs, traditions and culture. In the coming chapters, the thesis will not dwell as much on the political organization as was the focus of Lestrade, but rather attempt to unpack the issue of *vuhosivhuhulu* disputes which had marred the Venda *vuhosivhuhulu* since the Vhasenzi's arrival in the Soutpansberg in the early 1700s.

Van Warmelo

Nicholas Jacobus van Warmelo was one of the scholars who contributed immensely to creating and shaping the history of the Venda people. He was born in Pretoria on 28 January 1904 and he graduated with MA *cum laude* in classics at the University of Stellenbosch. He developed an interest in studying African people from his university days and this was evident when in 1925 he proceeded to Hamburg, Germany, where he was a member of Carl Meinhof's *Seminar für Afrikanische Sprachen* (Seminar for African Languages) and also studied under the anthropologist Thilenius. In 1927 he achieved the doctorate (*summa cum laude*) in African Languages with a thesis entitled *Die Gliederung der südafrikanischen Bantusprachen* (the Classification of the Bantu Languages of South Africa). Van Warmelo's career as a collector of information about the black communities of South Africa started on 7 March 1930 when he

11 G.P. Lestrade, 1927, Some Notes on the Political Organization of the Venda-Speaking Tribes, *South African Journal of Science*, 24, p. 307.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 308.

was appointed Government Ethnologist in the Department of Native Affairs. He replaced Lestrade and occupied the post for 39 years until his retirement in 1969.¹³

The Ethnological Section became almost synonymous with Van Warmelo. For the first fifteen years of his appointment, he was the only member of the Section. During this period the section changed its direction and started focusing on policy formulation. Hammond-Tooke acknowledged the role played by Van Warmelo in trying to disseminate the knowledge about all the Bantu-speaking people. His appointment saw the role of ethnography enhanced in the South African government. Before the arrival of Van Warmelo, not much was studied about the Bantu-speaking people of South Africa. Immediately after taking over, he was faced with a big problem: what role his Section should play in the Department of Native Affairs. He found the data coverage of the Bantu people to be scrappy; the Department was void of a clear policy, apart from maintenance of law and order ('good government'). The 'reserves' were divided into districts, each under a magistrate, and these districts were subdivided into 'locations' under government-appointed headmen.¹⁴ I think this should be the reason why there were cases where 'kings' and 'chiefs' were despised by the people.

During the early years of Van Warmelo as Government Ethnologist there were a lot of people who were sceptical about the role of the Ethnological Section. Hammond-Tooke highlighted the fact that it was well known; even in the 'enlightened' British Colonial Service, that the role of the anthropologist in administration was unclear, and not always welcomed.¹⁵ However, he acknowledged that there were two areas where ethnographic information was obviously useful. He cited indigenous law and succession disputes over the chieftainship as examples. Van Warmelo's major activities in the Section were the production of the five volumes on Venda Law with the assistance of the local historian W.M.D. Phophi, and the extensive body of official files on chiefly genealogies, tribal histories and the details of local politics that accumulated in the Section.¹⁶

13 W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters ...*, p. 111.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

As a linguist by profession, he also encouraged a number of local historians, mainly school teachers, to record 'chiefdom' histories and descriptions of 'custom'. These were, most of the time, in the vernacular, and continue to constitute a largely untapped corpus of local knowledge. Hammond-Tooke held the opinion that it is probably true to say that the Ethnographic Section's main work during the 1930s and 1940s was to advise on chiefly succession.¹⁷ One can also note that the relationship between Van Warmelo and the state was not that merry, because the former was very sceptical of the grand theory and ideological preoccupations of the state. However, he did advise the Department on specific matters when called upon to do so.

Van Warmelo's distrust of theory was shown specifically in his anthropological work and he attested to Hammond-Tooke that he saw his role as a recorder of swiftly changing cultures and that the full explanation of these matters was a task for future generations. He preferred to refer to himself as merely the means by which the knowledge of others could be made public. Hammond-Tooke believed that this explains his emphasis on presenting the vernacular text, with translation and comments, in most of his publications. Van Warmelo held the opinion that people should speak for themselves.¹⁸

When the National Party came into power in 1948 with an urgent focus on solving the 'Native Question', the Native Affairs Department was rapidly *Afrikanerised*, with nationalist ideologue W.M. Eiselen appointed as Secretary for Native Affairs. The Department of Native Affairs now for the first time thought of a comprehensive policy on the future of Africans. The idea of Bantu Authorities was developed, based on the principle of Indirect Rule as practised in the British African colonies, in order to exclude Africans from formally participating in the politics of the South African state. Although Van Warmelo himself never played a part in the formulation of apartheid policies, his classification system played a huge role in shaping the boundaries of the Bantu Authorities introduced in the 1950s.¹⁹

17 W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters ...*, p. 113.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

19 The planners of Bantu Authorities referred to here are the National Party.

One can argue that Van Warmelo was a victim of the National Party policies which were created on basis of his work years after he had left office. His work was not intended to segregate the black people of South Africa. Like any other person Van Warmelo was not short of controversy as he was accused of favouring a local *mahosi* in disputes with other Venda *mahosi*. Hammond-Tooke found that his field assistant of many years, Venda historian W.M.D. Phophi, was politically too ambitious, and that the material collected by Phophi himself may be particularly prone to bias.²⁰ However, I do acknowledge the massive role played by Van Warmelo in disseminating the history of the Venda people through his ethnographic work and the detailed analysis of the disputes about the *vuhosivhuhulu* of the Venda polity he provided in his volumes.

Schapera and Hoernlé

Isaac Schapera was a social anthropologist at the London School of Economics specialising in South Africa. He later moved to the University of Cape Town as a Professor of Social Anthropology. In July 1934 the South African Inter-University Committee for African Studies took a resolution to sponsor the preparation and publication of a “handbook of South African tribes”. Schapera and Professor W.M. Eiselen of the University of Stellenbosch were given a task to edit the book but Eiselen had to quit after being appointed Chief Inspector of Native Education for the Transvaal Province. The publication was made possible through the collaboration of several social anthropologists. I am more interested in the work of Winifred Hoernlé, who contributed by looking at the social organization of the black people²¹ of South Africa. She argued that chieftainship was a very important institution in the whole political life of these communities.²²

In the Schapera handbook the social organization of the Vhavenda was described as almost the same as most other South African “tribes” with the underlying “kingship structure”, the hierarchy of age, and the dominance of one lineage in the political structure.²³ The role of

20 W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters ...*, p. 115.

21 W. Hoernlé, Social Organization, in I. Schapera (ed.), *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962, p. 67.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 93. In this discussion of Hoernlé’s (and Schapera’s) work, I did not translate any concepts from English back into TshiVenda, but kept them as these authors had used them, in inverted commas.

women in the Venda social and political structure was described as very important: the sister closely linked to her brother right through life, and, in the case of the *khosikhulu*, the father's sister²⁴ was also meant to play a part in the administrative and religious life of the people.²⁵ Among the Vhavenda, *makhadzi muhulu* of *khosikhulu*, or failing her, the senior sister, was described as having a somewhat analogous position.²⁶ She had to be consulted on all important communal affairs, was described as having exercised a great influence over the *khosikhulu's* personal and political conduct, and deserving of being treated with almost the same respect and formality accorded to him. According to Schapera, the sisters and daughters of the *khosikhulu*, as leaders of the female age-regiments, commanded special authority over the women of the community, apart from the general respect they enjoyed by right of birth. The Venda and their few Northern Sotho neighbours were considered to be exceptional in that, among them, a "chief" could appoint one (or several) of his sisters as "headmen" over some villages or even districts, the succession to this office then tending in some cases to be confined to females.²⁷

Schapera have noted that disputes over succession to the "chieftainship", or quarrels arising from other causes among members of the royal family, could lead to splits, the dissidents either seeking refuge with some other "chief" or setting up an independent polity of their own.²⁸ The arguments presented here by Schapera and those who contributed to the handbook on the social and political organization of the black people of South Africa, specifically with reference to the Vhavenda, will help the thesis in the coming chapters, more especially when it tries to unpack the role of women in the succession disputes. The research on which the Schapera book was based, also dismisses the myth promoted by some Venda traditional leaders today, that a woman has no birth right to *vuhosivhuhulu* or *vuhosi*.

Stayt

Hugh Arthur Stayt was a South African anthropologist who grew up amongst the Venda people and later returned as a student of their culture. Stayt dedicated his time to compiling

24 W. Hoernlé, *Social Organization ...*, p. 94.

25 I. Schapera (ed.), *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962, p. 181.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

a monograph of the Venda culture and history during the many months he spent in various parts of the Soutpansberg with different communities of the Venda people. Stayt was able to distinguish that the social organisation and beliefs of the Venda people were not comparable to any other communities in the Republic of South Africa. He highlighted what he perceived as the close proximity of the Venda legends and customs to the culture that was revealed in connexion with the ruins of Great Zimbabwe. Stayt found links between the older forms of the Venda language and those of present-day Zimbabwe.²⁹

The More Recent Generations of Researchers

With the era of ethnographers as the major contributors to the Venda history coming to an end, a new era dominated by scholars who had qualified as historians, beckoned. This saw the rising prominence of local historians such as Victor Ralushai and Mphaya Henry Nemudzivhadi and also many others who were not locals, amongst them Johan Tempelhoff, Alan Kirkaldy and Fraser McNeill.

Historians, anthropologists and political scientists

Ralushai

Nkhumeleni Victor Ralushai was a Venda historian who studied many fields from linguistics, sociology, and social anthropology, to history. He was born and brought up in Sibasa in Venda, (today) Limpopo Province. Ralushai realised before his university days that he had an interest in the history and customs of his Venda people. In his thesis submitted in 1977 to Queen's University of Belfast for a doctorate in Social Anthropology; he looked critically at Venda history as presented in written sources.³⁰ Here he was looking at the number of accounts presented by different scholars about the Venda people. In this case he looked at the myth of Venda isolation, the limited boundaries of most Venda studies, and theories of Venda origins and views on Venda society, culture and history as presented by different scholars. Ralushai also looked at the issue of Venda *mitupo* and issues of *vhuloi*.

29 H.A. Stayt, *The Bavenda*, Frank Cass, London, 1968.

30 V.N. Ralushai, *Conflicting Accounts of Venda History with Particular Reference to the Role of Mutupo in Social Organisation*. Doctoral Thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1977.

Ralushai's thesis exposed some gaps in some of the Venda literature published previously and he tried to unpack some of the distortions presented in those early writings. He was able to do that by carrying out very extensive field work in all the areas where Venda people had settled, not only in Venda but also Johannesburg and what was then Rhodesia.³¹ He held the opinion that his close connection with some *vhothovhele* of Venda, more so *Thovhele* Mphaphuli, and the fact that he was interviewing people in their own language, had given him a great advantage.

Ralushai's perspective on the history of the Venda people will assist this study to draw its own conclusions on the facts about the Venda people's origin, more so about the Masingo and their rulers. It is quite apparent that there are conflicting views about the Venda people's origins. Ralushai, though critical in his analysis of the origins, failed to offer any definitive answer in his thesis. It is also important to note that he relied strongly on his supervisors, Professor J.A.R. Blacking and Professor R. Gray, who both helped him with his fieldwork. He also relied on Lestrade, Van Warmelo, Motenda (to be mentioned again in subsequent chapters) and others. This makes his work not too different from what scholars before him had presented in their studies. However, I acknowledge that he outlined the history of Venda in detail covering issues such *mitupo ya* Vhavenda and *vhuloi*. These are issues which were either not covered in detail, or not covered at all, by the previous scholars.

Nemudzivhadi

Mphaya Henry Nemudzivhadi, like Ralushai, is a Venda historian whose intention was to write the Venda history from a different perspective to that presented by government ethnologists and other anthropologists. He also had a mission to present Vhavenda as people within the orbit of South African history and to do so, he referred to traditional institutions such as *vhuhosivhuhulu*. He believed, and rightly so, that such institutions were deeply rooted in Venda culture.³² He was of the opinion that the traditions and culture of the Vhavenda were the basis of much of the disagreement between officials of the nineteenth century Boer

31 According to Ralushai there were about 425 000 Venda people in South Africa in 1977 with the biggest majority in the then Northern Transvaal and few in the Witwatersrand, Pretoria and Rhodesia.

32 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict between Mpephu and the South African Republic (1895 – 1899)*, MA dissertation, University of South Africa, 1977, p. 3.

Republic and the traditional leaders of the Venda people. He also stressed that most scholars misunderstood the culture, tradition and political and social structure of the Vhavenda. He claimed that scholars before him portrayed the Vhavenda as a nation consisting of differing tribal units and clans, bound by a common language and land of habitation.³³ Nemudzivhadi was of the opinion that he could present a more accurate and organised history of the Venda people compared to what had been written before.

I observed that Nemudzivhadi tried to present a different narrative of the Venda history by focusing more on the conflicts between the Vhavenda and the Boers (Voortrekkers). He also dealt more with the issue of *vuhosivhuhulu* disputes in the era of Makhado. However, I do not concur with the claims of Nemudzivhadi that the Vhangona, who are widely regarded as *vhongwaniwapo* of what is called Venda now, were originally from Angola.³⁴ I personally find the claims baseless without any substantial evidence coming from the scholar.

Tempelhoff

Johann Tempelhoff is a historian who was commissioned by the Louis Trichardt Transitional Local Council³⁵ to write the history of the Soutpansberg³⁶ from early human settlement until recent times. He provided evidence of early occupation of the Soutpansberg by people of the Late Stone Age; arguing that they had close links with the San (or Bushmen).³⁷ Tempelhoff holds a view that scientists of today are more familiar with people of the late Stone Age dating from about 30 000 years ago. It is commonly believed that these people had strong ties with the San (or Bushmen). These assumptions are strongly supported by lucid traces of art left on rock faces in caves and shelters in the Soutpansberg region.³⁸ However, Tempelhoff considered that historians know relatively little about the identity of the pre-late Stone Age

33 M.H. Nemudzivhadi, *The Conflict between Mphephu and the South African Republic ...*, p. 3.

34 There is also the already-mentioned argument, which will be discussed during the course of the study, that the origins of the Vhavenda lie in "the Congo". It might thus be possible that Nemudzivhadi had the ancient Congo kingdom which had included parts of what is today northern Angola, in mind.

35 The Louis Trichardt Transitional Local Council is now known as the Makhado Municipality. These changes came about after the 1994 general election.

36 *Soutpansberg* is the name of the mountain range in Venda and the whole region surrounding it is called the Soutpansberg Region. Vhavenda call the mountain *Songozwi* and consequently the main street leading to town is now called *Songozwi*.

37 J.W.N. Tempelhoff, *Townpeople of the Soutpansberg*, Louis Trichardt: Greater Louis Trichardt Transitional Council, 1999, p. 3.

38 *Ibid.*

residents of the Soutpansberg.³⁹ Tempelhoff, unlike other historians, was more focused on the ivory trade in the Soutpansberg. He alluded to the fact that hunting in the area did not start with the arrival of the Voortrekkers. It is important to note that Tempelhoff did give accounts in a more detailed way than they appear in other texts. He recorded the transition in the settlement of the Soutpansberg, which began with the Stone Age people through to the Khoisan and Vhangona⁴⁰ to the Masingo⁴¹ and later, the Voortrekkers.

He believed the Khoisan lived peacefully alongside the Vhangona people until the arrival of the Masingo in the Soutpansberg.⁴² Repeating local versions of history, Tempelhoff claimed that the new residents of the area brought with them a magical drum⁴³. This resulted in the Khoisan moving away for fear of the sacred drum because they had heard what had happened to Vhakalanga of Tshibi in Buluwayo. Tempelhoff's account presents this study with another dimension to the life of the Venda people in the Soutpansberg in the sense that he was able to reveal that they were traders. It also sheds some light on some pre-Venda and post-Venda settlement in the Soutpansberg by other communities and the fact that the Venda people were not the first to settle in the land known as Venda today and that they were also not the last, as some years after them the Buys community led by Dutch-speaking outcast Coenraad Buys arrived in the area. These details did not come out properly in the other texts regarding the Venda history.

The discourse of the Venda as a 'nation' is a very complex one which needs to be critically analysed. We do not, for example, know what the Masingo north of the Limpopo River were called before they migrated south, and the same goes for the Vhangona people south of the Limpopo. Both Van Warmelo and Tempelhoff concur that the Vhangona were 'authentic' speakers of Tshivenda and that the Masingo language was a dialect of the Shona language. It is argued that the Masingo conquered the Vhangona people and their language as well. The

39 J.W.N. Tempelhoff, *Townspeople of the Soutpansberg*, p. 6.

40 As will be explained in the subsequent chapters, the *Vhangona* are widely regarded in popular discourse as the 'authentic' Venda-speakers and owners of the Venda land.

41 The *Masingo* are the *Vhasenzi* people who in the early 1700s migrated from what is today Zimbabwe and settled in the Vhangona land where they absorbed the language and culture of their subjects.

42 W.N. Tempelhoff, *Towns People of the Soutpansberg*, p. 6.

43 The magic drum referred to here is famously known by its Venda name, *Ngomalungundu*. More on that in subsequent chapters.

arguments presented by the two scholars show that Venda was a contested terrain from its inception with various groups fighting to claim supremacy.

Kirkaldy

Alan Kirkaldy is a historian who coincidentally was my History lecturer during the early years of my tertiary studies at the University of Venda. In his doctoral thesis he unpacked the role of the Berlin Missionaries in the evolution of Vhavenda belief, custom, tradition and culture and their conversion to Christianity. However, Kirkaldy did acknowledge that Berlin Missionary, Carl Beuster, was extremely surprised at finding a group of Christians in Vendaland whose conversion pre-dated the arrival of missionaries there in 1872.⁴⁴ The early Venda converts were Johannes Mutshaeni, Piet (who would assume the name and title of Totane) and Solomon.⁴⁵ David Denga was one of those who were converted before the arrival of the missionaries; he was converted independently of the others while working as a migrant labourer in Natal, over the same period with the Mutshaeni group. Kirkaldy was of the view that Denga came into sustained contact with Mutshaeni after the break-up of the group. He also argued that David Denga's case demonstrates that, before the missionaries established themselves in Vendaland, there were other individuals in the area who had converted to Christianity independently of Johannes Mutshaeni and the Vendaland conventicle.⁴⁶

Kirkaldy's study offers the thesis with a new narrative of the Venda tradition and religion which was not the core focus of the scholars who wrote on the Venda discourse before him. His thesis demonstrated a great conflict between Christianity and Venda cultural beliefs, customs and traditions and at the same time he showed that Christianity was used as a means of reconstructing beliefs, customs and traditions of the African people. He cited Piet (Totane) and the converts from *nnduni ya vuhosi* of the Tshivhase as one good example of the challenges Christianity posed to long-held beliefs, customs and traditions. Things changed when Piet's father died while he was away in Natal. With Piet's return home, Thovhele Tshivhase appointed him as *gota* of the area formerly ruled by his father. With this he

44 A. Kirkaldy, *Capturing the Soul. Encounters between Berlin Missionaries and Tshivenda-Speakers in the Late Nineteenth Century*, PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 2002, p. 102. An adjusted version of Kirkaldy's thesis was also published as a book: *Capturing the Soul: The Vhavenda and the Missionaries*, Protea, Pretoria, 2005.

45 A. Kirkaldy, *Capturing the Soul. Encounters ...*, p. 102.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

abandoned his Christian name and reverted to his father's throne name, Totane, and he became known as *Gota* Totane. Beuster and Mutshaene viewed his action as a total rejection of missionary-interpreted Christianity.⁴⁷ Kirkaldy's thesis was able to acknowledge the fact that missionaries were able to learn the Venda language and their customs, and they were able to respect *mahosi*. This was strongly evident when Piet was referred to as *Gota* Totane by the missionaries. Kirkaldy established that it had been recorded in the missionaries' diaries that Piet was addressed as *Gota* Totane soon after his inauguration as a *gota*.

McNeill

Fraser McNeill is an anthropologist at the University of Pretoria, and he is one of the latest amongst several new generation scholars who found some interest in the discourse of the Venda history and tradition. In his study he tried to examine the context of a decision taken by the post-apartheid South African government to recognise a single *khosikhulu* in each of the areas with history of traditional leadership. McNeill claimed that this was the cause of the succession struggle between various *nndu dza vuhosi* in Venda – specifically the Mphephu and Tshivhase – and that this has reignited historically salient rivalries between the two. McNeill believed the concept of the African Renaissance became central to *Thovhele* Midiyavhathu Tshivhase's strategy for consolidation of power and this has prompted him to promote tradition within his boundaries officially.⁴⁸

McNeill tried to analyse the concept of tradition and the role it plays in post-apartheid South Africa. He tried to locate the dynamics of the Aids discourse in Venda within the concept of tradition. In his work he argued that tradition had been invoked to reclaim a “perceived loss of the capacity to control healthy social reproduction” in the post-apartheid era. He used *Thovhele* Midiyavhuthu Tshivhase's strategic alignment with the African Renaissance and the historical connection between the Tshivhase traditional leadership and the African National Congress (ANC) as a point of departure for his study on the battle for the Venda *vuhosivhuhulu*. He acknowledged the fact that Tshivhase's claim for legitimacy to *vuhosivhuhulu* was through means beyond established genealogical records. This was to

47 A. Kirkaldy, *Capturing the Soul. Encounters ...*, p. 119.

48 F. McNeill, *The Battle for Venda Kingship, in Aids, Politics and Music in South Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 26.

counter Toni Mphephu's claim which was based on his widely recognised genealogical superiority above the other. However, McNeill's claim that Mphephu's dominance was reinforced by the apartheid government, which installed Toni's father, P.R. Mphephu, as *khosikhulu* and head of the former Venda homeland, is open to question.⁴⁹ This insinuation might be devoid of facts in the sense that P.R. Mphephu came from the Venda *vuhosivhulu* lineage of Dimbanyika and Dyambeu. What the apartheid government did, was to continue supporting the old tradition of *vuhosivhulu* of the Venda polity lineage of Ramabulana, as all those leaders before P.R. Mphephu were from the Ramabulana clan.

Tshivhase's strategy was to embrace the Thabo Mbeki inspired African Renaissance within his boundaries, prompting a cultural revival through which the process of female initiation, performance of traditional music, and the installation of *magota*⁵⁰ in a ceremony known as *vuhosi*, have become regular features of daily life. McNeill believed Tshivhase's involvement in, and association with, the promotion of culture and tradition have been deeply rooted in "politically strategic incentives".⁵¹

Unlike other scholars on the Venda history discourse, McNeill's study illustrates the role of the post-apartheid South African government in incorporating structures of traditional leadership into a constitutional democracy and the role of traditional leaders in helping the government in fighting the AIDS pandemic through the reestablishment of initiation schools for both girls and boys. He also looked at the contradicting issue of the origin of the Masingo and Vhangona. McNeill's study gives a very good analysis of the Venda politics after independence in 1979 and shows how the VIPP (Venda Independence People's Party) and the ruling VNP (Venda National Party) contested the Venda political space as the two main parties in the Homeland era.

McNeill also gave a critical analysis of the various Commissions appointed by various governments over the years to look at the issue of the Venda *vuhosivhuhulu*. In this case the

49 F. McNeill, *The Battle for Venda Kingship ...*, p. 33.

50 Rather than ANC-inspired, the African Renaissance should be seen as the personal brainchild of then President Thabo Mbeki in his intention to call for African renewal in everything about Africans' day to day lives.

51 F. McNeill, *The Battle for Venda Kingship ...*, p. 34.

Mushasha Commission appointed during the later years of the Venda military government was looked at. He then proceeded to expose the gaps in the findings of the secret Ralushai Commission appointed by the then Northern, now Limpopo Province Premier, Ngwoako Ramatlodi, and finally he analysed the findings of the National Commission led by Professor Thandabantu Nhlapo appointed by President Thabo Mbeki. McNeill should be given credit for his interrogation of the present political scenario of Venda and taking the reader back to the early years. However, his assertion that the disputes that have pitted *nndu dza vuhosi* of the Tshivhase and the Ramabulana against each other were historical, lacks factual elaboration. It must be noted that his scholarly analysis of the Venda history is not balanced as it is evident that he relied far more on his encounter with *nndu ya vuhosi* of the Tshivhase than any *nndu ya vuhosi* outside Mukumbani, which is *nnduni ya vuhosi* of Tshivhase. In short, the study of McNeill fails to give multi-perspectival insight into *vuhosivhuhulu* of Venda owing to his failure to expand his scope of work to the Ramabulana, the Mphaphuli and other prominent role players in the Venda *vuhosivhuhulu* disputes. This left his work one sided, with only the Tshivhase perspective of history being narrated. His work will only help this study on the angle from which the Tshivhase house perceived their role in the dynamics of Venda political history.

Nevondo and Makhari

In his MA dissertation submitted at the University of Fort Hare,⁵² Malokisa Nevondo focused on the life and times of *Khosikhulu* P.R. Mphephu. Nevondo traced Mphephu's life from his time as a young boy attending primary school in Venda, to his youth working in Johannesburg, up until the time he replaced his father George Mbulaheni Ramabulana as *thovhele* of the Ramabulana. Nevondo also took us to P.R. Mphephu's involvement in South African politics by allowing himself to be used by the Nationalist government to accept the offer to convert Venda into the homeland which he eventually ended up leading as the President. Nevondo's study was primarily a biography of P.R. Mphephu, rather than focusing on the broader Venda history. It was also a piece of work paying homage to a man for whom many amongst the Venda people had mixed feelings of love and hate. Many have suffered a lot under his tyrannical rule which ended with his death in 1988.

52 M. Nevondo, A Political Study of Chief P.R. Mphephu of Venda "The Great Elephant of Africa", MA dissertation, University of Fort Hare, 2000.

Nthambeleni Morris Makhari had also focused on the biography of the late Khosikhulu P.R. Mphephu in his BA Honours essay submitted at the University of Venda already in 1991.⁵³ Malokisa Nevondo's MA dissertation submitted at Fort Hare University in 2000 reads like an expanded version of Makhari's honours research. As it was the case with Nevondo's thesis, Makhari focused more on P.R. Mphephu's childhood, youth and political life than on broader trends in Venda political history. The accounts of the history of P.R. Mphephu presented by both Nevondo and Makhari portrayed P.R. Mphephu as the hero of the Venda people, hence the affirmation of the title "The great elephant of Africa" by Nevondo. This narrative portrayed Mphephu as not only the great leader of Venda, but of Africa. This argument of Nevondo presents a challenge because it is common knowledge that Mphephu was not even recognised by his people as a great leader. The myth of the great elephant of Africa is a fallacy as Venda was not recognised by any African country except her master's apartheid regime in South Africa. It is also interesting to note that both Makhari and Nevondo relied mostly on the information provided in the Benso/RAU-initiated research project published in the book *The Independent Venda*,⁵⁴ to bring their point across.

Matshidze

Dr Pfarelo Eva Matshidze is an anthropologist from the University of Venda. In her doctoral thesis submitted at the University of Zululand in 2013, she tried to give a different perspective on the history of traditional leadership in Venda. Matshidze focused on the role of makhadzi in traditional leadership amongst the Venda-speaking people in the present South Africa. Matshidze considered the place of *makhadzi* in the new South Africa against the backdrop of the legislation enacted to give effect to traditional leadership, which did not recognise them explicitly. By this Matshidze wanted to demonstrate that even though, in most African societies, women are insubordinate to men, there exists a special class of women who play a critical role in the public sphere and whom the society holds in high regard. Matshidze also noted that in the case of Venda polity, *makhadzi* is the most highly regarded woman with

53 N.M. Makhari, A Biography of President Patrick Ramaano Mphephu, BA honours essay, University of Venda, 1991.

54 Benso/Rau, *The Independent Venda*, Benso, Pretoria, 1979. The research was collaboratively undertaken by the Bureau for Economic Research, Co-operation and Development (South Africa) (Benso) and the Institute for Development Studies at the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (RAU).

more power than men. Matshidze's thesis found that among the Venda, the *makhadzi* has different roles which are important in traditional leadership. She also asserted that such women can also be traced in other societies in Africa. Matshidze's thesis established that the *makhadzi* plays critical roles in, amongst other things, succession, resolution of disputes, regency, initiation of girls and spiritual roles. Matshidze's thesis, while acknowledging the powers *makhadzi* has in our society, also highlighted the fact that it is not well recognised by our constitution. She, however, admitted that *makhadzi* has a place and a role to play in the new democratic society.⁵⁵ Matshidze's approach to the role of *makhadzi* in Venda traditional authority is supported by Stayt's older narrative about the role of *makhadzi*, as will be illustrated in my own research.

Fokwang

Jude Thaddeus Dingbobga Fokwang is a Social Science MA graduate from the University of Pretoria. Fokwang made a comparative study of the chiefdom (as he refers to it) of Tshivhase in Venda, South Africa and the Bali chiefdom in Cameroon to try and demonstrate how these two kingdoms (his terminology) got entangled in politics of their respective countries. Fokwang noticed that during the 1990s, most African countries experienced what has been termed their "second independence", a period of political upheaval and transformation leading to the introduction of democratic rule. Fokwang noted that the dawn of democracy in South Africa, Cameroon and other countries in Africa posed a serious challenge to the traditional leaders. It presented a situation where the status and role of chiefs were questioned and presented a new discourse on their position in society. Fokwang highlighted the debate amongst the African National Congress (ANC) leadership prior to the dawn of democracy to push chiefs to the periphery of power once the struggle for a free South Africa would be achieved. Fokwang noted that this notion of pushing the chiefs to the periphery of power in a democratic era was intended to give room to people's power and new forms of accountability. Fokwang argued that certain assumptions amongst the rural communities brought into question the legitimacy of some structures such as local government even though the ruling African National Congress (ANC) continued to enjoy much support among

⁵⁵ Matshidze, P.E., 2013, The role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership among the Venda, PhD, University of Zululand.

the masses. This in turn provided an enabling environment in which some, but not all, the chiefs could make new claims for legitimacy.⁵⁶

Fokwang argued that this was the case because some chiefs remained discredited by their past association with apartheid authorities. Fokwang held the view that Midiyavhathu Tshivhase was one of the few 'chiefs' who had successfully associated himself with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) both at national and provincial levels. According to Fokwang, *Thovhele* Tshivhase's involvement in politics had given him space to act decisively in certain ways on behalf of the poor at the local level, thereby winning credibility among rural people. Fokwang noticed that Tshivhase's credibility was two-fold, with the national politicians because he was one of them, and with the people of the "chiefdom", because he was also one of them. Fokwang argued that Tshivhase's ability to renegotiate his status and gain new legitimacy as traditional ruler is a particular example of how the game of neo-liberal democracy is played out in post-apartheid South Africa. However, it cannot be assumed that Tshivhase's dual role as a *thovhele* of the Tshivhase community in Mukumbani and as active African National Congress (ANC) Member of Parliament won him the trust of all his people. It is likely that there were members within "his" community who belonged to other political parties and they might have felt marginalised by the service *Thovhele* Tshivhase and his party, the African National Congress (ANC), were offering.

The same applies to the kingdom of Bali Nyonga in Cameroon, where Chief Ganyonga's career looks rather similar to *Thovhele* Tshivhase's in so far as he too had risen to national prominence in the ruling party in Cameroon, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) in the era of democracy. Fokwang noticed that Cameroon's democratic transition was contradictory in the sense that it introduced the form of democracy but not its substance, enabling the ruling party to manipulate and suppress the opposition and civil society. It was against this background that Fokwang noted that Chief Ganyonga's prominence in the CPDM contributed to undermining his legitimacy in the eyes of his subjects because they believed that his prominence in the party left them without any shield from the depredation and

56 J.T.D. Fokwang, *Chiefs and Democratic Transition in Africa: An Ethnographic Study in the Chiefdom of Tshivhase and Bali*, MA dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2003, Abstract & p. v. In my discussion of Fokwang's work I do not alter the concepts "chief" and "chiefdom" as used by the author.

manipulation of the state. Fokwang failed to acknowledge that the ruling party in Cameroon's manipulation and suppression of the opposition and civil society was also manifesting itself in the case of *Thovhele* Tshivhase and his party, the ANC, because the ANC's majority in the South African parliament allowed them to abuse their powers and the legitimacy of *Thovhele* Tshivhase might have been questioned by some in his community.

Ganyonga was seen to be in illicit cohabitation with a self-serving ruling party at a time when his subjects wanted to use their new-found rights as citizens to vote the opposition into office. Fokwang's study examined why both Tshivhase and Ganyonga used their positions as a springboard into national politics. It also established the kinds of legitimacy claimed by these chiefs and to what extent the masses were persuaded by such claims and how the traditional leaders' involvement in national politics affected the relationship between them and their subjects. In the following chapter I shall elaborate more on points of comparison between rulership disputes in Venda and in other parts of Africa.⁵⁷

Archaeologists

Fish

Warren Fish, in his MA dissertation⁵⁸ submitted at the University of the Witwatersrand, argued that the origins and the political history of Venda have captivated scholars for over a hundred years, and thoughts on Venda origins have been dominated by two schools: (1) an early school giving priority to migration and (2) the current school emphasizing local development. According to Fish, the famous *ngomalungundu* account by Mudau (1940)⁵⁹ contains the longest of the genealogies, and according to this list the first Masingo leader settled in the Soutpansberg six generations before the Voortrekkers abandoned Schoemansdal. This would imply that the earliest Masingo settlement of the Soutpansberg would be in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Fish illustrated that there is evidence of pre-Venda late Iron Age activity south of the Soutpansberg. He further claimed that the Sotho-speaking people in the area contributed to the beginnings of a Venda culture. I cannot

57 J.T.D. Fokwang, *Chiefs and Democratic Transition in Africa*, p. v.

58 W.S. Fish, *Early Venda History and the Mutokolwe ruins near Tshiendeulu*. MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 2001.

59 To be cited also in subsequent chapters in this study.

dismiss this claim because many scholars have alluded to the ways the Vhavenda adopted some cultural traits of the people they interacted with over centuries, more so the northern Sotho people.

Huffman

Archaeologist T.N. Huffman presented another hypothesis about the Masingo. He argued in his research⁶⁰ that they moved into the Soutpansberg towards the end of the seventeenth century from what is today Zimbabwe and conquered most of the people in the area. In this version the Masingo appropriated Venda culture from the people they had conquered and asserted their version of history. Huffman's work concurs with that of other scholars, such as Loubser and Fish, that Venda ethnicity is extremely complicated and has a heterogeneous base.⁶¹

Linguists

Wentzel

Wentzel is a linguist who worked from the hypothesis that the Venda language is a bridge language between Sotho and Shona. However, Wentzel himself conceded in conclusion that Tshivenda is not a bridge language. He argued that, despite Venda having significant influence from Shona on the one hand and Sotho on the other hand, it is a language on its own. He admitted that Venda contains a core of linguistic features which cannot be attributed to the influence of other languages.⁶² It is my view that the Venda language owes at least some influence also to the language of the Boers they had interacted with in the Soutpansberg. For example: Venda borrowed the words *forogo* (*vrk/fork*), *lebula* (*lepel/spoon*) from Afrikaans since there were no words in Venda to call those things. According to Wentzel the fact that the Rozwi originates from Zimbabwe, makes it safe to assume that Tshivenda is the result of indigenous language speakers, in this case the Ngoni, mixing their language with that of the

60 See, amongst others, T.N. Huffman & E.O.M. Hanish, *Settlement Hierarchies in the Northern Transvaal: Zimbabwe Ruins and Venda History*, Johannesburg, 1986; T.N. Huffmann, *Handbook to the Iron Age. The Archaeology of Pre-Colonial Farming Societies in Southern Africa*, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2007.

61 L.J.P. Mulaudzi, *Linking with the Past and Cultural Regeneration: A Case Study of Schoemansdal Museum in the Soutpansberg Region, Limpopo Province*, MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 2007, p. 8.

62 P.J. Wentzel, *The Relationship between Venda and Western Shona*, D Litt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa, 1981, p. 172.

Singo, who were the invaders of the Venda land, it is therefore a recent language. Looking for the origin of a Venda 'Kingdom' in the distant past is, therefore, arguably, somewhat meaningless. However, Venda traditions concur with the notion that their origins are somewhere in the Congo.⁶³ This theory, Wenzel explained, is supported by Huffman (1969, 3) as it is based on the linguistic work of Greenberg, Guthrie and Murdock.⁶⁴ The idea that Venda origins might be from Congo are supported by similarities between Venda words and meanings to Kiswahili language mostly spoken in Central Africa and East Africa. For example, when you say *ndi khou tambula* in Venda you are saying I'm suffering, or you are poor. Swahili speakers say the same thing in similar way to the Venda language with the same meaning.

Khuba

In his doctoral research the linguist A.E. Khuba asserted that the fact the Singo rulers kept the *musanda* language to differentiate themselves from autochthones – even if at present both rulers (*mahosi*) and ruled (*vhasiwana*) speak Tshivenda – supports the suggestion that the invaders spoke a language different from the people that they subjected.⁶⁵ One can argue that even though both *mahosi* and *vhasiwana* speak the same Tshivenda language today, one is still able to distinguish between the language spoken at *musanda* and the language of *vhasiwana*.

The Role of Commissions in Resolving the Venda Kingship

There were several commissions appointed by various governments in South Africa to investigate the issues of *vuhosi/vuhosivuhulu* disputes in Venda over the last twenty-five years. It is imperative to highlight that my assessment of these commissions' reports is a significant part of my new contribution to the Venda history. The first of these commissions was the Mushasha Commission appointed by the late Venda Military ruler, Brigadier General Gabriel Mutheiwana Ramushwana. According to the accounts provided by the *Luonde website*, the Mushasha Commission was appointed partly due to the fact that the Constitution

63 P.J. Wentzel, *The Relationship between Venda and Western Shona*, D Litt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa, 1981, p. 151.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

65 A.E. Khuba, *The Significance of the Musanda Language in Venda: A Diglossia*, D Litt & Phil thesis, University of South Africa, 1993.

of the 'Republic of Venda' stated that the Head of State was the *khosikhulu/thovhele* of the Venda polity.⁶⁶ The Commission was also given the mandate to investigate the issues surrounding Venda traditional leadership and *vuhosivhuhulu*. The Republic of Venda Constitution put the military junta in the most precarious predicament because it implied that they had to be accountable to the *khosikhulu/thovhele* and they did not want that. The Mushasha Commission came up with a most controversial ruling which paved the way for the disputes in the post-apartheid South Africa. It stated that the Vhavenda had no such thing as a *khosikhulu*, and that the *nndu ya vuhosivhuhulu* of the Ramabulana should not be recognised as the most senior *nndu ya vuhosi*. This was for the second time in less than a century that the Ramabulana was demoted to the same status of the other 27 *mahosi*. The Mushasha Commission will be discussed in chapter eight of the thesis.

The Mushasha Commission was followed by the Ralushai Commission, led by the (by then) retired former University of Venda Vice-Rector, the late Professor Victor Ralushai. This Commission was appointed in 1996 in the post-apartheid South Africa by Limpopo (Northern) Province Premier, Advocate Ngwaugo Ramathlodi. The Commission's mandate was to investigate, amongst other things, claims that certain traditional leaders were irregularly deposed or unduly recognised by the apartheid government.⁶⁷ It is important to note that the Ralushai Commission's findings were reported to be very controversial. The details of the findings remain unrevealed to the general public even today. It has been alleged that the Commission went beyond its mandate of investigating the kingship/rulership disputes. In my study I am of the view that both the Mushasha and Ralushai Commissions, though controversial, helped to make the work of the Nhlapo Commission a lot easier. The Nhlapo Commission will be briefly elaborated on below. It is imperative to highlight that I got access to the Ralushai Commission of Inquiry from COGTA (Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs). I was able to include it in this thesis even though the findings had never been publicly released.

66 www.luonde.co.za, p. 4. The source was used since it is one of those that Venda people are using today to give a narration of their history. It might not be detailed or academic, and cannot be cited uncritically, but it is a useful source to comprehend the present-day shaping of a popular history of the Venda people.

67 www.luonde.co.za, p. 6.

The last Commission which will be part of the study is the Nhlapo Commission. On 16 October 2004, the Minister for Provincial and Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi, announced that President Thabo Mbeki had appointed a Commission on Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims in terms of section 23 of the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, No. 41 of 2003. The President appointed Professor Thandabantu Nhlapo to chair the Commission. To assist the Commission, the Ministry for Provincial and Local Government handed over all relevant research materials, including reports of various Commissions of Inquiry appointed in provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Free State, North West and Limpopo Province. Amongst the reports handed to the Nhlapo Commission was the Ralushai Commission of Inquiry report.⁶⁸ The findings of the Nhlapo Commission will be interrogated in chapter nine of the thesis. The findings of the commissions will be helpful in the thesis to reach conclusions on the matter of *vhuhosi /vuhosivhuhulu* disputes amongst the Venda people.

68 www.luonde.co.za, p. 6.