

*Mbonalelo kha vhurangaphanda ha vhafumakadzi: Young
Vhavenda Women's Views on their Traditional
Leadership Roles Historically and Post-1994.*

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BY

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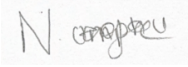
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DECLARATION

I, Omphulusa Nengwekhulu, hereby declare that *Mbonalelo kha vhurangaphanda ha vhafumkadzi: Young Vhavanḁa Women's Views on their Traditional Leadership Roles Historically and Post-1994* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative research study that examines how young Vhavenda women in post-apartheid South Africa views different traditional leadership roles that Vhavenda women have historically played and continue to play in Venda society. Therefore, the research question that this Master of Arts (MA) research study sought to research is the following: How do young, 21st-century Vhavenda women view the traditional leadership roles historically and currently held by Vhavenda women in Vhavenda society? To grapple with this research question, this study employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies to recruit seven research participants. Research participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview approach, which allowed the researcher to build rapport with research participants. Data was manually coded into five themes, namely: 1) The Role of *Makhadzi* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community, 2) The Role of *Vhakoma* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community, 3) The Role of *Vhakololo* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community, 4) The customary practice of male primogeniture and how it contradicts the South African Constitution post-1994, and 5) The socialisation process that puts boys and men on a leadership pedestal. The data was then analysed and discussed in Chapters Four and Five through an Africana Womanist theoretical framework. An important finding in this study is that *makhadzi*, the father's sister and also a woman who is a custodian of traditional leadership, is the traditional role that all the participants recognised as the leadership role that Vhavenda women have historically played and continue to play. Another role identified by participants as significant within the Venda leadership structure is *Vhakoma*, the Queen Mother and the chief's mother. However, there was limited familiarity with the role of *Vhakololo*, the royal members or people born into the royal family, as only one participant identified it as a leadership role traditionally occupied by Vhavenda women. Research participants suggested that colonial modernity contributes to a lack of knowledge about their culture. Another important finding of this study is that in post-1994 South Africa, there has been a tension between customary practices such as male primogeniture and the South African Constitution. Consequently, some women leaders have used the courts to challenge this practice. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse about women's empowerment and the dismantling of patriarchal structures that undermine women's potential as leaders in the Venda context.

Keywords: Traditional leadership roles, Colonialism and apartheid, *Makhadzi*, *Vhakoma*, *Vhakololo*, Africana Womanism.

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GLOSSARY OF TSHIVENḐA TERMS

Domba The final stage of a girls' initiation.

Dzekiso A wife, related by blood to royalty, married into another royal family meant to birth an heir to a chieftaincy or traditional leadership.

Khosi (Chief) This is a traditional leader of a particular area who acts and guides them in all aspects, such as tradition, culture, economic development, and service delivery to the community.

Khoro Refers to a formal traditional gathering or council that is typically made up of elders and leaders within a community where important decisions, disputes and cultural practices are discussed and resolved.

Khotsimunene The traditional leader's paternal uncle. Similar to *makhadzi*, *khotsimunene* is one of the important figures in VhaventḐa traditional leadership.

Makhadzi Matshidze (2013, v) defines *makhadzi* as a senior sister of the family head or chief's father, where seniority is not necessarily that of age. She would have been *khadzi* to the predecessor chief.

Mbonalelo Refers to one's perception or understanding of a situation or an event.

Mukoma Headman.

Musanda The royal palace.

Ndayo A set of rules that guides individuals at various stages of their lives.

Nduna Headman.

Tsenguluso Gaining a new understanding of something or Critical Analysis.

Tshisinavhute Buijs (2006:178) defines *tshisinavhute* as a title bestowed upon a female leader and rainmaker from Mianzwi, a location in VenḐa. Women have held this title exclusively since the late 18th century, with roots believed to extend further in history.

TshiventḐa The language spoken by VhaventḐa people.

Vhafumkadzi (plural) is a respectful term for women.

Vhakololo Royal Members (women in this study).

Vhakoma (Queen-Mother) This refers to the biological mother of the *thovhele*, *khosi-khulu*, *khosi* and *gota*. In terms of the Venda culture, if a *vhakoma* dies, the sister to the *thovhele*, *khosi-khulu*, *khosi*, or *gota* is chosen to replace the *vhakoma* in her position of power.

Vhamusanda The Chief.

Vhatanuni (plural) Refers to Royal wives.

Vhavana An ethnic group found in Limpopo province, northeastern South Africa, formerly known as the Republic of Venda (1979-1994), which borders Zimbabwe.

Vhurangaphanda Refers to Leadership.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Overview

This study is inspired by political initiatives that aim to empower girls and women by making visible women's leadership in African contexts (Poltera, 2019). These initiatives include the United Nations African Women Leaders Network, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the African Union's Women's Decade, Africa's Agenda 2063, Leading Women of Africa, and the 2019 Forbes Women Africa Leading Women Summit (Poltera, 2019). Against this backdrop, this research project aims to investigate how young Vhavenḁa women perceive the traditional leadership roles of Vhavenḁa women in society and how these perceptions align with the post-1994 South African agenda to liberate and empower women.

Traditional leadership is regarded as the oldest form of governance in African societies, with its roots stretching as far back as pre-colonialism in South Africa and across the African continent (Sharma, 2003). Mawere et al. (2022:250) define traditional leadership as “a style where power is given to the leader based on traditions of the past.” According to November and Wessels (2002), long before colonialism, Africa had established effective and advanced systems of leadership within their respective communities, which aligned with their cultural practices and socio-political structures. Mashele (2003) argues that African traditional institutions and their leaders can be described as modern-day state organs, such as the legislature, executive, and judiciary, because these institutions facilitate community harmony, conflict resolution, advice on cultural matters, and preserve customs and traditions, as shown in Table 1 below.

Powers of traditional leaders before colonial rule	
Political Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sovereignty: Safety and security, protection • Relations to “outsiders”
Economic Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land allocation and distribution/Custodians of land • Facilitator of and economic and environmental matters
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and development • Facilitator of infrastructure and services • Tax collecting powers
Social Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courts decisions and implementation • Judicial administration, law-abiding societies • Health systems, traditional healers
Cultural Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacred and spiritual leadership • Custom and tradition, cultural matters

Table 1: Powers and Functions of traditional leaders prior to colonialism.

Source: Mashele, H.P (2003:32) *Locating the institution of traditional leadership within the institutional framework of South Africa's new democracy.*

The history of colonial Dutch settlement and British colonisation in South Africa effectively destroyed African traditional leadership and its institutions. The colonial discourse described Africans and African societies as “primitive, barbaric and liable to cannibalism,” a discourse that was deployed to justify colonial violence, racist, exploitative systems, and a white supremacist state in South Africa (Kavanagh, 2016:1). Colonialism further devalued women’s leadership in African societies, portraying as it “backward,” while reinforcing Eurocentric norms of rigid gender binaries. Thus, African institutions and traditional practices of governance and leadership were destroyed and replaced with Western modes of governance, policies, and systems that were deemed appropriate and civilised at the time. For instance, in South Africa, this was achieved, among other practices, by the Glen Grey Act of 1894 and Act No.38 of 1927, subsequently renamed the Black Administration Act 38 of 1927. Through these Acts, the colonial government replaced African socio-political structures with colonial local and district councils that advanced the colonial project (Nicholson, 2006). Under this colonial system of governance, different Indigenous African groups were assigned a leader or chief amongst the local elites, typically an educated individual or a whitewashed product of colonial influence, tasked with ensuring compliance with colonial laws and objectives (Mamdani, 1996).

Mamdani (1996) argues that the colonial ruling system in Africa was categorised into direct and indirect rule. Direct rule was centralised despotism, and indirect rule was the system where the colonial power controlled a certain region through local leaders or the traditional leaders in place. Therefore, instead of the colonial powers overseeing the day-to-day operations and affairs of the regions, local leaders were installed by colonial powers to serve as proxies for colonial governance. Mamdani (1997) explains that indirect rule was the preferred choice of colonial governance because it gave an African face to the colonial project and, thus, was less likely to inspire African rebellion against colonialism.

Mamdani (1997:79) further explains that colonial powers grouped Indigenous African peoples into “tribes” to promote the myth of a primitive, undeveloped, and simplistic Africa, which is an inaccurate view given the rich history of change and complexity in African societies. Lowe (2001) points out that the term “tribe” perpetuates misleading stereotypes due to its history of

cultural biases against the realities of Africa. Additionally, the Western association of the term “tribal” is harmful, as it can be equated to notions of “savagery,” reinforcing racist perceptions of African violence as inherent and natural. Therefore, this study advocates for the use of the term “ethnic group” as a more appropriate and less problematic alternative.

A significant consequence of this indirect rule was the exclusion of women from leadership roles, as they did not have personal independence due to the patriarchal nature of the colonial project (Mamdani, 1996). They were systematically and forcefully marginalised from mainstream roles and relegated to the sidelines because the recognised and installed chiefs or traditional leaders were primarily men. This is because men were considered to have a higher social and political status than women in European/Western society.

Oyěwùmí (1997) argues that pre-colonial gender conceptions in Africa were intricate and multifaceted compared to a Western binary model. Oyěwùmí (1997) states that the cultural logic of Western social categories is based on an ideology of biological determinism, assuming that biology determines the social world. So, by Western standards, women were assigned biological roles, often maternal and home duties, while men were typically “head of the house” publicly and privately, translating this into leadership. However, in Africa, Tamale (1996) holds that women held influential positions, led armies, and played advisory roles in politics.

Scholars such as Guy (1990), Amadiume (1987) (1997), Oyěwùmí (1997), Cousins and Claassens (2004), and Weir (2006) argue that the arrival of colonialism in Africa, whether in Western or Southern Africa, brought about significant changes in indigenous practices, societal structures, and leadership dynamics. Colonialism encompassed more than just Western expansion and exploitation but also introduced ideologies that served Western interests and promoted the colonial agenda, including patriarchy. Sifana (2018) defines patriarchy as a social system whereby men are considered inherently superior and dominant over everything, including women. This explains the colonial preference of men for the indirect rule of colonial administration.

This colonial preference for male leadership disrupted the pre-colonial established hierarchy, where women held authoritative roles, and shifted the foundation of hierarchy to male dominance in the African context (Weir, 2006). As a result, the roles of African women, including *makhadzi*, began to lose their authentic power as they were deemed absurd or deviating from the norm of male leadership. Hence, according to Matshidze (2013: 209),

“present-day conception of women, as defined by Western influences, has to a large extent defined the societies perception of women and has ominously impacted the role and place” of the Vhavenda women in leadership in Venda society. In other words, Western influences, through colonialism and the dominant Western discourse, “has significantly affected” how young Vhavenda women in post-apartheid South Africa perceive the traditional institutions of Vhavenda people, as well as the beliefs and values of the Venda people (Matshidze and Mulaudzi (2016).

1.2 The Intersection of Women's Leadership and Colonialism in Southern Africa

This section discusses how the coloniality of gender historically disadvantaged women in Southern Africa. As Afasi (2010:234) puts it:

“The face of African society on gender equality changed owing to the influence of colonialism. Women began to suffer oppression from men. The Shackles imposed by law, custom, religion and attitudes forced women to play; the second fiddle.’ In fact, women mostly remained relegated to the last rung of the social and political ladder. Women were no longer allowed to exercise any power except those supervised by men.”

The idea of the coloniality of gender is used in this study to explain how the logic of colonialism was deployed by colonial powers to reshape Indigenous identities and African conceptions of gender. Through this discursive colonial re-conceptualisation of African identities, pre-colonial African notions of gender were deemed inappropriate and “backward” and therefore erased. In essence, colonialism subjected African communities to a colonial sociological process that forced Africans to abandon the African worldview. At this juncture, the study interrogates the various ways in which this sociological process unfolded in different African communities in Southern African communities such as AmaZulu, AmaXhosa, and the Vhavenda people. It will demonstrate that in Southern Africa, women have not always been subordinate to male leaders but had, especially during precolonial times, had political agency. For instance, According to Weir (2006), in pre-colonial Southern Africa, African women played important leadership roles in the military, economic, and religious spheres. While not all women shared these experiences, colonialism and apartheid disrupted the social order of African communities by stigmatising, marginalising, and constraining African women’s leadership roles within their communities.

1.2.1 AmaZulu

Historical accounts of the Zulu nation often emphasise male militarism via the colonial trope of a Zulu male warrior embodied in the Shaka Zulu narrative. This narrative downplays and, in certain cases, completely ignores historical evidence that shows that Zulu women have historically played significant leadership roles in AmaZulu socio-political structures. For example, historical records show that Zulu royal women had political agency and exercised their influence and power before, during, and after Shaka's reign. Regnant Queen Mkabayi and her twin sister Queen Mmama are two historical figures who could be used as examples to show that Zulu women held authoritative roles in the Zulu kingdom (Ndlovu, 2008). Queen Mkabayi is credited for bringing about political stability to the Zulu nation by ensuring that the royal lineage of the Zulu monarchy was protected and continued because of her direct participation in war within the Zulu Kingdom and fight against corruption, and her sister Queen Mmama for her respectable command of the military launching and overseeing enTonteleni (Klaas-Makolomakwe and Raniga (2021).

Although the reference made here is a royal woman, Shamase (2017) states that in the 18th and early 19th centuries, whether women were queens, princesses, or even just members of the *isigodlo* (palace), they were esteemed because of the impact they had. So, the role of women did not end only within the royal palace but also within the farms, battles, and homesteads (Shamase, 2014). For instance, Weir (2006) explains that Zulu women in precolonial times occupied various social and cultural positions that rendered them powerful. These positions include rain-making, being custodians of sacred sites and objects, and administering cultural and social rituals. It is worth noting that this was common across the different African cultures.

Mkhize (2015:29) contextualises this observation by stating that,

“The Zulu culture of ancient times was an antediluvian culture, but it was a traditionalist culture not tainted by Western education, thinking or other influences. Before colonisation, Zulu culture was influenced by external forces such as different cultural groups and other African cultures. Contemporary Zulu culture is a relic of other cultures because cultural dynamics have changed and have adopted modern ways of thinking and influence.”

1.2.2 AmaXhosa

The enduring trope about Xhosa womanhood is the idea that Xhosa women have, throughout history, been constrained in the domestic domain and without agency, while in contrast, Xhosa men are often portrayed as agents of history (Gqibtole (2020). Xhosa women were in charge of cultivating the land, growing crops, and directing harvesting, the colonial project portrayed Xhosa women as being “oppressed” and “exploited” by “lazy” Xhosa men who supposedly were “idle” and spent most of their time “gossiping.” Matters were further complicated by the spread of the Christian religion throughout the Eastern Cape. Cock (1990) argues that Christian missionaries were agents of the colonial project and became instrumental in re-socialising Xhosa women into the European gender norms. This Eurocentric socialisation centred around the colonial notion that the domestic was the woman. In essence, Xhosa women were “housewiflicated,” as they were firmly confined to gender defined duties such as housekeeping, cooking, sewing, or maternal duties (Peires, 1977). Cock (1990) highlights how colonial mission institutions merged European gender norms with ideologies of domestication to control colonised peoples. Given that AmaXhosa were one of the first African communities to be impacted by colonialism in the Eastern Cape, Xhosa women would have been directly exposed to and experienced the colonial policies implemented by the colonisers as first-hand subjects to test the effects of those policies. Moreover, during apartheid, women were expected to stay at home, reinforcing the idea of “stay-at-home- wife,” not as a choice but as an expected role to maintain social order. Any deviation from this was seen as bringing chaos to the nation, not just the homestead.

1.2.3 Vhavenda

The Vhavenda are an ethnic group located in the northeastern region of South Africa, specifically in what was known as the Republic of Venda from 1979 to 1994. This area now forms part of Limpopo province and borders southern Zimbabwe. The estimated population of the Venda people in South Africa is approximately 2.5 million (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Additionally, Venda people can be found in neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe (Huffman, 2022). This study focuses specifically on the Vhavenda in South Africa, as it examines traditional leadership within the Limpopo community. The highest recognised Vhavenda traditional leadership is located in Limpopo, where the majority of the population resides. Therefore, the Vhavenda in Limpopo serves as the primary point of reference for this research.

Within the context of Vhavenda, there are two contestations regarding the impact of colonialism and apartheid on the role and status of Venda women. One argues that pre-colonialism, Vhavenda society was characterised by a patriarchal system, a system that excluded women from ascending to the highest positions such as *khosikhulu*. However, research by Kuper (1982), Buijs (2002), Weir (2006), and Matshidze (2013) have challenged this narrative by highlighting various leadership roles that Vhavenda women have historically played in society. Weir (2006) further adds that Vhavenda women practised woman-to-woman marriage, a cultural and social practice which granted some women social opportunities to assert authority within their communities. Additionally, the historical significance of female leaders like *makhadzi* challenges the narrative that alleges that Vhavenda women lacked agency in their communities (Stayt, 1931). To further challenge this narrative, this section discusses three key traditional leadership roles historically held by Vhavenda women: *Makhadzi*, Chieftainship, and Rainmaker. The leadership roles discussed in this section illustrate that Vhavenda women have historically occupied important traditional leadership roles in the history of Venda society.

1.2.3.1 *Makhadzi*

The literature suggests that the leadership role of *makhadzi* has a long history in the historical tradition of Vhavenda society. Several scholars, including Lestrade (1930), Stayt (1931), Van Warmelo and Phophi (1949), Buijs (2006), Matshidze (2013), and Ross (2017), have researched the dynamics of gender and leadership in Venda society. Within their research, a recurring theme of the *makhadzi*'s role is variably defined across different contexts, periods, and locations. However, for this study, the most pertinent definition of *makhadzi* is a senior sister of the family head or chief's father (Matshidze, 2013).

One of the prominent roles that *makhadzi* plays is being the advisor to the chief. When the chief makes decisions, *makhadzi* plays a significant role in advising the chief and *khoro*. They also act as a regent. For example, sometimes, when the chief passes away, and there is no one to take over the chieftaincy immediately, or there are still multiple disputes, the *makhadzi* can act as the regent in the interim (Matshidze, 2013). Historically, the succession process to chieftainship was conducted secretly by elders who would appoint the successor. Only the *khadzi* (chief's sister) and the *khotsimunene* (chief's brothers) were granted exclusive authority to select the successor. However, the ultimate decision regarding succession rested with the *khadzi*. During this period, the *khadzi* was highly esteemed by the entire royal family, and her

decision was the final verdict. This was to avoid influence from other family members or local leaders, as it could undermine the legitimacy of chieftainship. So, *makhadzi* plays a massive role in the appointment of the chief.

Furthermore, considering that polygamy is prevalent within the royal family, with chiefs often having multiple wives, there are specific wives known as “*dzekiso*” or “candle wife” (Van Warmelo, 1989, Mafela,2016). The *makhadzi* plays an important role in selecting a *dzekiso* wife as the *makhadzi* is the one who engages in communication with other chieftaincies and makes arrangements to ensure the stability and protection of their chieftaincy (Matshidze, 2013).

Among other roles, *makhadzi* serves as the bridge between the socio-cultural and spiritual realms. In Venda culture, the *makhadzi* is regarded as the ritual leader of the royal family and the community, responsible for performing ceremonies or rites of passage to the ancestors. This spiritual role is one reason *makhadzi* is considered one of the most influential figures, believed to have been chosen by their ancestors and deriving their powers from them. “The *makhadzi* in Venda is considered the ritual head of the royal family and community. She performs libation for royals to the ancestors” (Matshidze, 2013:194). This role is also why the *makhadzi* are seen as one of the most powerful; they are believed to have been chosen by their ancestors and derive their powers from them. It is important to note that these are just a few of the documented roles of the *makhadzi*, and they have many more roles within Venda society.

1.2.3.2 Chieftainship

Kuper (1982: 59) explains that the Vhavenda people have a long historical practice of allowing women to become chiefs. Throughout history, Vhavenda women could become chiefs or act as regents for a minor son. For example, Matshidze (2013) argues that in Vondwe, the woman chief's lineage can be traced back to Nyatshitahela (Mutshalingana), the wife of Chief Rambuda of the Dzimauli kingdom. Nyatshitahela assumed chieftainship after her father's death, succeeding as her people's ruler. Cornelius (2022:175) confirms that Nyatshitahela played a significant role in the preservation of the Liegegise's kingship as she was one of the women who played a “decisive role in political strategies that male potentates prosecuted through the war.” Nyatshitahela's male successors faced ill-fated reigns, and the community and the family agreed to install a female chief once again. This decision may have been influenced by several factors, including the recognition of women's leadership and the belief that a female chief was better suited to serving the needs and concerns of the community (Matshidze, 2013).

The claim of women in chieftainship is backed up by Stayt (1931) and Weir (2006), who cite Nyadenga, a woman chief from the Phiphidi area, as an example. Nyadenga is said to have rights that are equal to those of a man. Additionally, her eldest daughter is selected as her successor in the position of chief. A contemporary example of women in leadership is found in villages like *Tshahulu tsha vha fumakadzi* or *Vhamusanda Vho Mukonanyi* in Matondoni Ha-Sengani village in Venda (Tshikudo, 2023). However, more research is needed on these particular communities because of the limited literature on such communities; one may presume they do not exist, effectively erasing their existence and experiences. This presumption also perpetuates the belief in the lack of women in positions of authority in this region, further marginalising them. Despite this, the historical record proves that women have held leadership roles in Venda, dating back to the 18th century and into contemporary times.

1.2.3.3 *Tshisinavhute* (Rain- Maker)

Tshisinavhute is a title bestowed upon a female leader and rainmaker from Mianzwi, a location in Venda (Buijs, 2006). Vhavana Women have held this title exclusively since the late 18th century, with roots believed to extend further in history. The first female *tshisinavhute*, Mufanadzi, received the gift of rainmaking from her father. Subsequently, the responsibility of managing the rainmaking powers at Mianzwi has been passed down from mother to daughter (Buijs, 2006). In the community, *tshisinavhute* is highly revered and respected for her ability to control the forces of nature and bring important water to her people. This achievement as a female ruler and rainmaker underscores the significant role of women in traditional leadership. Partly because of the dearth of research on this particular leadership role and partly due to the impact of colonialism on African cultural beliefs and social practices, this particular leadership role is often overlooked in the mainstream post-apartheid discourse on the history of Vhavana women's traditional leadership.

It is also worth pointing out that the idea of a rainmaker is a phenomenon that has been common in Africa. As Achebe (2020) notes, African states are spiritual; essentially, they are like a parallel world; what is done in the spiritual world is reflected in the physical world. Notably, African women have historically been powerful within the spiritual spaces, and this can be observed in their role as spirit mediums, goddesses, sangomas, and well-known rainmakers, hence of women such as Modjadji of the Balobedu people or Queen Manthatisi of the Batlokwa people or *tshisinavhute* in the case of Vhavana. Since African states are spiritual, as per Achebe, women's power and leadership in the spiritual realm have often translated into African

women occupying leadership roles in leadership structures of society. Therefore, this study argues that it is through this perspective that the totality of women's leadership in African societies could be better understood and studied in post-1994 South Africa.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study include examining the perceptions of young Vhavenḁa women in post-apartheid South Africa regarding the traditional leadership roles historically and currently played by Vhavenḁa women in Venḁa society. This objective aims to challenge the notion that women in pre-colonial Africa were merely victims or support structures to their male counterparts.

Secondly, to understand how the perceptions of young Vhavenḁa women regarding traditional leadership roles of Vhavenḁa women have evolved or been influenced by colonialism, apartheid, and the post-apartheid social and political context. This objective recognises that colonialism and apartheid, together with the post-apartheid social and political landscape, may have impacted how women perceive the traditional roles and contributions within Venḁa society.

1.4 Research Question

To that end, this study aims to research the following research question:

1. How do young, 21st-century Vhavenḁa women view the traditional leadership roles historically and presently held by Vhavenḁa women in Venḁa society?

1.5 Significance of Research

The study or research of women's contribution to the development of societal institutions and women's participation in the leadership structures of those institutions remains a vital aspect of the feminist research agenda. To a certain extent, one can criticise academia for its androcentric biases regarding how it is written, what is written, and who is writing. Such research begs the question of whose stories are being told, produced, and recorded. This critique enables one to recognise whose narratives are privileged and foregrounded while, at the same time, they expose the ongoing marginalisation of women's experiences and voices. For instance, in the South African context, discussions surrounding colonialism and the liberation struggle tend to adopt a heavily masculinised perspective, resulting in a notable

erasure of women's contributions to these historical narratives. This is partly why this study argues that the lack of literature on women's contributions to traditional leadership, for example, does not mean that they are absent. Hence, the study underscores the need to actively seek out and amplify women's experiences, their contributions to society, and their voices in order to achieve a decolonised and more comprehensive understanding of South African history and society. It is partly for this reason that this study aims to examine how young Vhavanḁa women in post-apartheid South Africa perceive the various traditional leadership roles that Vhavanḁa women have historically played and continue to play in Venḁa society to contribute to the debate and to spread awareness of such roles. This research is necessary because it cultivates awareness of Vhavanḁa women's contribution to the Vhavanḁa society, specifically regarding the roles Vhavanḁa women have historically played in traditional leadership structures. Additionally, it aims to promote the study of the history of Vhavanḁa people and their contribution to the broader South African history. Lastly, it contributes to the ongoing debate about the contributions of African women to the South African women's struggle in the fight against patriarchal practices and women's empowerment and liberation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter established a foundation for understanding the historical discussions about gender issues and the impact of colonialism on gender roles in African and South African societies to provide historical context for the study. The discussion in the previous chapter included women from various social groups, such as the AmaXhosa and AmaZulu women. The chapter also discussed three leadership roles that Vhavenḁa women have historically played in Venḁa society, namely: chieftainship, *makhadzi*, and *tshisinavhute*.

In this chapter, I examine some key literature concerning the historical and ongoing traditional leadership roles that Vhavenḁa women play within Venḁa society. The discussion is divided into two sections. Firstly, it critically discusses the traditional leadership roles of Vhavenḁa women by referencing earlier existing literature. Notably, this research primarily originates from a white liberal scholarship that interprets African culture from a European perspective. Indeed, this white liberal scholarship has shortcomings, and I highlight these in the discussion, but in this study, I also use this literature specifically to trace the history of the traditional leadership roles that Vhavenḁa women have historically played in their society. The second part of the discussion focuses on more recent, post-apartheid literature on women's leadership roles in Venḁa society, which is notably authored by insiders and offers a fresh perspective on women's roles in leadership. The difference in literature illustrates the evolution of these roles and highlights the changes in authorship and perspectives over time. It is important to emphasise that the dependence on specific scholars in this chapter results from the dearth of literature on the traditional leadership roles of the Vhavenḁa women.

2.2. A Critical Analysis of the Canonical Literature into the Traditional Leadership Roles Played by Vhavenḁa Women in Venḁa Society

There are two foundational texts that form the basis for the study and research of Vhavenḁa people, and these are *The BaVenḁa* by Hugh Stait (1931) and *Some Notes on the Political Organization of the Veḁa-Speaking Tribes* by Lestrade G.P (1930). Both books were written in the early twentieth century and were part of the white anthropological studies into Black life in South Africa. In the twentieth century, in South Africa, the discipline of anthropology uncritically accepted the racist narrative that asserted that Black people are “primitive people”

and that their culture is “backward.” Despite the fact that this colonial anthropological research incorporated racist insights into its epistemology, some of the research had useful research insights to offer. Be that as it may, Black scholars caution that the engagement with colonial history and the colonial archive has to be done via a critical filter if one wants to avoid reproducing Eurocentric biases. Michael Adas (1979, xxiv) demonstrates that “social scientists must also correct for the deep-seated prejudices that permeate the colonial sources.” I used this colonial anthropological literature with that caveat in the background.

The introduction of Stayt’s book is written by Agnes Hoernle (1931, vii), who writes that:

“The increasing importance of Africa, both as the source for many of the raw products and also of many of the metals needed in modern industry, has made it essential that those nations which are at work in Africa should know better the African peoples upon whom they will have, in the main, to rely for the production of the things they want.”

The quote above clearly communicates the notion that the targeted readership of this book were whites. An impression is created to communicate the idea that part of the goal for writing the book was to make Black people legible to white people who are to employ and presumably exploit black people. Nowhere in the book does Stayt correct Hoernle or clarify what Hoernle meant by this claim.

Instead, in the preface, Stayt (1931, xi) explains his research methodology, which included camping alongside Black people’s villages and visiting important chiefs. Stayt (1931, xi) further adds that he employed interpreters to collect his data:

“Two successive non-Christian interpreters, Mafunisa Masia Senthumule and Mashinya Mbizaan, made themselves invaluable to me. These boys, who were fully initiated members of the tribe, were familiar with the whole country and understood the different Venda dialects in addition to knowing Zulu, English, and Dutch. They helped us to make contact with their people and created a friendly atmosphere between us and them.”

In line with colonial research practices at the time, Stayt refers to his research assistants as “boys,” a racist trope used to depict mature and adult Africans as children who deserve little respect. This is both paternalistic and patriarchal. Likewise, the use of the word “tribe” to describe African communities with complex political systems is part of the colonial discourse

that was employed to justify colonialism and to mischaracterise precolonial Africa as a continent with no nations or fully developed societies with complex social systems. The use of the phrase “their people” marks Stayt as an outsider, a European writer invested in the colonial project and researching and writing about the Other from a Eurocentric perspective. The tone is condescending and problematic ethically, revealing a colonial power dynamic between the researcher and his “native” subjects.

Stayt conveniently avoids discussing ethical issues associated with the use of African interpreters in the production of colonial knowledge about Africans and their societies. For instance, Stayt is not sufficiently reflexive about his social position as a white researcher in colonial Africa studying African cultures from a Eurocentric perspective via “native informants” described as “boys” in his study. Stayt does not openly admit to the ethical dilemmas of employing interpreters to conduct research and the associated problems with such a practice, which include the loss of tone and ambiguity during translation.

Stayt (1931:154) also makes use of problematic observations such as:

“The women are far more industrious than the men, who do a minimum amount of work and spend a great deal of the day in sleep or complete idleness.”

This is another longstanding Eurocentric stereotype about the alleged laziness of African men, and it is a recurring trope throughout the history of colonialism in Southern Africa. It is a colonial trope that was used to impose Eurocentric gender norms onto African societies. As the quote above suggests, instead of studying the complex nature of precolonial African communities, white researchers instead deployed Eurocentric gender norms to research African societies. Through this Eurocentric heteronormative lens, African societies were judged to be deviant and “backward.”

Be that as it may, Stayt (1931: ix) recognises that:

“Unique for South Africa is the high position given to women in this society both in administration and in religious ritual. No account of the function and the capacity of women in Bantu societies will henceforth be complete, which does not take account of the responsible and efficient work being done by women among the Ba Venḡa.”

In the quote above, the researcher seems to acknowledge the significant involvement and appreciation of the leadership roles of Vhavenda women in Ba Venda society. The strength of the book lies in its discussion of the Vhavenda political system, which encompasses the significant roles played by women in that system. For example, Stayt's book examines the rich cultural heritage and a unique and complex system of Vhavenda chieftainship. Stayt (1931) explains that historically, Vhavenda people lived in villages, and each village would have a chief or petty chief. He states that Vhavenda leadership was not primarily based on one individual or position but on various roles and responsibilities of key individuals such as the *Khosi* (chief), *makhadzi*, *khotsimunene*, *khadzi*, *ndumi*, and other officials.

Despite its flaws, this book laid the foundation for studying Venda society. The same could be said of Lestrade's (1930) book *Some Notes on the Political Organization of the Veñda-Speaking Tribes*. In his book, Lestrade focused on documenting the Venda people's customs, laws, and marriages, among other cultural practices. It is worth noting that Lestrade's study is based on observations and data collected from the locations of Mbiliwi and Tshakoma. Therefore, the findings and observations presented in Lestrade's study are not representative of the entire Venda-speak population. Moreover, the researcher does not provide details about the methodology employed to collect the data or the sample size that this study is based on; instead, Lestrade only mentions that it was obtained "from members of" the community (Lestrade, 1930:306). This lack of transparency in how the study was conducted raises ethical concerns about the accuracy and reliability of the study. In contrast to Stayt, Lestrade (1930) does not specify the type of assistance he received in collecting the data, nor does he mention the use of interpreters, and he does not explain whether or not he is proficient in the language of Tshivenda, the language of research participants. However, Lestrade does reference Venda concepts and the orthography, signalling that he has familiarity with the cultural context, but that is as far as he goes, leaving much to be desired.

The book's notable strength lies in its portrayal of the role and status of women. Lestrade (1930) states that, unlike other African communities, Venda women could inherit property and succeed in positions of power such as village headships, petty chieftainships, and chieftainships. The strength of Lestrade (1930) is that he recognises and acknowledges that Vhavenda women could exercise personal agency to navigate their society and thus could inherit property, personal property and positions of leadership such as petty chiefs. Lestrade (1930) acknowledges that while male succession was generally common, women

were allowed to succeed in these roles regularly (Lestrade, 1930). For instance, Sisters of a chief could be appointed as *nduna* or *mukoma*, presiding over villages or districts, and there are instances of female ascension extending through multiple generations within these positions. Lestrade (1930:314) uses a place called Phephidi as a case study of how women ascended to chieftainship. For instance, Nyadenga of Phiphidi and Nyakhalavha of Khalavha are women who exercised authority as petty chiefs. When the father of Chief Tshivhase left Phiphidi to establish a new capital at Mukumbani, he appointed his daughter Nyadenga as the petty chief of the Phiphidi district (Stayt, 1931). As the heir and the only child of his great wife, Nyadenga possessed full rights equivalent to those of a man at Phiphidi and was subordinate only to the chief himself. Her eldest daughter will inherit her position as the next in line. The foregoing reveals that Vhavenda women have historically had access to chieftainship and other leadership roles in Vhavenda society.

It should be pointed out that, despite their limitations, A strength of Stayt's (1931) and Lestrade's (1930) books is that both these books complicate the idea of gender amongst Vhavenda. While both authors acknowledge a prevailing preference for males among the Vhavenda, they also recognise that this preference was not absolute or fixed. They observe instances where certain women, particularly women petty chiefs, enjoy certain privileges, which complicates the notion of gender dynamics within the Vhavenda society, as well as challenges the customary law principle of male primogeniture in the context of succession to chieftaincy.

2.3 The Impact of Apartheid on the Role of Women in Traditional Leadership

The apartheid system's impact on African women represents a complex web of intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class that affected different ethnic groups in both unique and similar ways. Through examining the experiences of Xhosa and Vhavenda women, alongside the broader context of Black women's oppression during apartheid, we can see how colonial and apartheid policies systematically undermined women's traditional authority and social standing across multiple dimensions.

The colonial project initially established the foundation for women's oppression through deliberate misrepresentation and restructuring of traditional gender roles. In Xhosa society, women's significant economic power through agricultural management was deliberately undermined by colonial narratives that portrayed them as oppressed by supposedly idle men.

Similarly, Vhavenda women's traditional leadership roles, particularly the influential position of *makhadzi*, were systematically dismantled through colonial and apartheid policies.

Apartheid policies, deeply rooted in colonial and patriarchal structures, relegated Black women to the lowest socio-economic positions, stripping them of political rights, economic opportunities, and social autonomy (Levy, 2013). Their lives were defined by systemic violence, forced removals, exploitative labour conditions, and the destruction of family structures. Under apartheid laws, Black women had no political representation and were denied the most basic rights. The pass laws, which required Black people to carry identification documents to restrict their movement, were particularly oppressive for women (Levy, 2013).

The apartheid government systematically disrupted traditional leadership structures across South Africa by imposing rigid patriarchal and racial policies that reinforced male dominance in traditional leadership, sidelining women who had historically held influential positions. Colonial and apartheid-era laws centralised power in the hands of male chiefs, disregarding the governance structures that had previously allowed women to exercise authority in various capacities (Weir, 2006). This reveals striking parallels between different communities. For Vhavenda women, the erosion of the *makhadzi*'s authority and the undermining of women's roles as regents and chiefs mirrors the colonial "housewifification" of Xhosa women described by Peires (1977). The role of Christianity and colonial institutions in this transformation process was particularly significant. Among the Xhosa, Christian missionaries served as agents of colonial transformation, actively working to reshape women's identities according to European gender norms. This religious and cultural intervention paralleled the broader apartheid strategy of disrupting traditional ceremonies and practices where women held leadership roles, as seen in Vhavenda society.

Traditionally, Vhavenda women held positions of considerable influence, with the *makhadzi* playing a crucial advisory role in governance. Women served as regents, and some even managed their territories as chiefs. The apartheid system systematically dismantled these traditional roles by refusing to recognise female regents and chiefs, diminishing the traditional role of the *makhadzi*. Kuper (1982), Buijs (2002), Weir (2006), and Matshidze (2013) demonstrate that Vhavenda women historically exercised authority in roles such as *makhadzi*, *vhakoma*, and through practices like woman-to-woman marriage, which enabled them to assert social and political power.

However, apartheid-era policies, such as the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, formalised male-dominated leadership structures, reducing the influence of women in decision-making processes and altering the traditional balance of power. The cultural impact was significant as many traditional ceremonies and practices where women played leadership roles were either abandoned or significantly altered. The distortion of cultural narratives about women's roles led to the marginalisation of women's traditional knowledge systems and the erosion of matrilineal aspects of Vhavenda culture. This cultural disruption has had lasting effects on gender relations and leadership structures within Vhavenda society.

At this juncture, the discussion shifts to reviewing the literature published mainly in post-apartheid South Africa. The drastic jump from the 1930s to 1994 in the study is primarily due to a lack of relevant available literature from the intervening period. However, the section on the impact of apartheid on women's traditional leadership is to provide context to the social and political conditions. As well as the position in the society of Black South Africa, including Vhavenda women within that gap. This gap reflects limited documentation and research on the topic during those decades, especially concerning the traditional leadership roles of the Vhavenda women. As a result, the study focuses on well-documented periods before and after 1994. To reiterate, the post-apartheid literature tends to focus largely on contemporary issues facing Vhavenda women leaders and how some of these women use the South African Constitution and the courts to challenge issues such as the customary practice principle of male primogeniture, especially in a democratic society.

2.4 Post-1994 Contemporary Challenges and Contestations: How Vhavenda Women use the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa post-1994 to challenge traditional and customary practices that reinforce patriarchal norms

Interestingly, in post-1994 South Africa, issues of gender and gender equality have taken a turn towards the deployment of the courts to challenge patriarchal practices and customs. The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) report (2018:12) notes that there is a “widespread practice in the name of culture and tradition that tends to discriminate against potential female heirs who often resort to courts and legal battles to claim their right to assume positions of leadership in their communities”. The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), an independent statutory body established in Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution, 108 of 1996, has constitutional powers to promote and protect gender equality (CGE website, n.d.). Research shows that some women are using the post-apartheid Constitution and the CGE to challenge,

among other practices, the customary law principle of male primogeniture in the context of succession to chieftaincy.

For instance, in the article “*The Role of Women in Traditional Leadership with Special Reference to the Valoyi Tribe*,” Chauke (2015) notes that transitioning to a new democratic dispensation resulted in the shift toward adopting democratic principles. The researcher conducted a study that involved reviewing various articles on traditional leadership, analysing court proceedings related to disputes over traditional leadership, and collecting data through interviews conducted during the court proceedings of the *Shilubana* case. The background to the *Shilubana* case is that in 1968, after the passing of the Valoyi Chief, Chief Fofozwa Nwamitwa, his daughter Ms Shilubana was prevented from assuming the role of Chief/Hosi because it was claimed that the law of male primogeniture recognised only male heirs. It was in this context that Ms Shilubana’s uncle, Richard Nwamitwa, assumed the position of *Hosi* of the Valoyi (Mmusinyane, 2009). It was subsequently agreed upon that Ms Shilubana be designated as the legitimate heir to the Chieftainship upon her uncle’s death. However, upon her uncle’s death, Ms Shilubana’s nephew, the late Richard Nwamitwa’s son, Sidwell Nwamiwa, challenged Ms Shilubana’s claim to chieftainship (Mmusinyane, 2009:138). Ms. Shilubana took her nephew to court. The Court supported Ms Shilubana’s case that the reason Richard Nwamitwa became chief, to begin with, was due to the application of customary law of male primogeniture. The Constitutional Court, therefore, ruled that the customary law of male primogeniture was unconstitutional, entitling Ms. Shilubana to succeed in the Chieftainship (Mmusinyane, 2009).

It is in this context that Chauke’s (2015) study particularly examined the decision made in the *Shilubana* case by the Constitutional Court of South Africa to overturn the customary law principle of male primogeniture. This principle has been one of the foundations of traditional leadership. As the South African Constitution overrules all social and cultural practices, the Constitutional Court found male primogeniture to be unconstitutional because it violates gender equality principles. The South African Constitution prioritises gender equality, constitutional democracy, and justice.

Based on this ruling, Ms. Shilubana was appointed as the *hosi* (Chief). While this represented a victory, one of the limitations of this victory was that her children could not succeed her as chief since the heir had to be from the Nwamitwa lineage (Madondo, 2019). It could be argued that Ms. Shilubana’s victory was pyrrhic because it does not extend to her children as it would

have if she were male. This raises the question, “What good is the victory against a sexist law principle of male primogeniture if it does not extend to the children of the woman?” We need laws that aim to fundamentally change societal patriarchal practices that regard children as belonging to the man or patriarchal customs that require children to carry only the man’s surname. The post-apartheid laws fall short in this regard, as Ms Shilubana's victory demonstrates.

It is worth noting that the *Shilubana* case was no exception. The *Mphephu* case is another case that challenged the sexist law principle of male primogeniture in the context of chieftainship in post-apartheid South Africa. The *Mphephu* case involved Masindi Mphephu, the daughter of the late chief, who was in a dispute with her uncle Toni Mphephu-Ramabulana over who should rightfully succeed as the chief. This case demonstrated the ongoing tension between the traditional practice of male primogeniture and the push for gender equality in traditional leadership in post-1994 South Africa (Mulaudzi and Kriel, 2021). This case also challenged traditional norms and highlighted the potential for women to assume top traditional leadership roles within the Venḁa community, using principles of the South African Constitution to support them.

2.5 The Role of *Makhadzi* in Post-1994 South Africa

In her qualitative doctoral study, “*The Role of Makhadzi in Traditional Leadership among the Venḁa*,” Pfanelo Matshidze (2013) discusses the traditional role of *makhadzi* that Vhaventḁa women have historically played in Venḁa society. Matshidze (2013) examines the role of *makhadzi* in traditional leadership within the Venḁa community through observation and interviewing fifteen *makhadzi* from different chieftainships. Her work is scholarly significant as it represents one of the first post-apartheid contributions to understanding women's role in traditional leadership among the Venḁa. Matshidze (2013) offers valuable insights as an insider by drawing on her experiences and observations of the *makhadzi*'s role within her community. Her study contributes to the existing literature regarding the esteemed position of *makhadzi* as one of the highest leadership roles that Vhaventḁa women have historically occupied in the Venḁa society. Furthermore, Matshidze’s (2013) research serves as an important post-1994 reference point for understanding the intricate gender dynamics within traditional leadership structures among the Venḁa. Through interviews with various *makhadzi*, Matshidze (2013) seeks to understand the challenges, opportunities, and ever-evolving roles and statuses these encounter in their respective communities.

Additionally, she discusses how the failure of the post-apartheid state to recognise the role of *makhadzi* legally undermines women's empowerment and liberation. Matshidze (2013) argues that the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (TLGFA) fails to recognise *makhadzi* as active contributors to the traditional leadership of the Vhavenda. This lack of recognition diminishes and devalues the social significance of the leadership role that the *makhadzi* position has historically played and continues to play in Vhavenda society. Additionally, Matshidze (2013) contends that undermining the significant role of *makhadzi* primarily exacerbates the marginalisation of Vhavenda women in leadership. By highlighting the significance of *makhadzi*'s role, Matshidze (2013) demonstrates that the legal disregard for the *makhadzi*'s role undermines their position. Should the role of *makhadzi* be legally protected, it would receive the recognition and respect it deserves. Matshidze's (2013) work effectively showcases how this non-recognition has caused instability in the Vhavenda community. Matshidze (2013) argues that since customary practices are acknowledged by the state and operate within legal frameworks, it is equally important to recognise the role of *makhadzi*, because the social role of *makhadzi* represents a customary based leadership social category.

2.6 Vhavenda Women's Contributions into the Political and Military Spheres

In his PhD dissertation titled "*The Venda Armory: Warfare, Gender, and Technology in South Africa*", Akil Cornelius (2022) focuses on Venda's political and military history. Despite being an outsider, Cornelius's work stands out as the first comprehensive academic study of the Venda Armory. In Chapter Four of the study, Cornelius discusses the power of women and their involvement in warfare, a history that is particularly germane to this study. Cornelius's (2022) study centres on two nineteenth-century internecine wars in which Vhavenda women participated, namely, the contested succession following the death of Khosi Dingana and the war for control over the chiefdom of Dzimauli. According to, Vhavenda women actively participated as strategists and combatants during these wars. Cornelius (2022) challenges the androcentric bias prevalent in the mainstream narrative on warfare, which often portrays women as passive victims or infantilises them in need of care and protection from male combatants (Cornelius, 2022).

A remarkable aspect of Cornelius' (2022) dissertation is its acknowledgement of women's influence in preserving Vhavenda chieftainship, along with exposing the positive contribution of Vhavenda women in two civil warfares that stemmed from succession conflicts of the late

nineteenth century. Cornelius's (2022: 211) research demonstrates the ways in which “the ritual and more indirect authorities entrusted to Venda women were sufficient to constrain the prerogatives of even the most powerful Venda dynasts” during the nineteenth-century internecine wars. For instance, he explains that:

“The death in 1881 of Vele Rambuda created an opportunity for King Ligege Tshivhasa to draw the kingdom of Dzimauli back within his sphere of influence and restore the historical relationship between the Tshivhasa dynasty and Rambuda chiefdom. Despite his initial success in 1881 and 1882, by 1883, Ligege had alienated two of the most important women in Ha-Tshivhasa. Ultimately, Ligege's attempts to strengthen the northern flank of his country collapsed under the weight of adversarial relationships between himself and Nyatshitahela, his sister, and Muofhe Nyatema, the senior *makhadzi* of Ha-Tshivhasa (Cornelius, 2022: 211).”

Ultimately, what makes Cornelius' (2022) work stand out is the fact that it goes beyond the usual discussion of the most recognisable leadership roles that Vhavenda women have historically played in Venda society to highlight a least researched area in which Vhavenda women excelled in as well.

2.7 The institution of Queen Motherhood amongst Vhavenda – *Vhakoma*

Nomathamsanqa Tisani (2023), in the article “The Queen Mothers' Struggle for Breath: The Colonisation of an Institution”, draws an analogy between the strangulation of Queen Motherhood and the death of George Floyd at the hands of white police brutality. She argues that just as Floyd was strangled to death, the institution of Queen Motherhood was killed by colonial asphyxiation. The imposition of colonial rule restructured African societies to align with Western administrative systems, often sidelining or erasing existing power dynamics that included significant roles for women. Mamdani (1996) discusses how colonial authorities entrenched indirect rule, reinforcing patriarchal norms by selectively recognising and formalising male-dominated chieftaincies while disregarding or undermining the authority of women leaders such as *Vhakoma*, the institution of Queen Motherhood. This legacy persisted through apartheid, which further marginalised women in traditional leadership by embedding legal and institutional barriers that restricted their roles to the domestic sphere or informal advisory positions.

Tisani (2023) highlights that the institution of Queen Motherhood existed across Southern Africa under different names yet represented similar characteristics. She defines Queen Motherhood as “a practice where, in some royal courts, a woman, designated *uNdlunkulu*, would assume regency if *inkulu*/heir she had borne was still a minor on his father's death.” According to Tappe Ortiz and Kobrich (2022), Queen mothers in precolonial Africa ruled alongside chiefs and symbolised women's political and economic leadership. Similarly, Babalwa Magoqwana (2018) contends that using a bio-logic framework, a Western model for understanding reality, fails to capture the essence of certain traditional African institutions adequately. She illustrates this with the institution of “*uMakhulu*,” which serves as a vital source of knowledge and cultural preservation, passing heritage from one generation to the next. However, due to the biological perspective, which often undermines the category of women by attributing them less power, status, and position, institutions like *uMakhulu* are misunderstood, and their contributions are underestimated. In a parallel argument, Tisani (2023) applies this reasoning to the institution of Queen motherhood. Tisani (2023) similarly argues that, though impactful, Queen motherhood becomes invisible when analysed through a European lens. Tisani (2023) asserts that this lens distorts the understanding of Queen motherhood, ultimately misrepresenting the institution and diminishing its significance. Both scholars emphasise Western frameworks’ inadequacies in fully appreciating these traditional institutions’ social roles and contributions.

In Venda culture, the equivalent institution of the Queen Motherhood is called *vhakoma*. Mulaudzi and Poulos (2003), in “*The Musanda variety: the language of the 'ruling community among the Venda people*”, define *vhakoma*, also known as *Vhatshiozwi*, as the chief's mother. *Vhakoma* falls within the category of Queen Mother, the mother of *the khosi-khulu*, *thovhele*, and *khosi* Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2023:3), regards *vhakoma* as “mainly an elderly person who is either a relative or a trusted person who acts as a mediator between the community and the chief”. In essence, what Tisani (2023) describes as *uNdlunkulu* amongst the Nguni identifying groups is what Vh Venda people refer to as *vhakoma*.

Aside from *vhakoma* being the mother of the chief, which is fundamentally important to the making and breaking of the chieftaincy, Ramavhunga (2019) shows that some of her roles include being an advisor to the chief, organising and overseeing important cultural events such as *Ndayo*, *Mahundwane* or *Domba*, which are practices or “set of rules that guide individuals at various stages of their lives”, which in the community contribute to the educating and

socialisation of cultural practices (Ramavhunga, 2019:65). These practices are taught so that there can be a state of peace, harmony, and equilibrium in the community. Other studies such as “*Exploring initiation schools’ impact on HIV and AIDS management in the Vhembe district of South Africa: An ethnography*” by Avhatakali A Ndou-Mammbona and “*Could Vhavenḁa initiation schools be a panacea for HIV and AIDS management in the Vhembe district of South Africa?*” by Ndou-Mammbona, A.A. and Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A.H have shown that these practices, events like the *Domba* or *Ndayo*, positively impact the lives of adolescents. This is because, in these events, young men and women are taught about adulthood and how best to transition while also maintaining cultural knowledge and practices. *Vhakoma* oversees these cultural events, *Vhakoma* plays a significant role as a primary socialiser for young adults in the Venḁa community.

Thizwilondi Joabeth Madima (2021: 108) states, “*Vhakoma* is a member of *Dzomo la Mupo* organisation which rallies behind the empowerment of tribal members on how best culture can be prevented from eroding together with the traditions, beliefs, and norms of the Vhavenḁa traditional Society.” So, based on this statement, we gather that the role of *vhakoma* is important when it comes to the preservation of culture. Similar to how she organises the *Domba*, which is a major cultural heritage preservation. She is also an important member of decision-making on cultural empowerment through finding ways to preserve traditions, norms and beliefs that have been the cornerstone of the Venḁa society. While the dominant literature on *vhakoma* focuses on how the institution preserves norms and practices, it is important to look at this role from a leadership viewpoint and contextualise it to understand the Venḁa traditional leadership structure.

Another significant role of *vhakoma* includes being an advisor to the royal wives, who are known as *vhatanuni* (plural). In this role, she ensures that the chief's marriages remain intact and harmonious. Additionally, she oversees the royal wives' performance of their assigned duties, which include various ceremonial, administrative, or domestic responsibilities. This advisory role underscores *vhakoma*'s importance in maintaining stability within the royal family structure. By guiding the *vhatanuni* and ensuring they fulfil their obligations, *vhakoma* contributes to the overall functioning and reputation of the royal household.

2.8 Conclusion

In reviewing the literature, a clear distinction emerges between apartheid-era and post-1994 research on Black South African communities, particularly in the use of emic and etic frameworks. Pre-1994, research predominantly employed an etic perspective, where Black communities were analysed through a Western academic lens that often reinforced colonial and racial biases. This is evident in Stayt's work, where he refers to his research assistants as "boys," a derogatory term that diminishes mature African men to childlike status. His use of terms like "tribe" and "their people" underscores his outsider perspective, observing and interpreting these communities from a detached, often condescending viewpoint. In contrast, post-1994 literature marks a shift towards an emic approach, characterised by a growing presence of Black researchers who aim to understand these communities from within. Researchers such as Matshidze (2013) and Ramavhunga (2019) embody this insider perspective, offering insights that are both respectful and empowering. They broaden the narrative by highlighting the significant roles of women, such as *Vhakoma*, within the Venda community, roles that apartheid-era studies largely overlooked or simplified. This transition illustrates a broader movement towards decolonising research methodologies, where the focus shifts from mere observation to genuine understanding and representation.

The literature shows that the Vhavenda have a long history of accepting women as chiefs. Vhavenda women have traditionally been appointed "as 'headmen' over some villages or even districts, the succession to this office then tending in some cases to be confined to females" (Mulaudzi and Kriel 2021: 95). That being said, the concept of male primogeniture has historically been dominant framework within which to resolve customary law disputes of intestate succession in many African societies, including the Vhavenda society (Mireku, 2010). Post-1994, the South African Constitution has encouraged and empowered women to challenge male primogeniture on the basis that it "discriminates unfairly on the grounds of age, birth and, most conspicuously, gender" (Mireku 2010: 516). Against this backdrop, some Vhavenda women have asserted their right "to the highest position of Venda traditional leadership by appealing to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa" (Mulaudzi and Kriel 2021: 90). These include Vhavenda women from royal houses amongst whom the Ramabulana, the Vhangona, the Tshivhase and the Mphaphuli are the most prominent (Mulaudzi and Kriel, 2021).

The literature reveals that the role of *makhadzi* in post-apartheid South Africa is not legally recognised. This is despite the fact that *makhadzi* in Vhavenḁa society is “the most highly regarded woman with more power than men, playing critical roles in, amongst other things, the politics of succession, resolution of disputes, regency, initiation of girls and spiritual guidance” (Mulaudzi and Kriel 2021: 96). Matshidze’s doctoral study highlights the significance of *makhadzi* in post-apartheid South Africa, and advocates for the legal recognition of *makhadzi* as the legitimate traditional leadership role that Vhavenḁa women continue to play in Venḁa society (Mulaudzi and Kriel, 2021). The literature readings also revealed the long history of Vhavenḁa women’s involvement in Vhavenḁa wars of the late nineteenth century. Cornelius’ (2022) study recounts how Vhavenḁa women actively participated as strategists and combatants in Vhavenḁa internecine wars of the late nineteenth century.

The discussion of the literature shows that the role of *vhakoma* remains an area in need of more comprehensive research, particularly as it relates to traditional leadership within the Vhavenḁa community. *Vhakoma* plays an important part in the functioning of traditional governance, yet it has received far less scholarly attention. Further research into *vhakoma* could provide a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of traditional leadership, offering a complete picture of how Vhavenḁa women have historically influenced and continue to shape these systems. Post-1994, the legacy of colonial and apartheid-era governance structures remains evident in the continued struggles of women in traditional leadership to gain formal recognition and influence. Despite legal reforms promoting gender equality, structural inequalities persist, limiting women’s participation in decision-making within traditional governance. However, women are actively challenging these historical barriers by asserting their leadership roles, advocating for policy changes, and mobilising within their communities to reclaim positions of authority.

This MA study aims to build on the studies reviewed in this chapter by researching how young Vhavenḁa women in post-apartheid South Africa perceive the various traditional leadership roles that Vhavenḁa women have historically played and continue to play in Venḁa society. Moreover, due to the dearth of research on Venḁa society and how the Vhavenḁa people have contributed to the creation of modern South Africa, this study aims to contribute to the research and epistemological efforts of scholars who research and write about the Vhavenḁa.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on reviewing the existing literature regarding the role of Vhavenda women in traditional leadership structures. This section outlines the research methodology used to collect the data throughout the research project and how the data was analysed. Therefore, this section will address the following aspects: research design, semi-structured interviews, sampling strategy, data analysis, theoretical framework, and ethical considerations. These aspects will be discussed thoroughly to demonstrate how the data was collected and why specific methods best suited my study.

3.2 Research Design: Qualitative Method

This is a qualitative study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) state that qualitative research is a research methodology that focuses on understanding the meaning and significance behind the experiences, behaviours, and settings of individuals or groups. As Creswell (1994) mentioned, qualitative research is instrumental when investigating complex topics, allowing for in-depth analysis. Kothari (2004) defines qualitative research as collecting and interpreting non-numerical data to identify patterns, attitudes, behaviour, and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Qualitative methodology maintains the essence of complex data while presenting it meaningfully and comprehensively. Creswell (1994) adds that considering the research has culturally specific information about a particular population, qualitative research is the most effective, encompassing attitudes, norms, behaviours, and values. “Qualitative research aims to discover meaning grounded in human experience” (Gill, 2020: 579).

Using a qualitative approach, I aimed to capture and examine the views of women on traditional leadership structures. This method ensured open communication between the researcher and the research participants. It encouraged participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and views on the traditional leadership roles women have historically played in Venda society. The study used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Interviews were selected explicitly because the research question aimed to capture the perceptions and viewpoints of young Vhavenda women. As highlighted by Schmidt (2004), interviews were deemed appropriate considering that perceptions and views are often personal, subjective, and influenced by the context or environment in which individuals find themselves. Furthermore, according to Denny

and Weckesser (2022), interviews are the most commonly used data collection strategy in qualitative research. Their extensive usage further supported the decision to utilise interviews as the primary method for data collection in this study.

3.3 Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews

As noted in the previous section, data collection for this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. Using a semi-structured interview format allowed the research participants to think and respond openly and feel empowered enough to drive the conversation at their own pace and comfort. Moreover, Adams (2023) states that the semi-structured element maintains professionalism and formality yet also grants the interviewees freedom to express their beliefs, thoughts, and experiences in their own words and at their own pace. Traditional leadership and leadership roles are complex and multifaceted phenomena deeply embedded within cultural and historical contexts. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to deeply explore participants' perspectives, beliefs, experiences, and attitudes surrounding these roles without compromising the richness or depth of the data. It facilitated two-way communication and allowed for probing into responses.

It is worth noting that some interviews were conducted telephonically, while others took place in person. This was because some of these participants lived far from my location, while some found the telephonic option the most convenient because of their busy schedules. Interviews were conducted in English and Tshivenda, with transcriptions in both languages to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The advantage of the interviews is that they included participants from younger to slightly older generations, varying from university student leaders to individuals with experiences in the community and workplace. Notably, one observes similar patterns in their knowledge and engagement with Vhavenda history. This caught my attention as it offered valuable insight, indicating the slow collapse of cultural heritage within the younger generation compared to the older generation.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

3.4.1 Purposive and Snowball Sampling

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies to recruit participants. Purposive sampling was used to start the participant selection process because it allowed me to specifically choose individuals who possessed the criteria relevant to the study and whose

experiences would help address the research question (Tongco,2007). Maxwell (2012) defines purposive sampling as a deliberate strategy that involves intentionally selecting specific settings, individuals, or events to gather essential information that cannot be obtained through choices. Rai and Thapa (2015) state that the advantage of using purposive sampling is that it enables researchers to target and select information-rich cases intentionally, that is, participants who could provide in-depth and detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

After establishing this initial purposive sample, the best way for me to expand the participant pool and tap into broader social networks was by implementing a snowballing strategy. According to Denny and Weckesser (2022), snowballing sampling involves recruiting a few people from the target research population; in this case, the participants are recruited through purposive sampling, who will connect the researcher with their network. These individuals will then facilitate connections between the researcher and other potential participants within their networks. In this instance, the specific focus is on young Vhavanḁa women. The recruitment process began by utilising a purposive sampling strategy to pinpoint and interview a limited group of Vhavanḁa women who have previously held or are presently holding leadership roles across diverse domains such as educational institutions, cultural organisations, social groups, and political organisations. These women then referred the researcher to other potential research participants.

3.4.2 Sampling Size

Seven Vhavanḁa women aged 20-30 were recruited for this research project. Although the sample size was limited to seven participants, the sample size was not intended to be representative of all young Vhavanḁa women but to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of individual young Vhavanḁa women. This approach seeks to provide deeper insight into how the research participants interpret and make sense of their world. Hence, the participants were selected based on their lived experiences rather than for statistical representation, ensuring they provided rich and insightful data. Furthermore, this study serves as an important exploratory step in addressing a knowledge gap. Given that this is a half-thesis with numerous aspects to unpack within a limited word count, the selected participants were sufficient to achieve the study's intended objectives. The participants were purposefully selected based on their gender, ethnicity as Venḁa, familiarity with the Venḁa culture and some form of leadership position (See Table 2 below). This selection criteria were important as the study specifically focused on exploring the dynamics of the Venḁa culture and its impact on

leadership. Participants were required to first fall within the age range of 18 to 39 to ensure they were mature adults who could provide insightful perspectives on the studied topic. Secondly, the range of 20 to 30 is often the demographic that experiences intersecting traditional and modern influences and is typically more engaged. By specifically targeting women who have occupied a leadership role, their experiences provided unique insights into the intersection between gender, culture and leadership and the challenges faced in traditional and modern contexts. While not all participants held traditional leadership positions per se, they did occupy leadership roles within their respective areas.

The importance of the perspectives of the young Vhavenḁa women enriches the study by shedding light on the evolving roles of Vhavenḁa women in society and what leadership means in contemporary times. Lastly, the study did not limit participants to a specific geographical locality to allow a broader range of experiences and perspectives to enrich the findings.

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Leadership Area
Participant A	Female	Venḁa	30	University Lecturer Ethics Research Committee
Participant B	Female	Venḁa	24	Student Women’s Economic Empowerment Organisation leader
Participant C	Female	Venḁa	30	SABC Phalaphala News Bulletin Editor and a Union Representative
Participant D	Female	Venḁa	22	University Student Organisation Leader
Participant E	Female	Venḁa	20	University Student Organisation Leader
Participant F	Female	Venḁa	20	University Student Leader
Participant G	Female	Venḁa	22	Member from a Royal Family

Table 2: Profile of Study Participants.

3.5 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as transcribing data, generating codes, and classifying themes. They further note that a theme captures an important aspect of the data about the research question, representing a pattern or recurring meaning within the dataset. Then followed by their six-phase guide to conduct the thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 1: The first step was to become familiar with the data in depth by repeatedly listening to the interview recordings to identify concepts and patterns across them all. Since the work was verbal or recorded interviews, they had to transcribe them into written form to start the thematic analysis process. The transcribing process of the interviews was also a way for me to become more familiar with the content.

Phase 2: The second step was generating codes by labelling and highlighting words, phrases, and sections within the transcribed interviews. These words, phrases, and sections were not necessarily themes but interesting points that assisted me in observing certain connections and patterns across interviews. Parts that stood out were highlighted to try to understand how they related to the literature and the objectives of this research study.

Phase 3: The third step was identifying broader, overarching themes by examining the highlighted words, phrases, and statements. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), using a mind map or table is helpful in brainstorming and organising themes, as it makes the work more readable and structured. Through a rigorous process to identify themes via a mind map, five themes were identified, namely:

1. The Role of *Makhadzi* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community.
2. The Role of *Vhakoma* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community.
3. The Role of *Vhakololo* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community.
4. The customary practice of male primogeniture and how it contradicts the South African Constitution post-1994.
5. The socialisation process that puts boys and men on a leadership pedestal.

Phase 4: The fourth step was reviewing the themes to ensure they were distinct, added value, and aligned with the study's research objectives. This was a back-and-forth process to ensure that the themes were refined and consolidated.

Phase 5: Once the themes were established, the next step was naming and defining them. The names had to be clear and direct, not vague, and each theme was defined to create distinctions and avoid overlap, but also, it is important to note that where there was an overlap, it was a good thing, as it highlighted an important repeated point. It was important to ensure that each theme had to tell a coherent story about the study's findings.

Phase 6: The last step was presenting a comprehensive thematic analysis report. This is presented in the subsequent Chapters, Chapters Four and Five.

3.6 Africana womanism as the theoretical framework

This study adopts Cleonora Hudson-Weems's (1993) theory and method of Africana Womanism. Africana Womanism is grounded in African culture and emphasises African women's unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Hudson-Weems (1993) holds that African womanism should not be viewed as a supplement to feminism but rather as a counter-theory. Unlike Western feminism, which has been criticised for not fully capturing the experiences of Black women, Africana Womanism uses an Afrocentric perspective to reflect pre-colonial African practices and values, such as those found in traditional leadership roles in Vhavenḁa society, but with Black women at the centre. Chikafa-Chipiro (2019:20) has also pointed out that African Womanism is a “reclamation theoretical perspective that seeks to reclaim Black women’s identities and subjectivities in the face of Western feminist hegemonies.”

Hudson-Weems’s Africana Womanism centres on African women's identity and cultural context, prioritising ethnicity and cultural identity. The term “Africana” highlights the ethnic and cultural roots of African women. At the same time, “Womanism” captures their gendered experiences, emphasising that African women have not received privileges afforded to other women. The theory rejects the generic application of “feminism” due to its origins and values within a Western paradigm. As such, Africana Womanism offers African women a framework for self-naming and cultural relevance, allowing them to assess and address their own lived realities from an African-centered perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2001).

Africana Womanism aligns with this study's objective to explore the perceptions of young Vhavenda women regarding traditional leadership roles historically and presently held by women within Vhavenda. This alignment is evident in how Africana Womanism's African-centered approach allows a critical focus on the intersectional experiences of African women, addressing layers of racial, cultural, and gender-based dynamics as they relate to traditional leadership and cultural practices specific to Vhavenda society. Furthermore, Africana Womanism acknowledges the distinct historical and social contexts African women navigate, making it relevant for interpreting young Vhavenda women's views on their heritage and cultural roles.

The theory also offers a culturally relevant lens through which African women's unique struggles and roles can be examined, especially within traditional leadership. The theory critiques Eurocentric and colonial narratives, providing a decolonial framework that values and centres African women's perspectives and agency. This is evident in the following chapter when Africana Womanism as a methodological framework is used to analyse data by highlighting the distinct experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of the young Vhavenda women participants. Thus, Africana Womanism allows a culturally specific examination of African women's roles, such as *makhadzi*, *tshisinavhute*, *vhakoma* and *vhakololo*, as the theory provides a foundation for African women to claim autonomy and independence, positioning them as central actors in their cultural narratives and leadership roles.

The Africana Womanist perspective not only contextualises these roles within an African historical framework but also recognises the ongoing efforts of African women to uphold and reshape cultural practices that affirm their identity and leadership within their communities. This aligns with Hudson-Weems's argument that African women must address their issues, with a focus on African solutions to African problems (Hudson-Weems, 2001).

Scholars such as Kolawole (1997), Ebunoluwa (2009) and Msila and Gumbo (2016) argue that Western feminism does not fully consider the socio-cultural realities of African women. Western feminism's portrayal of African women as powerless is viewed as patronising and attempts to fight on behalf of African women without fully understanding or acknowledging their contexts can be counterproductive. This critique underscores why many African women prefer an approach like Africana Womanism, which acknowledges "triple oppression", the combined racial, class, and gender-based struggles African women face (Ebunoluwa, 2009). It is against this that this study adopted Africana Womanism as a theoretical framework that seeks

to understand how the Vhavenḁa women within traditional leadership roles navigate power, identity, and cultural expectation, mirroring pre-colonial roles that may still hold influence today.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

3.7.1 Informed Consent

The study received approval from both the Rhodes University Humanities Faculty Higher Degree Committee and the Ethics Committee, underscoring the rigorous ethical review process it underwent ([See Appendix 2](#)). As per the University's ethical guidelines, the participants were informed of the purpose of the research and issues concerning confidentiality, and then, if a research participant had no questions regarding the rationale of the research, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form. The research participants were informed that they were not obliged to accept the invitation to participate in the research. They had the option to decline to answer questions they were not comfortable answering, and they had a right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The following step-by-step process was used to obtain consent. First, a consent form was drafted, and it was stipulated that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time voluntarily ([See Appendix 1](#)). Secondly, it highlighted the study's central purpose and benefits and the procedures that would be used to collect the data. Thirdly, it informed them about the confidentiality and anonymity they would uphold as the research participant and the benefits their contributions would bring to the study. The consent form was drafted most clearly and unambiguously to allow all participants to understand and be well-informed of what they were consenting to. Then, the consent form was explained thoroughly to the participants to remove any confusion or ambiguity. Their signature followed this to show their agreement. With the participants' consent, all interviews were recorded. This recording was important to ensure that no valuable information was missed during data analysis. As Rabionet (2011) states, using recordings allows for a more comprehensive analysis than relying solely on notes. The significance of recording these interviews was emphasised, not only because they were lengthy and challenging to remember verbatim but also because capturing the accuracy and authenticity of the participants' words and directly quoting them and their reactions to the questions was important.

3.7.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

It explained to research participants that all the information obtained during data collection would be treated as strictly confidential. It further pointed out that all the data collected from research participants will be anonymised to protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants. To that end, all the research participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. These pseudonyms are participants named Participants A to G.

3.7.3 Cultural Sensitivity

As a young Venda woman, this study was approached with the sensitivity that it requires and deserves. Therefore, I was mindful of and respected the fact that young Vhavenda women do not hold homogenous views about women leaders. I explained to research participants that the study does not seek to impose preconceived ideas about what traditional leadership roles Vhavenda women should play in society. Instead, the study was interested in learning from research participants about what they think and perceive to be appropriate traditional leadership roles that Vhavenda women should play in society.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methods used to conduct and achieve the main objective of this study. The research design used was qualitative, considering the nature of the study. The research participants were exclusively women who identify as Vhavenda and have served as leaders in their respective capacities. The study used purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure a representative sample of the research participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which I then themed and coded for analysis. Additionally, it placed significant emphasis on acknowledging my positionality throughout the research process to avoid any potential biases in the study and to accurately present the voices of the research participants and the Vhavenda community. This commitment to transparency and ethical considerations enhances the credibility of the findings. The following chapter will present the findings from the data collected.

**CHAPTER FOUR: TSENGULUSO YA MUSHUMO WA MAKHADZI, VHAKOMA
NA VHAKOLOLO KHA VHURANGANPHANDA - EXPLORING THREE
FUNDAMENTAL LEADERSHIP ROLES PLAYED BY VHAVENḂA WOMEN
POST-1994**

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data analysis discussion by framing it around three themes: *Makhadzi*, *Vhakoma*, and *Vhakololo*. These themes emerged during the data collection and coding phase. During interviews, research participants frequently referenced *makhadzi*, *vhakoma*, and *vhakololo* as the prominent traditional leadership roles VhavenḂa women have historically and presently played in VenḂa society. As discussed in Chapter One, the leadership role of *makhadzi* has a long history in the historical tradition of VhavenḂa society. It is the one leadership role that all the research participants referenced. While the other two leadership roles, *vhakoma* and *vhakololo*, also have a long history in the VhavenḂa society, they are not as well-researched in the literature as the *makhadzi* role, nor are they recognised and associated with traditional leadership roles that VhavenḂa women have historically played in the VenḂa society by many young VhavenḂa people. The discussion of the findings begins by analysing the role of *makhadzi* and the several ways research participants talked about it and understood it. The second and third sections discuss how research participants understood and spoke about *vhakoma* and *vhakololo*'s roles as traditional leadership roles historically associated with VhavenḂa women.

4.2 The Role of *Makhadzi* in Traditional Leadership Among the VenḂa Community

To gauge women's perception of leadership roles that VhavenḂa women have historically and continue to play in VenḂa, research participants were asked during interviews to talk about how they understood the role of *makhadzi*. One of the participants describing the role of *makhadzi* stated:

Participant E: "I remember when my mom and dad went through a Lobola process, right? And I saw that my culture, the VenḂa culture, really does put women at the forefront. My aunt, *Makhadzi* Zimu, was there and at the forefront of the negotiations. It was a bit of a culture shock. It's usually men who negotiate, but now it's like, what is

this auntie doing here? And when I asked my dad what this was all about, He said, no, women are basically at the forefront of Lobola negotiations.”

The *Lobola* process, known as *mamalo* in Tshivenda, has been a long-standing practice in African cultures. Across various cultures, the *mamalo* signifies different things, but the core principle of the Lobola process is that it allows two families to come together as a “gesture of gratitude for looking after the bride” (Gwatimba, 2021:70). Minga and Gadzikwa (2019) state that *makhadzi*’s role in the negotiations process has been significant even during pre-colonial times, as she was often the first person to learn about her niece’s marriage proposal even before the father so that she could communicate with the in-laws and participants of the lobola negotiations. Therefore, when Participant E states that it is a culture shock for them to see a woman at the forefront of what is seemingly a process dominated by men, Minga and Gadzikwa (2019), on the other hand, provide that history shows that *makhadzi* being at the forefront of negotiations is not a new practice, as she has been recognised as a “female father”.

A female father is defined as a “father who is a woman”, and this is because in African culture, roles and duties were not confined within the premise of gender binary; as pointed out in Chapter One, the coloniality of gender turned around how African women were treated and perceived in spaces of power. However, the term “female father” acknowledges that even if one is a woman, they can also play a role traditionally associated with being a father, given their social fatherly roles. Matshidze (2013:31) also asserts, “The *makhadzi*, in the context of Venda, could be considered as ‘female fathers’ granted the status they occupy and the seemingly masculine role that they play in a patrilineal society.” Hence, when there was a need for negotiation or peacekeepers in marital conflict, *makhadzi* was regarded as an authority and key player, often holding the final say (Minga and Gadzikwa, 2019). This literature supports that what Participant E observed has actually been a long practice that post-1994 is still observable.

While Participant E was not aware of this, Participant A, who is slightly older, expressed sentiments similar to those of Minga and Gadzikwa. Participant A expressed the following:

“You spoke of *makhadzi*. And for me, that role is very crucial. And I believe that, or I’ve learned that throughout, it is something that we still practice, not sufficiently or formally so, but suppose when we do our lobola negotiations, we still have our *makhadzi* and *khadzi* leading those negotiations. And when you also have problems in

your homestead, you do invite the *makhadzi*' to come and help out on the challenges that you're facing. So that's something we still hear of today, but it's things that come from the practices that come from the previous female leaders. So, we still practice a bit of that, although it now may be in a modern way. I am aware of the crucial role that females have had to play in shaping how we are; I mean, our own communities or our own homes.”

Participant E further added the following describing the role of *makhadzi*:

“Number one would obviously be that they are at the forefront in the lobola negotiations. Number two, I think they've also played a huge role in preserving the culture, not only the Venda culture but also the Mudau clan, the way things are conducted at home and when you want to do certain things. Also, last year, in April, we had to do a ritual for my grandfather, who passed away. And he passed away years back. So, I was like, okay, why are we doing it? He passed away. And the people that I referred to be my aunts, *makhadzi*. They had to make me understand. So, I can say that they've played a huge role in maintaining and preserving the Venda culture and the way we do things at home.”

Another significant role that Participant E highlights is that *makhadzi* plays a significant role in preserving the Venda culture by passing it on to the younger generation and educating the younger generation about Venda customs and traditions. As the Participant notes, when she was seeking clarity about why the ritual was being performed, she referred to her *makhadzi* as someone who could teach her and pass down the knowledge of why certain things were being done in a particular manner. This is noted by a scholarly study by Matshidze and Nemutandani (2016) that “*Makhadzi*, elderly women in particular, carry responsibility for customs that are integral to cultural socialisation, in preserving and reinforcing cultural practices that create cohesion in the family structure”. In another study, Sinthumule (2022:4) also notes, “The *makhadzi* is highly regarded among the Vhavenda; hence, they are also called women of power. They are custodians of religious and traditional knowledge and serve as a resource to the family and community.” *Makhadzi* are regarded as custodians of the Venda culture, and they are expected to induct young Venda women into the broader Venda traditions and way of life and maintain and preserve the Venda culture. This role exemplifies the gravity of the significance of *makhadzi* within the Venda culture.

Matshidze (2013) notes that *makhadzi*'s role includes being a mediator. As a mediator, she comes up with solutions that will be acceptable and fair to the parties concerned and affected by the dispute. *Makhadzi* "champions social cohesion among family members" (Matshidze, 2013:43). A similar sentiment was pointed out by Participant D, as a role that they observed from home from their *makhadzi*:

"I have a lot of *makhadzi*, and so is my mom, a *makhadzi* to many more. I honestly mostly see their role when there are issues or disputes. Also, when there are events, they are often at the forefront. For example, in an unveiling ceremony, they often delegate what people should be doing and what the programme looks like. She is essentially the full stop to anything."

Matshidze and Nemutandani (2016) state, "The disintegration and collapse of the family are guarded against through the *makhadzi*'s religious and cultural authority to mediate, discuss and intervene to resolve problems. She may play this role in the immediate and extended family when needed." This scholarly quote aligns with the observation made by Participant D of *makhadzi*'s role being a mediator. When disputes arise within the family, this can be between husband and wife, between father and child, siblings, and all other members. When she is called, she listens to both sides of the parties involved and, based on the merits of the matter, produces the ideal solution that is satisfactory to all parties. This important leadership role ensures strong kinship bonds to maintain a strong Venda community and society that practices its customs and traditions, and this reinforces her role as a peacekeeper (Minga and Gadzikwa, 2019).

Participant D also describes *makhadzi* as "she is essentially the full stop to anything," indicating that the final word that goes is approved by *makhadzi*. This implies a form of authority and a decisive role that *makhadzi* plays. Participant D highlights the social, political, and cultural power *makhadzi* wields in Venda society. This observation is consistent with longstanding research findings in the literature. For example, Buijs (2002:61) equates *makhadzi* to "one who commands or is in control". In Khunou (2023), the role of *makhadzi* is depicted as a central and authoritative figure within the family and community. She is depicted as a custodian of traditions, a mediator in disputes, and a vital link between the living and the ancestors to show that she embodies strength and wisdom, hence her status as a respectable leader within the Venda culture.

This is something that was noted by Participant A as part of the social and cultural factors that have contributed to the evolution of the role of *makhadzi* in the Venḡa society, her role of persevering customs. Participant A stated the following:

“I learned that *makhadzi* is an adviser, and she's also so much involved in shaping her brother, who then in the kingdom becomes the chief. And she will also then be responsible for preserving their customs. So, I think when we look into this role, it's like our transporter from one generation to the next, the carrier of our customs and our traditions from one generation to the next, because she then teaches the kids, the female children that will be born of a brother who will also eventually be the *makhadzi* as well, and then generation to generation, they will be responsible for carrying the customs traditions of the family. So, they perhaps even guide the other women that join their family on what it means to be in that family.”

Moreover, Matshidze (2013) discusses several roles that *makhadzi* plays, ranging from *makhadzi* as someone who ensures that in the event of the death of a chief, there is a succession to traditional leadership or when there is a need for advice, she provides that function. Matshidze (2013) further points out that the role of *makhadzi* is a link between the living and the dead, and an example provided is the *thevhula*, a thanksgiving ceremony where the *makhadzi* leads and shows her as an individual at the forefront of other ceremonies as well. During the *thevhula*, family groups gather annually to pay tribute to the ancestors, with the *makhadzi* at the forefront. In this ceremony, family members also bring forth any grievances or misfortunes experienced throughout the past year. The last roles discussed are *makhadzi* as the bride's chooser and arbitrator.

Another Participant connected the role played by *makhadzi* to the larger role played by women in society as a whole:

Participant B: “*Nga Tshivenḡa ndi nga to u ri makhadzi ndi thikho*. So, one thing women are known to do better is to be that support system within the family. That's why, in most families, you see that immediately when a grandmother or a mother dies, there can be problems within the family. Everyone just does what they want to do. This also shows you how much power we have as women. If we're able to keep a family or a royal house intact, imagine what we could do if we were the leaders. That position

has traditionally been reserved for men, but I believe a woman has the power and ability to keep something intact and ensure everything goes as planned within a household.”

Firstly, the Participant describes *makhadzi* as “*thikho*,” which means pillar or cornerstone of the family. She highlights how *makhadzi* is the glue that holds the family together, providing emotional, social, and cultural support. Hence, the participant points out that even when a woman figure passes away, the family can fall apart as a way to underscore the importance of the role of *makhadzi* in bringing stability and harmony to the family. Hence, the participant questions why leadership positions traditionally reserved for men do not more commonly include women, especially since women have proven capable of keeping families and even royal households intact. The participant is advocating for a wider understanding of women's leadership potential. She argues that if women can manage the complex matters of family life and keep things running smoothly, they are just as capable of managing larger societal responsibilities. The rhetorical question, “Imagine what we could do if we were the leaders?” calls for rethinking traditional power structures and opening leadership roles to women.

On the other hand, other participants provided alternative views of the role of *makhadzi*. For instance, Participant C stated that:

“I think *makhadzi* was respected back then. Back then, your father's sister was like your parent. They were the ones who even knew the secrets of the family and how father matters are currently standing. They would arrange marriage or even the making of children within the family if there is an issue of childbearing. So, the role has evolved because things have changed. You do not have arranged marriages or royal councils as such; even when there were family problems previously, you would find *makhadzi* as the mediator; we don't find that happening like that now. Youth of now, I don't think they understand the role of *vhomakhadzi*. They know about it and enjoy calling *makhadzi*, but *makhadzi* does not work as she used to a long time ago. Even I, for example, I don't have someone close that I wake up to every day and say *makhadzi wanga*. So, it feels like the youth no longer values that position.”

In a follow-up question, participant C identified the following as factors contributing to the decline of the role or less understanding and respect of the role:

“We learn most of the things from social media these days. We no longer go for advice or get advice from our parents or *makhadzi*, like we would back in the day. *Makhadzi*,

back in the day, you would ask her to speak to your parents on your behalf if there were issues. These days, there is WhatsApp, and I can just quickly send a message to my mother, my father, and my uncle wherever I want. So, not because of the involvement of technology and other things, we have access to everyone and anything we want without involving a third party. We no longer need to mediation, like maybe back in the day. I think technology and social media are contributing to that because now, after forever, I can, if I wanted to speak to my whatever in the family or even my father, I can just write to them, unlike back then when there was a procedure.”

Participant C expresses the view that the role of *makhadzi* is now less respected than it was in the past. They identify two factors: first, societal changes have led to an evolution of the role, altering traditional practices, and second, younger generations do not understand the significance of the role compared to earlier times. The participant laments how colonial modernity has broadly impacted the Venḁa family unit and culture, suggesting that it has diminished the social and cultural role of *makhadzi* within the family. Colonial modernity promotes a Western conception of family, specifically the nuclear family structure. This is evident when the participant states, “Even I, for example, I don’t have someone close that I wake up to every day and say *makhadzi wanga*. So, it feels like the youth no longer values that position.” When discussing the roles of *makhadzi* above, we noted that she was well-informed about family matters and was often called upon to resolve disputes. Participant C noted that if someone needed to communicate with a parent, they could turn to *makhadzi*, highlighting the communal setting that characterised traditional families, in contrast to the nuclear family model that excludes broader relational dynamics beyond parents and children. This is something Murovhi (2019) points out that when conducting their study about *Nyaluso ya vhana*, the traditional child-rearing practices in Vhavēḁa families, they and their participants found that in contemporary families, there is a huge shift in family structures, moving from extended families to nuclear ones because they are “modern and practice western lifestyle.”

Participant B connected to this by stating:

“No, I don’t think we are aware of the significance and responsibility of *makhadzi*. These days, as young ladies and young men, we just live to get educated, make money, and continue living. But there’s a lot we don’t know about our traditions. I feel that if I didn’t have the opportunity to stay with my grandmother, I wouldn’t know as much as

I do. I only know a few things. But I feel we should make it a point that our tradition doesn't die out by educating the younger ones about the culture and tradition.”

Participant F, from a personal experience, also added:

“When it comes to tradition, Vhavenda people are very modern these days; they are very modern people; you won't hear them say things, like when Xhosa people go to the mountains for initiation when they turn a certain age, that their tradition, and it will never change. But as Venda, I don't think it is still done. I don't think people still go *khombani*. They say why are you doing that? Things have changed; there is technology and things that we need to adapt and leave our traditions behind.”

Participants B, C and F are pointing to the enduring impact of colonialism in post-1994 South Africa, which encourages young people to be alienated from their own culture. The younger generation seems to feel comfortable following the Western ways of communication model rather than the longstanding Venda traditional ways of communication in the family. Colonial modernity in the form of popular culture encourages the younger generation to divest their cultural tradition and embrace Western culture uncritically. This is evident when Participant B states, “We just live to get educated, make money, and continue living. But there's a lot we don't know about our traditions,” as well as when Participant F says, “Vhavenda people are very modern these days, they are very modern people.”

This is also highlighted by Participant A:

“I think we do not give much attention, or we no longer give respect. I am not sure if it could be globalisation or having a global culture, but we no longer find our identities in our ancestors now irrelevant.... For example, if you look at the issues of *vho Maine*, those are the traditional healers that we need so much. We cannot run away from that. Every single medicine comes from our natural trees and roots, even if they have been technologicalised or put into some plastics to make up capsules. But we do need them as they pass some knowledge on which tree will help us with what kind of problem and which roots will help us with what kind of problem. So much knowledge is what needs to be passed from generation to generation, but, with this globalisation or modernisation, some ideas have been put into our minds to start to feel like those things are inferior and foreign...So you now become the odd one out when you try to practice

those foreign ways, I mean, our traditional ways of doing things that our ancestors used to our fore-parents used to do.”

It is in this discursive context that none of the research participants identified *makhadzi* as a chief maker, a very important role that *makhadzi* has historically played in the Venda society. Presumably, participants were not aware of the significant role that *makhadzi* traditionally played due to the impact of colonial education, which rendered the knowledge of research participants about their culture limited at best and non-existent at worst. Although there have been efforts to decolonise education post-1994, colonial miseducation persists through Eurocentric curricula, the marginalisation of African knowledge systems, and the slow transformation of institutional structures (Maluleka, 2023). Addressing these issues requires a stronger commitment to policy implementation, the promotion of African languages, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge into formal education.

At this point, it is germane to discuss this particular role of *makhadzi* briefly. Moagi and Mtombeni (2021:14) have demonstrated that *makhadzi* has historically played the role of a “chief maker whose decision was final.” She can also act as a regent if the successor is a minor from taking over or for other legitimate reasons that prevent them from executing their duties. This has been a role identified by numerous scholars such as Matshidze (2013), Msila and Gumbo (2016), Mulaudzi and Kriel (2021), and Khunou (2023). Mulaudzi and Kriel (2021) provide the case of *Makhadzi* Phophi Mphephu, who acted as regent for almost seven years before Masindi’s father, Dimbanyika Mphephu, ascended to the throne as an example.

4.3 The Role of *Vhakoma* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community

As discussed in the literature, Chapter Two, the role of the Queen Mother is notable in Southern Africa, as she is regarded as someone who holds an important position within the traditional framework, having given birth to the heir of the chiefdom. Her influence as Queen Mother extends to the community. She is considered the mother of the next chief in line and wife to the chief, as illustrated in diagram 1 below, making her one of the most important people in the leadership structure. As the participant's responses are analysed below, *vhakoma* is said to be a nurturer, and her familial proximity to the chief and community allows her, to a great extent, to influence leadership decisions. This is why Tisani (2023) argues that the institution of Queen Motherhood is important to be acknowledged and studied. *Vhakoma* is also essentially what

Tisani (2023) would term “uNdlunkulu”, which means matriarch in Zulu, a leader in her own right within the traditional political system.

In the interviews, one question was: “Apart from the classical role of *vhomakhadzi*, what other roles would you say have illustrated the power held by women in Venḁa culture?”

One of the interviewees responded as follows:

Participant A: “I think also the role of *vhakoma*, that’s the mother to the chief, who was just a Queen in the previous leadership, then now she becomes the mother, she also forms part of who raised this person, perhaps they are even able to understand each other more. So even when he is a man and sees himself as a man, as a superior being, he will always go back to think of his mother, who is a woman. So, I think that’s another role that is not popularly discussed because we are too aware of *makhadzi*...I don't know much about what power she possesses, but she would be a crucial part of the advisory council of the leadership.”

In this statement, the participant identified that another role that Vhavendḁa women play in leadership is that of *vhakoma*. Mulaudzi and Poulos (2003:39), in “The Musanda variety: the language of the 'ruling community among the Venḁa people” define *vhakoma*, also known as *vhatshiozwi*, as the chief's mother. Asnath Khuba’s (1993) royal lineage diagram illustrates the organisational structure of the Venḁa royal family:

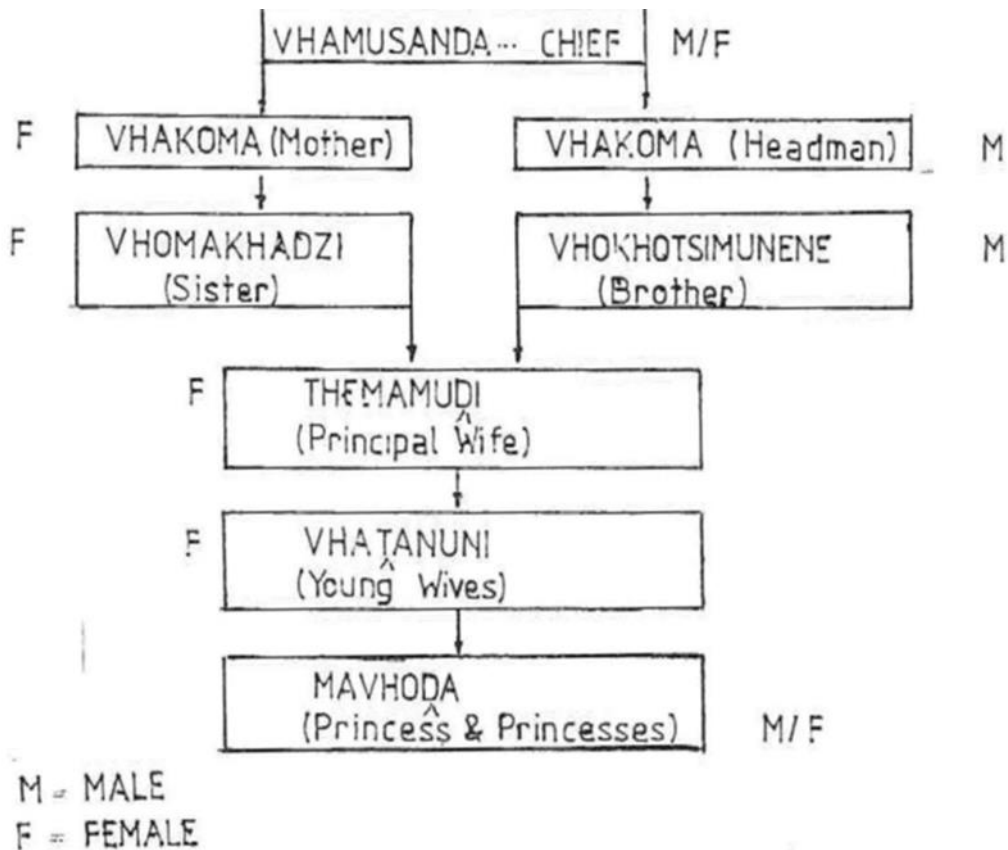


Diagram 1: Organisational structure of the Venda royal family (Khuba, 1993:31).

Khuba (1993) explains that though the title *vhakoma* is given to the chief's mother, it "is also given to someone given a place to rule but under the chief *vhamusanda*" (Khuba, 1993: 30). Thus, the headman is similarly titled as the *vhakoma* (Khuba, 1993). The chief's mother, however, has two titles: *vhakoma* and *vhatshiozwi*. These titles are used synonymously (Khuba, 1993). Along with other duties and responsibilities, the Queen Mother possesses "a great deal of authority to mobilise the king's *mahosi* on his behalf" (Braun, 2013: 287). Matshidze (2013: 70) explains that '*mahosi*' refers both to chiefs and junior chiefs". A chief in Venda "rules over the largest area and has several *mahosi* (senior chiefs) paying tribute to him" (Matshidze, 2013: 70).

While there is not much literature on the role of *vhakoma*, based on the above statement by Participant A, she identifies *vhakoma* as an important person in making the chieftaincy as she raised the chief. In other words, the participant claimed that the mother-son relationship between the Queen Mother and the Chief empowers the Queen Mother to influence and shape the royal decision-making. The fact that the Queen Mother is the chief's mother gives her access to the royal court. This is significant because she can influence how the chief develops as a

mother or parent, which can impact how he chooses to lead, partly based on the values and beliefs she instilled in him. Research by Chinyakata, Rachel, Nicolette Vanessa Roman, and Gift T. Donga (2022) concludes that “Parents act as role models and educators for their children as they create home environments that transmit parental values” (Rachel et al.,2022:2). This stems from the idea that parents act as primary or the most immediate agents of the socialisation of children. Through “Parental bonding, attachment, support, monitoring, and discipline,” parents play a factor in how a child will transit into society and the norms, values and attitudes that will guide them.

I draw this argument to align it with the statement of Participant A in that *vhakoma*, as the mother or parent to the chief, as an immediate agent of socialisation, plays a significant role in how the chief develops in terms of norms, values, and ideas that he adopts. The participant further states that due to the relationship between *vhakoma* and the chief, “perhaps they are even able to understand each other more.” This reinforces the importance of the *vhakoma*'s influence on the chief and, ultimately, the throne. Therefore, *vhakoma* is influential in that she can use her familial ties to the chief to gain his ear, leveraging the position to command respect and shape the social and political course of the community. This aligns with Moagi and Mtombeni's (2021) study of Queen mothers in pre-colonial African societies, where they often held power parallel to that of chiefs. In Swaziland, the Queen Mother, known as the *indlovukazi* “Lady Elephant,” had political influence and economic independence, as seen through her control over tributary villages. Tisani (2023) argues that Queen Mothers in Southern Africa have historically played a pivotal role in royal decision-making, from Ngqika's mother to Shaka Zulu's mother.

Similarly to Participant A, Participant C reiterates that *vhakoma* is the chief's mother. This tells us that she is someone significant in the making of the lineage but also a person who is important and respected in the community. Participant A also states that part of *Vhakoma*'s role includes guiding and helping the chief. In other words, the *vhakoma* never stops being a mother to the chief, and the chiefs have historically accepted this fact.

Another participant connected the role played by *vhakoma* to organising the *Domba*:

Participant G: “So the roles that they used to do; I would say that they used to take care of everyone else at the house. Also, there is something called *Domba*, so they would organise *Domba*, which is like a woman's initiation, a coming of age, ceremonies, and

all of that. So, they were at the forefront for mostly all those things, if I had to think about it. Not many men were involved in that. The men would just come for the celebration when there is *Domba* and the dances and all of that. So, most of them were organisers of some sort of cultural activities and certain meetings. So apart from bearing kids, they had much, there was a lot they were doing.”

Participant G describes the significant role of the Queen Mother in inducting the younger generation of Venda women into the broader community. Historically, the duties of the Queen Mother included initiating the younger generation of Venda women through a rite of passage called *Domba*. Mulaudzi (2001:9) defines *Domba* as an “initiation school for young men and young women... This school prepares the grown-up boys and girls for life after marriage. When the school is in session, they are taught to understand the most important aspects of life after marriage.” Mwamwenda (2020) also adds that *Domba* includes three phases, the second phase of which involves the girls being taught what adulthood encompasses. Some of these teachings include sexual education, pregnancy, motherhood, womanhood and much more. Recently conducted studies by Avhatakali A. Ndou-Mammbona as well as Ndou-Mammbona, A.A. and Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A.H have indicated that *Domba* has been shown to positively enhance awareness about things such as HIV-AIDS education through its insertion of sex education teachings. Therefore, the *Domba* is not only recognised as a significant practice of the Venda culture but also a positive initiative towards teaching and advising young people about safer sexual practices. *Vhakoma* plays a huge part towards this.

While the position of *vhakoma* is known or still exists, one of the participants noted the following:

Participant D: “We had roles like the chief's mother, *vhakoma*. I believe that traditional leadership roles for women still exist, but they are not practised in the same way as before. I feel that women are present, but the problem is that women in leadership are often placed behind the scenes. For example, although a woman *vhakoma* may make the most important decisions, when they are announced, it appears as if the chief made them.”

Participant D first notes that traditional leadership roles are not practised in the same way as they used to. A significant part of this stems from the colonial legacy of colonialism and apartheid. As discussed in previous Chapters, one of this study's fundamental points is that

colonialism and apartheid were turning points for traditional leadership. Through the colonial strategy of indirect rule, which was later instrumentalised during apartheid through the passing of the Black Authorities Act No. 68 of 1951, chiefs became the leaders of the ethnic entities created by colonial governments (Mamdani, 1996). During these events, much of what is considered culture or tradition today was diluted by colonial ideas, norms, and systems. As a result, indigenous institutions, such as Queen Motherhood, began to crumble under the colonial-apartheid project because they did not fit the purpose of colonial indirect rule.

This statement also sheds light on the ongoing gender imbalance in traditional leadership. Even though women like *vhakoma* play key roles and make important decisions, their influence often remains behind the scenes, while men get public recognition. This is not just about tradition, and it reflects a wider pattern where women's contributions to leadership are downplayed, reinforcing the idea that visible power belongs to men. While these leadership roles for women have not disappeared, they have become less openly recognised, making it harder for women to claim their authority and be seen as legitimate leaders. This raises important questions about representation and visibility: how can we ensure that women's leadership is not just present but also acknowledged and valued?

As Tisani (2023) notes, the colonial project propagated harmful stereotypes about Queen Mothers, often depicting them as perpetually childlike, lacking agency, and possessing negative traits such as drunkenness, ugliness, and laziness. This deliberate mischaracterisation undermined their authority and respect and largely weakened the institution of Queen Motherhood. This would align with the last statement by Participant D, who mentions that even when "*vhakoma* may make the most important decisions when they are announced, it appears as if the chief made them." Ideally, the point here is that laws and systems were put in place to undermine other institutions outside of chiefs, and this impacted the institution of Queen Motherhood, affecting both how it is practised, how it is perceived in society and its significance in society. This quote is important to note because it provides a practical and tangible connection to the previous Chapters, showing how deeply rooted the legacies of these events are, even in the post-1994 era.

Similarly, in another interview, participant G stated the following:

“A lot of things that used to happen, certain traditional leadership roles that used to happen back then, that our grandparents tell us about hardly happen now... Fewer girls

are being taught about womanhood, and boys are as well; there is no initiation school for them. What my grandad went through as a young boy, transitioning into a man, has decreased drastically since then and now.”

This participant's statement provides valuable insight into the changing dynamics of traditional leadership roles and cultural practices among the Vhavanḁa people. The participant notes that many traditional practices their grandparents speak of are rarely observed today. This observation highlights a generational gap in cultural knowledge and practice. Specifically, they mention the decline in teaching girls about womanhood and boys about manhood, including the diminishing prevalence of initiation schools. This is important to note because some of the roles that were discussed and played by *vhakoma* were organising the *Domba* and *Ndayo*, which were initiation schools where young women and men were introduced to adulthood (Ramavhunga, 2019). The decrease of these could be influenced by the decline of the role of *vhakoma* because of the influences that colonisation and apartheid had, as well as colonial modernity.

Ester Ramavhunga (2019:79) states:

“The power of *vhakoma* was weakened by this modernisation. Had it not been for modernisation, our cultural practices would still be in one accord, and we would be living in peace and harmony.”

This statement asserts that the impact of modernisation and colonialism on traditional African institutions, particularly the role of *vhakoma* and the broader institution of Queen Motherhood, was significantly undermined and weakened through modernisation. Modernisation, as implemented in the African context, was largely a by-product of colonial rule that marginalised many African countries and cultures in nature. Its direct and indirect impact shifted Indigenous practices, ways of living, cultural expressions, and lifestyles, replacing them with Western alternatives. This imposed modernisation often came at the expense of traditional knowledge systems and social structures developed over generations. But this quote, along with other previously discussed quotes, highlights the urgency of preserving institutions such as Queen Motherhood to understand the roles that women have played and continue to play in society, but also preserving cultural heritage and practices that have been proven to be beneficial to society.

4.4 The Role of *Vhakololo* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community

Rebecca Matodzi Raphalalani (2015) defines *vhakololo* as the chief's children, including sons and daughters. The sons are *mazhinda*, while the daughters are called *mavoḁa*, as illustrated in the diagram in the previous section. Sometimes, the term *vhakololo* is used to describe royal members, often descendants of the chiefs, *khotsimunene*, and *makhadzi*, who hold noteworthy influence within the hierarchy of Vhavenda culture (Khuba, 1993). Following the same question asked, "Apart from the classical role of *vhomakhadzi*, what other roles would you say have illustrated the power held by women in Venda culture? Participant G added that while *makhadzi* and *vhakoma* are popular, as someone from the royal family, they have observed another significant role, *vhakololo*.

Participant G responded as follows:

"So apart from *makhadzi*, I can say *vhakololo*. I'm talking about *vhakololo vha vho mme* because *vhakololo* just means a person from royalty. They played a role in making sure that, you know, women were in leadership. They used to host church events."

Vhakololo plays a large part in supporting and sustaining the traditional leadership structure. The leadership structure is stronger because some duties and responsibilities executed by people, such as the *makhadzi* or *vhokhotsimunene*, can only be performed with support. Women *vhakololo* are significant in traditional leadership, particularly within Musanda and the wider community. Their responsibilities are often connected with the cultural and ceremonial aspects of leadership because they are raised within the royal household; *vhakololo* are well-versed in the history, lineage, customs, and protocols that govern the *musanda*. This intimate knowledge allows them to support and guide important rituals and ceremonies, ensuring that traditions are upheld in their proper form. Whether it's during initiation, such as the ones mentioned above, or ancestral rituals like rainmaking and thanksgiving, *vhakololo* are central figures in the execution of these events, making sure that every aspect aligns with cultural expectations. Their involvement maintains the sanctity of these traditions and helps reinforce the community's connection to their heritage.

Therefore, women *vhakololo* contribute significantly to the preservation of culture by upholding and teaching the protocols of the royal homestead to the next generations and the community at large. They work closely with *vhomakhadzi* to ensure that younger generations, particularly women, understand their cultural obligations and responsibilities. This often

involves organising and leading ceremonies like the *Domba* to reinforce traditional values. They also monitor compliance with these protocols, ensuring family members and community leaders adhere to the established customs. Through their active participation, *vhakololo* helps preserve the balance between cultural preservation and leadership, ensuring that the wisdom of their ancestors continues to guide the community.

In addition to their ceremonial roles, *vhakololo* takes on responsibilities within decision-making processes, especially in royal and community councils (*khoro*). As respected figures, they assist elders in deliberations, offering insights to reach a solution. Their ability to mediate disputes between the royal family and community members demonstrates their importance as peacekeepers. *Vhakololo*'s roles as mediators extend beyond just solving conflicts; they also act as cultural intermediaries, ensuring that decisions made align with the broader cultural values of the community. In these ways, *vhakololo* serves as both guardians and enforcers of tradition.

The role of *vhakololo* was only identified by one participant – participant G, whose views were discussed in the opening of this section. The rest of the participants did not reference the *vhakololo* role in their interviews, presumably because they did not know about it. It is safe to make this presumption due to the negative impact of colonial modernity on Vhavenda society and the enduring legacy of colonialism in post-1994 South Africa, as previously highlighted under the section of *makhadzi*, and how it made people unaware of their own traditions.

Below is the analysis and discussion of the strategies that research participants employed to express their limited understanding of the role played by *vhakololo* or to articulate their general need for more awareness about traditional leadership roles that Vhavenda women have historically played in the Venda society.

Here is one of the participant's responses:

Participant B: "I'm not sure. Yeah, I have not done much research on my culture, honestly."

In another interview, participant E expressed the following:

"So, okay, so with the women in leadership, especially in the Venda society, I don't really know much about it, number one, because there isn't really much in it. So, when

I learned the content, I meant that the only person I know is *makhadzi*. So, you know, when you go through the different content and just try to learn more about it, it's not practical.”

In another interview, participant C stated the following:

“Apart from *makhadzi*? I don't know any other. A long time ago, it was just known that a woman was *makhadzi*. That's why even when you go to other areas, like Johannesburg or any other city in the country apart from here in Venda, when a person first hears that you are Venda, they will say *vha ri mini vhomakhadzi*. So, I would not say we have another role that we as Vhavana women have that we can thoroughly explain apart from *makhadzi* or *mme* in the community.”

These responses from Participants B, C and E remind us about the cultural and social importance of the decolonisation project in academia. Firstly, the research participants' responses highlight a possible disconnect to cultural education within the younger generation. For example, possibly pointing to a lack of accessible resources or mentors who could teach them the responsibilities and influence of the roles identified. This suggests that the transmission of Indigenous knowledge systems in the Vhavana community, such as oral traditions, may have weakened over time, leaving younger generations with minimal knowledge and information about their heritage. In a recent study conducted in the Venda Vhembe district, Malapane, Chanza and Musakwa (2024) indicate that they found three main threats leading to the decline of Indigenous knowledge systems in the Vhavana community. The three threats were identified as the invasion of technology, the failure of elders to pass on the knowledge, and, lastly, forgetting the Indigenous knowledge systems. The findings align with responses from Participants B, C, and E, which underscore the challenges the younger generation faces in accessing and retaining knowledge of traditional leadership roles.

Moreover, the responses from Participants C and E reflect a view of *makhadzi* as nearly synonymous with women's leadership within the Vhavana community. The participants' references to *makhadzi* when describing Vhavana women in leadership suggest that this role has endured through social and cultural shifts, becoming a cultural signifier of Vhavana identity even outside Venda. This is observable when Participant C states, “That's why even when you go to other areas, like Johannesburg or any other city in the country apart from here

in Venḁa, when a person first hears that you are Venḁa, they will say *vha ri mini vho makhadzi*.” This is someone also acknowledged by Participant A as follows:

“So, I think that’s another role that is not popularly discussed because we are too aware of *makhadzi*.”

Lastly, the responses indicate the effects of colonial and postcolonial experiences. The systemic undermining or undervaluing of African women’s leadership roles by colonialism and later apartheid led to a trivialisation of women’s leadership roles in African society, as well as a distorted perception of leadership roles that Vhaventḁa women have played in the past. This is evident in the participants' responses, where they struggle to articulate the leadership roles of Vhaventḁa women beyond *makhadzi*. Mawere and Tshamano (2023) state that colonialism's impact on Vhaventḁa was beyond education. The colonial ideologies disrupted and reshaped traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge and practices were mainly suppressed and stigmatised by the missionaries, often regarding or referring to them as “savage” or “superstitious” (Mawere and Tshamano, 2023:7). Msila and Gumbo (2016) further add that Western influence and colonialism miseducated the younger generation about the vast leadership roles that Vhaventḁa women played in the past to the extent that the only leadership role that this younger generation recognises and associates with women is the *makhadzi* leadership role. This lack of awareness of women’s leadership roles in the Vhaventḁa cultures continues to be enforced through Western popular culture that glorifies “gender-biased lenses” of knowing and understanding leadership roles.

Adding to this, participant E stated that their lack of awareness stems from the lack of diverse ethnic group inclusion in the education system. Participant E expressed the following:

“Education, that's number one. It goes back to the education system, right? For instance, in history, when we learn about the different kingdoms, we learn about Soshangane, Shaka Zulu, and Ofaku for the Xhosas. I mean, we learn about them. But when it comes to the history of the Venḁa society, it's not really taken into account, right? We don't really learn it. We just touch base on it. Oh yeah, and then we had Limpopo, so let's move on. So, it's not really taken into account. So therefore, it's very important for us as Venḁa people who are in research to put it to the forefront, you know, to actually make people aware of the fact that it exists; it played a role in making modern-day South Africa. And that, as Venḁa people, we should also just enter those spaces and not

just enter those spaces and be quiet, you know, enter those spaces, and make it known. But I think more than anything, education should just be at the forefront, and people should be made aware of it.”

Maluleka (2023) speaks of the coloniality of knowledge, which refers to the monopolisation of knowledge production by Euro-Western epistemologies that have dominated globally for the longest time. In South Africa specifically, this Euro-Western modality has historically distorted the history of African peoples by popularising the history of Shaka Zulu while downplaying and minimising the histories of other African groups in South Africa. In this narrative, Shaka Zulu is deployed as a dominant figure to tell the histories of all African peoples in the context of colonialism in South Africa. When other African groups are included in this narrative, it is usually either to illustrate the dominance of Shaka Zulu or they are discussed in relation to the action of Shaka Zulu. It is partly for this reason that in the dominant culture, Shaka Zulu is the most well-known historical African figure even though Europeans had meaningful and sustained encounters with AmaZulu in the 1840s when Shaka Zulu had been dead for over two decades, and when the colonial project had already been unfolding in South Africa for a century and a half. During colonialism and later apartheid, particularly through the Bantu Education System, education was one of the key tools used to distort and miseducate Africans about their societies and history, as indicated by Mamdani (1996).

In post-1994 South Africa, the dominant historical narrative has shifted slightly from centring Shaka Zulu to foregrounding the colonial encounter with amaXhosa. Dominant university texts often rationalise their exclusive focus on amaXhosa by arguing that modern South Africa was created during the 19th century when the British Empire fought wars with amaXhosa and white missionaries led an intense civilising mission in the Eastern Cape. This is what Participant E is pointing to in the quote above. Additionally, Participant E encourages Vhavenda scholars to foreground the history of the Vhavenda people in their scholarship. Participant E is making this argument within an epistemological context that has been exposed by Maluleka (2023:4) as continuing to suppress African ways of knowledge because,

“Curriculum 2005 (C2005), an Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) implemented in 1997, the Revised/National Curriculum Statement (R/NCS) of 2002 and CAPS of 2011/2. These curriculums failed to fully confront and challenge the embeddedness of Eurocentrism, neoliberalism, and coloniality characterised by patriarchy, homophobia, misogyny, sexism, tribalism, regionalism, epistemic xenophobia or colonisation,

epistemic deafness, discrimination, segregation, inequality, ecocide, ethnocide, epistemicide, culturicide and linguicide that were inherited and continued through the school history curriculum.”

4.5 Conclusion

A key finding in this chapter is that the *makhadzi* is the traditional role participants recognised as the leadership role that Vhavenda women have historically played and continue to play. For instance, participants noted that the *makhadzi* fulfils multiple roles, often regarded as the 'full stop' or “*thikho*” of the family and the Venda community. Another role identified by participants as significant within the Venda leadership structure is *Vhakoma*, the Queen Mother and the chief's mother. She plays a significant role in the upbringing of young men and women into adulthood. Participant A highlighted that her influence stems from her familial proximity to the chief, who often gives her a voice in important matters.

However, there was limited familiarity with the role of *Vhakololo*, as only one participant identified it as a leadership role traditionally occupied by Vhavenda women. Research participants suggested that colonial modernity contributes to a lack of knowledge about their culture. One participant stated that for young people today, priorities revolve around getting educated, making money, and living, making the knowledge of traditions seem less significant. In contrast, another participant argued that cultural knowledge about the Venda people is not part of popular culture in post-1994 South Africa. This contributes to the alienation of the younger generation of Vhavenda women from their own culture and knowing less about it.

**CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING THE TWO COMMONLY IDENTIFIED
CHALLENGES/CHALLENGES VHAVENDA WOMEN FACE IN LEADERSHIP
POST-1994**

5.1 Introduction

This chapter expands on the previous chapter on data findings. While the previous chapter focused exclusively on traditional leadership roles that Vhavenda women have historically played and continue to play in Venda society, this chapter critically discusses long-standing societal and cultural practices that either tend to undermine women's leadership or openly prevent women from taking leadership roles in society. This discussion is organised around two themes, namely: 1) the customary practice of male primogeniture and how it contradicts the South African Constitution post-1994 and 2) the socialisation process that puts boys and men on a leadership pedestal. The theme of male primogeniture and the South African Constitution is related to and continues from the discussion in Chapter Four. The socialisation theme, however, is a general investigation into the socialisations of boys and girls, along with a critical interrogation into how girls and women have historically and continue to be discouraged from leadership roles.

5.2 The Discontent of Customary Practice of Male Primogeniture in Post-1994 South Africa

According to Mubangizi (2012), primogeniture refers to the right of the eldest surviving male to inherit the parent's estate. This cultural practice effectively excludes women from inheritance and sometimes places them under the guardianship of the male heir. Mubangizi (2012) further highlights that the exclusion of women from inheritance originates from the deeply rooted patriarchal system prevalent in traditional African society. In Venda culture, the principle of male primogeniture dictates that leadership roles, such as that of a chief, are reserved for men, even if a woman is the eldest child. This cultural practice effectively excludes women from inheriting leadership positions, reinforcing patriarchal norms that prioritise male heirs. As a result, women may find themselves placed under the guardianship of the male heir, further limiting their autonomy and participation in leadership. This exclusion not only undermines women's rights but also perpetuates a cycle of disempowerment, denying them the opportunity to contribute to their communities in significant ways.

While the Constitution of South Africa recognises traditional leadership institutions, statuses, and roles by customary law, it mandates that traditional leaders exercise their authority and cultural customs and practices in alignment with all the Constitutional provisions (Kanyane, 2017). The case of *Bhe and Others v. The Magistrate, Khayelitsha, and Others* is pivotal in illustrating the clash between customary law and constitutional principles, particularly regarding women's rights. In this landmark ruling, the Constitutional Court of South Africa addressed the constitutionality of male primogeniture in customary law, which denied inheritance rights to women and children in favour of male heirs. The court found that the exclusion of women from inheritance rights perpetuated gender inequality and contradicted the constitutional commitment to human dignity and equality. This ruling supports the argument that traditional leadership roles, particularly those affecting Vhavenda women, must evolve to reflect modern democratic values and gender equity. It emphasises that customary practices have historical significance but must be critically examined and reformed to eliminate discriminatory elements.

Similarly, the *Mphephu* case, comprehensively discussed in Chapter Two of this study, underscores the challenges of customary practices and the need for reform in the face of constitutional mandates. In this case, the court ruled on the legitimacy of traditional leadership claims, reinforcing that customary practices must align with constitutional rights and not discriminate based on gender. The ruling highlighted the necessity for traditional leaders to adapt to the evolving legal landscape, thus ensuring that their roles do not undermine the rights of marginalised groups, particularly women. One of the research participants in this research project referenced this case. Participant B recounted that:

“I think I remember there was a case here at Venda. *Mphephu vs Mphephu Ramabulana*, that lady, I’m not sure if she finally became the chief or the queen as they call it. But even though I heard that there were some people who were saying, how can a woman lead us? That still says they’re still living in the past where they only believe that chieftaincy is only for men. Even if you are the only child of your mother and your father and your father were the chief, they’re still going to find someone else to occupy that position just because you are a female. I don't think there's something else that makes us not be considered as chief other than the narrative that has always been there of saying that women cannot be leaders. So, if from the past they could go and look for someone else to occupy my birthright when I'm alive just because I'm a female, it says

a lot saying that as a female, you never be; you just have to be led or what you can do is to support the leader who is the chief.”

Another participant, Participant E, referenced the case of *Bhe and Others*:

“I think that one is it’s very difficult to navigate right, and obviously, it's also very easy for us to be like, oh, we must find the balance, but it's very difficult right because nothing is above the constitution anything that is not in line with the constitution is declared as an invalid right but we must we also have these cultural roles, and then we have the bill of rights that says okay you know people are equal gender you know we must consider those things, and then we also find male primogeniture which was I think was declared unconstitutional. It was declared to be invalid by the Constitution. The thing of, like, if you are a male, you are the heir of your parents' estates and all of that, it becomes a problem, and I think we’ve seen that in many cases; I think it was the specific case that I was looking at the *Bhe versus Khayelitsha* and all of that which basically spoke about male primogeniture and it becomes obviously a problem but it's very tough to navigate because you have the constitution here, you have customary law basically which states that women should do this, men should do this”.

Participant E's assertion highlights the difficulty reconciling traditional practices, like male primogeniture, with constitutional principles. The statement recognises that balancing respect for cultural and customary practices with adherence to the South African Constitution is a complex challenge. The participant statement underscores the supremacy of the Constitution, indicating that any practice contradicting it is rendered invalid. Moreover, the statement made by Participant E also emphasises the significance of the Bill of Rights, which advocates for gender equality, noting that male primogeniture has been declared unconstitutional. This perspective reinforces the problematic nature of male primogeniture, as it marginalises the role of Venda women in traditional leadership structures. Mamdani (1996: 64) notes that in many African cultures, women cannot “inherit or bequeath,” a patriarchal principle that excludes them from leadership roles. In the Venda culture, this exclusion is similarly evident, as male primogeniture dominates leadership structures, preventing women from ascending to positions of authority. This cultural norm not only reinforces gender inequality but also hinders the advancement of inclusive governance, limiting women's participation in decision-making processes within the community.

Participant E further added that,

“We can’t we can’t ignore that we can't dismiss the fact that social units are constantly changing because here we have the Constitution; yes, here we have customary law; however, social units are changing, you know; therefore, the customary laws need to change with the society you know we can’t be like okay but in 1967 it was done like this, but now it’s 2024 so how do they move around that so I think it would then be to just have that understanding and that acceptance, especially from the customary point of view that society is constantly changing and because customary laws it’s flexible right why can't they then adjust to making those roles of the woman or accepting the role of the woman in society and what they play and the fact that yes male primogeniture you know it’s it does not make sense in present-day South Africa because it then discriminates against women”.

Participant E’s statement emphasises that customary laws must evolve with changing social dynamics and constitutional eras. Participant E argues that although the Constitution and customary law exist, outdated practices should not dictate contemporary norms. This perspective implies that women should be allowed to occupy historical leadership structures traditionally held by men in Venda culture. Participant E calls for recognising women's societal roles and suggests that customary laws should be flexible enough to support gender equality. Ultimately, Participant E's statement asserts that male primogeniture is discriminatory and no longer relevant in modern South Africa.

Participant C made the following remarks when asked about the way forward and how the clash of customary practices and the Constitution can be resolved.

“I think maybe we need to start with our own Constitution. We have the constitution, but when it comes to implementation, are we implementing or is it just on paper? And also, is it doable? Let’s start there. These rights that are said that people have, the rights are women or whoever has, is it practical, and if it is not practical, what should be done? Can we reach a point of compromise? Are we going to see that, or is it just court cases every day whereby the law says yes, constitutionally you have the right, and then we go to the customary and royal councils, they say no, women can't be chief? I think that is a grey area at the moment because courts are saying yes, a woman can chief because it is their birthright, and just because you are a woman, gender should not be a measure

of your ability. But customary, there are a lot of other beliefs which, in turn, are seen as triumphing over women's rights. So, for me, I can't pick a side because we need the customs because they make us Vhavenda, and so we need to balance because we will end up doing away with Vhavenda culture. So, there is still a gap. So maybe you researchers can come up with answers.”

Participant C critically views the gap between constitutional rights and their practical implementation within traditional contexts, questioning whether these rights are genuinely enacted or merely exist on paper. Participant C further highlights the tension between constitutional guarantees, such as women's rights to leadership, and the realities of customary and royal councils, which often uphold traditional beliefs restricting women's roles. While courts affirm women's rights to chieftdom based on birthright and ability, customary beliefs frequently override these legal rulings, creating a problematic “grey area” in applying rights. Participant C acknowledges the importance of customs in preserving Venda's identity, suggesting that abandoning traditional practices could erode cultural heritage altogether. Participant C's statement also advocates for a balance that respects cultural identity while promoting gender equality. The quote above from Participant C offers a nuanced and complex picture of what happens when Constitutional Law interacts with customary and royal councils. Participant C points to the important tension this interaction creates and further explains why that tension exists. The tension exists because what is at stake is the erosion and the loss of Vhavenda's cultural heritage. Be that as it may, this study argues that challenging patriarchal and sexist practices should not necessarily lead to the erosion of culture. This study regards the tension between the South African Constitution and customary and royal council, which Participant C identified as a healthy tension that could lead to a society that empowers women. The tension between the Constitution and royal councils is not destructive but healthy and constructive.

When asked about the tension between the constitutional law and the customary practices and traditional royal councils that historically have advocated for male primogeniture, participant G explained that:

“I perceive it as the Constitution, which talks about how everyone has freedom of choice. I think when it comes to bringing the Constitution and how the heritage and traditional stuff works, I would say they do overlap, and sometimes it causes a bit of complexity in that. A boy child, like at home, my granddad only has girls. So, it's only

three girls at home. So, none of them are ever going to be chiefs. They're never going to be on a throne. That's a given. It's unfortunately at that moment right now, it is. However, my granddad has brothers, right? Who has kids, and who is a boy? So even in the second one, the second born has two daughters and the third boy, who's my age. He doesn't want leadership. His lifestyle, him being in varsity all that and knowing that he has to graduate then and come back home and lead. He doesn't want that. Do you understand? So, I feel like his freedom of choice gets then compromised. You can't live your life how you want to because, as a guy, as much as we think they have options, they actually don't. The tradition, heritage, and the norm of how things have been done."

Like Participant C, Participant G's statement highlights the conflict between constitutional rights and traditional norms within the Venda Culture, emphasising that while the South African Constitution guarantees freedom of choice, cultural practices often impose limitations. Participant G illustrates this with the example of their granddad's family, where only girls are present, meaning none can ascend to leadership roles like chiefs. This situation underscores the rigid gender expectations that prioritise male leadership, effectively side-lining women. Furthermore, Participant G points out the pressures a male cousin faces, who, despite being eligible for leadership, feels constrained by traditional expectations, compromising his aspirations. Participant G's assertions reveal that contrary to popular belief, men also face limitations imposed by tradition. Ultimately, Participant G's perspective suggests that both genders are affected by cultural norms, albeit in fundamentally different ways, which restrict their choices and opportunities in leadership, indicating a need to re-evaluate these customs to align with contemporary values of equality and personal freedom. Participant G's insights highlight the complex ways tradition can empower and limit individuals, regardless of gender.

One of the research participants, Participant F, suggested that some cultural traditions and customs should be reconsidered or even abolished. For instance, Participant F stated,

"Honestly speaking, as much as I believe we should not abandon our roots, I think there are aspects of tradition that should be reconsidered. The notion of women being inferior is perplexing to me, as they bear the most responsibility in the household. While men may provide materially, they cannot buy morals. There is a contradiction here; we advocate for tradition while also recognising the importance of empowerment. We need to revisit the origins of these traditions, understand their historical context, and adapt them to fit contemporary society. We don't have to discard everything, as these

traditions were established for a reason, and understanding that rationale can help us build a better future.”

Participant F went as far as to suggest that every tradition and custom should be on the table and that everything should be reconsidered and renegotiated.

“Oh, that one is a tough one. I am not gonna lie because, honestly, I feel like we should just scrap everything, because it is not fair; that does not make any sense to me.”

Participant F's statement highlights the inherent tension between preserving traditional values and recognising the necessity for gender equality and empowerment. This perspective underscores the importance of critically examining historical practices and adapting them to modern societal norms. The participant emphasises that while tradition holds value, it is important to reassess and reformulate aspects that perpetuate inequality, particularly regarding women's roles. This dialogue reflects a broader discourse on how customary law and constitutional principles coexist and evolve to empower marginalised groups, such as Vhavenḁa women, within both traditional and modern democratic contexts. Moreover, Participant F's statement indicates that women within the Vhavenḁa culture are becoming aware that their culture has marginalised them for a long time while favouring men. This participant's perspective signals a shift in mindset, as women in the Vhavenḁa traditionally would not have called for their rights to be recognised in the context of modern society before democracy. The underlying message of this perspective is that traditional principles, customs, and practices within Venḁa culture must align with democratic values of non-discrimination and equality between men and women. This implies that positions and responsibilities historically assigned to men must now be reconsidered and made accessible to everyone in light of the democratic era and constitutional values.

Finally, Mashele (2003) argues that democracy does not discriminate based on sex, treating men and women as equals in political participation, including involvement in societal leadership. A democratic system can be evaluated, among other factors, by how it includes or excludes women. Traditional leadership institutions often must catch up when applying this criterion, as they are primarily male-dominated. There are only a few exceptions where some nations have allowed women to take on leadership roles. Mashele's (2003) argument critiques the tension between democratic ideals and traditional practices like male primogeniture in the Vhavenḁa culture. While democracy promotes gender equality in political participation, the

male-dominated leadership structures hinder women's inclusion. This highlights a fundamental conflict where cultural norms can undermine democratic principles, suggesting that true democracy requires legal frameworks and cultural shifts to empower women in leadership roles.

5.3 The Socialisation Process that Puts Boys and Men on a Leadership Pedestal

Netshitangani (2008) explains that the socialisation process that privileges masculinity is largely influenced by the gender roles that we have in society. Often, how women are expected to present and comport themselves in society and their homestead in a way that conforms to the idea of masculine supremacy. Nzegwu (2020) states that men are expected to be head of the house, while women are expected to play a subservient role in the house. This assimilates a Tshivenda proverb that says, “*munna ndi fhoho, musadzi ndi mutsinga*” (the man is the head, the woman is the neck). It highlights a cultural perspective on gender roles within traditional Vhenda society, whereby the men hold the position of authority, the “head,” and are seen as the primary decision-makers. In contrast, women play a complementary and significant role as the “neck,” supporting and guiding the direction of the head. These characteristics are often transmitted to the workplace and society at large. It is like society's unwritten rules for how men and women “should” behave, which is also deeply rooted in culture. Participant A explained how this socialisation process is expressed in the Vhenda culture.

“Now, if you go to the chieftainship, you will not be the leader if you are a female child who is the first one. They will wait for the first one of the males, who will be the leader. So, they start by gender, and then they go to age. And it should have been about maybe age, and then the qualities, other qualities that the person possesses.”

Participant A's statement refers to the argument of male primogeniture in the Venda culture. As the participant notes, in chieftainship, they prioritise male heirs over female heirs regardless of age or the qualities of the individual and this a cultural norm that often shapes and reinforces the idea that leadership and authority are inherently masculine qualities. So, even if the firstborn child is female, the family and society at large expect her younger brother to assume the leadership role. This emphasis on male primogeniture shapes the socialisation of girls more broadly, as it sends a clear message about gendered expectations and limitations. Consequently, from an early age, girls are socialised to see leadership roles as unattainable within certain cultural contexts, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies and influencing how they perceive

their roles. This is gender socialisation, and it is defined as “the learning of behaviour and attitudes considered culturally appropriate for a given sex” (Raselekoane, Morwe and Mulaudzi, 2017:10515). Raselekoane, Morwe and Mulaudzi (2017:10515) further state, "This type of socialisation is well-entrenched in culture because of the patriarchal system prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. In this way, boys and girls are taught how to behave and perform roles and tasks differently.”

Participant E further pointed out that the socialisation of boys and girls results in a situation where masculinity rejects qualities associated with femininity:

“I always say masculinity rejects anything feminine, right? So, you find that most of the time, they just tend to just reject you, not take you seriously. Or when you ask for something, when you say something, you're not really taken seriously. Maybe because of that element of sort of rejecting women, not taking women seriously. And it's something that I've realised that a lot of men, even young men, tend to do that even they don't realise it, you know. And it's gotten to a point where I see it, I peep it, but I'm just like, you know, it is what it is, you know. Being involved or being in that type of thing is always being spoken over when you try to speak; they speak over you. All of those things, not really taking your opinions very seriously or your insights very seriously.”

Participant E's statement implies that masculinity tends to overlook femininity, and this dismissal highlights a broader societal issue, as even young men often unknowingly perpetuate these attitudes. The participant's mention of being “spoken over” underscores the significant challenges women encounter in social situations and the workplace. According to Janet Holmes (2008), extensive data collected over the last three decades has shown that there are usually established patterns of gender differences in workplace behaviour and communication. Table 3 below lists several feminine and masculine characteristics identified through empirical research, suggesting that there is often a gender identity in the workplace. Usually, within masculine-identified spaces, there tends to be a need to exert “control, define goals, defend personal stance, [demonstrate] knowledge [and] dominate...conversation[s]...to be forceful and direct” (Verderber, 1995: 21-22), while in feminine spaces, it is the opposite. Based on the characteristics identified by Participant E, the factors that she identified have been commonly recognised in men in the workplace.

Feminine	Masculine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitative • supportive feedback • conciliatory • indirect • collaborative • minor contribution (in public) • person/process-oriented • affectively oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competitive • aggressive interruptions • confrontational • direct • autonomous • dominates (public) talking time • task/outcome-oriented • referentially oriented

Table 3: Widely cited features of feminine and masculine interactional styles (Holmes, 2008).

Participant C added another dimension to the conversation by explaining that even women in leadership positions are often portrayed as undeserving of those positions.

“*Zwiakonda*, we still find ourselves having to prove beyond to those out there that we are capable. That *ri hafha hune ra vha hone* because we deserve it. You find yourself having to deal with rumours like you slept your way up. Sometimes, there's a lot of, there's hardly anyone who believes, or people generally don't believe that you got it, or because you worked hard. We find ourselves having to prove it every now and then. Also, on any basis, when you're working with other people, male or female, there's always a challenge *ya u ri uyu muthu u fit zwa vhukuma kuma na*, I'll give you an example of when I was recently elected as a chairperson for the organisation that I'm leading at the moment. Previously, the position was held by a guy, a male person, or a colleague. And because of age, and because he had been occupying that position for a very long time, I still feel like he undermines, as I say, the constant calling and making corrections. Sometimes, I take it as a support mechanism, but sometimes, I do feel like it's more of him, thinking I don't really know what I'm doing. So, we constantly need to prove ourselves here and now, or that we deserve what we are doing, or that we are where we are because we worked hard.”

Participant C and Participant E, who occupy different leadership positions in society, report similar experiences regarding their challenges as women in leadership roles. Participant C occupies a leadership role, whereas Participant E is in a position of authority at this

organisation. Although these two research participants do not know each other and have never met, their lived experiences as women in leadership positions are similar. They emphasise that their journey has been far from easy, primarily due to the persistent undermining of their authority and the constant need to tackle stereotypes suggesting that women are incapable of effective leadership. These participants noted that there is a continual necessity to defend themselves and their capabilities, as people frequently question their competence. They observe that this scepticism often originates from men in particular. Participant E highlights explicitly a critical point: masculinity, as a social construct, tends to reject anything perceived as feminine. This rejection manifests in women being dismissed or undervalued in leadership roles purely based on their gender differences from men.

Participant A explained that masculinity rejects femininity based on the misconception that femininity is inferior:

“Mostly, if you're a woman, you're regarded inferior, and you are regarded as physically weak. So, in most cases, even if it is just a game, there are games that people would say can't be done by a woman. People would say this is a women's play when they want to belittle any situation or circumstance. They say this is a man's thing when they want to magnify something. So, the woman is inferior, and then the man is superior. And so, this what you are in terms of gender has a huge role in what you can do in the community, but it's not supposed to. It's our minds that are supposed to play a role. It's how we think our ideologies and the plans that we can come up with for the community should not beat the agenda, but it does play a role.”

Following the same question about their thoughts on the role of gender in traditional leadership within their community, other participants stated the following:

Participant D: “Gender does play a huge role. Especially because we are growing up in a world where, even in the bible, women are mentioned to be leaders after men because they have to be submissive. So, we continue to follow that trend because even today, when a leader has to be chosen, they start with a man and then comes the woman.”

Participant G, who drew her answer from a lived experience of the observation she made from how her grandfather, the chief, was treated in comparison to her grandmother as regent, answered as follows:

“Gender comes into play in the sense that people go with what they've known for a long time or what they're accustomed to. So, it's very hard to change a person's mindset because if you grew up in a household where you're always told what you're told, and that's just how it is, what men are the leader, then that's what most people then just go with. So, at home, it was always, we all knew *gugu* makes the decisions. *gugu*, I'm talking about *Vhamusanda*. *Vhamusanda* makes the decisions. He is the leader of the house, right? But then, for me, it shaped me in a sense that I could see that it became more of a partnership instead of just being *gugu* making the decisions. So, I can't speak for other people. I can only speak for myself. So, for me, I could say that it wasn't just men. There were a lot of women. It wasn't just men. So, for me, I view leadership as yes, gender does play a role, and a lot of community members actually trusted men more. So, there was a time when my granddad was sick, and then *gugu* had to be the one to address people, and she actually didn't get the respect that she deserved or that *gugu* would have gotten if was *gugu vhamusanda* who was addressing them. Does it make sense? So, I can say that it obviously does show it will; it has always been the men who get the respect or speak sense because a woman can come and say the same thing, and then it will be taken lightly. So that, when that happened in *kharoni*, that I think answers the fact that gender does play a role.”

Participant G's example highlights a significant gender disparity: despite a woman, her grandmother, performing the role of regent, she did not receive the same respect or attention that a male leader, like her grandfather, would have. This underscores a deeply embedded bias within the community where male authority is normative and reinforced by social reactions and respect levels in communal settings, such as *kharoni*. As previously explained, *kharoni* is a traditional court or sitting. Here, the community members dismissing the woman's authority reveals that, although leadership capabilities are not inherently gendered, societal perception often limits women's authority. The report by the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) (2018) revealed that many traditional leadership structures have been slow to embrace gender equality, resulting in disparities in how male and female leaders are perceived and respected and that there was a lack of written internal policies that regulated gender equality and women's rights and empowerment. The CGE notes that while South African constitutional law mandates gender equality, cultural biases persist, often diminishing the authority of women in roles traditionally held by men.

Participant B reflects on the following:

“I was born in a generation where I saw most ladies taking leadership positions. But even though they were taking leadership positions, whereby it's either their secretaries, deputies, or never the chairperson or the main leader of an organisation.”

This statement reflects that even though women take up leadership positions, they are often relegated to supportive, secondary roles rather than holding top positions of authority. According to the South African government report, *Gender Series Volume XI: Women Empowerment, 2014-2024*, in 2019, females in senior management accounted for 42,4%, and those in middle management positions accounted for 45,2%, which increased to 45,2% for senior management accounted and 41,6 % for middle management positions in 2024. The growth in gender representation at a higher management level indicates a positive trend. However, while this is a positive thing, the participants indicate several gendered challenges that they still encounter, indicating that the issue is one deeply embedded in social norms and gender roles.

Ultimately, even in democratic states, Nzegwu (2020:42) states that women within leadership positions are often told that they are “hard” and “aggressive” or that they are “wicked” because, regardless of their achievements, the place of a woman is still seen as subservient to her husbands because he is regarded as the head of the house. This is also echoed by Dodo et al. (2017), stating that traditionally, many men would oppose their wives taking up leadership roles because it was viewed as “loose morals”. They make an example with the Shona culture to say that cultural norms even discouraged women from speaking in public or participating in gatherings with men, severely limiting their leadership opportunities. Women were expected to focus on homemaking, child-rearing, and upholding cultural practices, as societal beliefs depicted them as lacking resilience, competence, and impure to lead.

5.4 Conclusion

One of the findings in this chapter is that, post-1994, there has been a tension between customary practices, such as male primogeniture, and the South African Constitution. As such, there have been several cases in the courts that have addressed this. The participants' reflections underscore a critical womanist perspective on excluding women from leadership positions within Venda culture, particularly concerning constitutionalism and the challenges they face as

women, including sexism. Despite the constitutional framework advocating for gender equality, traditional practices like male primogeniture continue to marginalise women, preventing them from inheriting or holding significant leadership roles. This contradiction highlights the urgent need to reconcile cultural practices with constitutional rights. Womanist critique emphasises that true democracy cannot be achieved while women remain systematically excluded from important leadership positions. The *Bhe* case highlighted the urgent need for reform to reconcile traditional practices with contemporary constitutional rights. The calls for reform reflect a demand for a legal and cultural shift that acknowledges and empowers women's contributions within their communities. By challenging traditional norms and advocating for a more inclusive interpretation of constitutional rights, participants highlight the necessity of dismantling patriarchal structures that undermine women's potential as leaders in the Venda context.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This MA study explored the perceptions of young Vhavenda women regarding the roles Vhavenda women play in traditional leadership, both historically and post-1994 South Africa. The study began by providing a historical background, emphasising that the significance of the study is to shed light on rarely researched topics, such as Venda culture and the challenges faced by women in traditional leadership, a field often overlooked because of dominant masculinity culture embedded in traditional leadership.

A commonly used phrase in South African languages, “*Musadzi u fara lufhanga nga hu fhiraho*,” translates to “a woman holds the sharp edges of the knives.” According to Phendla (2000), this phrase signifies that a woman must learn numerous ways to handle this knife without getting cut. The phrase highlights the tensions women navigate within personal, cultural, institutional, customary, and societal contexts. Therefore, it is important to examine the interplay of gender, culture, and leadership factors within our societies as we work towards creating a socially just and equitable community. That is what this study set out to understand, document, and theorise.

During the course of studying and investigating this topic, this study made important research findings. These findings are comprehensively analysed and discussed in Chapters Four and Five. The analysis and the discussion of these findings were framed around five themes, namely:

1. The Role of *Makhadzi* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community.
2. The Role of *Vhakoma* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community.
3. The Role of *Vhakololo* in Traditional Leadership Among the Venda Community.
4. The customary practice of male primogeniture and how it contradicts the South African Constitution post-1994.
5. The socialisation process that puts boys and men on a leadership pedestal.

Chapter Four of the study specifically dealt with the first three themes, whereas Chapter Five interrogated the last two themes.

This chapter seeks to summarise the key findings of this study and highlight the important cultural and social meaning of these findings. Additionally, based on the research findings of this study, the chapter aims to make recommendations with regard to how the tension between the constitutional law and the customary and royal councils could be regarded as a healthy, constructive tension. Furthermore, recommendations will be made pertaining to how women in general could be empowered to leadership positions socially and culturally in post-1994 South Africa.

6.2. Chapter Four: Identifying Key Findings

Chapter Four identifies and examines distinct roles played by Vhavenda women within traditional leadership, specifically focusing on the roles of the *makhadzi*, *vhakoma* (Queen Mother), and *vhakololo* (royal daughters). The chapter notes that each role holds unique responsibilities and significance, yet often, they intersect from time to time to strengthen the Vhavenda traditional leadership structure. The chapter discussed as many duties and responsibilities as possible under each role based on the participants' responses and the literature.

Under the theme of *makhadzi*, participants highlighted that the *makhadzi* is an integral member, or rather the cornerstone, of the Vhavenda traditional leadership structure. Her responsibilities often include decision-making, advising, leading rituals and ceremonies, and having her word regarded as final. However, participants pointed out that modernity and the influence of Western culture have impacted the perceived value of roles like that of the *makhadzi* within the homestead and community. Although still recognised as necessary to the culture, many young people are unaware of the extent of *makhadzi*'s significance and authority.

In the theme of *vhakoma*, participants identified this role as another significant position, as the *vhakoma* is the chief's mother. Her familial relationship with the chief allows her to influence him, as well as decision-making and the broader leadership structure. Additionally, *vhakoma* is important in introducing young men and women to adulthood through key Venda customs, such as *Domba* and *Ndayo*. Tisani (2023) reveals that the institution of queen motherhood experienced "colonial strangulation". During colonialism, such institutions were viewed as a

threat and misunderstood due to the colonial agenda's lack of gender sensitivity. Consequently, institutions like the Queen Mother were buried under colonial history.

The final role discussed is that of the *vhakololo*, which only one participant mentioned. This led to the finding that many young women struggled to identify the roles Vhavenḁa women play in traditional leadership. Contributing factors included the coloniality of knowledge, with participants being unaware of Vende culture due to the suppression of African knowledge systems by Western culture.

6.3 Chapter Five: Identifying Key Findings

Chapter Five critically examined the challenges Vhavenḁa women encountered in traditional leadership roles post-1994, with a particular focus on male primogeniture and gendered biases in leadership. The findings reveal a significant tension between customary practices and constitutional principles of equality, mirroring similar research in other African societies where customary practices increasingly conflict with democratic ideals. Participant statements indicate that customary norms continue to uphold male primogeniture, prioritising male heirs in leadership succession despite the constitutional emphasis on gender equality. This finding aligns with Mubangizi's (2012) study on South African customary practices, which shows that male primogeniture perpetuates gender inequities and subjugates women by denying them access to leadership and inheritance. This outcome is influenced by societal expectations around gender, often relegating women to secondary roles.

The chapter also references the case of *Bhe v. The Magistrate, Khayelitsha*, which declared the male primogeniture practice unconstitutional, reinforcing the Constitution's stance on gender equality. This judicial shift underscores that customary practices need to adapt to contemporary democratic values. As argued by Kanyane (2017), although traditional leadership is legally recognised, it must comply with constitutional mandates to preserve its relevance and legitimacy in modern society. Participants who are younger and were born after 1994 hold liberal views that challenge longstanding cultural practices favouring men. Their perspectives indicate a shift away from cultural norms that deny them certain privileges and positions. Notably, some participants passionately emphasised that the practice of male primogeniture should be abolished, highlighting how it marginalises women.

Additionally, the findings reveal participants' frustration with the persistent perception of women as inferior and less capable leaders. This aligns with the findings of Muradzikwa and Madziwa (2023) in Zimbabwe, where traditional female leaders face similar gender-based stigmatisation and are often viewed as unsuitable for leadership roles. This enduring view echoes Nzegwu's (2020) observations, indicating that women leaders are frequently labelled "aggressive" or otherwise unfit due to entrenched gender norms. Participants' insights that women are often pigeonholed in supportive roles rather than top leadership roles are supported by government data showing the underrepresentation of women in senior positions, reinforcing how societal expectations limit women's leadership trajectories.

Furthermore, the discussion reveals internalised gender biases among both male and female participants. Participants' critique of male primogeniture as discriminatory reflects the growing consensus that customary practices must evolve alongside social progress, as Mashele (2003) argued, highlighting the dissonance between democratic values and traditional male-dominated leadership structures. This observation aligns with Mamdani's (1996) critique that patriarchal principles continue to restrict women's roles, undermining democratic efforts to establish inclusive governance.

Therefore, the findings discussed in Chapter Five highlight a critical intersection between constitutional rights and cultural practices, emphasising that while traditional customs hold cultural significance, they must be reformed to be inclusive of gender equity. This view is consistent with existing research advocating for an inclusive legal and cultural framework that empowers women and challenges restrictive norms in traditional African leadership systems.

The findings of this research make a substantial contribution to the development of Venda cultural knowledge and heritage, spreading awareness about the roles Vhavenḁa women play in traditional leadership and within the community.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on this research and its findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Development of Africanised Knowledge Approaches in School History Curriculum**

As discussed in Chapter Four, the post-1994 South African school curriculum often foregrounds the histories of AmaZulu through the narrative of Shaka Zulu, along with the history of amaXhosa, which is often told through the 19th century Frontier Wars. This study argues for the expansion of the historical narrative of South Africa to incorporate diverse South African cultures and institutionalising the histories, experiences, and cultures of all African communities.

- **Further Research on Roles Such as *Vhakoma* and *Vhakololo***

Future research should examine these roles extensively to build an African literary base or library, which could serve as a resource for curriculum development. This follows the limited awareness of these roles and their contributions within the Venda community and traditional leadership role, compared to the role of *makhadzi*.

- **Oversee the formation of structures under the Customary Initiation Act (CIA) to promote gender equity and equality.**

This institution ought to develop a comprehensive approach and policy to promote gender equality by incorporating women in senior leadership positions in alignment with the South African Constitution. This follows the report by the Department of Traditional Affairs 2024/25 Annual Performance, which indicated the need for more women in traditional leadership senior positions (See Table 4 below). Women should also be involved in the process of revising factors that perpetuate gender inequality, such as male primogeniture, ensuring that constitutional principles of equality are upheld.

Province	Headmen/Women (positions)		Senior Traditional leaderships		Kingships/ Queenships		Principal Traditional Leadership		TOTAL
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Kings	Queens	Male	Female	
FS	106	11	7	4	0	0	2	0	130
Gauteng	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	5
EC	866	231	147	36	5	0	1	0	1288
Limpopo	1514	317	136	44	2	1	0	0	2014
Mpu	386	37	52	3	1	0	0	0	479
NC	21	2	7	1	0	0	0	0	31
NW	76	3	42	5	0	0	0	0	126
KZN	2560	302	257	20	1	0	0	0	3142
TOTAL	5531	904	650	113	9	1	3	0	7218

Table 4: Number of Traditional Leaders in Terms of Province, Levels and Gender.
Source: Department of Traditional Affairs Annual Performance Plan 2024/25

https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta_2016/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Approved-DTA-2024-25-Annual-Performance-Plan.pdf

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Consent Form



PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(To be signed by research participants)

Research Project Title: *Mbonalelo kha vhurangaphanda ha vhafumkadzi: A study into how young Vhavenda women in post-apartheid South Africa perceive the various traditional leadership roles that Vhavenda women have historically and contemporarily play in Venda society.*

Omphulusa Nengwekhulu from the Department of Political and International Studies, Rhodes University, has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The research project aims to examine how young Vhavenda women in post-apartheid South Africa perceive the various traditional leadership roles that Vhavenda women have historically played, and continue to play, in Venda society.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project (**2023-7439-8113**) and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate by contacting the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)
3. By participating in this research project, I will positively contribute to the scholarship about Vhavenda women in leadership. There has been little research done in this space and this thesis intends to fill those gaps and contribute to the ongoing conversation of how African women have traditionally challenged patriarchal gender roles In South Africa. Furthermore, by being part of the research project, I will be granted the

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opportunity to reflect on my leadership experiences and tell many other stories of women that I know in the past and present who have refined the idea of women in leadership.

4. The potential benefits of this research are to produce knowledge and expand the conversation and debate to include previously marginalised stories of Vhavenda women. Additionally, it is to cultivate awareness about women's leadership role and continue to play in the Vhavenda community.
5. I will participate in the project by conducting a semi-structured interview with the researcher, Omphulusa Nengwekhulu. The interview will take place on zoom, phone call or a designated space where I am comfortable and safe. Interviews are expected to take up to 60 minutes and will be arranged at a time and place that suits you. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded. I understand that should I desire a copy of the audio recording or a copy of the transcript, this will be made available to me.
6. To participate in this project, you must be 18 and older. My participation is entirely voluntary, and should I wish to withdraw from participating further at any stage, I may do so without any negative consequences.
7. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.
8. The Researcher intends to publish the research results in the form of a Master's thesis, as well as academic journal articles and possible presentations. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained, and my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in conducting the research unless I indicate to the contrary/recognise that as a public figure, my identity will inevitably be/become known in which case I agree to and accept the loss of

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confidentiality.

9. In terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act, it remains my right to request that the Researcher provide me with a detailed explanation of whether confidentiality and anonymity will be achieved. I may request to know how my personal information will be stored securely, for how long it will be stored, and whether it will likely be used again in further research. However, unless I indicate to the contrary/recognise that as a public figure, my identity will inevitably be/become known, I agree to and accept the loss of confidentiality.
10. In terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act, I possess the right to receive feedback about this research. This will take the form of Master's thesis that will be made available to the research participants. The researcher will provide a summary of the main findings with the group of participants as soon as the researcher has examined the findings unless I elect not to receive feedback.
11. Any further questions that I might have regarding the research, or my participation will be answered by Dr Mandisi Majavu and Omphulusa Nengwekhulu- 066 218 6287 [g19n5599@campus.ru.ac.za/](mailto:g19n5599@campus.ru.ac.za) omphulusa.mulugisi.nengwekhulu@gmail.com
12. I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies by signing this informed consent declaration.
13. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I,, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I

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understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all the questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

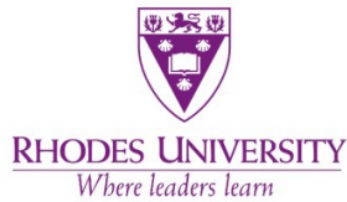
I **agree/disagree** (SELECT APPLICABLE) to the Researcher's request to take photographs and/or videos of me as part of this research project, recognising that agreement here is likely to raise the risk of compromising my anonymity and that steps will be taken to ensure this does not happen if my approval is granted.

I **agree/disagree** to the Researcher's request to voice record my comments and opinions during interviews, the purpose of which is to ensure the accurate recording of my views. Furthermore, I have the right to request a copy of interview transcriptions to confirm that my opinions are accurately recorded.

.....
Participants signature **Date**

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Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance



Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee
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17 October 2023

Omphulusa Nengwekhulu

Email: g19n5599@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2023-7439-8113

Dear Ms Nengwekhulu

Title: Mbonalelo kha vhurangaphanda ha vhafumkadzi

Researcher: Omphulusa Nengwekhulu

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee (HF-REC). Your Approval number is: 2023-7439-8113

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the Humanities Faculty REC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Humanities Faculty REC should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,

