TRADITIONAL TERRAIN: LAND, GENDER, AND CULTURAL BIODIVERSITY PRESERVATION IN VENDA, SOUTH AFRICA

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the colonial and apartheid frameworks manifest in South Africa's land act legacies and the specific impact on land administration, gender, and the environment in the former apartheid homeland of Venda, South Africa. These historical forces shape present-day neocolonialism and globalization in the region which challenge the rights and citizenship of Black South African women within traditional leadership structures—concurrent with the country's democracy. In Venda, politicians, traditional leaders, and multinational corporations reinforce colonial and apartheid gender ideologies which undermine *Vhomakhadzi* roles and eco-cultural knowledge practices. *Vhomakhadzi* are women who have historically played a central role in their clans by advising *Vhamusanda* (chiefs) on community affairs and presiding over customs that connect with environmental sustainability. Yet today, leaders and politicians ignore *Vhomakhadzi* warnings that development projects threaten biodiversity and food and water security in the region— instead commencing with deals to establish foreign coal mines, commercial farms, casinos, and tourist resorts.

This empirical study in particular investigates the environmental and community activism and cultural biodiversity preservation strategies of *Vhomakhadzi* of the community-based organization Dzomo La Mupo. Through ethnographic-style interviews, participant observation, and archival research, this scholarship analyzes the historical and present-day gender politics that have diminished cultural biodiversity. The study reveals that colonial social formations

historically confronted the role of *makhadzi* and continues to undermine her authority today in a globalized, post-apartheid era.

To my mother and father who always stressed the importance of education and made many sacrifices over the years for me to achieve my goals. Also to my sister Tracey whose unwavering encouragement gave me energy and confidence. It was the love and support of my family and the spirit of my ancestors that carried me across the finish line.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

AfriMAB	African Regional Network of Biospheres
AU	African Union
CBO	Community Based Organization
DLM	Dzomo La Mupo
IUCN	International Union for The Conservation of Nature
LIRHA	The Limpopo Heritage Resources Agency
MAB	Man in the Biosphere Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDRIP	The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
VBR	Vhembe Biosphere Reserve

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Biological diversity is a common term that refers to the varied species, organisms, and ecosystems in a region. We often hear members of the scientific, conservationist, and environmentalist community discuss the need to safeguard biological diversity amidst threats of climate change and environmental degradation—yet what is less referred to is *cultural biodiversity*. This concept, sometimes referred to as biocultural diversity, is the embodiment of cultural, linguistic, and environmental knowledge which coevolved over many centuries (Maffi and Woodley, 2010; China Bioreserve Network 2008). Maffi and Woodley (2010) characterize this process as a complex socio-ecological adaptive system—one that many Indigenous people around the world and on the Continent have retained as centuries-long cultural, spiritual, and ancestral beliefs. Akin to indigenous knowledge skills (IKS), cultural biodiversity is often represented through rituals and an intricate spirituality, sometimes associated with sacred natural sites and forests that have been protected by local communities for generations. In essence cultural biodiversity includes diverse indigenous epistemologies expressed as a symbiotic, context and culturally-specific relationship that human communities embody as inhabitants of their natural world. What many intergovernmental and academic researchers are finally conceding is that indigenous environmental knowledge is just as expansive and complex as contemporary conservationist methods.

Indigenous women in particular have been acutely aware of the links between eco-systems and human communities for many centuries, and have observed that a loss of endemic languages and cultures is directly linked with biodiversity loss (Maffi 2004; Zent and Maffi 2009). For example, in many African cultures women have customarily managed seed selection

and storage, utilize indigenous agricultural techniques, and pass on cultural taboos about plants and nature to protect sustainability. Yet, as women are impacted the most when these techniques are altered in the name of modernity, many communities of women are on the frontlines defending indigenous knowledge systems, sacred lands, and human rights[1].

Similarly, within the ancestral role of *makhadzi* (pl. *Vhomakhadzi.)* in Indigenous *Vhangona* culture, women observe the ecological importance of sacred sites and forests in Venda, South Africa in the Limpopo Province. *Makhadzi* eco-cultural knowledge is the indigenous understanding of native plants and eco-systems including natural resource management. *Makhadzi* ecological knowledge also focuses on seed, food, and seasonal cycles rooted in an appreciation of the sacredness of life and nature. In Venda, specifically in the Vhembe District Municipality there are many sacred sites in the forest, by rivers and lakes, and in the mountains that are environmentally susceptible. The sacred sites serve different spiritual purposes and have distinctive management customs and ceremonies. The spots include burial sites, ritual only sites, and communal sites (Matshidzhe 2013; Tshigavo 2008). As custodians of these areas, *makhadzi* have traditionally served a vital role in protecting these sacred environments and maintaining a harmonious balance between community and spiritual life. Moreover, for many centuries the role of *makhadzi* has extended to managing the relationships of individuals to their family, clan, community, and society to nature. The literature describes sacred areas identified around the world as retaining high rates of biodiversity with a range of animal and plant life that need protection. The same is true among Venda's sacred areas and *Vhomakhadzi* have played a central role in upholding the sacred site culture (Tshivugho 2008).

Scholars (Maffi and Woodley 2010; Zent 2009) note that the interdependence between

[1] See Lutz, for a comprehensive example of indigenous women's organizing.

culture and nature or cultural biodiversity is not just among rural indigenous communities, but exists among people in varied societies. Yet environmental and cultural connections have been weakened in industrialized, urbanized communities where people are removed from subsistence living (Maffi and Woodley 2010). Changes in gender roles, and global food and seed systems have also altered women's influence on environmental matters in indigenous communities. Additionally, as many remaining indigenous cultures and communities have endured socio-political changes and strife, traditional environmental practices and knowledge have deteriorated. Other external changes include "…loss of tenure over such lands and resources, displacement, out-migration, impoverishment, forced or induced assimilation, loss of cultural identity and acculturation to a dominant way of life" (Maffi and Woodley 2010; Zent 2009). The end result is that Indigenous people lose self-determination due to the overt linguistic, economic, and political influences of the dominant-culture. Ultimately, cultural biodiversity erosion leads to environmental hazards that directly impact the resilience of ecosystems and human welfare and is reflective of larger social, economic, and political processes at work.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the former apartheid homeland of Venda, South Africa, the Indigenous *Vhangona* communities have endured many socio-political changes that have disturbed their way of life and relationship to cultural biodiversity. A legacy of colonial and apartheid frameworks have restricted *Vhangona* access to sacred sites, forests, and land. What is especially striking is the gathering of local, national, and multinational actors who appropriate colonial and apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies to disenfranchise women within the land administration process. Specifically, politicians, chiefs, and multinational corporations reinforce imperialist authority to undermine *makhadzi* traditional roles and eco-cultural knowledge practices.

Vhomakhadzi once played a central role in their clans by advising chiefs on community

affairs and presiding over customs that connect with environmental sustainability. Presently however, chiefs and politicians ignore specific *makhadzi* community-organizers who warn that development projects threaten biodiversity and food and water security in the region; instead commencing with deals to establish foreign coalmines, casinos, and tourist resorts. In this context, *makhadzi* and *Vhangona* women are socially and economically vulnerable within national, provincial, and local traditional leadership structures—and subject to compromised livelihoods, environmental and cultural degradation, and a basic lack of citizenship rights.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This empirical study examines the environmentalism and cultural biodiversity preservation efforts of *Vhomakhadzi* members of the community-based organization Dzomo La Mupo (DLM). Through ethnographic-style interviews, participant observation, and archival research, the study investigates the historical and present-day land legacies and gender politics that have contributed to the erosion of cultural biodiversity, and DLM's subsequent preservation efforts. Through this qualitative research I analyze how political and corporate actors appropriate colonial and apartheid gender ideologies that disenfranchise Indigenous *Vhangona* women in the land administration process. Lastly, through the study I elucidate the ways that neocolonialism and globalization impact gender-based discrimination and environmental sustainability in Venda. As I investigate the politics of land reform and the subsequent effects on the role of *makhadzi*, I consider how indigenous women are excluded from economic decisions and land tenure amidst new power relations in South Africa's post-apartheid era.

1.4 Need and Significance of the Study

The study is important for practical and theoretical reasons pertinent to conservation and social science. To begin, the erosion of cultural biodiversity and women's eco-cultural knowledge in Venda is a post-colonial, post-apartheid issue. Land continues to be a contentious issue in South Africa and women's land rights feature prominently in this debate. Furthermore, upon examining land-use, it is clear that climate change due to industrialization and unsustainable development practices is a Continent wide concern. According to The African Union (AU), the regional bloc comprised of 54 African states, sustainable development is a crucial goal as outlined in its 14 constitutional objectives proposed, "to promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies" (German Commission for UNESCO, 2015). And climate change and sustainability are among the AU's strategic plans articulated in *Africa Agenda 2063,* the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD) and African sub-regional bodies/Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Additionally, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) recognizes that companies predominantly from the global north, use unsustainable development techniques evidenced by extractive industries and plantations. UNECA also identifies, in its two "*Sustainable Development Reports on Africa*" the following problems:[2]

- Inadequate institutional and legal frameworks for environmental management
- Weakly applied institutionalized environmental planning and management tools due to inadequate capacities
- Unchecked population growth rates
- Transboundary management of environmental resources
- High turnover of national experts and officials
- The following topical challenges of Africa are quoted again and again by many international organizations: over-exploitation of natural resources, loss of

2 See German Commission for UNESCO (2015).

> biodiversity, land degradation and desertification, agriculture and food security, social protection for poor and marginal groups, gender equality, disaster and risk management plans, access to water and sanitation facilities, as well as youth unemployment.

It becomes clear that nongovernmental and regional organizations in Africa— from the AU to UN agencies such as UNECA, UNESCO, the Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) and MAB's African regional network of biospheres, AfriMAB— have prioritized human-centered models of conservation and economic development. Consequently, the issues explored in this dissertation are timely and relevant. Likewise, the study offers suggestions to scholars, conservationists, and United Nation environmental and cultural agencies working in Venda's Vhembe District Municipality to integrate more explicit gender and cultural biodiversity objectives into their development models and/or conservation strategies.

Regarding theoretical contributions, the research is significant because it dynamically intersects with Black/Africana Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Cultural Anthropology, as well as feminist political ecology and post-colonial studies. The field of African American and African Studies engages research topics across the African diaspora, including continental Africa to comprehend the global Black experience. The examination of structural racism and gender bias contributes to research on discriminatory frameworks to illuminate the experiences of Black South African women on the Continent. Furthermore, the study incorporates African feminist and gender theories that offer oppositional knowledge and research paradigms which contest hegemonic discourses about African women. Such models particularly examine the intersectional dimensions of gender-based discrimination, such as race, class, gender, colonialism, and neocolonialism. This is imperative because it problematizes assumptions about African patriarchy and gender-based discrimination through a post-colonial lens. I draw on the

works of Filomina Chioma Steady, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Molara Ogundipe Leslie, Obioma Nnaemeka, Catherine Ancholonu and more who challenge narrow epistemological discourses about gender and globalization and women in development in Africa. Moreover, I employ the theories of gender scholars who engage in dialogue about gender as a socio-cultural construct with distinctive implications in an African context. I also incorporate research from Southern African scholars such as Patricia McFadden, Desiree Lewis, and Winnie Wanzala, who explore how resources and power are allocated and how historical forces have shaped present day neocolonialism and globalization by reifying a colonial and imperialist world order that challenges the rights and citizenship of South African women (McFadden 2001).

These approaches are reflective of the Black Studies-Africanist trained scholar who embarks on a new genre of Africanist scholarship outside of the traditional African Studies research framework that has been subsumed into a White, paternalistic, and Afro-pessimistic view of the Continent (Edozie 2012). Alternatively, it supports Zeleza's vision to, "…integrate traditional Black studies and African-centered African Studies initiatives into a single academic paradigm" (Edozie 33). The Black Studies Africanist scholar therefore uses Black diasporic epistemologies to examine the global Black experience. For example, in my research I use African gender theories that probe standpoint theory and intersectional research paradigms used in Black diasporic feminisms to explore gender-based discrimination in South Africa.

The research encompasses ecological feminist philosophy, namely feminist political ecology, feminist geography, as well as ecofeminist theories to explore gender and land reform politics. This literature will explore neo-liberal development paradigms that marginalize Africa through corporate globalization and the exploitation of resources— which has specific gendered consequences such as feminized poverty, environmental degradation as well as the insecurity of

land tenure by women in South Africa's former homelands. Exploring ecological feminist philosophy as it connects with African gender theories frames oppositional knowledge that challenges Eurocentric social science theories, such as *acculturation* resurrected in development paradigms that imply that Vhavenda women or the elder *makhadzi* women as the custodians of sacred environmental sites, must acclimate to a new global political economy and all of its entanglements as a natural progression towards Western dominated economic models and values. The study also draws from scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Rachel Carson, who in their writings explore issues like water pollution, deforestation, toxic waste dumping, agricultural development and sustainability, animal rights and nuclear weapons policies to explore environmental issues as they intersect with women's rights and the role of patriarchy in the domination of women and nature[3]. Therefore, the study also interrogates derogatory metaphors and representations of African women and their relationship to land and nature constructed in the colonial era.

Significantly, the study adds to the growing gendered analysis of cultural biodiversity, sacred natural sites, and women's land rights, further exposing the relationship between patriarchy and environmental degradation. This is accomplished through a broad exploration of alarming environmental issues as they are outlined by researchers and scientists, and through an evaluation of Indigenous *Vhangona* women's perceptions of environmental risk factors and their interpretation of the socio-cultural and political implications. Specifically, I examine issues of water pollution, food and seed security, and biodiversity loss. *Vhomakhadzi* have identified these issues in critical interviews, documentaries, community based organizing, letters of petition, formal legal complaints, and eco-cultural mapping projects.

3 See *Metz* for a concise explanation of ecofeminism.

Lastly, reflecting on the study's theoretical contributions, land, gender, and traditional leadership have been explored extensively, nevertheless much of the literature focuses disproportionately on custom, power, and African patriarchy. Such research examines to a lesser extent how colonial and apartheid authority manipulated gender roles to establish a system of indirect rule in the homelands and how current legislation reinforces that imperially imposed framework. In the politics of land reform, South African feminist scholars also criticize the technocratic approaches to women in development (WID) strategies, referencing gender mainstreaming and inclusionary approaches to women's rights as opposed to more transformational and radical approaches that address the power imbalances in a male dominated society (Britton 2009). Likewise, select research on post-colonialism—especially post-colonial, African feminist discourse— periodically upholds binary categories of oppressed and oppressor, or the politics of difference, ignoring situational authority based on local, national, and international conditions that alter power dynamics and gender relations. Highly differentiated scenarios determined by ethnicity, race, class, and gender, where heterogeneous populations abuse power in innumerable ways exemplify these situational power dynamics. This study neither ignores present-day African patriarchy nor the colonial and apartheid gender ideologies with which it currently intersects. Instead it contributes a gendered analysis of land politics in South Africa through an examination of the assemblage of local, national, and international actors that reinforce global patriarchy. What is more, while much of the literature on this topic critiques agrarian reform, and the politics thereof, gender as it intersects with environmental sustainability in this region is scantily addressed. Venda's historical, political, cultural, and geographic discrepancies in South Africa which relegate this reserve as an outlier in the study of homelands, is a far less explored topic in the nationwide conversation on women's land rights.

Therefore, I hope this study presents new topics to explore in land administration, gender, and conservation in South Africa.

1.5 Research Questions

The study was guided by four main questions: (1) How do colonial and apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies manifest in South Africa's land act legacies? (2) What impact has South Africa's land acts, in conjunction with traditional leadership, had on cultural biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality? (3) What do *Vhomakhadzi* attribute to environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality? and (4) How do *Vhomakhadzi* construct cultural biodiversity preservation? In other words, what do their efforts or positions reveal about gender and cultural biodiversity and how they as women frame culture and environment?

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms are a mix of standard definitions along with a working glossary defined by Mphatheleni Makaulule (currently volunteer director) of the community based organization, Dzomo La Mupo, who was a key informant during my field research.

- **Agroecology:** Consideration of ecologically beneficial techniques within agriculture.
- **Cultural biodiversity:** sometimes referred to as biocultural diversity, is the phenomenon of cultural, linguistic, and environmental knowledge which coevolved over many centuries.
- ***Dzomo La Mupo*:** Luvenda phrase, voice of the Earth, or voice of Mother Earth.
- **Eco-cultural knowledge:** Akin to cultural biodiversity. Local knowledge pertaining to resource management and conservation, indigenous agricultural food and seed systems, and environmental systems relevant to ecosystems and biological diversity.

- **Finger Millet: Also known as**
- **Indigenous Knowledge Skills (or systems) (IKS):** Indigenous knowledge developed outside of a formal classroom by indigenous inhabitants, about myriad aspects of community living, such as agriculture, spirituality, medicine, and natural-resource management.
- ***Khadzi:*** The precursor to *makhadzi*.
- ***Khosi*****:** a term that denotes a pre-colonial traditional Venda leader. Used to indicate a king, or sometimes the less preferred English term of chief.
- ***Khotsimunene*****:** The chief's younger brother.
- ***Luvenda/Tshivenda*****:** the language spoken widely by Vhavenda people.
- ***Makgoshi***: Luvenda term for traditional male leaders.
- ***Makhadzi*****:** (pl. *Vhomakhadzi*) In addition to being the paternal aunt, makhadzi is not just a name or title; it is a role. An indigenous ancestral role bestowed on Venda women to safeguard spiritual connections, to maintain order in the clan and families, and to assist royal leadership in community governance.
- ***Masingo:*** The dominant sub-ethnicity in Venda.
- ***Mufhoho*****:** *The sacred* Finger Millet plant.
- ***Mupo:*** Nature or Creations of the Universe.
- ***Phangami:*** is a Luvenda word for one who initiates a journey, a leader who has a vision which others are able to follow.
- ***Ramunangi* (*Madau*) clan:** *Vhangona* clan and protectors of the sacred Phiphidi Waterfall.
- **Riparian Vegetation:** Vegetation growing alongside a river bank.

- **Sacred Site:** There are many Zwifho zwa Venda (sacred sites of Venda). Also referred to as sacred forests. The study focuses on three, yet there are over 54 located near rivers, pools and other environmental areas. There are also manmade consecrated areas called: 1.) *Zwiawelo,* which is a place of rest for carrying the dead 2.) *Zwiendeulu*, royal graves and *zwitaka,* a general name for shrubs, it is a dense forest with no entrance.
- **Shango:** Territory, pl. *mashango.*
- **Vegetation biomass:** Measured vegetation.
- **Venda:** Former apartheid homeland.
- ***Vhamusanda:*** Luvenda term for a chief.
- ***Vhangona*:** An indigenous clan or ethnic group in Venda. They claim exclusive rights over sacred sites.
- **Vhavenda:** People within the Venda culture
- **Vhembe District Municipality:** A District in the Limpopo Province historically the region of the former apartheid homeland of Venda.
- ***Zwifho*:** Luvenda term for one type of sacred site which is most referenced in this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter investigates the correlation between colonial and apartheid gender ideologies, land-policies, and cultural biodiversity erosion, which has resulted in the marginalization of *Vhomakhadzi* in the Vhembe District Municipality of Venda. The surveyed literature therefore is a synthesis of relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental reports, academic research, blogs, and analysis of selected discourses on ecological feminist philosophy in the context of environmental grassroots activism in Africa. This approach underscores the four main research questions which guide the study: (1) How do colonial and apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies manifest in South Africa's land act legacies? (2) What impact has South Africa's land acts, in conjunction with traditional leadership, had on cultural biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality? (3) What do *Vhomakhadzi* attribute to environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality? and (4) How do *Vhomakhadzi* construct cultural biodiversity preservation? Thus drawing from core research on land, cultural biodiversity, conservation and gender, I incorporate four subsections—*South African Land Politics, Environmental Degradation, Cultural Biodiversity and Conservation, and Ecological Feminist-Environmentalism.*

Amidst shifting cultural and political landscapes, the eco-cultural knowledge practices of *Vhomakhadzi*—the paternal aunts/women of Indigenous Vhavenda culture—have been undermined (Tshiguvho 2008; Makaulule 2012; Matshidze 2013). The denigration of their cultural role has occurred increasingly throughout South Africa's history, during the colonial and apartheid periods— to the current post-apartheid, globalized era. The intersections of *Vhomakhadzi* responsibilities related to environmental well-being, such as their roles as custodians of sacred natural sites and presiders over ceremonies pertinent to agricultural cycles

and harvesting of crops, encapsulates the concept of *cultural biodiversity,* also referred to as *biocultural diversity, or cultural and biological diversity*. Research on cultural biodiversity, by environmentalists, intergovernmental agencies and NGOs, has grown exponentially. Such investigations inform a second generation of protected areas and biosphere reserve policies that seek to create co-management solutions with indigenous populations and local communities. Thus cultural biodiversity research addresses more expansively poverty reduction and gender equality to develop livelihood strategies—and to better incorporate human welfare and development goals into their conservation initiatives.

2.1 South African Land Politics

There is a wealth of historical evidence about South Africa's land act legacies, the land reform program, and the current challenges and contradictions between the country's land policies and post-apartheid constitutional rights. The evolution of laws as they exist today stifle public involvement and equitable arbitration, and there remains a consistent struggle between the separation of powers. Particularly, special attention is paid to the integration of customary law and traditional leadership within South Africa's democratic structures and the subsequent vulnerabilities women face in the land administration process (Claassens and Cousins 2008; Ntsebeza and Hall 2007; Claassens and Ngubane 2013; Hosegood 2013; Budlender et. al 2011; De Soto 2007; Gray and Kevane 1999; Basa et al. 2014; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Wilmien 2013; Luwaya 2014). Comprehensively, these vulnerabilities manifest as structural inequalities that disempower women due to poor legal representation, dominant systems of patrilineal inheritance, low ratios of female political influence, female exclusion from select traditional courts, tenuous access to land, insecure housing tenure, lack of public participation for proposed development plans, degraded livelihoods, and lack of women's access in shaping customary law,

environmental policy, and conservation. (Ntsebeza and Hall 2007; Basa et al. 2014; Cousins and Walker 2014). The literature exposes traditional authority's impact on the politics of land reform today which has led researchers (Claassens and Cousins 2008; Cousins and Walker 2014; Ntsebeza and Hall 2007; Heinbeck 2013; Claassens and Ngubane 2013; Hosegood 2013; Budlender et. al 2011; De Soto 2007; Gray and Kevane 1999; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Wilmien 2013; Luwaya 2014) to examine the historical linkages of the policies through the colonial, apartheid, and democratic eras. Legacies of colonialism reveal the ways that indirect colonial rule, is still intertwined in current land policies which uniquely impact women.

Historically, chiefly power as it is expressed today derives from South Africa's White settler colonialists. In an effort to take control of land, the 19th century White settle regime appropriated South African customary laws as they observed — and mostly misinterpreted—and began the process of forming the ethnic reserve system to control Black people and land (Sithole 2011). 1913 marked the beginning of a series of land acts that segmented Black land. Following the South African War the *Native Lands Act* (1913) was intended to reduce the numbers of Black people on designated White land (Christopher 2001). Through forced removals, Black South Africans were ushered onto these lands and in 1927 the *Natives Administration Act* (1927) established the governing structures of the ethnic reserves whereby homelands developed a separate governing structure to be utilized and controlled by White settler colonialists through the chiefs. Furthermore, the *Bantu Trust and Land Act* (1936) was designed to reorganize agricultural ownership to further dispossess Black people of their land-dwelling (Christopher 2001). While these Land Acts essentially created a legal framework for racial discrimination, they also cemented Black South African women's marginalization in both traditional leadership structures and within imperialist frameworks.

Once the White settle regime codified their interpretations of customary law, women who contributed to indigenous agricultural labor were excluded from decision-making concerning land and the products of their labor. Women thus inhabited the domestic sphere more exclusively based on colonial notions about gender roles and the social division of labor and the desire to control Black agriculture, women's field labor, livelihoods, and their homesteads. Consequently, colonialism altered gender relations in South Africa forcing women to be housebound. Rhampele (2008) discusses how land dispossession disadvantaged women's economic power and marginalized African women in a society in which they had once been respected for their contributions to agricultural labor *and* for stabilizing the homestead. Moreover, these discriminatory laws undermined the legal status of women's land rights and shifted power relations in the family structure (Claassens and Cousins 2008; Claassens and Ngubane 2013; Hosegood 2013; Budlender et. al 2011; De Soto 2007; Gray and Kevane 1999; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Wilmien 2013; Luwaya 2014). The actions of the White settler colonialists to undercut Black women's roles in society disenfranchised them within traditional authority and systemized patriarchal control, enforced through traditional leadership and the colonial administration (Rhamphele 2008). Women, who once worked the land, therefore became dependent on the wage labor of their fathers, husbands, and brothers, in a system of indirect rule created by White settlers and supported by emergent colonial gender philosophies (Rhamphele 2008).

These segregationist policies became central principles of the National Party Government first mandated on a large scale in 1948 at the onset of apartheid in the Afrikaner controlled government (Kelso 1999). The National Party expanded indirect rule in the apartheid era to control the Black population of which there was a great fear by Whites of Black rebellion and

revolution. In 1959, parliament passed the *Bantu-Self Government Act*, which changed the reserves into homelands with the intent that they would ostensibly become sovereign 'states.' It essentially delineated the shape of contemporary South Africa (Christopher 2001). Through continued forced removals of Blacks such as Vhavenda people onto homelands— previously referred to as Bantustans or Bantu reserves—Blacks and Whites were then further segregated in South Africa with ten territories grouped by ethnic and linguistic affiliation determined by White ethnographers. They included: KwaZulu, Bophuthatswana, Transkei, Ciskei, Venda, Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, Lebowa, and QwaQwa (Kelso 1999; Christopher 2001). South Africa's Land Acts thus formed the governance structure and court system of the homelands, which has had long ranging implications for gender in the new, democratic South Africa.

Claassens' research with the Centre for Law and Society at the University of Cape Town interrogates these heritages and the gendered implications of present-day customary laws and policies. (Claassens and Cousins 2008; Ntsebeza and Hall 2007; Claassens and Ngubane 2013; Hosegood 2013; Budlender et. al 2011; De Soto 2007; Gray and Kevane 1999; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Wilmien 2013; Luwaya 2014). In South Africa's former apartheid homelands, Ngubane and Cousins' research illustrates how women are still regarded as second-class citizens (Claassens and Cousins 2008; Claassens and Ngubane 2013; Hosegood 2013; Budlender et. al 2011, De Soto 2007; Gray and Kevane 1999; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Wilmien 2013; Luwaya 2014). The chiefs, headman, royalty, and court systems that comprise the traditional leadership structures are criticized for being non-democratic. Women's land rights for example, feature prominently in these debates because the traditional leaders who are mostly male make land administration decisions that privilege men. Colonial and apartheid era practices established in the homelands still remain in contemporary legislation, which shape land administration and

traditional leadership, impacting women (Claassens and Cousins 2008). Current legislation such as the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act* (2004) the *Communal Rights Bill* (2004) and the *Traditional Courts Bill* (2008)—which was overturned in 2014[4] and reintroduced to parliament in 2016— has given traditional authorities unrestrained governance over land issues including the power to sanction national and multinational development projects. And because women are considered minors in some rural areas of South Africa, these Land Acts have further disenfranchised them within the traditional court system or village assemblies (Claassens and Ngubane 2013; Hosegood 2013; Budlender et. al 2011; De Soto 2007; Gray and Kevane 1999; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Wilmien 2013).

It is argued by many women's land rights activists and legal scholars (Claassens and Cousins 2008; Ntsebeza and Hall; Luwaya 2014) that many of South Africa's current land policies are in conflict with the constitution. For example, the 2004 *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act* (TLGFA) reinforces colonial and apartheid era authority. TLGFA also works with other laws such as the 2004 *Communal Land Rights Act* (CLRA) and the now overturned 2008 *Traditional Courts Bill* (TCB) to provide traditional leaders with far-reaching, semi-autonomous control over residents in the homelands (Claassens and Ngubane 2013; Hosegood 2013; Budlender et. al 2011; De Soto 2007; Gray and Kevane 1999; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Wilmien 2013; Claassens and Cousins 2008). Namely, TLGFA initially incorporated a transitional provision that authorized existing traditional authorities to act as land councils. Furthermore, CLRA enabled land administration committees to have extensive powers over land, such as the power to represent the community as owner of such land, and the power to assign and register land rights and claims. These Acts therefore entrenched the position of chiefs

[4] See all Africa press release, "South Africa: Traditional Courts Bill is Dead!" *All Africa, Alliance for Rural Democracy*. http://allafrica.com/stories/201402211306.html

appointed during apartheid (Claassens and Cousins 2008). Claassens and Cousins (2008) contend that essentially, TLGFA as an umbrella to these other laws, incorporate groups who oppose apartheid-imposed limitations within the boundaries of larger encompassing "tribes" yet as a result, these ethnic factions become minorities subject to the powers of traditional leaders. Additionally, traditional leaders are also enforcing tribal levies or obligatory fees paid by residents within their jurisdiction.

Within these systems women are virtually defenseless. The Commission on Gender Equality therefore challenged these Land Acts, submitting a legal complaint suggesting that these constellations of laws threaten Black South African women's rights. The Commission cited in section 25(6) of the South African Constitution where African women are among people whose tenure of land is legally insecure as a result of past racial discriminatory laws or practices. In their formal legal complaint, they questioned the apartheid legislation that blocked land ownership for African women rejecting them from permission to occupy (PTO) certificates (Claassens and Cousins 2008). These policies present major dilemmas for the current government, also reflected in the land administration and gender politics of my research site in the former homeland of Venda, in the Vhembe District Municipality.

Researchers (Luwaya 2014; Claassens and Cousins 2008; Ntsebeza and Hall 2007; Basa et al. 2014) continue to deconstruct South Africa's complicated land reform program and its various attempts to redistribute land back to Black South Africans from whom it was dispossessed during colonialism and apartheid. Cousins and Heinbeck (2013) provide a socio-historical analysis of South Africa's land policies that impact agrarian livelihoods highlighting the chasm between policies and progress. Given that the objective of South Africa's land reform program is to restore land and alleviate poverty (Cousins and Heinbeck 2013; Ntsebeza and Hall

2007; Claassens 2008; Cousins and Walker 2014) the current policies and procedures are problematic and have catalyzed autocratic chiefly power and traditional leadership, and neo-traditional ideals that prompt expansive land claims.

UCT's Centre for Law and Society, now the Land and Accountability Research Centre (LARC), manages a superb website, *Custom Contested.* LARC's site is managed by a team of multi-ethnic legal, scholarly, and activist contributors, who continuously track living laws. The site provides up-to-date information on land claims, court proceedings, and current events that detail parliamentary decisions about South African land politics and restitution. *Custom Contested* is also an ideal source and digital repository for primary sources embedded in links to a series of laws and bills published online. Once again, among the laws and policies that they are particularly critical of, some of which were previously discussed, include: The *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act* (TLGFA), the *Communal Land Rights Act* (CLRA), *The Traditional Courts Bill* (TCB), as well as The *Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act, The Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill* ('TKLB'), and *The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act* (SPLUMA). A review of their positions on the latter bills is an important component to understanding the nation's land politics and current land reform perspectives from advocates who oppose the evolution of laws as they currently stand.

When The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform reopened land claims under the amended *Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act in* 2014 (Here on referred to as the Restitution act, first passed following the end of apartheid in 1994), many were and continue to be skeptical about the outcome of such legislation. In February of 2016 civil society organizations and representatives from 50 communities protested aspects of the amendment (which stipulates a five-year window to file claims) to the Constitutional Court in Braamfonetein

outside of Johannesburg—to express grievances because as the, "Former Director of Land Access Movement of South Africa (Lamosa) Constance Mogale explains, 'Lamosa's disapproval of the Act…comes as 8000 claims are still not finalized" (50 Communities to challenge the Restitution of Land Rights Act). Further, there are many people who have been waiting 20 years for the first claims to be resolved. *Custom Contested* contributor's express similar incredulity of the reopening of claims with concerns that these new laws benefit traditional leaders and their vested interests more than communities. They reference examples of conflicts and counter claims over mineral rich regions such as lands restored to The Royal Bafokeng Nation in South Africa, a region with a multitude of platinum, of which companies such as Impala Platinum Mining—pay royalties to the nation in exchange for its deposits. In the 1960s deposits of valuable minerals such as platinum, chrome, titanium and coal have been discovered in the former homelands of North West, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.

A key traditional leader who also features prominently in many of *Custom Contested* articles[5] is Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelithini. Zwelithini has become the prototypical example in recent years of neo-traditional ideology[6] run amuck, as he continues to make newsworthy and far-reaching land claims that extend to neighboring provinces beyond that which he governs in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Critics of the Restitution Act regard it as a form of pacification for traditional leaders like Zwelithini, who may be agitated when the Traditional Courts Bill (TCB) did not pass. Some (Mkhize 2014) regard the act as a political bargaining chip that state officials like President Jacob Zuma, use to appease traditional leaders who have been aggrieved in the country's complicated democracy which they feel is leaving them out. Moving forward, land

[5] See the Custom Contested archives, for multiple land articles regarding land administration and Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, http://www.customcontested.co.za/tag/king-goodwill-zwelithini/.
[6] Neo-traditional ideology is a term used to describe traditional leaders who reference culture to file extensive land claims.

rights researchers, speculate that the *Restitution Act* may lose its effectiveness as royal houses make overlapping land claims, finding themselves, "in protracted legal battles over land ownership" (Mkhize 2014).

The *Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill* ('TKLB') was introduced by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in September of 2015. The bill replaces the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 and now integrates Khoi-San[7] leadership into the governing structure. *Custom Contested* asserts that the bill is problematic because essentially it is a repackaged version of the *Traditional Affairs Bill of 2013* which maintains the boundaries of the former homelands much like the *Framework Act* of 2003 which also disenfranchises populations through inexorable legal divisions. And much like the *Framework Act*, it does not provide guidelines for how the national and local governments and the traditional leaders will enact government functions, pertaining issues such as, health and social services to traditional leaders and councils (clause 25)[8]. The main concern with the introduction of a series of bills such as these, is that they work in concert with one another forming a type of fourth tier of government out of the boundaries of South Africa's democracy.

Finally, the *Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act* (SPLUMA), first introduced in 2013, with final regulations passing in 2015[9] permits the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) to make land decisions based on spatial planning data. This framework law will be a blue print for the nine provinces to implement development plans. It intends to resolve inconsistencies with the fragmented laws that once functioned under

[7] The Khoi-San are a South African Indigenous ethnic group in the Northern Cape. They are comprised of the San once prevalent hunter-gatherers, and the Khoi Khoi people.
[8] See Classens, "Say Which of these facts are not true."
[9] See South African Government Gazette, 23 March 2015 for SPLUMA *GG* 38594 GN R239 regulations, http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/38594_rg10397_gon239.pdf.

apartheid-era laws that have since been dismantled. There is a great deal of debate, as *Custom Contested* relays, concerning the extension of powers to the traditional councils— although traditional powers believe that they were not consulted enough during the legislative process. One of the major complaints lies in provision of 19(1) and (2) of the SPLUMA Regulations. These provisions permit in a small amount of land planning and land use powers with the oversight of the municipality in some circumstances. As for women's roles in traditional leadership as it exists today, *The Framework Act* require all traditional or tribal authorities enacted under apartheid to function as traditional council only if they adhere to a series of transformation requirements such as, 40percent of traditional council members must undergo an election process and one third must be women. Apparently, many of these standards have not been met, in particular with regards to the quota for women and in some instances like the Limpopo province where Venda is located, elections have not taken place in 10 years.

Land has always been and will continue to be controversial in South Africa. Colonialism and Apartheid spatial planning has impacted people beyond racial segregation. The land legacies mentioned have gendered and environmental consequences that uniquely affect women in the post-apartheid era. In the next section I discuss how South Africa's land policies have detrimentally impacted people-environment relations, and what that means in the context of the former homeland of Venda, in the Vhembe District Municipality. I also include the empirical observations of Vhomakhahdzi based on their cultural practices and ontological perspectives.

2.2 Environmental Degradation

Pertinent data and literature derives from research specific to the environmental status of the Vhembe district municipality. Here I exclusively include research from Vhavenda scholars, as well as Vhavenda student dissertations from the University of Venda (UNIVEN). Examining

empirical studies of ecological issues in Vhembe and surrounding areas—joined with information regarding the ecologically susceptible sacred sites identified by *Vhomakhadzi*— provides a comprehensive picture of environmental degradation in the region. These Vhavenda scholars corroborate the concerns and ecological knowledge assertions of *Vhomakhadzi* who recognize many causes of climate change and loss of biodiversity due to deforestation, commercial and mono-crop farming, mining, and threats to wetlands. And lastly, the literature shows an interrelationship between environmental degradation, land policies, and South Africa's colonial and apartheid history, which is thematically relevant to the overall study.

Using remote sensing methodology[10] and district demographic information, Munyati and Kabanda (2008, 2010) have produced studies on human activity and environmental change in the Vhembe District Municipality. In this territory the indigenous vegetation of the savanna biomes, an ecosystem characterized by distinct plant and animal life, are officially categorized as vulnerable (Munyati and Kabanda, 2008, 2010). Munyati and Kabanda's research (2010) focuses on anthropogenic-induced (human-induced) climate change, including additional observations (2008) on deforestation of the region's tropical forests— which offers a composite of human activity that has depleted indigenous vegetation and ground cover, thereby altering rainfall patterns. Rain pattern disruption has resulted in desertification, increased risk of floods and declined agricultural productivity. These people-environment relations disclose a direct correlation with urban expansion, poor agricultural practices, and land-use due to apartheid era land policies. Further, the literature reveals how such a chain reaction of events inevitably threatens human and food security owing to conflict over scarce resources and land. This information is significant because it contextualizes how South Africa's land act legacies have

[10] Remote Sensing methodology and satellite imagery is used within the U.S. Landsat Program including international Landsat signal receiving stations.

adversely reshaped people-environment relations contributing to environmental conflicts.

In the 1960s, forced removal of Black South Africans led to approximately four million people being relocated to segregated areas. Therefore, in the Vhembe District Municipality, 87 percent of the population now resides in nine percent of the land (Munyati and Kabanda, 2010). Overpopulation in the foothills and populations nestled in the Soutpansberg mountain area in Venda in recent history has given rise to agriculture in place of forests. This has had a drying effect on the land because these communities, including the major town of Thohoyandou (Toy-yan-doh), sit on the eastern side of the mountain where upward winds once more consistently contributed to condensation and *evapo-transpiration*[11] important for rainfall. The rainfall changes depending on microclimates on different sides of the mountain. The southern sides of the mountain draw higher rainfall for the woodlands and small trees and what is called a rain-shadow effect on the northern regions. Ultimately, mountains and indigenous vegetation and trees are all important for rainfall and as a result of overpopulation and forced removals of Black communities during apartheid, rainfall activity and all of its processes have dramatically changed.

What is more, massive deforestation of the Soutpansberg region since 1979 continues to affect the ecosystems of the villages and townships of Tshakhuma, Tsianda and Lwamondo (Munyati and Kabanda 2010; Munyati and Kabanda 2008; Mphaphuli 1999), verified by increased settlements and development. Deforestation and removal of woodland areas according to Munyati and Kabanda (2008) is of great ecological concern and important to biodiversity conservation and groundwater, and carbon stock provision in buffering the accumulation of CO_2 which is a vitally important factor for regulating greenhouse gasses (Munyati and Kabanda

[11] This is a process when water is transferred into the air from ground plants and soil.

2008). According to Munyati and Kabanda's 2008 study on land use pressure trends in Vhembe— 1990 to 2006 saw a 20 percent reduction in natural forests, which has not shown evidence of reversing today. The areas that saw this decrease include human settlements close to the forest plantation zone near Makhado, and the towns of Elim and Tshakhuma. Deforestation is attributed impart to commercial practices, climatic factors, land and government policies, as well as economics and tenure. Yet Munyati and Kabanda (2008) also impute deforestation to socioeconomic factors such as wood use for fuel for low-income to poor households.

To address these land tenure issues, poverty, and eco stressors, Munyati and Kabanda (2010) recommend that South Africa establish a more progressive and equitable land reform program in Vhembe. Such a plan by their estimation should invest in improving rural economies and livelihoods, enfranchise women, and include rural people in the implementation and design of land reform policies. Munyati and Kabanda bring a unique argument to the land reform debate, not only in their call to recognize marginalized groups in Vhembe, but also in their suggestion that compensation, whether financial or through restored lands— should also consider recompense owing to the environmental ramifications incurred from draconian apartheid-era policies.

One curious point however was in their recommendation that all land should be restored in its entirety unless such land is a, fundamental government development such as forest plantations (Munyati and Kabanda, 2010). This rebuts *Vhomakhadzi* members of the CBO Dzomo La Mupo who claim that mono-crop plantations are bad for soil quality and local ecosystems, due to chemical fertilizers used, or because of new seeds that also degrade the soil. Not to mention that some of these government plantations encroach on sacred site areas (Tshiguvho 2008; Khorombi 2000). Munyati and Kabanda's (2010) position also contradicts

their 2008 suppositions that nonnative eucalyptus and pine tree plantations, under the South African Forestry Company Ltd (SAFCOL)—are also bad for *vegetation biomass*[12]. Nevertheless, the ostensible reasoning is outlined in their article on land pressure, which cites how the forest plantation industry is important for alleviating poverty, given that job creation was one goal of the forestry and development cluster of 2004-2014, of the Limpopo Provincial Development Plan. The 2015-2020 Development Plan's, Land and Agrarian Reform policy, aims to integrate agricultural trade and production with, the sustainable use and management of natural agricultural resources. Policy makers acknowledge that former attempts to assuage climate change such as through the LandCare Programme initiative did not adequately address these issues (Limpopo Provincial Development Plan 2015). It can subsequently be gathered that there are indeed tensions and challenges between alleviating poverty and creating sustainable livelihoods in the midst of environmental and land degradation.

Makhado's (2005) examination of forest management and road construction provides alternative information on the consequences of deforestation and development on slope failure and instability in the mountainous regions of the Thathe Forest. Thathe, a suburb of Thohoyandou is also referred to as the Thathe Holy Forest and is in or near one of the many sites of the Indigenous *Vhangona* or *Vhongwaniwapo* sacred groves—also known as *zwifho*. It should be noted that most sacred natural site locations are unknown. The IUCN, *Sacred Natural Sites, Guidelines for Protected Area Managers* (Wild, et al. 2008) firmly notes, "While the identification of sacred natural sites within protected areas is useful for protected area management, no pressure should be exerted on local communities to reveal the location of their sacred natural sites, nor the details of their cultural values, practices, history or use" (Wild, et al.

[12] Vegetation biomass in this context refers to the recuperation of indigenous vegetation.

37). Commercial ventures in Thathe include a timber and tea plantation, and the research site also contains the Thathe Vondo Dam, which provides water for the plantations and surrounding rivers such as Mutshindudi, Mutale, and Nzhelele (Je-lel-lay).

Slope instability and failure in Thathe causes landslides and flooding, which has great economic and environmental implications. For example, soil erosion from slope failure decreases soil quality and disrupts groundwater and aquatic ecosystems. The destruction of forests and grass also contribute to this instability because they serve as protective layers to retain soil on steep and rocky slopes (Makhado 2005). Moreover, according to Ryding (1998), these forests are important ecosystems that regulate, "climate and water flow, produce oxygen, provide hardwood timber and fuel wood, protect drainage basins for farmers, and provide ecosystems for invaluable animals and plants" (qtd. in Makhado 2005). Therefore, the negative consequences from deforestation are massive. Makhado (2005) attributes deforestation to new cultivation needs for agriculture and grazing, the building of roads, dams, and for mining.

Despite the many reasons for deforestation and slope instability, Makhado (2005) identifies forestry practices and road construction as the two most menacing development causes in Thathe. Road construction has not given sufficient consideration to preventing soil erosion or silt and sedimentation from rivers and excessive sediment taints water supplies, and degrades aquatic and wild life. Returning to the chain reaction metaphor, when soil erosion spoils water quantity and quality this further impacts infrastructure in devastating ways. Makhado (2005) notes that this is already leading to damage of stream and land surfaces, obstructing breeding areas or migration routes of animals, and obstructing proper water drainage. Lastly, Makhado (2005) blames forestry practices from managed, commercial timber plantations for slope instability owing to techniques of harvest site preparation and utilization of fertilizers and herbicides. Such

practices change the forest and soil composition leaving some areas vulnerable to mass movement and slope failure.

The research presented above supports the eco-cultural knowledge claims of *Vhomakhadzi*, who reference deforestation, government policies, commercial and mono-crop farming, mining, and degradation of wetlands as the root causes of climate change, and reduced food and seed security and food sovereignty. *Vhomakhadzi* of the CBO, DLM in particular make these claims in the media through articles, radio and television interviews, court affidavits, and through websites. They have also expressed their claims in sacred site profiles drafted for The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in their attempt to register three of the 50 plus sites as Provincial Heritage Sites. These mostly elder women also reiterated the profile verbiage in the interviews and focus groups I conducted, as well as in casual conversations and will be examined in detail in the data analysis and results chapter.

Water is the source of all life and *Vhomakhadzi* contend that watershed areas assist the climatic cycle. The protection of springs, lakes, and rivers manage the entire water ecosystem in Venda. Water is of particular concern for *Vhomakhadzi* given mining proposals that intend to exploit ground water. Open-pit mining degrades the landscape and puts further stress on rivers, as *Vhomakhadzi* and local farmers in Venda argue that there simply is not enough water available. According to the Mupo Foundation, coal mining uses an exorbitant amount of water. For example, approximately 70-260 million gallons of water a day is used in mining projects in the United States by comparison. Further, mining is a major source of water pollution due to toxic waste dumping, which threatens public health through the spread of disease (Mupo Foundation Website; Fo, 2007). Coal companies in the region plan to get water from different sources, such as Kruger National Park and Mozambique communities and, “they also plan to

pump partly reconstituted sewage water into underground aquifers as a reserve and of course the justified fear is that this will contaminate other underground rivers and aquifers" (Mupo Foundation). There is a national water conflict in South Africa and coal is literally and figuratively fueling this problem. The Mupo Foundation website relayed that South Africa will have a shortfall of 2.7 billion cubic meters of water by 2030, stating that experts are calling for strict restrictions on mining. This is all intensified in Venda because it is one of the driest regions in the nation.

Fo's study (2007) on open-cast mining in Grootegeluk, Limpopo province— provides additional, in-depth information on the effects of mining as one of the external environmental threats in the territory. At the Grootegeluk mine, located 25 km east of Lephalale town, Fo tested water samples from monitoring wells in a laboratory. He compared the selected water with what the prescribed samples should be under common regulations, which revealed that toxins were too high for drinking standards. The findings also revealed that some of the boreholes in proximity to the mine waste dumps, also used for drinking, contained geochemically active wastes such as nitrates and sulphates or the chemical compounds found in mine explosives, used for blasting.

Fo (2007) determined that Grootegeluk's water management plan is in relative accordance with environmental standards, but multiple sources of groundwater contamination exist and they have not eliminated all of these sources. The sources of pollution at mines like Grootegeluk include, the open pit, nitrogen based explosives (and the run-off transported during storms), waste dumps, acid mine drainage, onsite mechanical workshops, and tailing dams. With such pollutants lurking, water is still at risk. Acid mine drainage has been an especially pernicious source of pollution and because of a long history of coal and gold mining in the area, ecosystems and riparian vegetation along the Vaal and Limpopo Rivers are extraordinarily uncertain. Fo's

study (2007) made specific recommendations for Grootegeluk's water management plan, which impacts human, plant, and animal life as it is located near five game reserves and approximately 18 farms, as well as surrounding communities. It is undetermined if those improvements have been made since this study. Nevertheless, it is clear that mines are an ongoing threat and a source of great concern for South African water safety. This safety concern is also recognized by the country's water laws under the constitution and the National Water Act (NWA), of 1998 (Act 36 of 1998). For *Vhomakhadzi* of Dzomo La Mupo, mining has been an issue that they have fiercely protested,[13] much to the consternation of the Australian company Coal of Africa and their clients who have been scoping out development sites since 2011.

Vhomakhadzi of DLM recognize threats to climate change and loss of biodiversity due to: deforestation, commercial and mono-crop farming, mining, and threats to wetlands. Modern conservation science from these Vhavenda scholars also support their assertions about these many environmental threats[14]. *Vhomakhadzi* rely on their own empirical observations of environmental degradation based on their roles as self-identified ecologists, rooted in a legacy of eco-cultural wisdom, and indigenous knowledge practices. The next section addresses the issue of integrating cultural biodiversity and indigenous knowledge with modern conservation.

2.3 Cultural Biodiversity and Conservation

I begin this section by briefly localizing the significance of cultural biodiversity and indigenous knowledge systems in a South African context before discussing it more generally. In South Africa in 2014, the Department of Science and Technology introduced the Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Systems Bill, in which the

[13] To see footage of Dzomo La Mupo's water protests and public participation see the YouTube clip, https://youtu.be/CI2EebpiqNM.
[14] I use this phrasing for people critical of indigenous knowledge claims, mostly to dispel myths about IKS not being a legitimate source of scientific knowledge by Western standards.

preamble states, “Recognizing that the liberation of South Africa and its people from centuries of racially discriminatory colonial rule and domination and the establishment of a constitutional democracy was is and will remain a historic achievement…” (IKS Bill 2014). The Bill, in some respects, a clarified addendum to South Africa’s, *National Heritage Resources Act* of 1999, was introduced to protect the rights of indigenous knowledge holders and the local and institutional mechanisms that wish to revive these customs. Advocates for IKS in South Africa in particular, have proclaimed the need to protect cultural rights that were so egregiously violated under colonial and apartheid rule. This demonstrates that cultural biodiversity and indigenous knowledge preservation indeed fit into a post-colonial narrative.

Intergovernmental and civil-society organizations such as: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), including UNESCO’s cross-disciplinary, Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and the International Union for The Conservation of Nature (IUCN), represent the leading intergovernmental organizations, NGO’s, and membership unions that are producing literature on the interconnection between conservation, cultural biodiversity, and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). IKS comprises the local knowledge developed outside of a formal classroom by Indigenous inhabitants, about myriad aspects of community living such as, agriculture, spirituality, medicine, and natural-resource management. UNESCO has pushed the issue of understanding cultural biodiversity since the 1990s which has led to international conventions such as the Convention on Cultural Diversity (2001), the Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Heritage (2003) and the Protection of the Diversity in Cultural Expressions (2005). These conventions and subsequent studies provide a plethora of reports and data available on the Internet.

The increased research on this topic indicates the growing recognition of the interrelationship between culture, sustainable development, and conservation, yet post-colonial analysis of these issues is still sorely missing, especially within literature published from the United Nations. Nevertheless, these various studies are incredibly essential for three reasons: (1) To outline the mistakes that conservationists made in the past, by ignoring local people's perspectives in crafting initiatives and co-management solutions for protected areas and biosphere reserves (which resulted in polices that exacerbated existing poverty, gender inequities, and marginalization of Indigenous peoples) (2) to explain how a second generation of protected areas and biosphere reserves are attempting to rectify these issues and (3) To contextualize the ways that Protected Areas and Biosphere's are at times ineffectual or limited due to land politics.

Maffi and Woodley (2010) review 45 projects worldwide that contribute to existing research on conservation from a socio-political and cultural perspective. Their writings provide in-depth analysis about the inextricability of biodiversity and cultural diversity, thus deconstructing the relationship between custom, language, and eco-cultural practices expressed within indigenous knowledge systems. Maffi and Woodley assess the social upheaval in indigenous communities that have endured severe socio-political changes and strife—exemplified by Vhavenda, specifically *Vhangona* people, who underwent centuries of colonialism, apartheid, and now land policies in the post-apartheid era. They remark that these conditions alter traditional environmental practices and knowledge.

UNESCO's report with the Christensen Fund, a report back from its international workshop in Paris, *Links between biological and cultural diversity (2007)* explains the cultural fissures induced by urbanization that have changed indigenous communities. Like the

Vhavenda— the *amaXhosa* and *Mfengu* people of the Eastern Cape of South Africa, despite modernization attempt to retain their cultural connections to the environment. The report identified the ways that plant taxa and the larger landscape areas have significant religious meaning for the *amaXhosa* and *Mfengu*, who make offerings of corn and tobacco to their ancestors to keep them content. Despite urban living, these ethnic groups can be found selling various plants in the city in accordance with cultural beliefs and practices.

The literature revealed that many customs of the *amaXhosa* and *Mfengu* are dependent on the availability of certain plant species that are not as readily accessible in a changing society. For example, *Ptaeroxylon obliquum* which comprises the building materials for the *ibhoma* or hut used during coming of age ceremonies like circumcision— provides a temporary shelter for seclusion after the ritual. Although such ceremonies do not necessarily take place in urban areas, the publication highlights how plant and animal life are interwoven into the culture as a means of safeguarding the natural world and how those rituals are changing. The *amaXhosa* and *Mfengu*, like *Vhavenda* people, revere certain natural spaces such as deep river pools and larger landscapes, which are being transformed (Links Report 2007). Weakened by urbanization and industrialization, the spiritual and religious components connected with the environment among the *amaXhosa*, *Mfengu*, and *Vhavenda*, illustrate a small aspect of a larger complex system of cultural and environmental practices that are of lesser value today.

Taboos and myths, which are also eroding, have for generations been important elements of cultural biodiversity among many indigenous communities. Mutshinyalo and Siebert's study (2010) in the Vhembe District Municipality in Venda, situate myth and taboos as elements of cultural biodiversity and/or conservation strategies. They describe the ways that these beliefs have commonly been used by *Vhavenda* and all across the African continent as tactics for natural

resource management, to prevent the over use of plants and harvesting. Their research confirms my own analysis of *Vhomakhadzi* interview statements that reflect similar use for myths and taboos in the Vhembe District Municipality. As one *makhadzi* relayed to me in an interview, regarding her clan's belief that the wrong firewood transforms into snakes she stated, "They [*Vhomakhadzi*] even teach us the names of trees which cannot be used for wood. If you take the trees, if you fetch woods from sacred site they will change to become snakes. We have been taught by *Vhomakhadzi* of the past." Mutshinyalo and Siebert (2010) confirm that these "scary myths", were used to regulate plant collection, but also to protect entire forests and lakes and sacred sites such as the Thathe Holy Forest and the sacred Lake Fundudzi in Venda (Mutshinyalo and Siebert 2010; Van der Waal 2010; Khorombi 2007; Khorombi 2000).

These taboos and myths unravel the complexities of cultural biodiversity and the ways that indigenous societies such as *Vhavenda* have protected their ecosystems. Mutshinyalo and Siebert (2010) suggest that such approaches of selected plant use, such as *makhadzi* selection of trees, allows plants to recuperate during different seasons to ensure that fauna, flora, and their surrounding landscapes will be preserved for future use. Likewise, Mutshinyalo and Siebert (2010) regard myth and taboos as significant elements of cultural biodiversity that should be included in modern conservation practices.

Tshiguvho's study (2008) provides anthropological evidence that supports Mutshinyalo and Siebert's (2010) research, noting that cultural ecological studies have suggested that embedded in sacred site practices, including myths and taboos, are ecological functions. Tshiguvho (2008) provides additional analysis of cultural biodiversity in relationship to this dissertation's research site and population, and the surrounding area. Tshiguvho (2008) examines the effectiveness of sacred sites and related cultural practices in the Duthuni-Mapate-Lwamondo

region of Venda— in sustaining local native plants. Tshiguvho's research examines, three units of sacred sites, the derivation of the sacred practices their institutional arrangement, and their long range development and present-day ecological status. In doing so, her study links these three units to the current conservation value of sites to assess their future conservation potential, contingent upon current and possible future practices (Tshiguvho 2008).

Tshiguvho's study (2008) is also valuable because she perceives biodiversity conservation as an issue of Western science *and* a national political agenda in South Africa. She includes the arguments of some scholars who contend that sacred sites were established to serve a variety of functions including economic and political (Malhotra and Ramakrishna qtd. in Tshiguvho 2008). This supposition compliments the assessment that cultural biodiversity is a part of a larger post-colonial conversation and closely meshed with other socio-political phenomena— such as gender, race, and land. This is further supported when Tshiguvho contends that particularly for the *Vhangona* or *Vhongwaniwapo* people[15] sacred site practices changed and adapted due to politics and conflict; and she contends that post-colonial claims to sacred sites was and is a means to assert political and cultural self-determination.

Tshighuvo (2008) provides a thorough analysis of the exogenous factors that contributed to the erosion of cultural biodiversity and sacred sites in Venda. She argues that the colonial encounter contributed to the emergence of harmful practices at sacred sites, as she focuses on: 1) Christian Missions 2) mission and colonial education 3) modernization through technological advances 4) colonial administrations and other foreign economic systems and 5) population pressure. Missing from her description of external factors that have diminished sacred sites and their conservation potency, is the influence of new food production and agricultural methods.

[15] Vhangona are Indigenous Vhavenda people.

While she does explain that the introduction of mono-crop plantations—such as the Tshivashe Tea Plantation, have encroached on land and former sacred areas, she does not probe into the ideological dimensions of Western dominance over agriculture, development, food production, or natural resource management in a globalized era. I see this as an important entity and distinction from my larger study. Analysis of Western influences explains the denigration of sacred sites, the connected landscapes and *Vhomakhadzi* roles as female ecologists and sacred site protectors. It further explains the activist rationale for *Vhomakhadzi* participants of the community based organization Dzomo La Mupo.

Due to various societal changes and Western influences, cultural biodiversity in the form of sacred sites, taboos, and myths are disintegrating. The next generation in Venda question the legitimacy of such beliefs often viewing them in conflict with scientific and Western knowledge. Once more, such social attitudes are indicative of cultural and political changes and/or forced adaptations. The literature reviewed so far lays the foundation for understanding why conservation science has not vigorously embraced local perspectives and concerns. Analyzing the political and social upheaval, deconstructs western dominance and authoritative positions within conservation science. Conservation and development policy gaps and lack of knowledge about cultural biodiversity have thus exacerbated the marginalization of Indigenous people by ignoring the concerns of local communities and the complex systems that these communities use to protect their own natural resources.

It is purported (Safety Report 2008) that the earliest generation of protected areas were thrust upon local communities by colonial administrators in the tropics, whereby indigenous communities were forcibly removed from ancestral lands that many had resided on for centuries (Safety Report 2008). Although protected areas in some form have been a method of many

Indigenous communities, "the modern concept of a 'protected area' – known variously as national park, wilderness area, game reserve etc. – developed in the last years of the nineteenth century as a response to the rapid changes brought to lands in former European colonies and concern at the loss of 'wilderness (Safety Report 13)." Thus colonizers first established protected areas in the colonial era as a means of protecting landscapes they revered. It should be noted that very few African people, no-less African women, are stake holders or owners of contemporary national parks or game reserves on the Continent. The Safety Net Report (2008) published by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) recaps the more recent history, tracking the trajectory of protected areas through other eras of top-down, non-democratic approaches to conservation protection. The report uncovers subsequent protected areas, as recent as the 80s and 90s, as recorded by the World Rainforest Movement and Forest People's Programme that resulted in the forced removal of local people. Deemed *environmental refugees*, the prevailing wisdom of the time period argued that protected areas should eliminate anthropogenic-induced environmental degradation and should therefore remove people as threats to these eco-systems.

Consequently, scores of indigenous communities were removed from resources and homelands that were significant to their cultural, spiritual, and ecological well-being, thereby aggravating preexisting poverty among these populations by cutting them off from their livelihoods and subsistence living. To assuage such problems, the Convention on Biological Diversity, a multinational treaty was signed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, to integrate development goals with the conservation of biological diversity. Additionally, The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was drafted in 2007. Together, these international laws, conventions, and treaties intend to alleviate poverty while supporting ecosystem benefits. Some Protected areas should remain no-go areas because of the

magnitude of devastation or the fragility of the eco-systems. Yet protected areas and biosphere reserves today advocate more so for human-centered models of conservation that seek to protect biological diversity because of its inherent value to the planet and because of the benefits of ecosystems for human welfare.

Efforts to safeguard indigenous knowledge systems in African countries have gained more traction in the past 30 years and intergovernmental agencies continue to push for protections as the increasing value of IKS and cultural biodiversity within conservation science and development is finally being recognized. Indigenous knowledge systems and empirical observations by local communities have for so long been ignored and devalued in Western science, yet conservation reports reveal that local claims of high biodiversity in sacred areas is in fact measurable. Following the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, when nearly 200 countries committed to tackling worldwide biodiversity loss by 2010, a call came for the development of Traditional environmental knowledge indexes. Thus quantitative tools have been devised for statistical comparisons of cultural and linguistic diversity with biological diversity around the world to investigate the connections between culture and environmental knowledge. The irony does not go unnoticed that the development of Western tools of measurement is what is giving cultural biodiversity more credence.

Multiple NGO and intergovernmental agencies have supported the development of cultural biodiversity Indices— or rely on external studies in the field to shape conservation strategies such as : The Index for Linguistic Diversity (ILD) to track endemic languages, the Index of Biocultural Diversity (IBCD) which supports data on global and regional correlations of cultural biodiversity by comparing data on language, religion, and ethnic variation— with biodiversity richness and land mass in a single country. It therefore calculates cultural

biodiversity proportional with the size and population of the country. An additional index includes the Protected Areas Benefits Assessment Tool (PA-BAT) which charts the value of resources and the population in a protected area (Protected Areas Report, Convention on Biological Diversity 2008). Indices and Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) Indicators have also been implemented to gauge the effectiveness of social and scientific polices intended to rectify exploitation of Indigenous people and their natural resources.

Zent (2009) with the NGO Terralingua, conducted a study to examine the methodology used to design The Vitality Index of Traditional Environmental Knowledge (VITEK). VITEK rates the vitality status and trends of Traditional Environmental Knowledge among various indigenous groups comparing linguistic regions susceptible to weaknesses and political and social change that may impact local knowledge systems. The methodological approaches to studying indigenous knowledge show that trends have shifted from qualitative ethnographic research for the purposes of ethno-biological theory-building and ethnographies—whereby academics laid out detailed fieldwork agendas and in-depth interviews alone— to incorporating quantitative methods that unearth more exacting results about conservation statistics, medicine, ecological impact, and for the measurement of natural resources and biodiversity loss (Zent 2009). Maffi (2009) and Zent (2009) however, encourage and appreciate interdisciplinary research to approach the goal of cultural biodiversity preservation holistically.

Zent predicts that indices such as VITEK, ILD, IBCD and PA-BAT, will be used for a range of human rights projects in medicine, agriculture, rural development, environmental protection, cultural protection and political empowerment—specifically for NGO's and governments that are desperately trying to assuage poverty, gender inequalities, disease, and conflict due to scarcity of resources— all attributable to environmental degradation and loss of

biodiversity. Yet there remains concern about which authoritative voice will underscore the value of cultural biodiversity, or what Zent refers to as Traditional Environmental Knowledge, and the rationale for its preservation or lack thereof. Therefore, the development of TEK indicators is just one of many strategies to inspire biodiversity-sustaining enterprises to utilize TEK practices such as agro-ecology, increase in seed and crop varietals (which is better for soil quality) and indigenous forest restoration strategies, and refugia protection. Those projects and organizations that have adopted these techniques represent communities with healthier eco-systems (Zent 2009). Utilizing these strategies is important to the well-being of the whole community as conservationists and proponents of green business solutions struggle to untangle themselves from a history of marginalizing and exploiting indigenous populations.

Traditional environmental knowledge in Africa has been marginalized in favor of industrialized agriculture and privatized seeds due to policies and laws that reinforce commercial farmers, industrial models of agriculture, and multinational seed companies. Even the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) through the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, regarded as the model for philanthropy— although positive in many respects, does little to integrate the Traditional Environmental Knowledge of local communities, therefore traditional environmental, and agricultural knowledge has been marginalized. And through the introduction of GMO's, hybrid varieties, and genetically engineered seed, these practices will be further undermined. Within these industrialized models, indigenous rights are not protected or honored and the disintegration of cultural biodiversity continues. (Mupo Foundation Grant Proposal Swiderska et al, 2011; Tansey 2011).

2.4 Ecological Feminism and Environmentalism

Eighty percent of small-scale agricultural farmers in Africa today are women who rely on

Traditional Environmental Knowledge. Therefore, it can be surmised that the socioeconomic and political contributing factors of cultural erosion have had a big effect on *Vhavenda* women and *Vhomakhadzi* (Warren 1996). The implications of undermining women's conservationist and agricultural roles include thee loss of their self-determination and vulnerabilities during natural disasters and ongoing environmental crises (Mukoni 2015). Moreover, data shows that policies for food, forests, and water in the developing world complicate women's roles to provide adequately for themselves and their families (Warren 1996). Protected areas and biosphere reserves are making greater strides towards understanding and addressing feminized poverty and other gender-based eco-vulnerabilities through expansive development models.

For example, gender equality and women's empowerment is a key millennium development outlined in the UN Millennium Declaration for 2000-2015. The new target year for those development objectives is 2030. Among the evolving objectives for gender equality and empowerment—including eliminating all forms of violence against women, enhancing women's economic opportunities, eliminating discrimination in the private and public spheres and ensuring access to reproductive health and rights—are provisions to support, "…access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws" (#Envision2030 Goal 5: Gender Equality). The unique environmental susceptibilities women and children face, described here, necessitate feminist scholarly attention.

Vhomakhadzi themselves do not make feminist claims—yet as a feminist researcher this dissertation relies on ecological feminism because it provides an additional theoretical framework to deconstruct the social, economic, and political origins of what ecofeminist scholars refer to as the twin dominations of women and nature. Ecological feminist philosophy, rooted in

empirical evidence and grounded in environmental and feminist social movements, requires critical analysis and feminist epistemologies. Ecofeminists for example rely on strong empirical evidence that documents the impact of pollutants—i.e. low-level radiation, pesticides, and toxins—that disproportionately impact women and children (Warren 1996; Verchick 2004). These empirical observations in the 1960s and 1970s shaped feminist legal theory and the methods that ultimately contributed to the modern environmental justice movement. Understanding the environmental justice movement's connection to feminist legal methods explains ecofeminist epistemologies and approaches that unearth the biases embedded in environmental law, which expose policies that benefit men and critically examine the experiences women (Verchick 2004).

As a framework of analysis, ecological feminist theories encompass a diverse spectrum of approaches and theoretical perspectives that challenge positivistic research paradigms and concepts of objectivity in the social and natural sciences (Warren 1996). From this branch of feminist theory, I include eco-feminism, feminist political ecology and feminist geography. These theories have methodological consequences for my study in Venda as my research exposes the colonial and apartheid gender philosophies that comprise South Africa's Land Act legacies. Moreover, ecological feminist theories, such as Eco-feminism and feminist geography, deconstruct the ways that neocolonialism and globalization dominate women, land, and the environment (Shiva 1989; Rocheleau *et al.* 1996). For this review I begin with perspectives on Ecofeminism and environmentalism in an African grassroots context to avoid essentializing claims about African women made in ecofeminist, environmentalist, conservationist and development discourses.

Amid the destruction of natural resources, Women in Africa often lose self-determination

and are often at risk during natural disasters and ongoing environmental crises (Mukoni 2015). The social and natural emergencies described are predominantly attributed to resource extraction in the global south by multinational companies, resulting in overlapping social problems and gender-based disparities. The NGO, WoMin: African Women Unite Against Destructive Resource Extraction, is an African gender and extractives alliance, that networks with likeminded causes and organizations in 14 different countries in Africa. One of their five year goals between 2014-2018 is to work, "towards a progressive post-extractivist, women-centered and ecologically responsive African alternative to the current destructive model of extractivism" (WoMin: African Women Unite Against Destructive Resource Extraction). The extraction of fossil fuels, such as coal, gas, and oil— or as some would even suggest, corporatized renewable energy are of great concern to many African women whose livelihoods, health, and social well-being are threatened. Further, women bear a greater burden during disasters such as oil spills, land grabs, and climate change, such as poor health and high mortality and, "high levels of inter-personal, domestic and sexual violence, often linked to militarisation associated with energy resources" (WoMin: African Women Unite Against Destructive Resource Extraction).

WoMin, in their article, "An African Ecofeminist Perspective on the Paris Climate Negotiations" criticizes COP 21[16] and the countries most culpable for perpetuating climate change, including some nations from the global south such as South Africa. Their position is that companies regularly participate in the global meetings yet disregard the recommendations, proceeding with economic and political practices that harm women and the environment. Deeming the extractive process as patriarchal, the blog reiterates the point that social, ecological, reproductive, energy and climate change are the major proponents of war, militarization,

[16] The Convention of Parties (COP) is the international governing body for overseeing the UN Convention on Biological Diversity; they hold annual to biennial meetings.

violence and land conflict. Most devastating to women are the cases of sexual violence and rape by male miners, soldiers, and male employees of private security companies who live or work in communities fraught with resource extractive politics, and socioeconomic issues related to environmental problems. For-profit models of renewable energy, as an alternative to the Fossil Fuel industry, are also being criticized as they too contend with land and energy access inequalities, the blog suggests. The solution that some African female environmentalists propose, such as the NGO WoMin, is a return to indigenous agricultural methods and agro-ecology strategies. Their proposal mirrors the many aims and objectives of *Vhomakhadzi* and Dzomo La Mupo to revive such cultural practices.

WoMin's article also situates African women's experiences with environmental degradation within the scope of sexual violence and domination. The debate leverages notions ecofeminists raise about the twin supremacies over women and nature. *Cultural ecofeminism* emphasizes that masculinity is formed in opposition to and separate from women and nature, and a dominance of masculine thought is preoccupied with controlling both entities (Dodson 2002). This point assumes greater significance in the context of South Africa which has struggled with gender-based violence during colonialism and through apartheid. When WoMin's article states that, "Women's bodies are typically one of the terrains upon which these [environmental] conflicts are waged," it conjures the increasing collection of research on African male and female sexualities that frames sexual violence within the context of postcoloniality (Moffett 2009). Postcolonial analysis of gender-based violence in South Africa focuses on women's bodies and sexuality as potential political and cultural landscapes in the process of political transformation. Thus in a nation that greatly politicized race, space, and land, the themes of domination are clear. The environment likewise undertakes these motifs within the confines of

the country's race-based socio spatial arrangement (Dodson 2002) orchestrated through forced removals and through subsequent, severely compromised people-environment relations, and exploitation and marginalization of women.

Dodson (2002) suggests that in South Africa, the environment was actually sacrificed in the interests of racial and gendered segregation. Urban migration of Blacks was highly regulated and restricted to those who worked in mines, factories, or as domestic laborers, until the mid-1980s. According to Dodson (2002) a distorted demographic-distribution directly segmented urban and rural populations based on gender, age, and race—therefore, while men's work was urbanized, "the rural 'homelands' became the preserve of women, children, and the elderly, forced to deal with the day-to-day realities of land shortages, soil erosion, fuel wood depletion, water scarcity and food insecurity" and a lack of decision-making power only aggravated these problems (Dodson 95). Through this system Blacks and women were systematically excluded from crafting policy about land and environmental issues. Instead Black South Africans were displaced from their land often to establish wilderness areas largely accessible only to privileged White males. On that account, the protection of plants and animals were prioritized above Black people or their own particular natural resource needs (Dodson 2002).

Attending to global patriarchy and post-coloniality African male leaders are not absolved from exploiting natural resources and putting women at risk. The late Wangari Mathaii faced great opposition in Kenya to her Greenbelt Movement which challenged the land grabs of President Daniel Arap Moi's regime. Her activism to plant trees and protect green spaces led to jail time, beatings, and demonization in Kenya. To begin her tree planting initiatives to curtail deforestation, she turned to village women to plant indigenous acacia, fig, cedar, and baobab seedlings; instructing the women to, "Use your woman sense. These tree seedlings are very much

like the seeds you deal with— beans and maize and millet—every day," (Economist 2006). African women in rural contexts have been charged with seed selection for many generations and Mathaii merely empowered them to reclaim their traditional agricultural skills.

Muthuki (2006) evaluates, though an ecofeminist lens, the implications of the colonial encounter in Kenya, the ensuing disruption of pre-colonial systems of sustainability, and its gendered, post-colonial ramifications expressed through Mathaii's GreenBelt movement (GBM). Muthuki (2006) asserts that changes in local economic systems, as a result of colonialism, manipulated gender divisions in environmental management. Through the onset of gendered labor divisions during the colonial period, she suggests that such divisions solidified public and private economic gender roles, resulting in less power and respect for women's unpaid labor. Furthermore, Muthuki (2006) argues that the rise of global capitalism crystalized the marginalization of women, as African male leaders in a post-colonial Kenya, by Muthuki's (2006) assessment, carried on a western, capitalist agenda—in what *socialist ecofeminist* theorists would refer to as the patriarchal state. She references the economic policies of the Kenyatta and Moi regimes which purportedly relied on foreign investments, foreign ownership of resources, and capitalist principles of production, and resource exploitation (Muthuki, 2006). Such policies favor resource extraction by foreign companies, amplifying environmental destruction and poverty—especially among women. Therefore, like Vhavenda women, many women in rural Kenya grapple with commercial agriculture which disturbs subsistence living, and access to other pertinent household and medicinal resources.

Grassroots activism like Mathaii's Greenbelt movement continues to empower many women in Kenya, even after her death from ovarian cancer in 2011. Responding to rural women's lack of access to essential resources such as firewood, clean water, and vital

livelihoods, GBM began to focus on environmental conservation and community development. Thousands of women have been trained in conservation management through GBM and many have been empowered to start green initiatives in their own communities. By challenging the capitalist-patriarchal state as Muthuki (2006) describes it, Mathaii was labeled a "mad woman", and accused of engaging in subversive activities that were harmful to the country by a predominately male, Kenyan parliament, who incidentally also characterized her as a frustrated divorcee (Muthuki, 2006). Mathaii's experiences showcased the ways that global patriarchy co-mingles with the Western world in ways that perpetuate the need to govern women and nature to usurp economic and natural resources, and to suppress women's social movements and grassroots organizing.

Sections of this dissertation utilize feminist geography, a theoretical branch of feminist political ecology, to partially examine one of four research questions posed—namely, how do *Vhomakhadzi* construct cultural biodiversity preservation? For this question, my analysis builds upon pre-dissertation research on *Vhomakhadzi* community organizing to protect land and culture through ongoing eco-cultural mapping workshops initially sponsored by the Gaia and Mupo Foundations. My explication of *Vhomakhadzi* maps as tools for cultural biodiversity preservation draws on discourses of traditional maps as visual representations of power, including feminist geographical research on mapmaking and geographical information systems (GIS) that provide cartographic and spatial analysis. These discourses and literature ultimately aid in assessing *Vhomakhadzi* interpretations of how their cultural land is being appropriated and degraded, and the various and accompanying intimations.

Feminist geographical studies argue that there is a noticeable absence of critical engagement and social theories in the scientific practices of geographic research and

visualization technologies such as GIS. Kwan (2002) asserts that geographic research in the past embraced a positivist viewpoint, while McLafferty (2010) assesses how feminist geography and GIS has challenged traditional geographical research by including reflexive methodologies and/or subjective approaches. Yet McLafferty (2010) also contends that although feminist geography has invigorated the field and has changed the direction of exploration, there is still a quantitative and qualitative gulf in research methods within geographic research. She asserts that feminist geographers typically include more qualitative research methods such as interviews and participant observation, or what is "subject-centered" research, which she argues is sorely missing in geographic research. McLafferty includes a case study on the grassroots activism that took place in Long Island New York in the 1980s to determine why the women of a Long Island suburb had such high rates of breast cancer. She focuses on the pin maps and GIS that women in the community used to determine spatial clustering with environmental risk factors. McLafferty's study reveals how the Long Island maps in the hands of women activists, contributed an understanding of knowledge, perspective, and authority. Mclafferty and Kwan's articles are good companion pieces as they both use positivism as a point of departure to discuss how female situational knowledge gives meaning to spacial data in ways that quantitative data does not. They suggest that quantitative data alone masks statistics relevant to women's environmental concerns and problems. These debates are important for framing *Vhomakhadzi* fears concerning how land is being used and how their customs are being subverted. Additionally, Tshiguvho's (2008) research on the sacred sites in the Forest Montane region in Venda referenced earlier, provides the type of critical information on cultural-biodiversity and conservationism that justifies how sacred natural sites in Venda are significant and why their intersection with geography, ecology, and women's land rights warrant more subject-centered,

qualitative research.

Traditional maps also represent power and patriarchy. During European exploration in the colonial period maps were used to designate territory for conquest. In C. Kelso's, *Ideology of Mapping South Africa*, she states, "Explore, map and colonise. The theory that maps have an ideology which is revealed within the image has been used to analyse many maps drawn during the colonial period... they were drawn by the colonizers with a Eurocentric bias towards mapping the relationship of authority and territory" (Kelso 17). In Kelso's article she examines maps of Phuthaditjhaba, a South African homeland of Qwaqwa. In maps of Phuthaditjhaba, it is revealed that there are clear population distortions indicated by the mapping symbols used. She determined that a 1994 atlas of the region was incorrect, after examining and verifying the actual population numbers through the Phuthaditjhaba town council and census records (Kelso 1999). On the atlas Phuthaditjhaba is given the same symbol as Clarens, a White town with thousands less in population. Kelso states, "Through the use of selectivity, distortion and cartographic generalization the landscape of Phuthaditjhaba was fictiously constructed in the map making process. In this way the powerful manipulated the landscape in order to justify segregationist policies" (Kelso18-20). These distorted maps are still in circulation. Such cartographic manipulation affects the distribution of resources, regional planning, development and overall landscape politics. Kelso's article denotes that maps represent power in South Africa; they emerged from a context of oppression, patriarchy and European empire building and colonization. Thus maps are not merely scientific and rational representations as purported, but rather discourses that privilege Western modes of thinking and dominance over geography and resources in South Africa.

Maps as transmitters of colonial authority explain the vast land dispossession perpetrated

by European colonizers all over the African continent. The colonial encounter in Venda began a complex relationship between the missionaries and the land. The Berlin Mission Society that first occupied Venda in 1872 saw the impenetrable land as both an irritant and an evil, equating the land with the people (Kirkaldy 2005). Alan Kirkaldy, author of, *Capturing The Soul, The Vhavenda and the Missionaries, 1870-1900* contends that for the missionaries the external beauty of the landscape coexisted with a far more sinister core. This could provide the key to understanding the shift in the way that the missionaries constructed, and related to the landscape of Vendaland (Kirkaldy 2005). The dense an impassable area were frightening landscapes. The relationship that missionaries and explorers developed with the land has, according to Kirkaldy, created lasting opinions about rural landscapes and indigenous people. Kirkaldy describes how Carl Ritter, the progenitor of modern geography and his apprentice, Friedrich Ratzel who together controlled discourse on geography in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, used land development as an index for civilization and development.

Kirkaldy's supposition describes well, European conceptions of land and environment and give context to their justification of conquest, mapping, and colonization. This contextualizes Kelso's argument that maps are not objective and it begins a conversation about how maps could also be patriarchal tools for dominating women and nature in Africa and by contrast how *Vhomakhadzi* eco-cultural mapping is a rebuttal to those conceptions of land and space.

The four subsections on *South African Land Politics, Environmental Degradation, Cultural Biodiversity and Conservation and Ecological Feminism and Environmentalism* expose the correlating themes that explain the current marginalization of *Vhomakhadzi*/ Vhavenda women in the Limpopo Province. Through a synthesis of relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental reports, academic research, and blogs, the aim of this review was to lay a

foundation to investigate the interaction between colonial and apartheid gender ideologies, land-policies, and cultural biodiversity erosion. While the review highlighted selected discourses on ecological feminist environmentalism in a grassroots African context, the next chapter on methodology will include theoretical suppositions of African feminisms to further build a rationale for the research methods executed for this dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE: SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATIONS

This chapter presents pertinent historical background information on Venda society covering the pre-colonial, colonial, and apartheid eras. The research is comprised of the works of Vhavenda scholars such as Matshidze (2013), Ralushai (1977, 2002) Ralushai and Gray (1977) and Mabogo (1990, 1996), and sources from the libraries and special collection units of the Universities of Venda, South Africa, and Pretoria—including the Berlin Mission Society records, ethnographic data derived from the Van Warmelo collection (1932), and the Hugh A. Stayt ethnographic series on *The Bavenda* (1931). I also reference more recent and pertinent books, journal articles, and dissertations, including Vhavenda graduate scholarship. Vhavenda history is complex and oral descriptions at times have been purposefully obscured from non-native speakers and non-Vhavenda scholars for cultural-protection and defense. Given the intricacy of Vhavenda history it is important to underscore that this portion of the research as a non-exhaustive historical account, rather, a focused investigation of the following subsections: *(1) Historical Debates* (2) *Venda Geography*, (3) *Gender and Power* and (4) *Colonialism & Apartheid.* The subsections contextualize interview statements and information on culture, women's roles, spirituality, land, and the socio-environmental, socio-political, and even marginal ethnobotanical facts relevant to the study.

3.1 Historical Debates

It is imperative to elaborate on the challenges of researching Venda history. Historical research on the origins of Vhavenda ethnic groups is often controversial and contested due to politics, dominant ethnic perspectives, research- trends, and the positionality of researchers. Great debate centers on the migration patterns and linguistic and cultural development of numerous sub-ethnic groups that encompass Vhavenda people today and who settled in both

South Africa and Zimbabwe (Stayt 1968; Ralushai 1977; Loubser 1989). For instance, there are disputes about the historical origins of non-Indigenous ethnicities as some scholars contend that some groups, like the Masingo in Venda today migrated by way of the Lower Congo, while others purport that they came from Africa's Great Lakes region (Ralushai 1977; Loubser 1989). There has also been speculation in recent history about how fully integrated some sub-ethnicities are among Vhavenda people in the Soutpansberg[17] area, such as Sotho or Lovhedu-speaking people—the Lovhedu (Balobedu or Lobedu) being closely affiliated with the infamous Rain Queen (Lestrade 1930; Schlosser 2002). Moreover, scholars conjecture about the impact of Nguni and Shona cultural influences—with the latter sharing linguistic affinities (Lestrade 1927), and similar kinship systems as Vhavenda through the incorporation of the role of the paternal aunt known as *samakhadzi*, who presides over important matters after her brother's death similar to *makhadzi* of the Indigenous *Vhangona* (Loubser 1989; Buijs 2002). Further, there are many enthusiastic studies and documentaries about Vhalemba (or Balemba) people whose African-Semite customs have garnered much scholarly attention and whose DNA analysis suggests a further splintered, sub-ethnicity with Jewish ancestry (Junod 1908; Lestrade 1930). Ralushai and Gray (1977) likewise highlight research trends that contribute to an incomplete Venda historical compendium; they state, "Research into their history has tended to concentrate on what has been termed the 'Venda tribes proper' in contrast to the aboriginal Mbedzi, Lembethu, and Ngona [Vhangona] of the mountains, conquered by them and now largely assimilated" (Ralushai and Gray 1977 qtd. in Mabogo 1990; Van Warmelo 1932). Thus, there are many cultural distinctions and vast diversity among Vhavenda people.

Imbalanced accounts also emerge as a challenge when studying Vhavenda sub-

[17] This is the northernmost mountain range in South Africa.

ethnicities, as scholars have been criticized for privileging the historical perspective of the politically dominant Masingo in the region, thereby eclipsing the less powerful Indigenous *Vhangona* (or *Vhongwaniwapo*) people of whom this study concentrates (Ralushai 1977). Finally, amidst myriad cultural bearings, indigeneity itself is especially debated as groups assert ancestry associated with the key archeological sites at K2 and Leopard's Kopje B kingdom excavated at Mapungubwe Hill where it is purported that kingdoms in Southern Africa began (Kirkaldy 2005; Tshiguvho 2008). Proving indigeneity would connect one's sub-group with a technologically and culturally impressive people who originated in the region during the Early Iron Age (Raluashai 1977; Kirkaldy 2005; Tshiguvho 2008). Recognizing a consistency of opinion among *Vhangona* residents, for example Tshiguvho's (2008) research interviewees, like my own often referenced iron smelting as an advanced achievement unique to the Indigenous *Vhangona*. These claims are very contentious because in a region with polemic land debates, aboriginal status represents potential regional power in the post-apartheid era.[18]

Additional issues that surface researching Venda history involve historical ethnographies by White or non-Vhavenda academics and/or missionaries. Such historians include Van Warmelo (1932,1949,1949), Junod (1908), Stayt (1931), Wessman (1908), and others who conducted ethnographies or kept travel notes and diaries during the colonial and apartheid eras (Ralushai 1977, Tshiguvho 2008). Kirkaldy (2005) references the missionary historical accounts which he characterizes as the "distorting ethnographic lens" or "missionary gaze" (reiterated in chapter four) that portrayed Vhavenda people as primitive, and/or presented incomplete or erroneous data, especially concerning Vhavenda cosmology. An example of historical inaccuracies manifest in accounts from 19th century "…German missionaries that visited *Khosi*

[18] See Schoeman, quoted in *Business Day,* 15 May 2008.

(King/Chief) Tshivhase to establish a mission station, [who] misinterpreted the "*u luvha"* (bowing) greeting that local people expressed as Tshivhase approached the kraal[19]. They interpreted the bowing as a sign of fear rather than respect for the chief. Based on this misinterpretation, they interpreted Tshivhase as more of a dictator ruler" (Tshighuvo 47). Tshiguvho also writes about ethnographers who, "…mistook the ruling power of other members of the royal family particularly the *makhadzi*... and the roles of *Vho-khotsimunene* (the chief's brothers)" (Tshighuvo 47). again showing a misconstruction of Vhavenda kinship systems and political power, and crucial elements to understanding the roles of women and *Vhomakhadzi*.

Inconsistencies about Vhavenda spirituality have also emerged. While researching in Thathe, Ralushai (1977) uncovered discrepancies about Stayt's (1931) work and his reports of a lion in the forest, believed to be the reincarnation of an important member of the Netshitongani [Netshitangani] clan. This claim was considered dubious decades later by local elders when Ralushai (1977), drawing from his interviews, writes "…other local women, strenuously denied Stayt's interpretation. [As] Mrs. Netshitangani put it to me: 'As many Netshitangani descendants are buried here, if it were true that our people after death, as your Mukhuwa[20] reported, return to earth in the form of animals, Thathe sacred grove would have been teeming with many lions, as this grove is one of the oldest in Venda" (Ralushai 61). Considering these research distinctions, this chapter presents information substantiated by Vhavenda scholars and contemporary academics cognizant of these discrepancies. In concluding this section, it should be stressed again that rather than a comprehensive approach to Venda history, this chapter again is a concentrated account of historical events as they relate to key aspects of the study and interview statements. Despite the heterogeneous cultural composition of Vhavenda people, and their grand

[19] A kraal is the chief's residence.
[20] A mukhuwa is White person or Westerner.

and elaborate dynastic history of successive rulers and chiefdoms, the only ethnic variation highlighted in this dissertation centers on Masingo and European colonial dominance, in relation to gender, *Vhangona* self-determination, sacred site management, and land politics.

3.2 Venda Geography

This section gives a basic review of Venda geography, useful to comprehend the study's descriptions of various sacred sites, vulnerable environmental locales, and larger landscapes. Venda is located in the Limpopo province at the Zimbabwean border in the northern most region of South Africa. This former apartheid homeland lies in the northeastern section of what was once called the Transvaal, and west of the former apartheid homeland of Gazankulu (Mabogo 1990, Tshiguvho 2008). Further northeast Venda is split from Mozambique, "by Kruger National Park, one of the oldest and largest (about 20,000 km) parks in Africa and worldwide" (Tshiguvho 32).

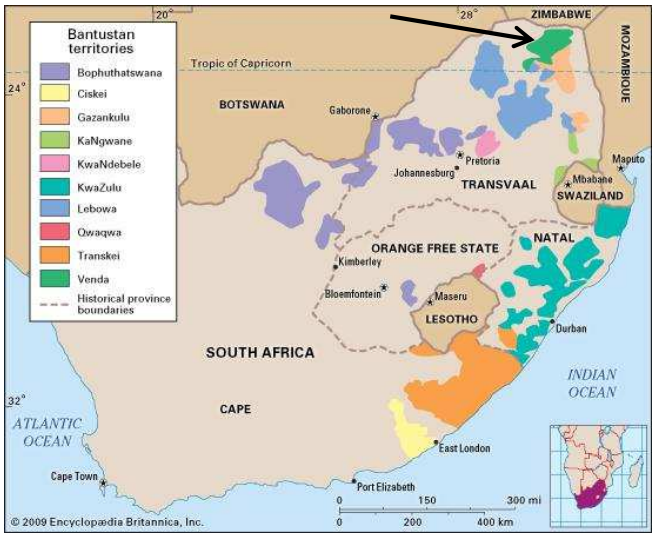


Figure 1: Map: Venda, South Africa
Source, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009.

Venda is swathed in bright red laterite soil possessing a mountainous terrain, with the Soutspanberg range sprawling east-west through the landscape (Mabogo 1990). The Tshiendeulu Mountains are the highest in the region, "separating the Nzehele Valley from Limpopo basin in the north, followed by the Thathe Vondo Mountains (1439 m) to the east of Nzhelele which gently slopes into the Sibasa region" (Mabogo 8). A substantial section of the Soutpansberg mountains cuts through the Entebeni State Forest and Nature Reserve, while on the eastern side of these mountains are the foothills of Thohoyandou district and its neighboring expanses (Mabogo 1990). Throughout Venda history, mountains have been an important defense against invaders because many settlements were strategically established atop these peaks (Stayt 1931; Van Warmelo 1932; Mabogo 1990; Kirkaldy 2005; Loubser 2008; Tshiguvho 2008; Pikirayi 2011). Tshiguvho (2008) and Loubser (2008) convey that mountains have also been regarded as sacred, conceivably because of this crucial defense. Moreover, mountains have often served as analogies to the strength and longevity of a chief's leadership and his mortality. Mountain forests are also vitally important to *Vhangona* spirituality as the montane groves make up vitally important Indigenous trees and vegetation. Finally, Makhado (Formerly Louis Trichardt) is level,

flanking the N1 route that runs through all of South Africa from Cape Town to Zimbabwe.

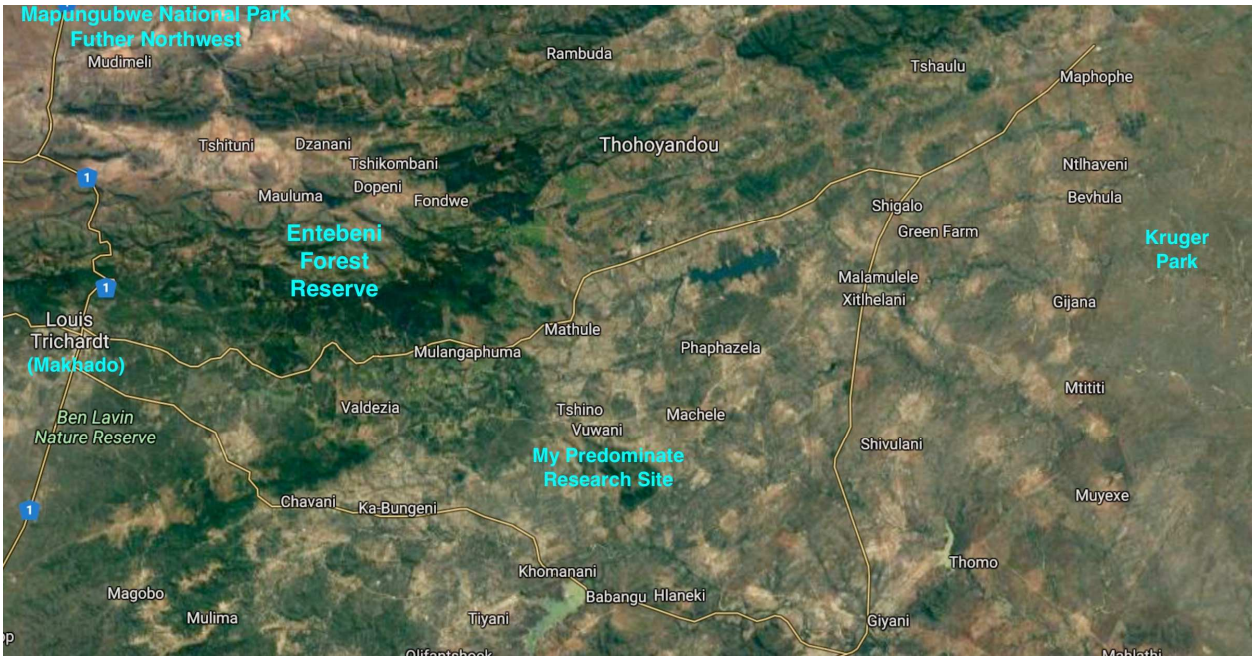


Figure 2: Map: This figure is a satellite image of my predominant research site in Vuwani township (Google Maps).

Mabogo (1990) suggests that geography as it is described by Vhavenda is delineated politically, while remarkably coinciding with vegetation and bushveld or grassland types. He asserts that the Vhutavhatsindi belt which covers much of present-day Mutale District is dominated by the north eastern mountain sourveld; the sourveld also expand into Southern Vhupani. Also in Vhupani, is the Sibasa region which is very near to my initial lodging in Thohoyandou, characterized by loweld sour bushveld. Also, further south of Vhupani is the area called Vhuronga, incorporating the villages and townships of Tshakhuma and the Vuwani District, where I conducted most of my interviews and lived the majority of my stay in Venda. Mabogo (1990) describes sourish mixed bushveld covering Vhupani regions as well as wide coverings of nearby grounds. Again, bushveld growth and vegetation biomass-loss feature in the literature review in conversation with Venda forestry plantation use of chemical fertilizers and

regarding the impact on slope instability and soil erosion.

The *Vhangona*, who sometimes refer to themselves as the true Vhavenda, according to oral history are credited with naming the geographical sites and flora and fauna in the area (Ramunangi Claim of Rights 2008; Vhangona SAHRA Application 2012). At the time of Mabogo's (1990) ethnobotanical study, little research had been done in Venda on indigenous vegetation and its medicinal and cultural uses. He describes a combination of Vhavenda accounts of communicating with ancestors and the trial and error of plant ingestion by earlier generations that developed into a sophisticated understanding of plant-knowledge and herbal remedies among traditional healers in Venda. The *Vhangona* have traditionally sanctified the environment and biodiversity in the various regions (*mashango*) since before written language (Vhangona SAHRA Application 2012). The myriad *Vhangona* clans that populate the area share a common and multifaceted spirituality that is linked with sacred natural sites; they believe that spirits dwell in the air, water, forests and mountains (Ramunangi Claim of Rights 2008). Thus Vhavenda have various ceremonies to honor ancestors and the relationship with *mupo*, meaning the earth or the cosmos throughout the territories (*mashango)* (Vhangona SAHRA Application 2012).

Springs, waterfalls, rivers, and wetlands are also consecrated in Venda. The four main rivers in the region flow from the Soutpansberg Mountains and empty into Limpopo River,[21] including Nwanedi, Nzhelele, Mutale rivers, and Luvuvhu (Earle et al. 2006; Tshiguvho 2008). Tshiguvho (2008) articulates how water shortages may have contributed to its significance in Vhavenda cosmology as follows, "Water has always been a scarce resource in Venda, especially in the drier regions of Nzhelele, Niani, Sinthumule and Kutama. Perhaps this has been the reason why Vhavenda have treated water as sacred. Natural water bodies, such as lakes, rivers, and

[21] See Tshiguvho, for Luvenda names of rivers and geography.

waterfalls have been treated with respect and declared sacred. Such examples include Lake Fundudzi and the Phiphidi Waterfall" (Tshiguvho 32). Both Fundudzi and Phiphidi have been important to Vhavenda spirituality as *makhadzi* attest to in chapter five.

The Nzhelele river also features prominently in the study's *makhadzi* interview statements. Earle (2006) describes how the tropical climate and the condensation and showers in the mountains reach Nzhelele through various tributaries. Many rural settlements have been established in the Upper Nzhelele Valley over time and today the water is still irrigated for agriculture in what Earle (2006) describes as a region among Venda's fertile valleys (Ralushai 1977; Earle et al. 2006). Although many *makhadzi* and specialists argue that the region was once more fertile than it is today, Ralushai (1977) suggests that historically the whole Nzhelele river valley area was never abundant:

> The Government, after forcing Chief Mphephu[22] to vacate the fertile hills of Louis Trichardt [Makhado] and return to his ancestral home Nzhelele, had to introduce an irrigation scheme, for without irrigation in this area, Nzhelele people can starve, as this area suffers from constant drought. In fact, many people, when their fertile areas such as Luonde, Tshindzivhani, Maulum, etc. were declared 'White',when told that they should go live at Nzhelele, preferred to settle in the east (Sibasa District) which was undoubtedly more fertile...(Ralushai 31).

Ralushai contends that the area has always been prone to droughts and food shortages given the intense heat in the region. Because of the various threats to water historically, scholars

[22] Chief Mphephu is a Vhavenda historical figure and leader among Venda's ruling houses in the 19th century. He was later defeated by the Transvaal government, which preceded the Transvaal province.

(Mabogo 1996; Tshiguvho 2008) describe how chiefs once enforced conservation procedures to safeguard this precious resource through rules governing the use of rivers and water for domestic and agricultural purposes.

3.3 Gender and Power

In the context of the study, this section on gender and power refers to women's traditional roles, access to land and property, and women's status and power within the home and state. Customary[23] kinship systems clarify gendered responsibilities and traditional women's roles and legal rights in Venda society. Stayt (1931) and Van Warmelo (1932) describe a web of relationships, hierarchies, and expectations within traditional kinship structures that are represented by non-gendered terms. For example, regardless of sex, all great grandparents are referred to as *makhulukuku*. This also pertains to the role of *makhulu,* which means big and great, again sex notwithstanding this refers broadly to grandparents, a man's sister-in-law through the wife's brother, an aunt by marriage through a man's mother, and the wife's parents and their siblings. *Makhulu* on the man's/father's side, however, carries distinction and requires more respect customarily (Stayt 1931; Van Warmelo 1932).

Explicit gender terms include the title of father, referred to as *khotsi.* A man's father, uncles, and cousins in the male line are called *khotsi muhulu* and *khotsi munene* (sometimes written *khotsimunene*) or great father and little father. A woman may use these terms when speaking to her husband's brothers as well because her children use this terminology. At times she will also refer to her brothers-in-law as *munnawanga* meaning "my husband" when speaking of them abstractly or indirectly. The mother is referred to as *mme* and her sisters are called *mme muhulu* or *mmane,* which means great mother and little mother. Vhavenda who practiced

[23] Customary in this section refers to the colonial era and into apartheid to varying degrees.

polygamy in the past, or today, recognize a woman's co-wives as her sisters and therefore the terms *mme muhulu* or *mmane* also apply conventionally. Originally a man referred to his elder brother's wife as "sister" because traditionally he cannot inherit her as Stayt (1931) describes. However, "He may refer to his younger brother's wife as *musadzi vha murathu*, wife of the brother—he can inherit the great wife of his brother next in age, as according to the system, he is the man who paid the *lobola*[24] for that woman and gave her to his brother…" (Stayt 173). Historically, according to Stayt (1931), brothers may refer to each other's wives as "our wife" and wives may refer to each other as "co-wives" possibly in expectance of becoming the wife of the same brother in the future.

In Pre-colonial and colonial Venda, within the household, married women enjoyed privileges of land and agrarian control. Customarily, when married, a woman lived with her husband's mother until after the birth of her first baby (Stayt 1931; Van Warmelo 1932). In the past, following the birth of her first child, "her husband builds her a hut for herself and allots to her a portion of land as her own personal property. It is her duty to feed her husband and support her own family, and she may dispose of her surplus produce as she wishes" (Stayt 142), yet in consultation with her husband. In this sense personal property would more likely be interpreted as decision making of harvests on designated plots of communal land. Overall, it was the duty of the man to provide each wife with a separate hut, lands, and granaries. In a polygamous marriage, which denotes the status necessary to support additional wives in this period, Stayt describes occasional disputes among co-wives who were dissatisfied with the distribution of land by their husband. Men have individual rights over land and their sons may continue to cultivate the land as adults or acquire their own portions of communal land; requests for land are thus

[24] The price of cattle to facilitate a marriage.

made to the headman. Stayt and Van Warmelo describe how land was communally allotted in precolonial and colonial Venda. Although governed by the chief, land was not privately owned, rather it was held in trust for the people, Stayt describes communal access to land and water for shared hunting, fishing, and timber rights, available to all people—never to be hoarded by the chief (Stayt 1931). In addition to land, comparable to a Vhavenda man, a woman may individually possess movable property considered to be, livestock, household items, and again surplus agriculture. These examples demonstrate how women's access to land was determined by a communal relationship to resources in Vhavenda culture. This communal approach to land-use and sharing resources within the family and society also denotes women's agricultural agency in pre-colonial Venda society.

Whether Vhavenda society overall is/was matriarchal is not firmly established. Amadiume (1987) has suggested that *patriarchal* and *matriarchal* are not suitable terms to describe pre-colonial African societies if interpreted through a Western archetype of power—specified by influential decision making exclusively exerted in public and state forums. She argues that women exercised power in both public and domestic settings that impacted state making (then and now) in different ways. Furthermore, although great attention has been dedicated to examining purported repressive African patriarchal structures, women in pre-colonial Africa accessed power through gender flexibility.

African gender theorists (Oyewumi 1997; Kopytoff 1997; Amdiume 1987; Achebe 2011) have established important social science and historical research on the customary status of gender in pre-colonial African societies—yet specifically regarding female masculinities and positions of power. A "female father" a "male daughter" and a "female husband" (or woman-to-woman marriage) in Africa was not a sex distinction, or indicator of sexuality, but alternatively

denoted birth order, political power, wealth and status, or the absence of a man relative to or suitable for a position. These flexible gender systems (which will be further reviewed in the study's methodology in chapter four and five) were common among African kinship and pre-colonial African societies. Stayt (1931) for example references *lobola* paid by wealthier Vhavenda women for wives, even if the head woman already had a husband of her own:

> A [Vhavenda] woman may bring three wives to live with her at her own home, and may allow her husband to have sexual relations with them, although he has no rights over them without her permission. These women are really in the position of servants and are obliged to do all the menial work; they may be given to different men for the purpose of obtaining children, but these men, not having paid lobola for them, have no legal rights over them or their children (Stayt 143).

Further, the children of these procured wives, at times referred to the head woman as father. The wealthy Vhavenda women who could *lobola* wives in this manner were thus the heads of these families, including the subsequent children of their wives, and were therefore entitled to an heir. The eldest son of the first wife in this case would serve as heir; or if the first wife did not have a son, her daughter would become the heir even over her brothers from other mothers (Stayt 1931). This daughter would then become the only heir to her female father's property (Stayt 1931).

An additional aspect to *lobola* and the facilitation of marriage in the past was observed through the role of *makhadzi,* who could also provide the cattle for the marriage. The role of *makhadzi* or the paternal aunt was once a very strong position in Vhavenda families and society

at large. As the carrier of cattle to her brother, *makhadzi* was essentially responsible for establishing her brother's family and was previously considered the best judge of his heir to maintain the strength and stability of the family Stayt (1931) writes, "In her nomination she must be guided by the conditions of succession, and is expected to name the eldest son of her brother's great wife [senior wife], unless he is absolutely unfit for the position or has disgraced himself in the eyes of the family. In this case the *makhadzi*, in conjunction with the deceased man's brothers, may appoint another son, usually the next in age of the same mother" (Stayt 167-168). Matshidzhe (2013) indicates that *makhadzi* make this decision with the little father or the *kotsimunene,* yet in most cases in the event of an impasse, it is *makhadzi* to whom the decision is traditionally deferred. If the son is too young, *makhadzi* may assume the role of a regent.[25]

There is great historical importance of *makhadzi* to commoners and chiefdoms among the *Vhangona*. Buijs (2002) describes matters of succession and the role of *makahdzi* among the royal family, which essentially parallels the practices of commoners. After the death of the chief, the *makhadzi* as the paternal aunt, along with the chief's brother or paternal uncle, the *khotsimunene,* once determined the chief's heir among his sons. Together they also selected a *khadzi* and *ndumi* among the newly installed chief's siblings who would eventually assume the roles of *makhadzi* and *khotsimunene.* Of the two roles, *makhadzi* in the royal family holds greater status, and when the chief dies, the deference once paid to him by his children would then be given to their *makhadzi*, or the "female father' and 'little father' [*khotsimunene*], "and until their deaths they have the right to command the person of their late brother's son, whom they have appointed to represent the family" (Stayt qtd. in Matshidze 44-45).

Makhadzi in both the royal family and among the commoners play a central role in the

[25] This is a position under the chief/Vhamusanda.

family and oversee important rituals relative to the family's sacred objects, eco-cultural knowledge, and communicating with the ancestors. Yet the *makhadzi* in the royal family has state responsibilities that relate to governance with the chief, and public rituals of *phasa* and *thevhula* or the libations and the thanksgiving after the harvest (Matshidze 2013); despite these distinctions, all women in Venda society are respected for being spirit mediums (Matshidze 2013).

In matters of the state, *makhadzi* is a dominant advisor to the chief's leadership. The chief consults *makhadzi* on all issues related to those under his chieftaincy, and she is a member of his "court." Buijs (2002) writes, "She lives at the chief's capital, with her husband and children living elsewhere. She receives a percentage of all taxes given to the chief…" Buijs (2002) continues, "Even men, Stayt says, to whom all other women kneel, must kneel to the *makhadzi*…All this respect, notes Stayt, is the outward and visible sign of the real power she wields in the state." Makhadzi is also important in the traditional court or *khoro.* Regarding the judgment of village cases in the *khoro,* Matshidze (2013) states, "The traditional leader does not decide the case alone in some instances, but he does that in consultation with the *makhadzi*. This confirms the fact that traditional leaders together with the *makhadzi* played a vital role regarding judgment of the cases" (Matshidze 11). From Amadiume's perspective, *makhadzi* would be an example of women who exerted authority within the household—and in this case, that power also extended to the state. Historically women outside of the institution of *Vhomakhadzi* also held important public political roles, which proves relevant in the context of discussing the potentially matriarchal features of Vhavenda culture.

Vhavenda populations in the Soutpansberg region have had various lineages of female leaders from petty chieftainships and headwomen to advisers known as *nduna* or *mukoma*.

Lestrade (1930) references examples of long successions of female leadership in some cases, including the *mukoma*ship at "Phephidi" (Phiphidi), a fact he relays from the Rev. P.E. Schwellnus of Pretoria, who states, "It is said that only a woman can be *mukoma* there 'because, the particular ancestral spirit associated with the place is a female spirit' (*hune mudzimu ndi tshisadzi*)" (Lestrade 314). Historians and gender scholars have also examined the matrilineal leadership of two mediums, for example, Tshisinavhute of Mianzwi an Mbedzi ruler, has been historically female since the 18th century and again the Lovhedu Rain Queen Modjadji, both of whom held power through their rainmaking gifts (Lestrade 1930; Schlosser 2002). Once more, as Amadiume (1987) describes, *patriarchal* and *matriarchal* may not be appropriate terms to describe pre-colonial African societies, yet what has been conveyed about gender historically in this region is that women have traditionally enjoyed more status and positions of power comparably with other South African ethnic groups (Stayt 1931; Lestrade 1930). As chapter four relays, with the arrival of colonialism, women's roles and status began to change. In particular, the political dynamics set in motion during the colonial era explain the erosion of the role of *makhadzi* through the apartheid and post-apartheid democratic eras—a fact that will be analyzed at length in chapter five. Ultimately, as Amadiume (1987) suggests, classifying African societies as matriarchal or patriarchal in the context of Western power structures, or from the positionality of a Western researcher is not applicable. However, what can be determined is that Vhavenda women's access to land, political roles, and power differed in pre-colonial Venda, which is a necessary argument to establish as the preceding chapters examine colonial influences on gender. The next section gives an overview of the colonial encounter in Venda, and the impact that colonialism and apartheid had on land and politics— and marginal facts related to gender, which will be more keenly explored in chapter five.

3.4 Colonialism and Apartheid

Beginning in the 19th century, the colonial and missionary presence disturbed the socio-political and cultural values of Venda society; including, religion, traditional leadership, gender and land. Berlin missionaries for example developed a complicated relationship with the people and their perceptions of wilderness and land-use. According to the Berlin Mission Society records, these German settlers equated the untamable vegetation and their own vulnerability to disease, due to the dense foliage in the region, with the perceived heathenism of Vhavenda people (Kirkaldy 2005). Kirkaldy suggests that the missionaries regarded the difficulties of converting Vhavenda as inextricably connected to the mysterious and malevolent terrain. At this time, the Voortrekkers, or Dutch descendent Afrikaaners who ventured north from the Cape Colony into the Transvaal, likewise had their own designs on 'Vendaland.' These Voortrekkers laid claim to the area in 1848 and settled in what they called Schoemansdal, at the foot of the mountain range that they first named Soutpansbergdorp and later Soutpansberg. Their settlement in the region began a manipulative, exploitative, and volatile relationship with Vhavenda people over forced labor and oppressive tax edicts, and they too left their mark on the geography by renaming rivers, mountains, and general terrain.

The dominant *Masingo* also presented challenges in addition to the White settlers. Tshiguvho (2008) writes about how the Indigenous *Vhangona* endured a type of dual colonization as they were dominated politically by both the *Masingo* and Europeans. Although they had been conquered by other Venda groups such as the *Vhatavhatsindi*, the *Masingo* however used military force to attack and demoralize them (Kirkaldy 2005, Tshiguvho 2008). Tshiguvho writes, "Khosi (Chief) Velelambeu, who led the Singo [Masingo] group when they came to Venda in the 1600s, kidnapped and beheaded two Ngona chiefs, which made both

Vhangona and Vhatavhatsindi (who had settled into Venda) surrender. Then the Laudzi group… overpowered Vhangona by targeting their strong belief in the sacred practice. Sometime in the early 1900s, Vhalaudzi burned what is now known as Lwamondo Mountain which was a sacred site for Vhangona in the area, as a strategy to overpower Vhangona" (Tshiguvho 55). Both European colonization and *Masingo* rule led to forced removals of *Vhangona*, leaving their sacred sites, customs, and burial practices vulnerable. *Vhangona* today have aligned with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) as their sacred practices and land have long been threatened by interethnic conflict, European colonization, and missionary proselytizing (Tshiguvho 2008). Throughout various periods of this social and cultural upheaval, *Vhangona* have been fervently committed to retaining their practices and safeguarding their sacred sites and burial customs despite these exogenous influences.

Sacred site vulnerabilities should be incorporated in the overall changes in land-use after the colonial encounter in Venda. As described, land was once held in trust by the chief and regarded as a communal concern, including shared conservation. There were rules pertaining to the cutting and use of trees, waterways and resources, and when plants and seeds could be planted and harvested. For example, in pre-colonial Venda if a *Marula* tree was growing on shared land, it could not be cut down but rather its fruit had to be shared with the chief (Stayt 1931). If these simple rules were violated, as Tshighuvho (2008) describes, these became matters to be settled by the chief who would issue punishment to offenders, as misuse of plots threatened sustainable land-use and resource management as well as important sacred customs.

Sacred sites and groves became a contentious issue between missionaries and all Vhavenda. In 1874 following the erection of the Tshakhuma mission station by the Berlin Mission Society, conflicts arose about collecting wood from the Thathe Holy Forest. Kirkaldy

alludes to an occurrence between known Berlin missionaries, Rev. P.E. Schwellnus and Carl Beuster, who developed tense relations with the king, *Khosi* Madzivhandila, after it was learned of their intentions to cut down trees in the holy area. After multiple incidents of this nature, where the king refused the missionaries' permission to collect wood from the forest, Schwellnus is recorded as telling King Madzivhandila, "God does not stay in the forest or in a river, but His home is in heaven…I would like to believe that he, the King, will later see this and be convinced of it that his opinion about the gods is false, because their gods are just lies of people, which the devil has fed them" (Kirkaldy 173). The missionaries did not hold the same respect for forests as the *Vhavenda* or *Vhangona* as they equated them with 'the dark forests of Bawendaland and the dark hearts of the heathen Bawenda.' [26] The missionaries thus developed a reputation for being destroyers of the land, to which they refuted this claim arguing that they were instead there to bring blessings, even referring to their mission stations as 'God's gardens in the heathen wilderness.'[27] This contentious relationship between custom and land became even more deeply entrenched following this era.

As traditional leadership and local politics changed in the homelands, so did traditional conservation. Venda had gradually been recognized as an administrative unit apart from South Africa, eventually gaining restricted self-government in the 1970s and nominal independence in 1979, yet not internationally recognized. Nevertheless, the White settler colonialists had already greatly influenced the traditional politics by manipulating interethnic tensions, installing chiefs through indirect rule, and crafting national policy. Ralushai (2002) characterizes this period as one controlled by the central government that managed land allocation and introduced new, yet unpopular farming techniques. During this period Native and or Bantu affairs commissioners

[26] See Kirkaldy & Kriel for revealing information on missionary perceptions of Vhavenda people.
[27] Kirkaldy & Kriel.

contracted White agriculturalists to work with local Black officials to develop farming, cattle rearing, and conservation approaches (Ralushai 2002). Native Conservation police were commissioned (*Madieme*) to stop tree cutting, deforestation and soil erosion, and to safeguard flora and fauna. Yet these police were unpopular as locals expressed discontent with their policies by composing derogatory songs (Ralushai 2002). The rejection of the new farming techniques led the government to implement gum and pine tree plantations to provide building materials and firewood for citizens.

During Venda independence, regarding South African national conservation policy, Tshiguvho (2008) remarks, "The tribal conservation systems continued even after colonization. Under the old Bantu Authorities Act 68 of 1951 (BERCD 1979), the use and management of natural resources was assigned to tribal authorities. The homelands then developed their own conservation regulation, although the national regulations could overrule the tribal authority" (Tshiguvho 44). Tshiguvho (2008) adds that although the semi-autonomous Venda government in the 1980s recognized the Nature Conservation and National Parks Act 20 (1986), "which controlled activities at the conservation areas in parks that were then established, including the Makuya, the Nzhelele, and the Mphaphuli Cycad Reserves…These protected areas did not adequately protect Montane Forests because they were located in semi-arid regions" (Tshiguvho 44). The Parks Act however, according to Tshiguvho, permitted *Vhanghona* to manage sacred sites which safeguarded areas of original vegetation—yet this may not have been a consistent privilege, given accounts by locals who reference the encroachment of such sacred areas such as the Phiphidi waterfall, or the establishment of the tea plantation on *Nevhutanda* scared sites both beginning in the 1980s in the latter years during apartheid.

The introduction of new farming and conservation techniques during the colonial and

apartheid era and Venda's quasi-independence was further reflection of White settler agrarian policies and land control. Following the enactment of colonial and apartheid era land policies explained in chapter two, Black land ownership in the western sense was reduced to 13percent and women were consigned as mere peasant farmers (Ralushai 2002). Whites usurped the most fertile and arable areas including the present day commercial farms of Levubu (Luvuvhu) (Ralushai 2002). A Vhavenda song of protest portrayed this loss of land and self-determination with the lyrics, "In our homes we used to live peacefully with abundance of food, fields and domestic animals (mahaya ashu ro vha ro dzula nga mulalo)" (Ralushai 12). The dominion of the land and the colonial and imperialist ideologies of the era, supported a power dynamic that is discernable in present governing structures and traditional leadership.

During colonization and into the apartheid era, the government undermined and manipulated traditional leaders and chiefs in the former apartheid homelands. In chapter five *makhadzi* interview statements emphasize from their perspective that it is the non-*Vhangona*, namely the *Masingo* chiefs who have been manipulated to support the interests of the government over Vhavenda people. Seizing traditional authority has especially impacted the former homelands as, "The apartheid government's power of patronage was encapsulated in its power to depose and install chiefs and it was an effective tool in implementing apartheid policies in rural areas" (Matshidze 6). These changes in traditional leadership during colonialism and apartheid marked when *makhadzi* first saw a deterioration of their own authority, which was further cemented in the country's democratic constitution post-apartheid (Matshidze 2013). Even Venda's ostensibly independent years did not sway the imbedded values of the White settler regime, and its influences over traditional leadership and women's access to land. On traditional leadership, Matshidze contends that, "The encounter of chiefs with missionaries, merchant

capital and colonialism significantly and ominously undermined traditional leadership. Traditional leadership is an important relic of the pre-colonial and colonial orders that poses a special challenge to post-colonial state makers." Matshidze explains how under the current democratic government, matters of succession that were once privately arbitrated are now publically disputed and controlled by state authority. This is a direct result of the interference of colonialism, apartheid, and the current democratic structures that never resolved these past issues. The diminished role of makhadzi and women's access to land will be further illuminated in chapter five, including extensive gender analysis that corresponds with *makhadzi* interview statements.

The subsections examined here, including: *(1) Historical Debates* (2) *Venda Geography*, (3) *Gender and Power,* and (4) *Colonialism & Apartheid,* are intended to elucidate the forthcoming interview statements and data analysis and results in chapters five, six and seven. The ethnographic-style interviews lay the foundation of the study and reveal the arguments and debates outlined throughout this chapter. It is anticipated that the interview statements may conflict with the opinions of other Vhavenda ethnic groups, local politicians, traditional leaders, or even Vhavenda Christians. As a researcher, my intention again is to highlight the claims and oral history accounts of *makhadzi* members of the CBO, Dzomo La Mupo, who regard their present customs as a true representation of the values of their ancestors, as they maintain that they are the true Indigenous Vhavenda or Vhangona— and custodians of sacred sites. Consequently, *makhadzi* interviewed for this research have firm opinions about the historical impact of colonization, interethnic conflict, threats to their land and sacred sites as an underrepresented group in the region.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the rationale for utilizing a feminist methodological framework, including African gender and broad feminist theories as guiding theoretical positions for the study. Additionally, I describe the research design, data analysis, and procedures that justify the adaptation and modification of grounded theory to analyze emerging themes within participant discourse—and to analyze social processes based on my own empirical observations and interpretations of the data. The theories outlined in this section offer oppositional knowledge and research paradigms to contest hegemonic discourses about African women, particularly examining the intersectional dimensions that impact gender-based discrimination such as race, class, gender, Indigeneity, colonialism and neocolonialism. These perspectives problematize assumptions about African patriarchy and gender bias in South Africa's former apartheid homeland of Venda through a post-colonial lens, and assist in answering the following research questions: (1) How do colonial and apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies manifest in South Africa's land act legacies? (2) What impact has South Africa's land acts, in conjunction with traditional leadership, had on cultural biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality? (3) What do *Vhomakhadzi* attribute to environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality? and (4) How do *Vhomakhadzi* construct cultural biodiversity preservation.

4.1 Feminist Qualitative Research

Feminist research in a diverse U.S. context is defined by analysis and theories of gender and power, and their normative frameworks (Ramazanoglu 2002). Thus, feminist theories deconstruct how and why women are systematically discriminated against across spectrums of society, in legislation, economic and social institutions, or abstractly evidenced by language, attitudes, and cultural beliefs. To analyze and dismantle these structures and beliefs, feminist

theories also consider ethical research approaches with a commitment to social change. It is therefore equally important how researchers choose their questions and techniques to engage in gender-sensitive inquiries, to circumvent dominant epistemologies, and challenge ostensibly objective positions that pose a threat to women as research subjects (Ramazanoglu 2002).

In fact, Harding (1987) and other feminist scholars (Doucet and Mauthner 2006; Ramazanoglu 2002; Steady 2005; De Vault 1996) argue that objective research is essentially unattainable given elite knowledge validation processes that determine who makes authoritative knowledge claims *and* because of the various social *filters* that shape observations (qtd. in DeVault 1996). As a social construct, knowledge historically situated within ethnocentric and androcentric scholarship produces biased, racially distorted, and male centered results. Culture, science, and even biology itself are socially constructed (Steady 2005; De Vault 1996) and, "feminist epistemological discussions owe a great debt to feminist scientists who relentlessly critiqued the effects of gender bias in the collection, interpretation, and organization of data on sex differences in behavioral, biological, and biobehavioral scientific research" (Doucet and Mauthner 36-37). Moreover, positivistic research paradigms have been used within science to control women through medicine and psychiatry— used to define women as hysterical, mentally ill, and "emotional," or used to maintain social power relations over women's reproductive choices and health (Tamale 2011; De Vault 1999). Feminist research strategies reject these legacies, and attempt to broaden inquiries that have been limited by the social and cultural partialities of androcentric and Eurocentric/ Euro-American epistemologies and methodologies.

Feminist scholars (Hill- Collins 1999; Harding 1991; Wuest 1995; Smith 1980; Smith 1982; Lorde 1984; Davis 1981; Crenshaw 1989; Hill-Collins 1990) critique male centered research paradigms —which impact studies of culture, race, and gender in the natural and social

sciences, to create less harmful scholarly models. Harding (1987) contends that there are no feminist methods but rather methodologies with attributes that support gender-sensitive research designs, such as feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemologies, and postmodern epistemologies (qtd. in Doucet & Mauthner 37). According to Doucet and Mauthner (2006), there are three characteristics that define feminist empiricism: 1) the acknowledgement that all observations are "value-tinged", thus empirical inquiry is shaped by value judgments, 2) empiricism as a source of evidence is contingent on sensory evidence, and lastly 3) knowledge does not come from a single knower but a community of knowers or epistemological communities. Like feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and postmodern epistemologies question observable reality and serve as an example of the overlapping features Harding herself acknowledged among her epistemological and methodological descriptions (Doucet and Mauthner 2005). Feminist standpoint epistemologies by contrast, however, challenge communities of knowers by granting epistemic privilege to women, asserting that research on power asymmetries and marginalized populations should begin with the most disempowered groups in society. Such groups, it is argued have special insight and perspectives from their vantage point or standpoint that assist in analyzing power dynamics and domination, where social contexts are shaped by the knower(s) (Collins 199; Harding 1991; Wuest 1995). Moreover, Collins suggests that Black women's standpoints and outsider-within location provide optimal understanding of power hierarchies given experiences with multiple oppressions (Collins 1998).

Black feminists (Smith 1980; Lorde 1984; Davis 1981; Crenshaw 1989; Hill-Collins; 1990; Higginbotham and Scott 1982) have produced groundbreaking theories and intellectual work to challenge harmful research used to construct pathological profiles of women of color as

sexually deviant and criminal. In particular Black women's critical social theories have embraced intersectional research and standpoint epistemologies to challenge the authoritative White and/or male voice that makes harmful knowledge claims in the natural and social sciences; for example, according to Millman and Kanter (1975), harmful knowledge claims include theories of family, work, sexuality, and other socio-cultural notions about African descendent women through-out the diaspora (qtd. in De Vault 1996). These theories, often rooted in historically racist studies such as the mock science of phrenology (Hull et. al 1982) have wrought portrayals of intellectual delay and behavioral deviance among Black people.

Second wave Black feminists such as Barbara Smith (1980, 1982), Audrey Lorde (1984), Angela Davis (1981), Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) have produced intersectional research critiquing Black matriarchy theory and the social science theories on Black family studies that focus on Black mother-son dyads to draw conclusions on the failures of Black mothers and female-headed households (Smith 1980; Higginbotham and Scott 1982). These scholars have also engaged in research to subvert the deviant images mentioned, used to disparage and stereotype Black women resulting in repressive policies, such as eugenics, welfare reform, prison legislation and gaps in medical research on Black women. Elevating Black women's critical social theories above mere "thought" or "Folk Wisdom," Black feminists such as Patricia Hill-Collins have supported Black female epistemic privilege particularly for those subjectivities outside of the academy—reiterating the supposition that, "women's lives are the 'places from which to start off knowledge projects" (Doucet and Mauthner (2006) Further, building Black women's political collectivity by isolating social justice issues pertinent to Black women's realities challenges these stereotypes and images that shape Black women's social and political representation (Hill-Collins 2000). Thus, feminist

epistemologies merely provide a framework for more critical analysis, where previous research designs were non-reflexive and falsely centered on White men's (and women's) perspectives about the world (De Vault 1996).

In an effort to analyze the social processes which have altered *Vhomakhadzi* traditional roles and way of life, this dissertation strives towards social responsibility, articulated by Vhavenda women and *Vhomakhadzi* of the community based organization, Dzomo La Mupo (DLM). And from their own experiences the study analyzes their approaches towards empowerment as self-identified ecologists and environmentalists. Thus, African gender theories and feminisms are the guiding theoretical positions that underscore the study, emphasizing: (1) the critical examination of gender as a socio-cultural construct through the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras in Africa (2) intersectional research paradigms that analyze gender as an organizing principle in economic and corporate globalization and (3) critiques of hegemonic development paradigms that marginalize African women, together complimenting feminist methodologies in environmental research and eco-feminism that clarify the twin dominations of women and nature.

4.2 Black and African Feminism(s)

Early iterations of feminism, particularly in the U.S., were articulated within a White middle class framework of analysis. Within the feminist movement in the 19th to mid-20th centuries throughout the longue durée of the Women's Movement, feminism concentrated on middle class White women's experiences and gender equity in a White patriarchal society (Springer 2002). Feminist politics and theory failed to acknowledge Black women's intellectual discourse including those intellectuals who had long observed how race, class, and gender oppression together uniquely affect(ed) Black women (Barriteau 2007, Kraditor 1965, Collins

1996). One such illustration is visible in Nancy Chodrow's (1978) work on sex role socialization and her scholarship shaped by psychoanalytic feminist theory, as well as Carol Gilligan's (1982) study of the moral development of women. Both scholars have been critiqued for their disproportionate use of samples of White, middleclass, women in their research which makes overarching claims about women's behavior— again positioning White women's experiences as universal and normative (Collins 2000). Audrey Lorde famously addressed such theoretical disparities, challenging the research of both Chodrow and scholar Mary Daly, author of *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978). In an open letter to Daly in 1978, Lorde emphasizes how White feminists continue to ignore the lived experiences of Black women; she states, "What you excluded from Gyn/Ecology dismissed my heritage and the heritage of all other non- European women and denied the real connections that exist between all of us" (Lorde 66). Thus feminist theory and discourse narrowly defined women's experiences from a middle class, White, standpoint and could neither recognize White female privilege or Black women's gender-based discrimination within a patriarchal and capitalist society (Springer 2002; hooks 1984).

By its omission of Black women's intellectual perspectives and experiences, feminist theory in the U.S. has been heavily criticized for upholding patriarchal structures and elite systems of knowledge validation. To reiterate an earlier point, Black feminist thought has developed analysis that transcends standard epistemological criteria, which challenge the very foundations of intellectual discourse to push against these hegemonic discourses that normalize White women's experiences (Collins 2000, 1998). Black feminism has reclaimed Black women's intellectual traditions, throughout the diaspora, from women both inside and outside of the academy— to build upon theoretical cogitations in order to organize around specific political

and social justice objectives. Black feminism is built upon the supposition that Black women's lived experiences shape meaning and require alternative knowledge validation due to the academy's dismissal of Black women's intellectual work and its assumptions that Black feminist thought lacks academic rigor and a solid theoretical foundation.

Likewise, African gender studies contest narrow epistemologies, which stem from androcentric and Eurocentric research and narrow discussions in the field, by critically examining constructions of gender through the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras. African gender studies analyzes gender flexibility that is distinguished from Western gender conceptions. Doing so challenges universal gender norms, explains differential power and patriarchy, dispels normative Whiteness and deconstructs historically racist ideology. Furthermore, African feminism uses intersectional research paradigms—identified as a framework to interpret the social dimensions and structural components of repression as interlocking systems. Therefore, African feminist theoretical frameworks draw from past lineages to clarify the multiple forms of oppression African women continue to face due to race, gender, colonialism and neocolonialism to offer solutions for African women's empowerment and transformation in Africa.

African gender scholars (Oyewumi 1997; Kopytoff 2005; Amadiume 1987; Achebe 2011; Osborn 2011) challenge universal notions of womanhood and constructions of gender that feature prominently in Western gender discourse. These scholars question concepts and approaches in gender studies steeped in Western experiences, asserting that because gender is a socio-cultural concept and women's and gender studies' origination in the Western academy cannot be applied to African realities. Oyewumi (1997) argues that because Western expressions of feminism circulate the domestic sphere, gender studies likewise revolve around the nuclear

family construct. This is regarded as an imposed normative framing of women's issues that fails to answer the necessary questions for gender research in Africa exclusively. African gender theorists and African feminists (Oyewumi 2005; Amadiume 1987) reason that normative Whiteness, the nuclear family construct, and strict gender norms are prominent aspects of feminist theorizing, therefore they alternatively present models of non-gendered African cultures and family structures as research paradigms.

Amadiume (1987) and Achebe's (2011) research on constructions of gender in pre-colonial Nigerian societies deconstruct the limitations of Western gender research that adhere to rigid gender conceptions and hierarchies and the inseparability of sex and gender. They have paid special attention to areas of gender flexibility in culture, language/ etymology, divisions of labor, domestic and family hierarchies, religion and African political systems that directly contrast with the strict gender roles of the West and the resultant social constructions of gender and power that portray African women, as a monolithic "oppressed" group under the thumb of African patriarchy. Amadiume's (1987) socio-cultural analysis of gender ideology in pre-colonial (Pre-1900) Nnobi society in Igboland, now Southeastern Nigeria, for example, reveals great gender flexibility in culture and language. Her research asserts that realms of power were not masculine or feminine in pre-colonial Nnobi society. Flexible gender systems were represented by male roles that were open for women through such practices as nhanye, 'male daughter', and igba ohu, 'female husbands; daughters who are 'male' in ritual and political matters, and female husbands who aid family in different matters and assist wives. There was no sexual role to these identities, and therefore no gender confusion by these positions within a family.

Achebe's (2011) research on the historical figure, Ahebi Ugbabe in colonial Nigeria, who

came to be known as a female king, is another noteworthy example in the same time period of gender flexibility in African societies in Nigeria. Ahebi Ugbabe serves as another model for how gender is a socio-cultural and historical construct and why gender in Africa cannot be understood through Western theoretical frameworks alone. Like Amadiume, Achebe (2011) contends that in pre-colonial Igbo societies, sex and gender did not coincide, as seen with the gendered performances of the male daughters and female husbands, or in her analysis of Ahebi Ugbabe's gendered performance of headman, warrant chief, and eventually king of Enugu-Ezike which is situated in the northernmost tip of present day Enugu state. (Achebe 2011; Amadiume 1987). Historically, Ugbabe exhibited a range of female masculinities and married many women. Her story models gender malleability in the practice of woman-to-woman marriage, which was a distinction of wealth and status, not of homosexuality (Achebe 2011; Amadiume 1987). It was colonial conquest by the British after 1900 that altered these flexible gender roles over time (Oyewumi 2000; Amadiume 1987) shedding light on the modification of gender in European colonies, and the construction and imposition of colonial gender ideologies. Amadiume and Achebe's research supports suppositions described in chapter two, that gender flexibility was prevalent in Vhavenda/*Vhangona* culture underscoring the role of *Vhomakhadzi* who rule with the Chief (Matshidzhe 2013; Buijs 2002).

Western thought embodied many sex and class disparities that were then foisted onto African men and women in the colonies through fixed gender ideologies originated in the European metropoles; a European woman was always female regardless of her social achievement or status (Amadiume 1987). This difference represents many challenges concerning how gender should be studied in Africa. Consequently, it is problematic when African societies and political systems are likened to the West in academic research. Ignoring these distinctions

conceals relevant information necessary to study how gender was ultimately constructed and perceived, for example in South Africa's apartheid homelands, and how these philosophies have permeated present-day political systems.

McClintock (1995) and Magubane's (2004) research examines the intersections of imperial power, commerce, sexuality, race, and gender as they were articulated in the imperial homelands in Europe, which explains the racialized and gendered scope of colonialism and neocolonialism. Constructions of race and gender in this context were essential to Western industrial modernity—and these social orders were also central to the evolution of capitalism. McClintock (1995) argues that scholars must first look to the European metropoles as the location from which race was constructed to make meaning out of new labor divisions and hierarchies in African societies. The African body was defined in an economic framework and as Magubane (2004) argues, became a metaphor for the body politic. Magubane's (2004) analysis of laws and rhetorical devices and imagery used to construct poverty discourses and gender in Great Britain and its colonies during the 19th century, clarifies how portrayals of African people proliferated throughout the European metropoles and their colonies, also shaping gender conceptions of Black South African women in the emerging ethnic reserves and homelands. The literature reveals the systematic way that women in colonial Africa were marginalized and how their social roles were depoliticized (Achebe 2011; Amadiume 1987; Osborn 2011; Magubane 2004; McClintock 1995; Frankel 2008) in an effort to establish a natural social division of labor and power conceived by colonial administrators. Depoliticizing women's roles and influences was typical of colonialism (Osborn 2011). African gender theorists would argue that ignoring this pre-colonial and colonial history presents an incomplete examination of gender, which fails to contextualize present day gender relations and gender-based discrimination in Africa.

Analysis of contemporary social and economic conditions in Africa are also vulnerable to an imposed normative framing positioned within Western gender studies and NGO initiatives. Dominant Western epistemologies in this sense are regarded by many as harmful to African women (Taiwo 2004; Kopytoff 2005; Haysom 2001). It is argued that Western feminist's concentrate on development, division of labor, and class in ways that do not fit the complex and pluralistic needs of African societies, thus poverty of theory manifests most prominently in the misrepresentation of African peoples. Described as safari scholarship (Taiwo 2004) such frameworks are considered shallow, presumptuous, and simple given Africa's massive continental diversity — resulting in a fixation with the rural, the exotic and Afro-pessimistic interpretations of African men, society, and gender relations (Taiwo 2004; Kopytoff 2005). Yet alternatively, in examining the idea of differential power, many African gender scholars (Wanzala 1998; Lewis 2001; McFadden 2001; McFadden 2009; McFadden 2011) feel hindered by scholarship that focuses asymmetrically on the politics of difference between the West and Africa, considered as pardoning African patriarchy, or romanticizing the notion that patriarchy did not exist in pre-colonial Africa.

Wanzala (1998) frames her radical analysis and conceptual approach to understanding women's access to resources and development needs as being controlled by an influx of societal powers, what she calls, a *multidimensional conceptualization* of power. Her radical analysis considers patriarchy, and a hierarchical social relation based on class, race, and religion, and does not posit that patriarchy and social hierarchies are due to colonialism exclusively. She asserts that some of these structures resulted from pre-colonial African societies. McFadden (2001) likewise recognizes the historical forces that shape present day neocolonialism and globalization in reinforcing a contemporary imperialist world order, which has especially

challenged the rights and citizenship of South African women. For example, the reinstitution of traditional courts and the assemblage of local, national and multinational actors, who appropriate imperialist authority and gender ideologies now unify men of different colors and class to continue to control Black South African women in a "colorblind global patriarchy" in the post-apartheid era (McFadden 2001).

So although colonialism did alter gender relations in Africa, there is debate about how prevalent patriarchy was in pre-colonial societies. African patriarchy does manifest in contemporary African social affairs and gender relations; and in effect colludes with other global forms of patriarchy in a neocolonial context. Consequently, in many African countries women find themselves vulnerable to both local and global economies that offer little support for land tenure or economic security for women (Boko 2005; Mate 2011; Tsikata, D. and J Kerr. 2000), which is significant because it explains how local and global systems of patriarchy disadvantage women and privilege men (Boko 2005; Mate 2011; Tsikata, D. and J Kerr. 2000).

4.3 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (GT) is an approach for developing theory that is "grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Strauss & Corbin 217-285). Glaser and Strauss (1967) as progenitors of the method, diverted from popular social-science research trends at the time, to suggest that results could move beyond positivist claims (Bryant, et al. 2007; Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, GT supports empirical observations derived from intensive interviews, documents, observations and surveys in qualitative research and as secondary analysis of quantitative data (Bryant, et al. 2007; Charmaz 2006; Creswell 1998). Using various stages of coding, GT relies on emergent data from participant discourse and the construction of categories to make thematic and conceptual links. GT can be used to generate new theories or generate analytical models,

measure data against preexisting theoretical claims for further investigation, or to examine causal relationships to analyze social phenomena (Bryant, et al. 2007; Charmaz, 2006). Yet what grounded theory is not a method dependent on prevailing theoretical claims to build upon. Glaser and Strauss' departure from traditional research methods of the era in fact, were prompted by two main concerns: (1) the primacy accorded to verification of existing theories; and (2) theory generated by logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Glaser and Strauss 3), Bryant, et al. 2007; Charmaz 2006). In essence, these concerns parallel those of feminist researchers who regard positivism and objectivity as anchored to privileged knowledge validation, as well as historically determined and universalized by androcentric and Eurocentric/ Euro-American research.

This study, however, relies on a modified grounded theory approach, as I adhere to a preexisting feminist methodological framework, while concurrently following Gurd's (2008) four principle procedures of GT: (1) Iterative Data Collection, (2) Theoretical Sampling, (3) Constant Comparison, and (4) Explicit Coding and Theory Building. The adapted grounded theory approaches used for this project are complimentary to the study's gender-sensitive research design—and the feminist qualitative approaches that shaped the guiding theoretical perspectives of the study. When Harding outlined the three types of feminist epistemologies: (1) Feminist Standpoint, (2) Feminist Empiricism and (3) Postmodern Epistemologies (Harding 1987; Wuest 1995), her aim was to diminish bias, highlight the lived experiences of women through their own voices, and examine patriarchy as an ever changing, non-static entity. Scholars (Wuest 1995; Keddy 1996; Kushner et al., 2003; Allen 2010) who share the perspective that grounded theory is complimentary to feminist qualitative research reference the preeminence of lived experience as a source of knowledge as a means of enhancing deductive evidence (Wuest

1995). Therefore, the study draws from African feminist and ecological feminist theories for the researcher to explicate meaning from participant discourse, and to analyze the social processes which have altered *Vhomakhadzi* traditional roles and way of life. The research in this sense is subjective, giving epistemic privilege to *Vhomakhadzi*, and placing women at the center of analysis to deepen the conversation about African gender and feminist theories through argument and debate. The challenge that remains is to be reflexive and cognizant of one's empirical interpretation and the ensuing implications.

4.4 Data Analysis and Procedures

In the analytic process, grounded theory relies on focused attention on the data. For this project, qualitative coding alone is not analysis. Rather the researcher reviews repeatedly the data to glean emerging conceptual categories for further examination; described as *conceptual elements of theory*, or to construct an analytical model (Glaser and Strauss 36). Grounded theory-coding comprises, "two main phases: 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (Charmaz 46-47). The approach for this project deviates from surface qualitative coding, going deeper to unearth the meaning of perspectives and language. A native speaker would undoubtedly have an advantage, yet participant observation aided in this process by supporting an added layer of understanding to interpret intonation and repeated phrasing and word choice. Living in the home of a *makhadzi* also provided the opportunity for greater clarification and discussion of data and guidance for rephrasing of questions. Lastly, listening to recorded interviews repeatedly, especially listening and remembering the expression of emotion of either frustration, sadness or humor, categorically assisted in the process of interpretation as well

(Pichler 2008; Charmaz 2006).

Throughout the two phases of coding and constructing categories, analysis was facilitated by extended research notes and the construction of research memos (Charmaz 2006). Memos and extended notes allowed the researcher to develop ideas for analysis, data comparison, and further development of conceptual categories (Charmaz 2006). The combined effort of coding data, devising conceptual categories, and writing research memos helps the researcher make sense of empirical observations. From the data the researcher may notice patterns and explore analytical hunches to make meaning out of the experiences of participants and the discourse from interviews (see Figure 3).

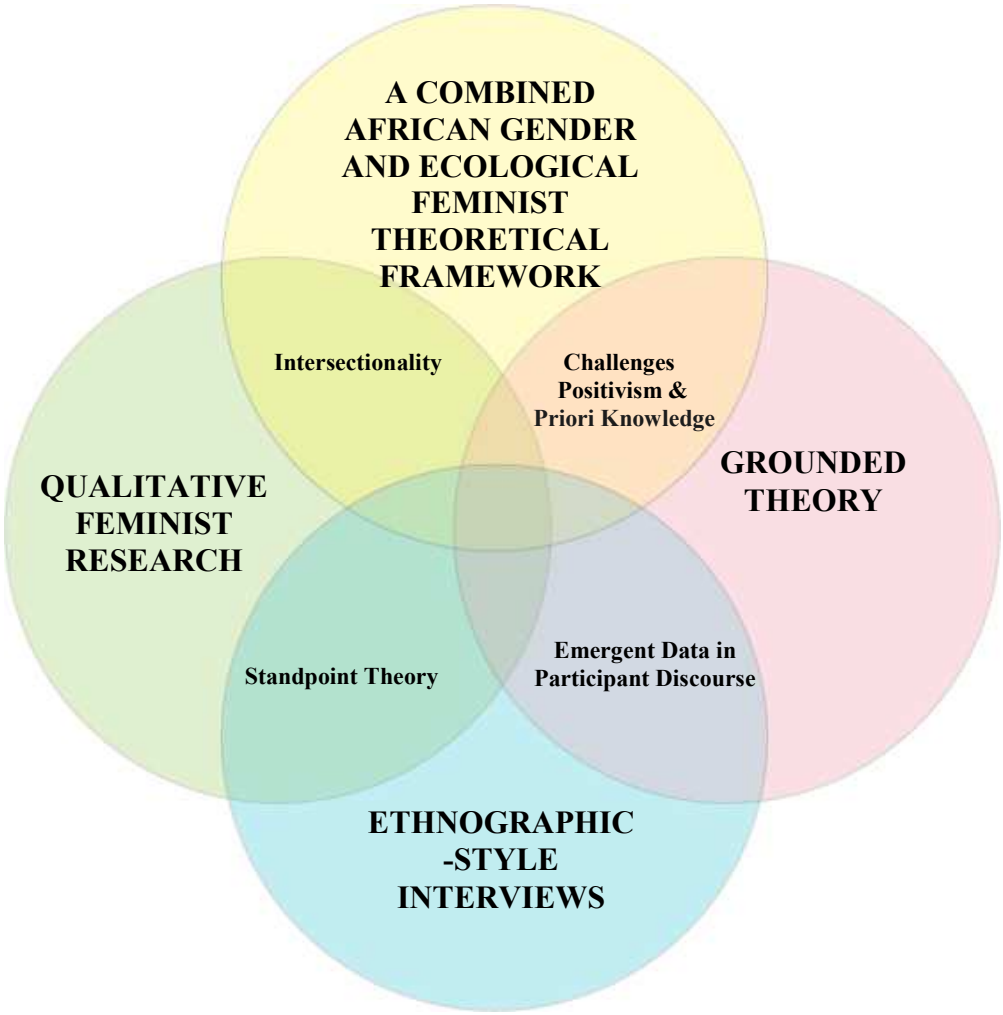


Figure 3: Diagram: This figure represents the study's methodology and its complimentary intersections.

4.5 Data Collection

Supplemented by multiple sources of data from three data collection trips to South Africa— between 2012 and 2016, this is an empirical study of the environmentalism and cultural biodiversity preservation efforts of *Vhomakhadzi* who are members of the community-based organization Dzomo La Mupo. Through ethnographic-style interviews, participant observations, and archival research, the study investigates the historical and present-day land legacies and gender politics that have contributed to the erosion of cultural biodiversity, as well as Dzomo La

Mupo's subsequent preservation efforts.

The research site and study population is located in the former apartheid homeland of Venda—five hours north of the capital city of Pretoria and near the South African and Zimbabwe border. Venda and its various districts are located in what was once the Northern Transvaal, later renamed Limpopo Province, post-apartheid. Within present-day Limpopo Province, this study is located in the Vhembe District Municipality, which encompasses all of the former Venda communities and still reflects the culture and linguistics of Vhavenda people, including the Indigenous *Vhangona/Vhongwaniwapo* people (SAHRA Application 2012). The research examines the overall environmentalism of *Vhomakhadzi* in this municipality, also focusing on their efforts to protect three of over 54 identified sacred sites: (1) *Zwifho zwa Vhutanda*, (2) *Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu, La Nwadzongolo*, and (3) *Zwifho zwa Thathe.*

The Vhembe District Municipality in Venda, like many districts in the former apartheid homelands, contends with high rates of poverty and unemployment and again little access to quality, arable land. And Although Vhembe, has a better infrastructure than most former homeland districts, many village and township residents do not have indoor plumbing or electricity. So while residents in the townships have access to water taps on their property, which are provided by the Municipality, those who live in the villages that are governed by *Vhamusanda* or chiefs often times only have access to communal water pumps. As for those who are privileged enough to have electricity, many still rely largely on firewood for cooking outdoors (Tshiguvho 2008). With this said, there are also wealthy pockets of communities with sizable homes that exist, but are not representative of the average Vhavenda residence.

My lodging for the first month initially began at a lodge in Thohoyandou—the former

capital of Venda. Mr. Ramunenyiwa, the owner of the lodge, a Balemba[28] gentleman, explained that the building was once the private residence of government officials during the homeland's nominal independence. During my initial time in Venda, I walked from the lodge to the University for research, spending afternoons writing notes and charting out the week's objectives in the small dining hall of the lodge, in view of a family of Vervet monkeys that rambunctiously passed through the backyard and on the tin roof covering most days.

The previous data collection trips to the region I relied on human rights lawyers, professors, and Vhavenda residents either familiar with the specifics of Dzomo La Mupo's activism, the Phiphidi waterfall case and sacred site preservation efforts, or merely Vhavenda culture. Nevertheless, I had not yet gained access to the inner circle of the Dzomo La Mupo community based organization. Any resistance I met was in large part due to the controversial nature of land politics in South Africa. In fact, according to Tshiguvho (2008), "During colonial times, Venda people feared that data collected by White [Western] researchers could be used to disadvantage them. My informants claim that such has been the case with regard to land dispositions that occurred during the apartheid era. According to them, their lands were taken from them after White agents learned more about these lands from the people themselves" (Tshiguvho 48). Yet upon returning on this last data collection trip, organizational changes within Dzomo La Mupo and their international partnerships— allowed me to negotiate entry with director, Mphatheleni Makaulule (Mpthathe), to observe their regional environmentalism, the threats they face, and the cultural factors that shape their preservation efforts in the Municipality. Ultimately, Makaulule and her husband Mr. Mashudu Rubson Dima (AKA "Doctor" Dima) were key informants in the field along with David Mulaudzi a resident of the

[28] The Balemba or Lemba people, known as the Black Jews of Southern Africa have shared genealogy and DNA with Jewish populations and likewise retain practices influenced by Judaism.

village of Tshakhuma, and Khathutshelo Mphidi who at the time of the study worked in the special collections unit at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) in Thohoyandou.

While nurturing my budding connections with Dzomo La Mupo, initially over e-mail and on the phone, I also spent time driving to various sites with David Mulaudzi. In addition to visiting various dams and reservoirs, such as the Vondo Dam and The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry—and driving through many of the region's commercial farms, such as Levubu Farms— David and I spent part of my first week in Venda in the village of Tshakhuma. In Tshakhuma we spoke to scholars off the record about Vhavenda culture, and talked to local actors from the soapie[29], *Muvhango*— and the first Vhavenda feature-length film, *Elelwani,* many of whom live there in David's community. In addition to compensating David for his time and gas (or petrol as they say) I also purchased lunches for David and myself, and we therefore spent time at grocery stores, mostly the local Spar, Shoprite, and even the Nandos and Galitos fast food restaurants. We also occasionally ventured to the impressive fruit stands at the roadside Tshakhuma Fruit Market where several times David facilitated my purchase of papayas, mangos, bananas and oranges. My drives with David, a very affable and well-connected man, afforded me the opportunity to learn important Luvenda greetings and phrases, hear many stories about Vhavenda people, and oral history— and become familiar with the local geography and observe the infrastructure of various towns and villages.

My first in-person contact with Mphatheleni Makaulule, director of Dzomo La Mupo was during a five-hour meeting at her home with David, where I interviewed her husband and her in the township of Vuwani. Interviews were proceeded by a walking tour of the township and neighboring village to see the deforestation, dried up rivers, and pollution. It seemed that

[29] Soapies are the South African equivalent to Soap Opera's in the United States or Telenovelas in Latin America.

Makaulule and I had an immediate connection and shortly after meeting her, she and I built enough rapport that I was invited much of the first month to spend nights in their home in a guest room in the Vuwani Township/Village where the majority of my interviews and research took place. I soon found myself trekking from the lodge with an overnight bag to the taxi rink in Thohoyandou, to take the 30-45-minute Kombi[30] ride to Vuwani— where I then walked to her family's residence to spend the night which often led to two or three nights at a time. Thereafter, I would return to my lodge to get clean clothes or to get alone time to focus on my research. I made a good enough impression on Makaulule's family— her husband, teenage son and two-year old son, that we negotiated that I could spend an additional month at her home, followed by archival research in Pretoria, yet with an open invitation to return if needed.

4.6 Participants

Vhomakhadzi (recognized as the paternal aunt as well as an ancestral role) are the focus of this study, principally those who participate in the community based organization Dzomo La Mupo (DLM), again formed in 2008, by Mphatheleni Makaulule. These women work to preserve cultural biodiversity by restoring indigenous agricultural techniques through the implementation of agro-ecology strategies, by empowering household farmers, and sometimes through protests and litigation to protect land. DLM also works towards alleviating the massive destruction of indigenous forests, rivers, and wetlands in Vhembe. Their community work stems from an ancient cultural role *Vhomakhadzi* inhabit as protectors of sacred forests, as mediators between the spirit and physical realms, and by presiding over ceremonies pertinent to agricultural cycles and harvesting of crops (Matshidze 2013). Other environmental threats identified by DLM include multinational development projects such as non-eco-tourism ventures and mining

[30] Kumbis are informal mini bus taxis in South Africa and other parts of Africa.

companies— namely the Australian based mining company, Coal of Africa (CoAL). Such development projects in Vhembe, particularly mining, deeply impact water resources and climate change and also fail to adhere to models of sustainable development. Interviewing this group of women was of particular interest because, amidst the cultural erosion that has diminished the role of *Vhomakhadzi*—or reduced them to the type of fictional portrayals seen on the soapie *Muvhango* (see more in chapter five)*, Vhomakhadzi* of DLM represent a contingent of Vhavenda people—the majority of whom are elders—who retain a deep understanding of their culture, and an acute awareness of the environmental, social, and political nuances which threaten their indigenous way of life. After previous data collection trips and snowball sampling of other *makhadzi* in the region, DLM was confirmed to be the most relevant group for interviews and focus groups. DLM comprises the informants because it is the most relevant, wide-spread, and to date, most effective community organizing in the district to tackle cultural biodiversity preservation by *Vhomakhadzi* themselves[31]. Further, Mpathe—a relatively well-known indigenous and environmental activist and *Phangami*[32]—represents in many ways a growing movement and a resurgence of pride after centuries of cultural denigration post colonialism and apartheid.

I conducted 32 semi-structured, qualitative interviews with *Vhomakhadzi* (paternal aunts/women), between the ages of 20 and 90. All *Vhomakhadzi* interviewed are participants of the Dzomo La Mupo (DLM) CBO, representing 11 different clans and 3,000 members and households that support DLM's mission. The interviews took place at participants' homes in the

[31] As of 2016, the Global Environment Facility, Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) in South Africa plans to work with pilot organizations that have used DLM as a model for aspects their work. Most are not formal organizations at this point.
[32] *Phangami* is a Luvenda word for one who initiates a journey, a leader who has a vision which others are able to follow.

villages and townships of Vuwani, Thohoyandou, Tshidzivhe, and Tshakuma. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Vuwani at Makaulule's home. I also hosted three focus groups with 7-8 women per group of which Makaulule translated the discussions. Makaulule recruited all participants for the focus groups based on the CBO's strategic outreach programs on seeds, sacred sites, and wetlands. Throughout the interviews and focus groups the conversation centered on questions derived from the four main research questions, and covered topics such as the role of a *makhadzi*, women's roles in the environment, sacred sites, eco-cultural mapping, environmental degradation, chiefs and their interaction with the government, and colonialism and the impact of missionaries on Vhavenda culture. In the case of the focus groups, questions included the basic questions devised from the main research questions— as well as questions pertaining to their specific outreach program—i.e. additional questions of sacred sites, seeds, and water or questions to identify women's and/or *Vhomakhadzi* cultural roles specific to these outreach activities.

4.7 Participant Observation

Living with Makaulule's family was ideal for participant observation, granting me time to learn about the family's day-to-day lives and activities. Makaulule herself is a *makhadzi*; in addition to her community activism through DLM, Makaulule and her husband are Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) experts and traditional healers, as well as wilderness retreat leaders. They both appear in the media regularly, and Dima served as a cultural consultant for the first large-scale Venda film mentioned earlier, *Elelwani*— directed by Ntshavheni wa Luruli, released in 2012. Venda has the most college-educated population among the former homelands. Makaulule has a B.A. degree in Education from UNIVEN and her family represents the average socio-economic status of most village/ township residents; therefore, I was able to observe

average Vhavenda family gatherings, cooking, TV watching, parties, interaction with neighbors, including inter-ethnic perceptions of Tsonga[33] people in the township. I was also attentive to community policing and reports of nearby mob justice, like the stoning of a thief who was a repeat offender in a nearby community. Moreover, I witnessed traditional healing sessions and consultations, and attended activities largely inaccessible by Westerners. I ran many errands with the family that varied from attending community organizing meetings, delivering packages to chief's and neighboring municipalities, to visiting both Mpathe and her husband's mothers— the latter of whom was over one-hundred-years old with a sharp mind and amazing recall about her experiences during the colonial era, and witnessing firsthand the role of *Vhomakhadzi* in safeguarding and maintaining wetlands.

For two months I also interacted with and on occasion babysat the Makaulule and Dima children. I once watched the kids at night, while Makaulule and her husband attended a funeral— as traditional Vhavenda funeral rituals are held at night and on the weekends typically. The children and I played games, watched movies, and I heated up food on a newly acquired propane stove in the back of the house. On another occasion I accompanied the family to a local clinic and helped keep the youngest son calm during a vaccination. I wrote my interactions and experiences down in a journal, and electronically—taking copious notes on the many stories they shared about Venda history, such as the sacred drum*, ngoma lungundu*[34], or historical conflicts with the *Masingo*, and the ceremony that Dima led for the reburial of the indigenous bones at that UNESCO World heritage site at Mapungubwe. They also shared their disputes with

[33] Tsonga people, are often referred to derogatorily as Shangaan(s). The incorporation of Tsonga residents within Vhavenda municipalities causes ongoing tension and protests in Vuwani and surrounding areas.
[34] These are oral history accounts of a sacred drum that warded off enemies, sometimes likened to or referred to as the arc of the covenant and thought to be brought to Venda by the Balemba people. Scholars (Kirkaldy 2005; Loubser 2008) reference the drums use by the Masingo *mahosi* to defeat his enemies.

assertions made by the noteworthy Vhavenda scholar Victor Ralushai.

In addition to observing the family, I also engaged in direct participant observation as a volunteer and research assistant for Makaulule and Dzomo La Mupo. In this role, I attended Dzomo La Mupo meetings, conducted in English and Luvenda/ Tshivenda, attended the Indigenous Knowledge System Interface Indaba Conference sponsored by UNIVEN, and co-wrote a grant proposal with organizational support from the Eco-Catalyst Foundation located in Virginia. This type of direct participation was an invaluable experience that allowed me to interact with *Vhomakhadzi*, *Vhamusanda*, and learn about the inner workings of their CBO.

All observations were open, except for the concealed observations at the Tshivashe Tea Plantation. Given the tensions around land disputes, I thought it best that I merely expressed an interest in touring the grounds as a tourist. At the tea plantation I arranged an extensive tour of the fields and plant facilities. My informal conversations with the plantation's field manager and plant staff and my observations of their activities, gave me insight into the worker's opinions of fragmented sacred sites on the property, as well as village gravesites also on the grounds

4.8 Archival Data

As outlined in the literature review, the research includes a wealth of studies, reports and legislation available on the Internet including publications from non-governmental agencies and conservationist organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and more. These reports provided information on current conservationist strategies and policies, as well as international laws that impact indigenous communities and cultural biodiversity—further, complete bills and land laws, including the South African Constitution, were accessible from the Internet.

Upon analyzing South Africa's Land Acts, and pertinent secondary data, I focus on areas of vulnerability for indigenous populations, women, and the environment including stipulations that may conflict with the goals of the democratic constitution, especially the equality clauses such as sections 9 (3) which specifies that the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth; and section 25(6) referencing people whose tenure of land is legally insecure as a result of past racial discriminatory laws or practices under apartheid (Constitution of The Republic of South Africa, 1996). Other important Internet research comprised documentaries and websites that showcased the environmentalist and land advocacy campaigns and activism on the ground in South Africa, including detailed media accounts of the environmental organizing and protests led by *Vhomakhadzi* and Dzomo La Mupo, CBO (See film and documentaries in bibliography).

Data retrieved from the field, as mentioned in chapter two, consist of sources from the libraries and special collection units of the Universities of Venda, South Africa, and Pretoria. Records included the Berlin Mission Society records, ethnographic data derived from the Van Warmelo collection, and the Hugh A. Stayt ethnographic series on *the Bavenda,* the prolific research of Vhavenda scholar Victor Ralushai —as well as a plethora of relevant secondary academic sources and periodicals. From the University of Venda I also relied upon student dissertations that provided invaluable science and conservation research from Vhavenda students and scholars. Other key documents and materials obtained directly from informants in the field in the townships and villages pertain to original court affidavits and legal letters, clan letters of appeal, protected area applications submitted to the South African Heritage Resources Agency

(SAHRA), Dzomo La Mupo meetings, A Global Positioning Systems (GPS) report detailing the locations of fragmented remains of sacred areas, videos of public participation meetings to discuss proposed mining projects, videos of eco-cultural mapping workshops, and original eco-cultural maps (community maps) constructed by *Vhomakhadi* themselves. All materials from the field are ethnographic data analyzed, and used to validate participant discourse.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS I

Utilizing a qualitative feminist and grounded theory-methodological approach, the following data analysis and results presented in chapters five, six, and seven utilize data from periodicals, interviews, participant observation, and primary sources from the field. In particular, an examination of Dzomo La Mupo (DLM)'s community-based organizing of *Vhomakhadzi* revealed Indigenous/*Vhangona* women's perspectives about gender, culture, land, and the environment and their political correlations and implications. The data analysis and results chapters are presented and organized according to the research questions and themes that emerged from participant discourse and initial coding. Analysis and explication of the discourse is rooted in the combined African gender and ecological feminist theoretical framework of the study and the conceptual categories devised and articulated from later phases of coding, research memos, and extended notes. Moreover, analysis is interspersed throughout the data presentation for a comprehensive exposition of information and interpretive meaning followed by a final synthesis of results, supplementary historical context, refined themes, and interpretation.

Following basic information about the community-based organization DLM, and its members and staff, this specific chapter begins by investigating the first two research questions: (1) How do colonial and apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies manifest in South Africa's land act legacies? (2) What impact has South Africa's land acts, in conjunction with traditional leadership, had on cultural biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality?

5.1 Makhadzi Participants

Makhadzi, a term for the paternal aunt, is the eldest sister of the chief and would have first occupied the position of *khadzi* to the forerunner chief (Matshidze 2013). More than just a title or a name, Vhavenda[35] stress that *makhadzi* is an ancestral role that manifests in several ways. In a general sense, every woman is a *makhadzi* and is recognized and respected for her connection to the ancestors. Next there is a *makhadzi* that is involved with sacred site rituals and safeguarding spiritual matters to maintain order in the clan and a separate *makhadzi* who is installed with the chief and assists with royal leadership and customary governance. Traditionally, *Vhomakhadzi* who are involved with traditional governance, also learn from and communicate with the *makhadzi* of sacred sites. Despite these varying roles, this trifecta of positions usually command respect from the community and traditional leaders, and work in tandem with one another for the good of their clans. While I had important and insightful conversations with Vhavenda men, including chiefs*, Vhamusanda*, university employees, and other residents—still adhering to the methodology – all interviewees with the exception of Mr. Mashudu Rubson Dima's were comprised of *Vhomakhadzi*. Interviewees were assigned a pseudonym with the title of respect "Vho" to denote that the participant has children and/or is married; the pseudonyms were selected by DLM's director, Mphatheleni Makaulule and may omit "Vho" in the text if the names are longer. Again, "Vho" is also a prefix of the word *Vhomakahdzi* which is the plural form of *makhadzi*. Given the more conspicuous roles of Mr. Mashudu Rubson Dima and Mphatheleni Makaulule in the community, their actual names are used, as are the names of several staff members who have been featured in documentaries and

[35] Vhavenda refers to the people and Venda refers to the land.

those more publically integral to the organization. In the table of interview demographics, a proxy clan is assigned to each pseudonym for additional anonymity as requested by *Vhomakhadzi*. The names chosen represent the actual *Vhangona*/ Indigenous[36] clan membership and are included to demonstrate the representation within the organization.

Bearing in mind that I boarded with Dima and Makaulule during the majority of my fieldwork, interviews with the two of them were sometimes conducted jointly, while other conversations and interviews occurred separately. Moreover, the Dima and Makaulule discourse features more prominently within the commentary because I spent considerable with their family and sometimes among their extended relatives. Lastly, both husband and wife were present during other *makhadzi* interviews as they provided translation, and occasionally added cultural clarification. It appeared that private conversations with *Vhomakhadzi* are rare; however, my interviews may have been conducted in a community or family setting due to my status as a foreign-national. Therefore, the concept of an individual interview is loosely defined in the context of the culture and household/extended family configuration(s).

[36]The wording *Vhangona*/Indigenous, should be distinguished from the dominant *Masingo* whose historical origins reside outside of the region.

Table 1: Interviews by Pseudonym, Clan, and Research Site.

Pseudonym	Clan	Research Site
1) VhoDenga	Netshidzivhe	Tshivhase
2) VhoMutshekwa	Nevhutanda	Tshivhase
3) VhoAlillali	Netshidzivhe	Tshivhase
4) VhoTshinakaho	Nevhutanda	Tshivhase
5) VhoMunzhedzi	Ramunangi	Tshivhase
6) VhoTshavhungwa	Nevhutanda	Vuwani
7) VhoMudanalwo	NeKhwevha	Vuwani
8) VhoMakaulule	Rambuda	Vuwani
9) Mashudu Dima	Nemalale	Vuwani
10) VhoConnie	Nemalale	Vuwani
11) VhoNyadzanga	Ramunangi	Vuwani
12) VhoPhophi	Ramunangi	Vuwani
13) VhoMakwarela	NeKhwevha	Vuwani
14) VhoJoyce	Netshidzivhe	Vuwani
15) VhoNyadzawela	NeKhwevha	Vuwani
16) VhoTshisikhawe	Nemalale	Vuwani
17) VhoMukumela	NeKhwevha	Tshivhase
18) VhoMuofhe	Luvuvhu	Tshivhase
19) VhoAlidzuli	Luvuvhu	Thohoyandou
20) VhoNyawasedza	Kokwane	Vuwani
21) VhoMuyananlo	Nepile	Tshivhase
22) Mainganye	Magabweni	Tshivhase
23) VhoMarandela	Magabweni	Vuwani

Table 1 (cont'd)

Pseudonym	Clan	Research Site
24) VhoMasindi	Nevhutanda	Vuwani
25) VhoBele	Nevhutanda	Vuwani
26) VhoAvheani	Ramunangi	Tshakhuma
27) VhoLuvhani	Magabweni	Tshakhuma
28) VhoLimani	Ramunangi	Vuwani
29) VhoLuvhengo	Nevhutanda	Vuwani
30) VhoNyamuladelo	Nevhutanda	Vuwani
31) VhoMatodzi	Nepile	Vuwani
32) VhoLalumbe	Kokwane	Thohoyandou

5.2 Disenfranchisement of Vhomakhadzi: Land and Culture

In the post-apartheid era, women's land rights are compromised within the current land administration process. Citizens and land rights advocates criticize traditional leadership and court systems for being undemocratic as such leadership structures privilege men. Colonial and apartheid era practices established in the homelands still remain in current legislation, which shape land management and traditional leadership, greatly impacting women in the former homelands in rural areas. Current legislation such as the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act* (2004), the *Communal Rights Bill* (2004), the *Traditional Courts Bill* (2008), the *National House of Traditional Leaders Act of* (2009), and other laws have given traditional authorities unrestricted governance over land decisions, including the power to authorize national

and multinational development projects. Because women are considered minors in many rural areas of South Africa, these Land Acts have further alienated them within the traditional court system or village assemblies (Claassens and Cousins 2008). Fundamentally, apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies manifest in South Africa's land act legacies and are further managed by traditional male leadership (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of Land Acts, their provisions, and their impact

Land Act	Provision	Impact
Native Lands Act (1913)	Reduced the numbers of Black people on designated White land.	Forced removals of Black South Africans onto ethnic reserves or homelands then called Bantustans.
Natives Administration Act (1927)	Established the governing structures of the ethnic reserves.	Homelands developed a separate governing structure to be utilized and controlled by White settler colonialists through the chiefs in a system of indirect rule.
Bantu Trust and Land Act (1936)	Reorganized agricultural ownership to further dispossess Black people of their land-dwelling.	Ratified the separation of White and Black South African rural areas. Adversely impacted Black agricultural systems. Blocked access to arable land for farming and grazing, and Black farmers were evicted.
Bantu-Self Government Act (1959)	Implemented to change the homelands into independent states.	Receded parliamentary presence for those homelands within the apartheid era under the rationality of being self-governing states.
Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (TLGFA), (2004)	Recognized traditional communities and founded traditional councils. It also recognized traditional councils and implemented a legislative platform to support traditional leadership.	Extensive power given to traditional leaders. Reinforced colonial and apartheid era authority and gender ideologies and provided traditional leaders with far-reaching, and semi-autonomous control over residents in the homelands.
Communal Land Rights Act (CLRA), (2004)	Land reparation plan	Criticism centered on the lack of involvement of the Provincial legislatures in crafting the Act. Vulnerable tenure of land for residents in the former homelands especially women.

Table 2 (cont'd)

Land Act	Provision	Impact
Traditional Courts Bill (TCB), (2008)	Grants power to traditional leaders, namely chiefs and headmen to oversee and try cases and disputes.	Used apartheid boundaries to delineate traditional court jurisdictions. Unrestricted power to try civil arguments. Was overturned and reintroduced in 2016 with new checks and balances currently being debated.
Traditional Affairs Bill (TAB), (2013)	Consolidated traditional leadership laws into a single law and recognized Khoi-San traditional leaders and communities. Antecedent to the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act (TKLB)	Maintains the boundaries of the former homelands much like the *Framework Act* of 2003 which also disenfranchises populations through inexorable legal divisions.
Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act (2014)	Equitable land administration post-apartheid first passed in 1994. The 2014 Act reopened unsettled land cases and claims.	The Act was heavily protested and critics of the new laws argue it benefits traditional leaders and their development interests more than communities.
Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill (TKLB), (2015)	Integrates Khoi-San leadership into the governing assembly.	Provisions of TKLB allow government departments to offer traditional leaders administrative roles (clause 25) without clear oversight. Advocates also argue that TKLB relies on apartheid-era classifications and boundaries.
Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA), (2015)	Allows Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) to make land decisions based on spatial planning data. This framework law will be a model for the nine provinces to implement development plans.	Permits a small amount of land planning and land use powers, with supervision of the municipality in some circumstances. The concern is with the extension of powers to the traditional councils in which many of the quotas for female leadership and participation have not been met.

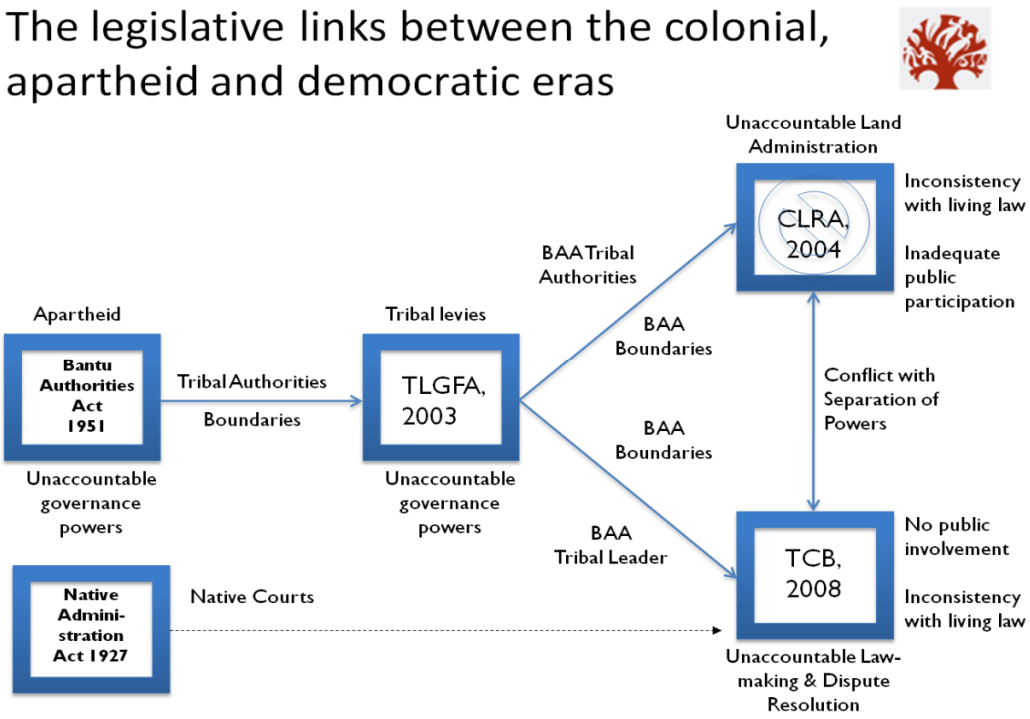


Figure 4: Diagram: This figure shows key links between pre and post-apartheid era laws
Source: Land and Accountability Research Centre (LARC)

Principal pieces of legislation that affect women's marginalization are exemplified by the disenfranchisement of *Vhomakhadzi* in Venda. The 2004 *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act* (TLGFA) reinforces colonial and apartheid era authority through provisions that provide far-reaching and semi-autonomous control over residents in the homelands (Claassens and Cousins 2008). The purported aim of TLGFA is to integrate traditional leadership in the post-apartheid democracy. Yet by excluding explicit protections against gender-based discrimination, the legislation perpetuates the same gender philosophies that prevented colonial and apartheid administrators from acknowledging the leadership roles of women. TLGFA, for example, omits the role of the *makhadzi,* who were once a central part of Venda leadership, which traditionally comprised the chief, the *makhadzi*, and the *khotsimunene,* the chief's brother or paternal uncle. By contrast, the Act disregards the role of the *makhadzi* and

the *khotsimunene* refashioning the role of chief almost like that of a Western king or lower level official who perhaps has a council of advisors instead. This is a glaring omission, as Matshidze (2013) contends that there are some accounts that *makhadzi* in certain situations plays a greater role than some men and "once enjoyed equal privilege with her male counterparts…even above the role of the *khotsimunene.*" Matshidze writes, "This is also suggested by Stayt (1931:196) when he writes that 'all vital matters connected to the state must be referred to her [the *makhadzi*]" (Matshidze 46).

As evidenced by present day legislation, structural inequalities persist from the traditional governance's complicity with colonial powers in omitting women from the upper echelons of power. This is a crucial point in understanding how colonialism and now contemporary politics, industrialization, and globalization have eroded the arguably matriarchal nuances of Vhavenda culture, visible through the decline of the once prominent role of *Vhomakhadzi*. Determining how *Vhomakhadzi* roles have changed, it was important to determine how Vhavenda people themselves interpret their strength in the past. The following interview statements and focus group data deconstruct the role of *makhadzi* traditionally, and her importance to Vhavenda society:

Dima: The mouth of *makhadzi* is important because she is the one who has to say the words. The knees of *makhadzi* is important because when she prays she kneel down. The heart of *makhadzi* is also important because she has to have a clean heart, a loving heart to say prayers to us, The appearance of *makhadzi*, the presence of *makhadzi* is a blessing. That's why even if he [her brother] has his own home, he will still need his sister to come there to play *makhadzi* role in the family. Marriage cannot happen, without *makhadzi*.

Makaulule: A chief cannot be a chief without a *makhadzi*. [If] you could be there last week – the king, all the chiefs of Venda were there – we

were installing another head chief; but including the king himself, there was a moment when he said, "It's not for me. This *makhadzi* is the responsible and everybody, government people, just sit down and let *makhadzi* to play a role.

Tshisikhawe: *Makhadzi* also, when you are sick – if I am sick they can take me to the hospital, to all the specialists. I cannot get healed, but when they call my *makhadzi* to come there, when my *makhadzi* just comes there, the present heals me; the word, the voice of *makhadzi*. *Makhadzi* can mention my totem,[37] and I got healed without using any medicine. We cannot bury a person. Traditionally, if we want to lay rest our beloved, take *makhadzi* there to do all the tasks of *makhadzi* to bury the person. You will continue life without any problem. But if you go around Venda and ask who didn't do traditional burial with *makhadzi*—they are going to traditional healers, the pastors at the church— they are having problems at home because they didn't involve *makhadzi*. Makhadzi is involved with marriage, when the baby is born, when we go to initiation schools,[38] when you grow up and go marriage, when you die, *makhadzi* is also there. How can we disconnect *makhadzi*?

Vhomakhadzi were indeed integral to all community life from birth to death and were once quite an influential staple to the chief's leadership. The role of *makhadzi* is crucial, and from initial discourse, it appears that even her human form was and is considered to be a wholesome vessel to impart ancestral wisdom. *Vhomakhadzi* are indistinguishably connected in this way to the sacred, or as Tshisikhawe relayed to me, "There is no sacred site without *makhadzi*." In addition, as Makaulule stated, "A chief cannot be a chief without a *makhadzi*." *Makhadzi* also previously played a fundamental role in *Vhangona* culture as a channel of sacred site rituals and by presiding over traditions deeply intertwined with ancestors, community and family life, traditional healing, and eco-cultural wisdom. Therefore, the role of *makhadzi* was once a

[37] Totems are spirit animals associated with each clan.
[38] Initiation schools refer to cultural meetings during puberty where adolescent boys and girls separately learn about responsibilities and roles of men and women in Vhavenda society.

foundational aspect of Venda society and its governance. However, these once key roles within the authentic traditional governing structure of Venda are not officially reflected within present-day statutes. For some *Vhomakhadzi,* due to present-day legislation, democracy is not equated with freedom, even in the post-apartheid era:

Tshisikhawe: A woman is respected at the chief's palace [*Musanda*], when you are staying together as women alone or as a group of women. But only if you are at the clan meeting or chief meeting, or clan members; not with other people outside the clan because they see the role of *makhadzi*, *makhadzi* of the clan. Because the clan naturally respects the role of *makhadzi*—but not at the government meeting, because it is a new governing system. But if we are on our own as a clan they will listen.

Nyadzanga: Apartheid has contributed a lot because apartheid has destroyed things. The non-indigenous, they go well with the White people. And they listened to what White people wanted to do. And these chiefs of the non-indigenous listened to the White people. Freedom also- this democracy also interfered.

Ross: Because it changed traditional ways?

Nyadzanga: The democracy and this freedom has interfered a lot. Because now you have your own rights. You no longer can even discipline your child in your home.

The perception that democracy and freedom has interfered with tradition may be surprising given apartheid's violent and degrading history. These are statements are samples of the full data set, which convey that the local perspective among many *Vhomakhadzi* is that with the advent of democracy, came a further weakening of their customary roles through the entrenchment of colonial and apartheid era legal structures; This was also confirmed by all of my interviewees. *Vhomakhadzi* associated with DLM perceive democracy as an intrusive element that disrupts culture and home life. This notion has more significance when considering that it

was *Vhomakhadzi* who traditionally arbitrated disputes, negotiated marriages, deliberated the placement of new chiefs, and in general had great influence in the clan, family, home, and civilization. Matshidze's (2013) *makhadzi* informants corroborate that the traditional leadership legislation post-apartheid has undermined *makhadzi* authority. Matshidze's informant states, "the government has stripped us of all powers. Firstly, it was the Traditional Leaders Act, the *makhadzi* were not written anywhere but we are the custodians of traditional leadership. We are in possession of the sacred artefacts. Now President Jacob Zuma has come up with the *Traditional Court Bill"*[39](Matshidze 203).

Further, post-apartheid legislation has strengthened the role of traditional male leaders, *makgoshi*, who may or may not have a vested interest in community well-being and may be controlled by outside influences such as politicians and multinational companies. Makaulule's recollection of the meeting where the king showed deference to *Vhomakhadzi* is noteworthy. The king's elevation of *Vhomakhadzi* above himself in that moment was an important public acknowledgement of the role of *makhadzi*. It was significant and pleasing to Makaulule to see the government officials and attendees concede to tradition. Makaulule's commentary likewise coincides with the distinction Tshisikhawe observes when comparing government meetings with clan or village assemblies. Tshisikhawe suggests that the presence of government officials changes the scope of a meeting and how it proceeds. Both women's statements indicate that the presence of the government officials modifies how Vhavenda traditional leaders proceed with local affairs. Disenfranchisement of *Vhomakhadzi* will be explored more extensively in the context of African gender theories and analysis in section 5.5.

Regarding the land debate, the Indigenous *Vhangona* claim authentic and exclusive rights

[39] The Traditional Courts Bill was overturned in 2014 and was introduced in parliament in 2016 (See Table 5.2).

to sacred sites, yet there are many cultures and corporate and political actors in the region who compete for resources and land. The next section explores the impact South Africa's land acts, in conjunction with traditional leadership, have had on cultural biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality.

5.3 The Politics of Cultural Biodiversity

The founding clans of the community based organization (CBO) Dzomo La Mupo (DLM) in Venda include: *Ramunangi, Nevhutanda, Netshitotsheni, Netshidzivhe, Netshivhale, Nekhwevha, Nemavhola*, and *Netshitungulu.*[40] These clans are custodians of sacred sites in the Vhembe District Municipality and through DLM have formed a network of protection for the sites and their surrounding indigenous forests and larger landscapes. DLM's work is grounded in *Vhomakhadzi* cultural roles and rituals linked with agriculture, harvesting crops, and maintaining healthy ecosystems. Sacred sites all over the world are considered biodiversity hotspots and as cultural biodiversity research conveys, ecological knowledge and principles of stewardship co-evolved with language in many Indigenous cultures.

While in Vhembe, an informant gave me access to DLM's copies of their official heritage nomination profiles and applications submitted to the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA). Each application was prepared in 2012 by DLM's legal representation at the time (Chennells Albertyn, Attorney, Notaries, & Conveyancers) and submitted to SAHRA for consideration of Provincial Heritage Status. The three sites that DLM hoped to register for provisional protection were under consideration for over three years. From *Vhomakhadzi* accounts, it appears that the applications are no longer being considered for Provincial Heritage Status – a full account and update will be detailed later in this chapter. The unpublished profiles,

[40] Most *Vhangona* clan names begin with "Ne" but are sometimes referred to by Luvenda speakers without this prefix, in which case the root name is capitalized.

however, provide invaluable information about why *Vhomakhadzi* regard sacred areas as important for the environment and the current threats that leave the sites susceptible. The three sites submitted for SAHRA's consideration included: *Zwifho zwa*[41] *Vhutanda, Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu, La Nwadzongolo,* and *Zwifho zwa Thathe.* Again, these are three sites of over 54 identified sacred areas. It should be noted that, the information on these sacred site profiles is given to researchers like myself – who come from Western cultures and institutions – with justifiable reluctance based on past exploitation and abuse. Nevertheless, information has been given sparingly to the international environmentalist community about sacred sites because it is a last recourse to procure funding to protect these natural environments and the *Vhangona* way of life.

Protecting sacred areas is a key element identified by *Vhomakhadzi* for addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. According to *Vhomakhadzi* interviewed to compile information for the SAHRA applications, sacred sites play a vital role in perpetuating energy flow and sustaining the health of their ecosystems by drawing rain (they also serve as important rainfall catchment areas for the region). The sites function as networks and represent varied aspects of different ecosystems. For example, sacred sites or *zwifho* can encircle bodies of water such as springs, waterfalls, ponds, lakes, and watershed forests or mountains and caves. Above all, they are connected to the landscape and indigenous forests, which they dwell in. As Dzomo La Mupo (DLM) director, Mphatheleni Makaulule explains, all sacred sites are also sacred forests. *Vhomakhadzi* and select others in their respective clans act as custodians of *zwifho* and manage the sites through intricate rituals. The rituals were not revealed, yet the use of tobacco, sacred Finger-millet drink, and ritual *Mpambo* are cultural elements used not necessarily inside the site.

[41] This is translation from Luvenda/Tshivenda, *zwifho zwa*, "sacred site of."

Each ritual and communication with the ancestors enhances the ecological integrity of the network of sacred sites, and the larger connected landscapes throughout their territory (*shango*, pl. *mashango*), (SAHRA application 2012, Lestrade 1930).

Damaging the sacred sites, according to *Vhomakhadzi,* will have dire consequences for the whole Earth community, including humans. They believe that there is a mutual understanding with other indigenous practitioners that if these biodiversity hotspots are eroded, ecological resilience will become unhinged (SAHRA application 2012). This point is also highlighted by claims that sacred areas contain many rare and endemic species of plants, ancient trees, animals, insects, and snakes that contribute to biological diversity. Hence, there is grave concern about exogenous threats that are destroying the remaining biodiversity in what are now increasingly fragmented areas.

In the SAHRA applications, fragmentation of sacred areas emerged as a cultural concern to *Vhomakhadzi* as well as conservationists. *Vhomakhadzi* reference the Tshivhase Tea Estate, established during apartheid in the 1980s, as one example of many plantations causing biodiversity loss in the region; owing to the fact that indigenous medicinal plants, wild greens and fruits, birds, and bee hives have become less prevalent in the area. The estate, which has enveloped the *Zwifho zwa Vhutanda* sacred site, has left small patches of indigenous forest, a fact that deeply disturbs *Vhomakhadzi* who explain that this disrupts even the air of the site. Rehabilitation of the area is a goal of *Vhomakhadzi* of DLM given that the area is under land claim. The hope is to reconnect the fragmented sites so that they may grow together again to restore the already weakened biodiversity—and so that the *Vhangona* clans can resume their rituals. Likewise, Tshiguvho (2008) recommends increasing sacred site biodiversity by enhancing the site's size and connectivity with other sacred spaces. This is what conservationists

and advocates for protected areas refer to as larger landscape approaches (Safety Net Report, 2008). This is achieved by improving the areas surrounding the sites through restoration of the montane forest area, which have been consumed by forest plantations.

Culturally, *Vhomakhadzi* regard the ecology of their sacred sites in a holistic and spiritual way. Described in horizontal and vertical dimensions, *Vhomakhadzi* and their clans view a sacred site and the spaces above and below as culturally and environmentally significant. Thus, *Vhomakhadzi* describe nature as converging with its surrounding areas high into the cosmos and deep into the earth's soil like an energetic force field. Consequently, even minerals and metals in the subsoil are essential (SAHRA application 2012). Removing such minerals through the extraction of gold or coal through mining is infringing on indigenous laws of origin that determine what are sound practices (SAHRA application 2012). The very soil of the sacred site is revered in that this is where *Vhangona* bury their dead in the ancestral way. Therefore, they believe that digging into the soil and damaging the ecosystem impacts their ancestors and will bring misfortune due to the destruction of plants, animal life, and water.

The proceeding statements reveal the importance of *zwifho*, or sacred sites, and the significance of *Vhomakhadzi* roles to protect the sites and surrounding *shango*, territory/environment for the health and well-being of the community:

Ross: Why are *zwifho* important for the environment?

Connie: *Zwifho* was strengthened because of a special stone that is important for the environment. If that stone is removed the sacred site will be destroyed. Our ancestors say that that stone is connected to the heat. They are saying now that at *zwifho* there is coal that they need to dig up. *Zwifho* is the stronghold of all of creation. *Zwifho* is important to the whole Earth. If we do ritual,

the rain comes. This is the place where we pray, it is like our only church.[42]

Tshisikhawe: I want to explain to you about our *zwifho* indigenous forest. There is a White person there who has take away our place, it is now a farm. I want you to know the value of this forest cannot be lost.

Ross: Why did you join Dzomo La Mupo/ Why do you participate?

Muofhe: I am at Dzomo La Mupo because I am a *makhadzi*. I am the one who takes the snuff, tobacco, to talk with the ancestors this is the ways we do to connect with the ancestors. As I am a *makhadzi,* our duty is to connect with the ancestors with tobacco for *u phasa* [at the sacred site] and to pray and asking for the health of little children like this, this is the duty of *makhadzi*. If the child is sick, they will call *makhadzi*, "come to our home the child is sick, come to our home and heal the child." That knowledge – we have learn it from our ancestors, those who gave birth to our parents. To our fore, fore parents. When we are born, they teach us that this tree is for scared site. It is important. This tree is for what, and that tree is for what – its function. When we grow up, they teach us. They also teach us this tree from sacred site, you cannot take it as wood for fire at home. They teach us which tree to take as wood. But trees from sacred site you don't take as wood from sacred sites. They even teach us the names of trees which cannot be used for wood. If you take the trees, if you fetch woods from sacred site, they will change to become snakes. We have been taught by the *makhadzi* of the past and more *makhadzi* of the past and they teach the next generation until they teach us. When young girls go to fetch wood from the forest, when coming back with a bundle of wood, the *makhadzi* will go and look and untie the bundle and will say no this one is not for wood…this one is for wood. This is how even little girls learn.

Ross: Why is it important to protect the land?

Mukumela: It is important for us to protect *mupo*, because Dzomo La Mupo [colloquial meaning here: Voice of the Earth] is holding us. It is important because Dzomo La Mupo is holding us, taking care of us. And we don't have to forsake Dzomo La Mupo. If we throw it away, there will no longer be health because it also assists us in our happiness and health.

[42] Although true of all sacred sites, she is specifically referring to *Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu, La Nwadzongolo.*

Vhomakhadzi participation in DLM is how many women maintain their vital role in connection to sacred sites, or *zwifho,* and ensure that they are protecting the sites, their customs, and their communities. The following data relates to *Vhomakhadzi* and DLM's efforts to protect the three sites (of approximately 54 identified) outlined in the SAHRA heritage nomination profiles, again those include: (1) The Phiphidi Waterfall, locally known as *Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu, La Nwadzongolo*, (2) *Zwifho zwa Vhutanda,* and (3) *Zwifho zwa Thathe*. The data retrieved from the field includes DLM external and internal legal correspondences, clan letters of appeal, DLM meeting minutes, the researcher's analysis of excerpts of DLM's legal correspondences—referencing the litigation and case to protect the Phiphidi Waterfall—and participant discourse. Efforts to protect the sacred Phiphidi waterfall by DLM have received significant media attention in recent years. There has been an ongoing sporadic effort by the Indigenous *Vhangona* to reclaim this area since the waterfall was usurped as a tourist venture in the 1980s by the apartheid government. Following apartheid, local traditional leaders have continued to support development of the site allowing the desecration of the most sanctified areas above and below the falls.

5.4 The Phiphidi Waterfall Court Case

In 2007 the local headman Jerry Tshivhase sanctioned a new and expansive development project. The Tshivhase Development Foundation Trust (TDFT) was then cleared to start building the Phiphidi tourism development right above the falls. Soon after, The *Ramunangi* (*Madau*) clan of the *Vhangona* people, who have traditionally been entrusted with the protection of Phiphidi Waterfall, submitted letters of discontent and formal petitions against this site beginning

in 2007 at the first signs of construction.[43] The construction brought unwanted attention, traffic, and trash to the holy area and contributed to the destruction of the overall ecosystem. Phiphidi supports hundreds of plant and animal life; 30 percent of Africa's tree species grow in the area and 60 percent of South Africa's birdlife; 40 percent of its mammals and 30 percent of its reptiles live in the surrounding region.[44]

The director of TDFT and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) millionaire Mashudu Tshivhase[45] is related to the former Venda King at that time, Kennedy Thivhase. Black Economic Empowerment, post-apartheid legislation intended to redress the issues of social stratification and oppression in South Africa, is controversial as critics question if it continues to foster class disparities (Chennells, Roger. Skype Interview. 23 April 2012). While the king claimed to know nothing about the *Ramunangi* petitions, the disregard of the *Ramunangi's* pleas or *Vhomakhadzi* influence demonstrates the shift in traditional roles that now favor lucrative development plans. The *Ramunangi* at that time sought the help of human rights lawyer Roger Chennells. Chennells, who worked on the case from 2007-2009, before handing it over to his partner Johan Van Der Merwe (Chennells, Roger. Skype Interview. 23 April 2012). On the issue of TDFT he states, "The Tshivhase trust is a modern vehicle for the benefit of the king and his tribe. On the one hand, women are venerated spiritually, but in the power and political games of the chiefs, women are all but invisible" (Chennells, Roger. Skype Interview. 23 April 2012).

As DLM's legal counsel prepared for trial, they sent an internal briefing report, "Ramunangi Situation Report," e-mailed on April 6th, 2009 to *Ramunangi* supporters and DLM

[43] See "Ramunangi Claim of Rights" *Roger Chennells and Ramunangi Tribal Leaders*. November 15, 2008. https://www.sacredland.org/media/Ramunangi-Claim-of-Rights_15Nov08.pdf
[44] See mailguardian.org.
[45] See "Royal Battle Set for Court" City Press and News24. July 4, 2010. http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Royal-battle-set-for-court-20150430.

staff. The report, as ethnographic data was analyzed in the field. The report reveals the obstacles DLM faced as an organization and as Indigenous and ethnic minorities. It explains that the sacred site and surrounding land in question is owned communally under a tribal trust land-form, which permits the chief ostensible ownership of the land on behalf of his people. Yet it was surmised by local people that the chief at the time allegedly managed the land as a private development for personal gain.

The briefing describes how local government agencies, such as the Limpopo Heritage Resources Agency (LIHRA), established to help people like the *Ramunangi*, are short-staffed and underfunded. The statement conveys that communication with LIHRA's CEO at that time, explains that their agency does not have power over a landowner and therefore only work with consensus based decisions. In other words, they are not equipped to deal with the legal, political, and cultural complexities of South African land administration to provide useful support for protecting the heritage of ethnic minorities among the more dominant ethnic groups in Venda. Additionally, a noticeable revelation from the report uncovers that further communication with various government departments and agencies denoted a reticence to challenge the power of the chiefs—particularly given the forthcoming elections that year. Ultimately, in the report, DLM's former legal team likens the process of protecting the sacred site to a land-claim, indicative of the similarly complicated political bureaucracy.

This briefing was the antecedent to formal attempts by DLM to register Phiphidi and the two other sacred sites as culturally protected areas through Provincial Heritage Status. Without a known precedent at that point for registering sacred sites as culturally protected areas in Limpopo, the expressed danger was that it would be classified as a third degree heritage site—in which case the three sites in question would only achieve local importance, thus subject to

local level government. The apprehension was that this level of protection would still leave them vulnerable to the governance of the Thohoyandou Municipality and chief. Provincial Heritage Status by contrast would secure stronger protections. The 2009 report reveals that at that time, both LIHRA and the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) had become aware of the *Ramunangi*—and subsequent communication with both agencies showed that they were "serious about wanting to protect their site." Therefore, based on this briefing, DLM and *Vhomakadzi*, in addition to taking legal action to protect the Phiphidi waterfall, also began preparation to apply formally through SAHRA for Provincial heritage status, to register: (1) The Phiphidi Waterfall (locally known as *Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu*, *La Nwadzongolo*), (2) *Zwifho zwa Vhutanda,* and (3) *Zwifho zwa Thathe,* as culturally protected areas. DLM thus began interaction with SAHR, which included site visits and meetings by their administrators.

In the interim, DLM continued with preparation for trial. Their lawyer, Roger Chennells, worked directly with *Vhomakhadzi* who he says, "provided the primary information in our case concerning the heritage and cultural rights of the *Ramunangi* to their sacred site" (Chennells, Roger. Skype Interview. 23 April 2012). Chennells also discovered that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) used to approve the project was flawed making the development project non-compliant. Despite this finding, the development project continued causing DLM to continue their petition: "DLM then extended their petitioning to government departments and the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religion and Linguistic Minorities" (Pinnock).

Regardless of *Ramungani* pleas, the traditional leaders continued to disregard their culture and indigenous land rights. On July 20-21, 2010, Mr. Johannes Ramutangwa and Mrs. Tshavhungwe Nemarude presented an open letter written by the *Ramunangi* for the Portfolio

Committee on Land Reform and Rural Development at the Parliamentary Hearings to the Repeal of the Black Authorities Act.[46] The letter, shared with me in the field, describes *Ramunangi* disagreements with Headman Jerry Tshivhase dating back to 2001 when they claim that the site was converted into a picnic place from which the headman pocketed the entrance fees. They state that the *Ramunangi* were not consulted in this decision and when they tried to enter the site to perform their rituals, the security guards demanded entrance fees from them as well. They performed their rituals despite these obstructions, and later complained to Headman Jerry Tshivhase, who claimed that the waterfall area belonged to Tshivhase, not the *Ramunangi*. The *Ramunangi* went through many people, even sending letters to king Kennedy Tshivhase without success— eventually appealing to government departments, including the Department of Land and Traditional Affairs, but no one would assist them at that time.

The open letter also details the timeline of development of the waterfall zone over the years and how in 2010, bulldozers began to dig up the sacred site. Since this destruction, the *Ramunangi* feel that many people in the clan have suffered illnesses as a result of angering their ancestors. What is especially poignant about the letter is that they describe how they do not want authority over the territory; they simply want their customs respected and honored so that they may continue their rituals. Finally, the letter details why the *Ramunangi* support the repeal of the Act stating, "The Black Authorities Act created tribal authorities that gave all powers to the chiefs. It disregarded individuals, families, and clans living in the same area and having particular rights over the same land, like the Ramunangi Clan" (*Ramunangi* open letter). *Vhomakhadzi* of DLM, with the support of various clans, continued to protest this development even through the Phiphidi Waterfall litigation. *Vhomakhadzi* interviewed reflect on their

[46] This legislation was formerly called the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951.

feelings about the litigation in relationship to the subversion of their traditional roles:

Ross: Are you familiar with the Phiphidi Case?

Mukumela: Yes, we used to go there. We were going there to Phiphidi, but those people were carrying sticks even wanting to kill us during the court case. We went there at Phiphidi during these problems— with the *Ramunangi*. They even carried the big sticks with big blocks wanting to kill us telling us not to disturb. The *Ramunangi* said we are the custodians of this place and we have to do rituals there. And they [the workers] said no, we do not want anyone here and threatened us with sticks. They said go away, go away don't disturb us. We are working here. These are the workers who are busy working inside there.

Ross: Have you seen things change a lot with the role of *makhadzi* from when you were a young woman to now?

Mukumela: *Makhadzi* is not respected. It's never respected. In the past when we were growing, *makhadzi* was seriously respected, but nowadays because they [chiefs] are looking for money it is not respected at all.

Mukumela was present with the *Ramunangi* clan during the Phiphidi court case and witnessed their protests. Her accounts detail threats of violence and a lack of access to the site for *makhadzi* to perform their rituals. Media accounts differ in the depiction, yet Mukumela is resolute in her account that they were in danger during the trial. Mukumela believes that chiefs are disposing of culture, but she ranks White people higher in culpability above the role of the chief in denigrating culture:

Ross: What do you think is threatening *mupo*?

Mukumela: What is threatening or destroying *mupo* is the chiefs. Because the chiefs are the ones who are selling the land. And they are even sacred sites because they need money even more than

the land. When you see our sacred sites, the chiefs allow the people to go into the trees inside sacred sites and debush them. They don't even respect the sacred sites. The chiefs are disturbing us because when we see ourselves they take people to disturb our sacred sites for money. Like in our sacred site there. They have removed – we have planted trees, to rehabilitate the forest that has been destroyed. Now they have removed those trees to make a garden of cabbages. It's cabbages now. We don't know what to do because we tried to replant the trees again, but now they replanted the cabbages there we don't know what to do, which way to go. They even put a fence around the place where they put the cabbages and in the street.

Ross: Is it White people and Black people in South Africa who are not respecting *makhadzi*?

Mukumela: It's White people who do these things. And they give Black people [chiefs] money to follow what they want. We Black people, we have been conquered we can't do anything about our *zwifho*, our sacred sites. We have been defeated. We the Black people. We have to go forward for what we are doing and to go forward is to continue going to the place we do rituals. We must continue to do rituals.

Mukumela describes how the chiefs are destroying *mupo*, nature, and the Earth by selling the land, discussing their need for money more than land. Her narrative (depicting how the chiefs permit deforestation; their willingness to exchange money for sacred sites; and the disrespect they show by removing the trees that Dzomo La Mupo (DLM) planted to restore indigenous forests) insinuates that the chiefs have directly changed how land is used and who has access to it. Yet by highlighting the chief's need for money, her account substantiates explanations by other *makhadzi* who see the chief's necessity for wealth as different than the actions of White government officials and corporate representatives. Mukumela seemingly incorporates the chiefs and their desire for capital into to her explanation that Blacks have been defeated. She insinuates that the act of bribery itself, or the exploitation of development loopholes by the chiefs,

somehow coincides with their collective legal and ethical defeat (this differentiation will be explored later).

Ross: Going back to the Phiphidi Case. Who is responsible for allowing them to destroy or build there?

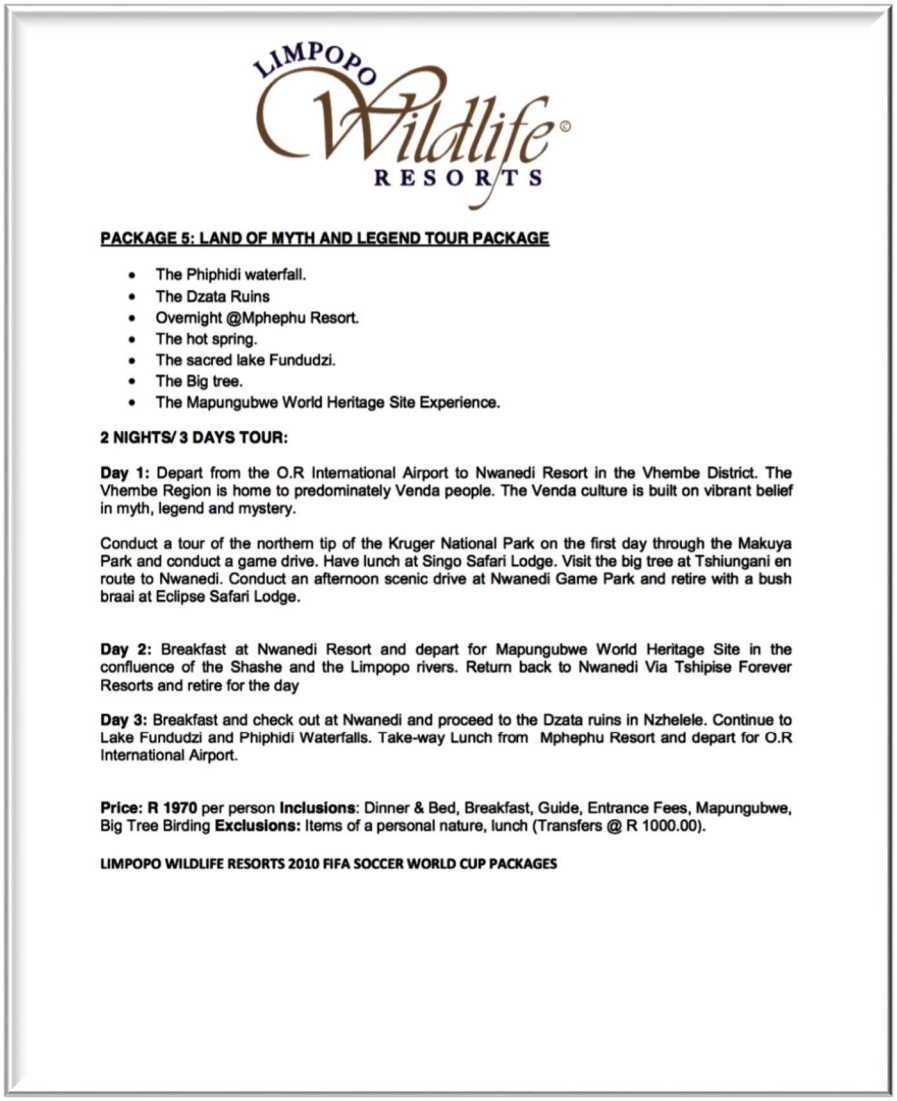
Mukumela: Is the chief, who is governing there at Phiphidi. Jerry Tshivashe. This is the headman of Phiphidi. For me it is the chief at that village. The chiefs don't respect the *makhadzi* because they are looking for money. Yes, people are saying that he is involved. It is so difficult; it is so sad for *Ramunangi* people what they have done. But we are the same, as *Ramunangi* because at our place they have planted the cabbages. That place where we have planted the trees.

Table 3: DLM's legal correspondence excerpts with traditional leaders preceding Phiphidi Waterfall court case

Source	Recipient(s)	Content
Chennells Albertyn Attorneys, Notaries & Conveyancers Letter October 28, 2008	The Director, South African Heritage Resources Agency	Request sent to terminate mining activity. Confirmation of road#: 3681, and destruction sacred site; replaced with stone quarry. Confirmation of application to Limpopo Road Agency for copy of EIA.
Chennells Albertyn Attorneys, Notaries & Conveyancers Letter June 15, 2009	The Honorable Chief J. Tshivhase, of Phiphidi	Asserts *Ramunangi* are custodians of the sacred site dating before recorded history. Details accounts of several years of appeals to the chief without acknowledgment. Describes how *Ramunangi* have been restricted by chief to perform rituals—describes desecration and pollution. References tourism-use beginning in the 1980s under the apartheid government
Chennells Albertyn Attorneys, Notaries & Conveyancers Letter January 22, 2010	The Member of Executive Council Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET) Cc: King Tshivhase of the Tshivhase Royal Family; The CEO the Limpopo Heritage Resource Agency (LIHRA); The Director General, Department of Arts and Culture; The Director General, The Department of Water and Environmental Affairs; The CEO, Commission for Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.	Follow-up correspondence from 11/17/08. Urgent request to meet regarding destruction at site. References meeting on 12/15/08 with LEDET and SAHRA reps regarding tourism development proposal w/out consulting the *Ramunangi* clan. References timeline of communication and assurances for clan and sacred site custodian protection by both agencies.

Table 3 (cont'd)

Source	Recipient(s)	Content
Chennells Albertyn Attorneys, Notaries & Conveyancers Letter February 1, 2010	The Honorable King, Royal Family of the Tshivhase The Royal House	Acknowledges *Ramunangi* clan is under tribal authority of the Tshivhase Royal Family; and Chief Vho-Mphathiseni Tshivhase. Reiterates *Ramunangi* complaints have not been heard. References a request made on 12/4 to meet at the Royal Palace at Luaname to discuss desecration at site. Describes Royal House chairman in attendance denying rights of land ownership or access. Meeting was concluded without Ramunangi clan responses
Hamman-Moosa Incorporated, Attorneys, Conveyancers, Administrators of estates July 2, 2010	Mr. H. Smith	DLM and the Ramunangi custodians applied for an urgent court interdict on June 25, 2010; Heard by the High Court on July 6th, 2010.
Chennells Albertyn Attorneys, Notaries & Conveyancers September 10th, 2012	The Director, South African Heritage Resources Agency	Heritage Site Nomination. Application for *Zwifho zwa Vhutanda, Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu, La Nwadzongolo, and Zwifho zwa Thathe*



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PACKAGE 5: LAND OF MYTH AND LEGEND TOUR PACKAGE

- The Phiphidi waterfall.
- The Dzata Ruins
- Overnight @Mphephu Resort.
- The hot spring.
- The sacred lake Fundudzi.
- The Big tree.
- The Mapungubwe World Heritage Site Experience.

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Day 1: Depart from the O.R International Airport to Nwanedi Resort in the Vhembe District. The Vhembe Region is home to predominately Venda people. The Venda culture is built on vibrant belief in myth, legend and mystery.

Conduct a tour of the northern tip of the Kruger National Park on the first day through the Makuya Park and conduct a game drive. Have lunch at Singo Safari Lodge. Visit the big tree at Tshiungani en route to Nwanedi. Conduct an afternoon scenic drive at Nwanedi Game Park and retire with a bush braai at Eclipse Safari Lodge.

Day 2: Breakfast at Nwanedi Resort and depart for Mapungubwe World Heritage Site in the confluence of the Shashe and the Limpopo rivers. Return back to Nwanedi Via Tshipise Forever Resorts and retire for the day

Day 3: Breakfast and check out at Nwanedi and proceed to the Dzata ruins in Nzhelele. Continue to Lake Fundudzi and Phiphidi Waterfalls. Take-way Lunch from Mphephu Resort and depart for O.R International Airport.

Price: R 1970 per person **Inclusions**: Dinner & Bed, Breakfast, Guide, Entrance Fees, Mapungubwe, Big Tree Birding **Exclusions:** Items of a personal nature, lunch (Transfers @ R 1000.00).

LIMPOPO WILDLIFE RESORTS 2010 FIFA SOCCER WORLD CUP PACKAGES

Figure 5: Advertisement: This figure is a resort ad promoting tours at Phiphidi Water Fall

After winning two court interdicts to stop building at the Phiphidi waterfall (see Table 3) the development project was halted. Yet tourists are still admitted on the grounds and admission fees are still collected for entrance to the falls and picnic areas that were installed. It is unknown what future plans the Headman has for this area but what is apparent is that despite litigation—and a court of law, which shows minimal support of *Ramunangi* claims—local leadership could still make development decisions without consulting the clan.

Despite the legal pretenses, DLM and their organizational partners continued to explore

applying for Provincial Heritage Status for the three sacred sites still in question. After a series of meetings and collaboration with local clans and custodians of the sites in consideration, three in-depth applications were submitted to SAHRA on September 10th, 2012 under Section 27 (3) of the SAHR ACT. The reports detail the sanctity and cultural and ecological significance of the sacred natural areas. Again, I retrieved copies of the unpublished reports in the field and reviewed them for the study.

5.5 Engagement with The South African Heritage Resources Agency

DLM meeting minutes dated September 11, 2014 describe a meeting and site visit by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) administrators.[47] SAHRA is "a statutory organisation established under the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999, as the national administrative body responsible for the protection of South Africa's cultural heritage."[48] According to the meeting notes and pictures, the staff visited all three sacred sites under consideration for Provincial Heritage Status. Curiously, the transcripts begin by alluding to strained relationships with the Agency because of previously alleged risks linked to the *Ramunangi* site and declaration proposals connected to the protection status of sacred Lake Fundudzi and unidentified interference. The notes also specify that DLM and the communities of the Vhembe District Municipality had yet to hear a response related to the status of their nominations submitted two years earlier stating, "we were waiting for respond [sic] since then, and there was also a threat that document will be in the hands of LIHRA [Limpopo Heritage Resources Agency] and that was a huge threat. This [SAHRA] meeting is a huge breakthrough." This statement echoes previous DLM briefings, and the fear that the sacred areas could be

[47] It is significant to note, that given South Africa's history, the administrators who visited were a man and woman of Black South African and Afrikaaner heritage respectively.
[48] See The South African Heritage Resources Agency official website, sahra.org.za/about-sahra/.

classified as a third degree heritage site leaving them subject to the same local level of protection as before such with agencies such as LIHRA. The fear is justifiable. As internal communication with DLM's legal counsel and other accounts revealed, appeals to various local government departments and agencies, such as the Limpopo Heritage Resources Agency (LIHRA), the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religion and Linguistic Minorities, and the Department of Land and Traditional Affairs, had all failed them. Increasingly, it would appear that national and local departments in South Africa are ineffective or burdened by the biases of a democracy that is intertwined with traditional leadership and the vestiges of colonial and apartheid legal platforms. As a result, ethnic minorities and indigenous communities, particularly women, are egregiously marginalized.

The meeting minutes for SAHRA's site visit illustrates the skepticism and fear that *Vhomakhadzi*, *Vhangona* chiefs, and other community members feel about relying on yet another government agency that could either fail them, prove ineffectual, or simply lack the cultural understanding and sensitivity to negotiate the process. Makaulule's notes state, "I detailed them about the sensitive reactions of the clans on the relationship with SAHRA and from that we agreed to come with an approach which will guide the meeting towards positive understanding with SAHRA and clans. We even formulate the questions on approaching them and also to be aware on how to respond if clans comes with questions that are sensitive" (Makaulule meeting minutes).

Figure 6: Photograph: Meeting with SAHRA Administrator at Musanda, (chief's palace), Tshidzivhe (2014)

Each site visit that day chronicled the fears and concerns of the three communities visited. Those excerpts of the transcript are consolidated below:

Vhangona Chief:

'…The SAHRA people can come as people who want to assist us, while there is an agenda of controlling us that we fall under control of SAHRA in way that whenever we want to do our tasks in our *zwifho* we will be bound to first seek permission from SAHRA. We do not want anyone to control our zwifho as we do not want to be blocked to have access to our zwifho or to be in a situation where we should first get permission from anywhere for access'… "The chief said that we should have a written agreement with you, the SAHRA people that in that zwifho we do not want any changes that affect well-being of *zwifho*."

"The chief explained further that, 'sometimes when thinking about SAHRA people, there is a doubt. What do SAHRA aim to achieve by saying that they protect *zwifho*? The SAHRA always said they want to protect and they are one who protect *zwifho*'… "The chief then explained that,'if is that case then this should be a written agreement with SAHRA and that signed agreement should be in the clan constitution.' "He said that if that written agreement happen, he do not have any problem or concern."

First Makhadzi:

"We as elders, we are doing this work for the future generations, so that the future generations should not blame us that we have sell the *zwifho*."

Deputy Chair Person of DLM:

"I am requesting to be clarified by SAHRA people. We do not have common understanding with SAHRA about *zwifho* and last time we denied SAHRA because they were telling us that Lake Fundudzi is the bigger or mother zwifho of all other and there were plans of developing Fundudzi for tourism. Ourselves here, we do not want that as our zwifho cannot be treated in the plan which is happening on Lake Fundudzi and we do not want to be included in the Lake Fundudzi process. I want to understand if you are involving this process with plans of Lake Fundudzi? "

Second Makhadzi:

"When the message came that we are required for meeting with the SAHRA people, I first deny as I know SAHRA people do not agree with us. Then the message came again that SAHRA people should meet us for our registration documents, and then I decided to come to hear what SAHRA are planning to do about our documents. To SAHRA people, *zwifho zwa Vhutanda* are not for the Tshivhase, the Ramabulana, the government, or SAHRA it is only the responsibilities of Vhutanda clan. *Zwifho* is a place which is highly respected. Everybody of Vhutanda clan when pass on, he or she comes back home, the remains cannot be buried anywhere, they are buried only where Vhutanda are buried, that is according to the ancestors of Vhutanda. Even if a child of Vhutanda relocate and stay in Joburg or America, the home for remains is only here at Vhutanda. We do not want the SAHRA to control our *zwifho* and at the end we found ourselves in a situation where our zwifho is controlled by SAHRA and we will be bound to ask permission from SAHRA."

Throughout the various SAHRA site visits that day, the trepidations of the community were numerous. The clans are distrustful of the process— and the fears range from broken promises and concerns that communication with the government will lead to a betrayal in the form of a lack of access to sacred sites; a homogenizing of the various clans and their practices; the burial of their dead in sites other than the respective clan sites; lack of differentiation between sacred areas; the absence of a formal written agreement with clans; and an overall lack of

transparency with clans and communities. Given that many sacred site rules are no longer followed, including when and how the dead are buried, and who has access to sacred sites, there is a fear of working with the government. The apprehensions are reasonable given the long history of duplicity of political leaders and regimes from the colonial era and apartheid to the present day. To this point, the transcript do reveal that the SAHRA representatives continuously tried to assuage their worries, assuring them that SAHRA is there to protect their sites and engage in open and well-defined conversations and ongoing dialogue for continued clarity, yet the doubts remain. It is unclear whether the communities' fears have been realized in this post-apartheid era. A record of SAHRA's actions do not suggest that as an agency they overtly work to exploit communities. What is more evident is that local and national politics could impede the efforts of agencies like SAHRA. Reflecting back about working with SAHRA, Mphathe shares:

> The SAHRA keep quiet while they [development companies] are building a hotel inside the sacred forest there at Phiphidi. We had this big court case, SAHRA was there. SAHRA was there, before they even start to plan; we heard rumors. We called SAHRA in 2007. We sit with SAHRA, They are going to put lights. I was sitting there translating. *Makhadzi* said if you are going to build a hotel there, this people it's a *zwifho*, they are going to put electricity there. Light is not allowed there at Phiphidi, SAHRA said to us there is no plan to build anything there and we SAHRA are the only ones who can authorize this; but 2011, 2012, they started building while SAHRA was there, when they start building SAHRA just hides. We wrote letters and letters, our lawyer went to SAHRA's office many times. SAHRA said we are no longer working in Limpopo we are in Cape Town. SAHRA is useless. This book….they told us to do the profiles, of why the sites are sacred. Three of them. It is a lot of work to be done but up to now there is no response from SAHRA. They came and said we agree with the book, this is nice information. 2012 they received this [booklet]. But up to now they don't declare it as a sacred site. Government is manipulating people.

DLM claims that they never heard back from SAHRA representatives.

An update in 2017, however, reveals that LIHRA is restructuring its organization and is open to working with DLM and the *Vhangona* on this issue. This may mean that Provincial Heritage Status may be unattainable at this juncture. This is a minor setback to DLM, who contend that they will work with LIHRA on the local level until they get funds to continue appealing to SAHRA for Provincial or even National Heritage Status. Partial transcripts of the 2014 site visit give insight into the SAHRA grading process used to determine how sites are selected for heritage status. The representatives describe how the purpose of a site visit is to meet the community members following a formal application or nomination for protection status. After the review, multiple committees make a decision of declaration. Finally, the committees make a recommendation of whether the nomination will be catalogued as a national, provincial, or local heritage site. Yet, it is unclear whether SAHRA communicated their decision to DLM or directly to LIHRA.

During SAHRA's site visit, according to the transcript, the group also toured the sacred areas and there seemed to be agreement and support by all participants about an action plan to plant indigenous trees to revive the blanket of their *zwifho*— and to rehabilitate the barren places where the trees were removed, which are a part of the *zwifho* buffer zones. In addition, signs were supposed to be placed at the beginning of the buffer zones and the roads entering the various *zwifho* to be closed to trespassers (see also table 4 below). There appeared to be a sincere concern by the representatives to assist. Whether SAHRA conversed to the communities about the ultimate status or subsequent plans again is vague— and I have yet to receive an answer based on independent outreach as well. Regardless, from the perspective of community members, the issue is not resolved and *Vhomakhdzi* and DLM have been persistently frustrated.

Figure 7: Photograph: Signage at the entrance of the Thathe Sacred Forest (2014).

Cultural biodiversity research linked with conservation has gained traction in recent years, but in Vhembe District Municipality this work is outwardly inhibited by colonial and apartheid legacies similarly found in land legislation. *Vhomakhadzi* and DLM will continue attempts to register sacred sites under Protected Heritage Status through the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA). Again, the ranking of the applications remains ambiguous. This research does not make claims to know the exact motivation of why SAHRA will not consider these sites under Provincial or National protection status; however, accounts from *Vhomakhadzi,* and the efforts of community and other non-governmental and civil society agencies, reveal that any stalemate on community assistance may be due to the fact that attempts to assist are in conflict with local politics or regional development. And as indicated in other communication, government agencies at times are afraid of contradicting traditional governance.

DLM members are required to adhere to 12 principles regarding sacred sites:

1. Sacred sites are not places of entertainment or for playing sports, they are to be protected and respected.
2. Construction work of any kind, especially hotels or entertainment centers, is not allowed in sacred sites.
3. Those who are not the custodians or guardians of the sacred site have to respect the boundaries, and should not enter within.
4. Sacred sites are not tourist attractions, they play an important role within the ecosystem and society.
5. Sacred sites are not dumping grounds for litter or rubbish.
6. It is forbidden for anyone to chop down a tree in the sacred site, or to fetch firewood.
7. Sacred sites are places for ritual activities and spirituality, only chosen clan members from origin can be custodians who perform the rituals on behalf of the whole community.
8. Sacred sites are to be respected by everyone; including the custodians, the whole community and people passing by.
9. Sacred sites should remain as undisturbed ecosystems; the trees and the atmosphere are essential for creating the right conditions for rain across the
10. It is taboo to move or replace any object in a sacred site from its original place.
    whole region.
11. Sacred sites should be respected by the government, and they should know that they have to discuss with the custodians first before proposing any project involving the sacred site.
12. The sacred site is not only the forest on the surface, it goes far down to the under-soil and far above to the sky and the stars.

Figure 8: DLM Sacred Site Principles

If apparent colonial and apartheid gender ideologies and legal frameworks permeate today's land acts and traditional leadership, it is essential to understand how such philosophies became embedded norms. Who and what is impeding the centuries old institution of *Vhomakhadzi*? Why is it that the women of DLM now find themselves organizing independently from local government, even seeking litigation to lobby for their indigenous rights to land, culture, and environmental protections?

5.6 Colonialism and Traditional Leadership

Interview statements provide useful data for unearthing *Vhomakhadzi* perspectives about gender and exogenous influences from the West. The following statements lay a foundation for

understanding how the colonial encounter altered gender roles, and how emergent colonial and apartheid gender philosophies have endured—impacting land policies and the environment. The commentary also reveals the influence that these legacies, in conjunction with traditional leadership, have had on cultural biodiversity in the region. I begin with Makaulule's extensive reflections as director of DLM. It is her vision that drives these efforts and contributes to a growing movement in the region to preserve culture. For DLM, Makaulule's philosophical outlook has a great deal of influence on the activities and community organizing executed:

Ross: Why have *Vhomakhadzi* been undermined in their role with sacred sites?

Makaulule: When I was at University, we were taught in sociology about this thing of hegemony, and African women were undermined when this new governing system came. As Dr. Dima was saying, Venda culture was respecting women but if you talk about the Venda culture or African culture you see that women were undermined; women were dominated by the men. We Venda people we do not have that…The companies continue with this hegemony that men are superior to women, and our chiefs also, but most of them go with women in the elder way. Outside forces, they came with the principles of undermining the cultural customs and these cultural customs when they are undermined is when women are undermined…This foreign role, outside forces, they undermine culture and if you undermine culture, you undermine women's role, because culture is held in the hands of women.

Makaulule's reflections here describe broadly a sociological concept she learned about the supposition that African women have been undermined by state control. She seemingly recognizes a semblance of collaboration by Western and/or White men, and African traditional male leaders in South Africa, yet adding a distinct caveat that this phenomenon is not the norm within Vhavenda culture. Among these outside influences, she includes companies. She directly states that, "the companies continue the domination of women" as if the companies themselves

are a continuation or extension of the colonial era and an outgrowth of the era's gender philosophies.

Women's liberation in the context of *Vhomakhadzi* cultural roles is framed as a reclaiming of agency for the benefit of the entire community. Customarily, a "Makhadzi is the one who makes sure that there is order in the family, order in the clan, order in the community. And through her knowledge, which continues to develop within her, and which is brought to her by the ancestors, she becomes a guide...The chief cannot rule without the makhadzi" (Gaia Foundation). Concerns for community well-being amidst shifting values is a characterization of women's empowerment in an African context.

Vhomakhadzi members of DLM identify these changes in Vhavenda culture as a result of historical, political, and industrial changes over time. In an interview posted on the Gaia Foundation's website, Makaulule shares her ideas of women's liberation in South Africa and Venda, stating, "Today, we the women in South Africa, we have got our platform on which to raise our voices. As South Africa has been liberated from the previous colonization, we have our own space now. We can stand up as a woman. Which is what we mean when we say 'women empowerment" (Gaia Foundation). For Makaulule, it is colonialism that eroded women's self-determination.

From this history, she sees disparities between Vhavenda women who live in the city and those who live in Venda among the elders in their community; to her they seem lost and vulnerable. Vhavenda are affected by the high rates of HIV and poverty, which impact all of South Africa, a country where one in five adults is HIV positive.[49] There is also a concern in

[49] See dosomething.org

Venda communities about single mothers, and/or increasing rates of teenage pregnancy.[50,51] Makaulule is hoping to bridge this gap between the old and the young, and stop this annihilation of culture and environment. She continues, "We have a great challenge because the younger women are disconnected from creation, disconnected from their ancestors. The modern world is consuming the younger generation." She explains how *Vhomakhadzi* are dismayed by this situation and are committed to reviving their eco-cultural knowledge and clan roles in order to stabilize the community. There is a keen recognition here that outside influences throughout South Africa's history have contributed to the destabilizing of their roles as women and *makhadzi*—and thus destabilizing their communities. *Vhomakhadzi* have traditionally been seen as centering the community through a connection with *mupo*.[52] *Mupo* according to many *makhadzi*, gives everybody a role and function in society, for women, men, and children. To restore order in the community again would be to return to those roles. Therefore, the undermining of the role of *makhadzi* is inescapably connected to the destruction of sacred sites, cultural biodiversity, and Vhavenda communities' way of life.

In the proceeding interviews, participants discuss missionary influences and colonialism. The commentary reveals a perception of observable inextricability between the two institutions— neatly exemplified in an interview statement by Makaulule who reflects, "The undermining the *makhadz*i is not only the company or anyone, it has started somewhere. The colonization people, when they come here to defeat the Venda people, they say that 'we cannot

[50] See, Ramalebana, Masilo Euclid. *Problems related to the learning situation of schoolgirl mothers in Venda secondary schools,* University of South Africa, Pretoria. 1995.
[51] See, Mothiba, Tebogo M. et al., "Factors contributing to teenage pregnancy in the Capricorn District of the Limpopo Province". *Curationis*. vol.35, n.1 (Online).
[52] This is a Luvenda word that means natural creations of the Universe.

win'... I used to ask is it missionary or colonization that comes first?" Other *makhadzi* commentary on this topic unearth *Vhomakhadzi* standpoint on the colonial/missionary encounter as it intersects with the role of women:

Makaulule: Colonization come first. They see that they cannot defeat the Venda people, then they send the missionary. After colonization was defeated, to win us, to colonize us, they send the missionaries. And when the missionaries came here, they bring another way of spirituality, the new allegiance. They teach people that *makhadzi* play a wrong role, evil role, because they use their ancestors.

Mutshekwa: Missionaries demonize our dead people. They say that ancestral spirits is hedon[53] or is not accepted by Jesus. And through that they take away the role of *makhadzi*, and place a man, a priest, and they take away the shrine. They take away the *zwifho*, and build a house—name it church that people no longer want this *zwifho* or at the shrine to pray there.

Nyadzawela: Already the women were undermined. They don't have power. Women don't have power, the men have power, but even when problems arise in the home, they need the skill of the women, but they say we are powerless. If they need to do ritual prayers, they need women, but they say we are powerless. They need women to carry out marriage rituals, women have a lot of responsibility.

Connie: In church, a woman cannot pray, it is only a man who can pray, this is when they start to undermine the *makhadzi*. They take away the Finger millet [a sacred plant], for us when we pray, we take the snuff [ground tobacco] we take the Finger millet, we take the water from the spring, not the table water, the clean water. Then they take away the Finger millet and place a book, a bible. They take away the *makhadzi* role and place a priest. They take away the sacred forest and *zwifho* and shrine, and put a church.

Joyce: We don't pray in the house; we pray outside. The shrine is outside,

[53] This term is a colloquial reference to heathen.

> or go to the forest or go to the tree, the Marula tree. Or indigenous trees. We cannot pray inside the house. This is why they took away the role of *makhadzi*; and they took away our water. Which we use for praying. They [missionaries] placed the wine, because our drink, when we pray, is a drink from Finger millet and water…the missionaries demonized that, that drink from Finger millet and water we used to pray, it's wrong, they use the wine. And when you remove that you remove the role of *makhadzi*, because these were the tasks of *makhadzi* and because they put fears into the people.

Connie: There was a time if you wanted to go to Joburg [Johannesburg], you could not go, you could not wear the *nwenda,*[54] they would say that if you wore the *nwenda* you were a hedon; and to Christians, you were just a person of demons, wearing just *nwenda*.

Interview statements reveal that colonialism and missionaries began the erosion of Vhavenda culture and the devaluing of the role of *makhadzi*. The statements divulge *Vhomakhadzi* knowledge that Christianity undermined culture by replacing the role of *makhadzi* with a male priest. The priest replaced *Vhangona* sacred traditions of communicating to ancestors with snuff, Finger millet, and other rituals in the sacred site with his own sacred articles and church objects of wine and an altar. From this discourse, an historical trajectory of silencing and shaming is exposed through the demonization of ancestral rituals. This silencing of *Vhomakhadzi*, which in many ways prevented them from asserting their cultural roles in the post-apartheid era, represents external and internal processes linked with cultural denigration and state control. The missionary presence cultivated a warped perception of Vhavenda culture, therefore traditional meanings are diminishing among younger Vhavenda people. When casually talking to Vhavenda strangers about my research on *Vhomakhadzi*, many assumed I was a broadcast and communications student because the dominant portrayal of *Vhomakhadzi* today derives from the

[54] A *Nwenda* is a traditional cloth worn by Vhavenda women.

Venda "Soapie," or Soap Opera, *Muvhango*— a dramatization that sometimes mischaracterizes the role of *Vhomakhadzi*. For example, *makhadzi* of DLM argue that their role was exaggerated for entertainment and portrayed as a person who torments and forces decisions aggressively.[55] Those depictions may, arguably, reflect changes in how a woman's power is perceived and shaped by colonial influences. Hence, the growing point of reference for the idea of a *makhadzi* derives from fiction rather than one's family.

In colonial Venda, the government and missionaries worked together to construct an Africanist discourse of inferiority. *Makhadzi* and Vhavenda people were coerced into Christianity through attacks on their culture. Consequently, the missionary arms of colonialism and apartheid have resulted in Christian fundamentalism in present-day Venda. This fundamentalism often reinforces long held and sometimes internal cultural vilification.

The condemnation of Vhavenda life was pervasive and lasting. Missionary attacks specifically targeted cultural artifacts such as clothing, including the traditional *nwenda,* and significant jewelry such as *Vhukunda*—bangles used to denote the marriage status of women. All these attacks fostered a suppression and indignity among *makhadzi*. They felt abashed of most components of their culture and role in their communities. The Berlin Mission Society records detail a distressing example in the 19th century of a Vhavenda woman who, as a symbol of her Christian faith, renounces her traditional Venda beads before baptism. The record states, "When we [Missionaries] arrived at the house of an old lady, who was about to be baptised, she had presented him with her heathen amulets and necklaces…she presented them with two stones and told him to crush the beads; to destroy her last link with the heathen world" (Berlin Mission

[55] Likewise, in the first large-scale and critically-acclaimed independent Venda film, *Elelwani,* released in 2012, starring Vhavenda actress, Florence Masebe one *makhadzi* of the "royal court" is portrayed as conniving and power hungry.

Society Records). A more recent example in the last 20 years is one story relayed to me by Makaulule of her college years:

> Makaulule: When I was at University [University of Venda] I was not allowed to wear these things [Vhukunda bangles], but when I was born, my big sister was wearing this and when I was born my father give me these. But when I arrive at University people said "ha! don't wear these don't wear these, is demon." I survive a lot. I could not mention *makhadzi* at University because the students of these church meetings, when you say *makhadzi* you are talking demons."

Makaulule adeptly negotiates the cultural paradoxes of Christian fundamentalism in Vhavenda culture. However, years before, she endured persecution in her own family when living with a very religious uncle who tried to convert her—even attempting exorcism when she refused to renounce traditional healing. Makaulule is the 11th of 24 children and comes from a long line of traditional healers. Her father played a prominent role in her life; from him, she gleaned a great deal of ancestral wisdom and a once treasured scrapbook of information with her father's indigenous medicinal notes. Her uncle later incinerated all of these notes because they were perceived to be evil. Makaulule has since forgiven her uncle, but this rejection and intimidation left a deep impression on her, and although imbued with passion and excitement for her work to revive *Vhangona* culture, there is lingering pain over these events.

Other conceivably cultural incongruities can be found within DLM's ranks as well, as numerous *Vhomakhadzi* are also Christians. I recall seeing many *Vhomakhadzi* with the "Zet[56] Cee Cee" star, emblematic of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), which has a prolific presence in Southern Africa. In Pretoria, people occasionally proselytized to me about the religion as well.

[56] Zet Cee Cee is the alphabetical pronunciation for the letter 'Z' in many Black South African languages; it is also often used to describe Zion Christian Church.

These Christian *makhadzi* pin these stars on their traditional *nwenda*. There does not seem to be a contradiction or fundamentalist position for these particular *makhadzi* who see value in both traditions. Makaulule herself speaks about God and Jesus broadly in the way people do who come from ethnic groups with multiple cultural influences.

However, the defamation of *Vhangona* culture and *Vhomakhadzi* still manifests today. In Venda, even cultivating and growing the sacred Finger millet may be perceived by some to be sacrilegious; thus, preachers at times lecture about these dangers on local radio stations. Dima, too, shared that he was one of the traditional healers in Venda who bore death threats during apartheid for his beliefs, surviving verbal attacks and pressures in the media. Again, the resultant shame and silencing is framed within an Africanist discourse of inferiority, nurtured by colonial administrators, missionaries, the Apartheid regime, and disseminated by present-day Christian fundamentalists. Some fundamentalist Vhavenda Christians even criticize the association of *Vhomakhadzi* with nature:

Denga: It said that sacred sites are a demon thing, and people moved away from these traditions and adopted new religions. This is why people were no longer valuing sacred sites…They say that if you follow your ancestral religion ways you are following the foreign or hedonistic or demonic ways. But for us, we know that our ancestral religion is not foreign. But they labeled it as foreign and not accepted by God.

Ross: [In asking follow-up questions] What are the modern reasons that *zwifho* are being destroyed?

Mutshekwa: People who preach the bible are threatening the people who practice at her sacred sites…They say that if you are still connected to the sacred site you are a mad person…[inaudible] The government is interfering a lot. The government is taking the places where there are sacred sites and selling them to the people. It is selling the land where there is sacred site. The sacred site of

the *Malale* clan. They White people fenced off the area and made it a game park.

Mutshekwa: The government is not respecting us. They aren't even scared to enter the sacred sites and destroy it. In this land of Venda, the first things which take away the value of the sacred site were the missionaries, second is the government who supported the missionaries, and the government development projects— this mining and pipeline.

Ross: What happens if someone in the community is against these projects?

Mutshekwa: The government will pay them for information and sign papers that they consulted with the community— and they will dominate against those who believe in the rituals. Division of the clan. The government then gains power.

For Vhomakhadzi, the issue of Christian fundamentalism and the government is interwoven. Among all *Vhomakhadzi* interviewed, it was also universally accepted that the chiefs are being enticed by the government and/or development companies. Yet *Vhomakhadzi* were adamant that the true Indigenous *Vhangona* chiefs adhere to the elder ways. *Vhomakhadzi* blame the dominant *Masingo* leadership for disorder in the *shango,* or territory. As articulated in chapter three, the *Masingo* historically conquered the Indigenous populations,[57] and refused to acknowledge *Vhangona* chiefs, even assisting the colonists to subdue and displace the *Vhangona*. The following statements discuss the Masingo chiefs in relationship to recent development projects in the region:

5.7 Exogenous Influences on Gender

Ross: Who here gives permission to the government to take the land?

Denga: From the chiefs. There are other groups that dominated the Indigenous. The chief that was given power from the government is from the new group (*Masingo*) because while

[57] *Vhalaudzi* also conquered *Vhangona* nevertheless interview statements focus on the *Masingo*.

they chase away the custodians of the sacred sites, it is a chief who came and dominated the Indigenous.
It is easy for them to sell the land and develop the place.

Joyce: That's why you will see Makaulule in many papers because she is fighting for our culture. That's why she is leading us to get up and get our guns. But not real guns, our mouths, talking. These are our guns…talking. When you keep on asking we remember a lot.

Denga: You see the place like Thohoyandou. That place has a new chief and they developed the whole area. You will no longer see where there was sacred site, because they built the whole town on the sacred sites.

Ross: So if they were true *Vhangona* chiefs, do you think they would listen more?

Denga: Yes. Even the environment would be clean all over, no cutting trees. *Vhangona* person respects the trees the Earth, the snakes, everything.

Ross: So these new chiefs are not *Vhangona*?

Denga: The chiefs who are destroying the land are not *Vhangona*.

Tshinakaho: We have many chiefs, but *Vhangona* chiefs are few. This issue is very serious. We are also having lawyers who are talking for each clan. And when we gather and they hear that we need to collect money to pay the lawyers they go away. It's the whole disorder, which have cost. And we the *Vhangona* move from our original homes and we are very far. They [*Masingo*]occupied our place. That relocation was not our choice. They burned our homesteads. We *Vhangona* are scattered far all over Venda. We are no longer in our home place. The other *Vhangona*, don't want to be called *Vhangona*, they have even changed their surnames. When they make us to relocate others were killed.

In these statements *Vhomakhadzi* explain that *Vhangona* chiefs would be more respectful of the Earth and its wildlife, unlike the dominant *Masingo*. *Vhomakhadzi* describe their historical

removal and consequently their decentralized residency and power. What can be interpreted by these statements is that their physical removal away from their homelands and sacred sites is the cause of environmental and cultural upheaval by a dominant group that does not respect nature. Further, the refusal of *Masingo* chiefs to acknowledge or respect *Vhangona* chiefs demonstrates the marginalization and disenfranchisement they face as an ethnic-minority and reveals the implications to the cultural institution of *makhadzi*.

An additional layer of land politics emerges in Venda with the historical conflicts between the *Vhangona* and the *Masingo*. Therefore, to claim sacred sites takes on varied political dimensions predating colonial frameworks. *Vhangona* are unwavering in their assertion that as a custom, *zwifho* or sacred sites and the accompanying rituals of *Thevhula* and *u Phasa* overseen by *Vhomakhadzi* precede the arrival of the *Masingo*, *Vhalemba*, and other non- *Vhangona* (Non-indigenous) clans who migrated from other parts of Africa centuries ago. This special claim to sacred sites, *Vhomakhadzi* explain, set *Vhangona* leaders apart from *Masingo* ones and is how they explain the exploitation by *Masingo* chiefs.

Makaulule: They take the chiefs to the nice hotels and the say they will give them money. So they get access to mining. They take out chiefs to the hotels and give them food there, after that they also give them alcohol then they give them a big file and ask for their signature here [mimics a signature line]. You will see the technical language…this colonization thing is still continuing.

Dima: The chief is poor, then they take him to the hotel and they make him to sign this and they buy him a car. He [a chief] came with that car in the public participation [meeting]….and they are promising him that he get royalties, money, when this mining continues, he forgot about the people, he says I got all this money, I will be rich and the people will recognize me as a good chief. It's manipulating.

Makaulule: They [chiefs] don't know, it is part of this colonization. They

> have been brainwashed; they are manipulating the chiefs because if you are poor, then they [government] come with the strategies of this 'we give you money. Because they are poor, the chiefs, they lose their fields; they no longer have the place where they can plough and have enough water, crops that they have, so they become poor. That's why they are manipulated. That's why if you resign [as a chief] you cannot even buy a cow. Then if they come and they [government] want 15 hectares and [say] we will buy you a car then the chiefs will allow, if they said mining is coming with lots of money—[if] you are poor—then you will just sign.

Vhomakhadzi make a distinction between the opposition they get from the national government compared with local *Masingo* chiefs who fail to represent their perspectives. *Vhomakhadzi* concede that there are chiefs who sell land for bribes but they attribute this to manipulation due to "recolonization" and "brainwashing." However, *Vhomakhadzi and Vhangona* are clearly conflicted on this topic, as Dima expresses disapproval of the chief who brings his new car—assumed to be a government gift—to a public participation meeting. This presumed "recolonization" impacts land tenure, culture, and the environment through the development projects sanctioned by the non-indigenous chiefs:

Mudanalwo: It is continuing that colonization because Coal of Africa did not do public participation with the real people. They did public participation somewhere and brainwashed our chief that [Coal of Africa] are going to create jobs for you, while they know they are lying, that there is no job that can satisfy the whole thing; it's a part of brainwashing people, colonizing the minds of people.

The great irony is that while many chiefs are using tradition and custom to secure land in the post-apartheid era, by contrast, in Dzomo La Mupo it is *Vhomakhadz*i who organize to retain authentic pre-colonial indigenous traditions to protect land. DLM's strategic efforts to protect indigenous trees, wetlands and cultural biodiversity is rooted in a desire to safeguard indigenous

Vhangona agricultural techniques which are in conflict with large-scale mono-crop plantations and other corporate development projects. Moreover, although *Vhomakhadzi* powers and influence have receded in Western democratic and capitalist institutions, the power of chiefs is ever dependent on global capitalism. It is therefore important to examine the power differentials among men and women in many African societies, such as Venda, and further analyze how colonialism impacted gender relations and women's power in the colonial, post-colonial, and now globalized era. This analysis will consider the current power disparities between men and women, particularly addressing the declining role of *makhadzi* in Venda society.

In Venda and throughout Africa, colonialism dramatically transformed constructions of gender (Oyewumi 1997; Chacha 2005; Achebe 2011; Bolich 2007). Colonial authoritative regimes reorganized indigenous customs to exert control over African economies and social formations exemplified by systematic male hegemony. Women were confined to rigid Eurocentric gender norms, which catalyzed power disparities between African men and women. These imposed gender ideologies contributed to the invention of the 'African woman' as a second class colonial subject determined by her race and gender (Oyewumi 1997; Chacha 2005). African women, therefore, lost significant power endemic to precolonial African societies situated in gender flexibility, seniority, communal access to land, and household and family influence.

Same sex marriage was practiced throughout the Continent in regions such as pre-colonial Bukuria on the border of Tanzania and Kenya, among the Uchendu of the Igbo of Southern Nigeria, in Dahomey in present-day Benin, and within the Nuer culture in Ethiopa and South Sudan. In Southern Africa, woman-to-woman marriage was also found among the Lovhedu of the Sotho group, the Zulu of Natal (KwaZulu-Natal), and in pre-colonial Venda

society (Chacha 2005; Bolich 2007; Stayt 1931). Chacha's (2005) research illuminates gender malleability and agency in woman-to-woman marriage in Africa. According to Chacha, this form of same-sex marriage mediated male domination and allowed women to transcend potential gender barriers to assuage social, reproductive, and economic problems in African societies (Stayt 1931; Amadiume 1987; Chacha 2005; Achebe 2011). In Bukuria, this marriage custom aided barren women, or sonless widows, affording them the opportunity to be respected within their society. It was socially acceptable for young wives, comparable to surrogates, to conceive through a male consort (*umutwari*) in order to bare a son for an older female husband (Chacha 2005). It has been documented among the Nandi of Kenya, that a woman who took a female wife even stopped sexual intercourse with men, dressed as a man, and was thus regarded as a man, or what scholars refer to a cultural or ritual man (Oboler 1980, qtd. in Chacha 2005). Many societies that accepted this marriage practice regarded a sonless house as a poor one, thus the expression of female masculinities was considered beneficial to the prosperity of the household (Chacha 2005; Bolich 2007).

Woman-to-woman marriages eventually dissolved at the onset of colonialism or emerged as a covert practice, as the concept ran contrary to Christian values. Missionaries regarded these same-sex unions as either homosexual, adulterous, or a form of prostitution (Chacha 2005). The moral and authoritative interference of missionaries in indigenous cultures was largely indicative of the patriarchal framework of the Church. Even the notion of African maturation to womanhood was characterized disdainfully, reflective of Victorian mores (Tamal 2011). This is also corroborated by Southern Africanist and missionary Henri-Alexandre Junod's work, *The Life of a South African Tribe* (1912), which included an appendix written in Latin to conceal what he described as the 'vile and immoral' subject of female sexuality and puberty in African

cultures (Arnfred 169). Likewise, among the Masasi in Southern Tanzania, missionaries characterized their female initiation rights and customs as sexually explicit (Arnfred 2005); again showing the Church's disdain for indigenous customs and women's bodily rituals, existence, or power. Ultimately, the White settler regimes that abolished same-sex marriage and polygamy as moral abominations, disregarding the economic and social benefit for women (see chapter three). As a patriarchal institution, the Church targeted social formations that allotted women power through gender flexibility, or embodiment as cultural or ritual men. Consequently, colonial social formations affected women in myriad ways both socially and economically.

The literature (Rwezaura's 1985; Arnfred's 2011; Tamal 201; Chacha 2005, Bolich 2007) deduces that African women's power and status was largely confronted at the intersection of the Church, the nuclear family construct, and wage labor. In colonial society, African women's lives were limited to the roles of wife and mother in contrast to the range of identities accessible through pre-colonial gendered flexibility. This in part was due to imperialist systems of wage labor predicated on Christian values that favored male-headed households. Thus, colonial authorities reconstituted African women's gendered identities to meet Christian and capitalist aims, clarifying Rwezaura's (1985) assertion that woman-to-woman marriage in Bakuria was a pre-capitalist custom. Attempts to dismantle or phase out same sex marriage throughout the Continent underscores the meeting between the Church and capitalism as a joint civilizing mission of colonial regimes.

Arnfred's (2011) research on Portuguese Mozambique supplies additional textual evidence on colonial influence over gender in Southern Africa. Colonial speeches and documents reveal that administrators were disturbed by the matrilineal features of marriage in northern Mozambique— particularly customs that encouraged men to leave their villages to marry, and

women's freedom to seek divorce. Colonial reports note the perceived instability of these unions given the judgment that there was no solid position for a husband as the natural head of the household. Additionally, it was assumed that "patrilineal societies [were] better suited than matrilineal ones for adaptation to rapid social and economic change" (Rita Ferreira et al 1964:78). Marriage in this context was interpreted as unnatural as, "Matriliny conforms neither to the demands of Christianity, nor to the demands of development; and furthermore these societies are irritatingly resistant to change" (Arnfred 123). By restricting African women to the social identity of wife, compared with the extended family configuration of many traditional African families, colonial administrators normalized the nuclear family whereby women and children relied on the wage labor of men. Before these gendered and economic constructs, women were very active in farming and work interpreted to be men's labor. Moreover, beyond Christian moralisms, subverting women's work was also a means of controlling agriculture, pastoral living, and land ownership by altering their agricultural production and gendered division of labor.

By governing African female identity and the woman's role in the institution of marriage, colonial authorities were reorganizing divisions of labor, agriculture, and patrilineal inheritance within a male-dominated capitalist hierarchy (Miescher, 2007). In South Africa, particularly in Natal, White settlers restructured production within the Black family by seizing the chief's control of women's lives and work. McClintock (1995) describes, how the mid-19th century British politician, Theophilus Shepstone, engineered this agenda which he executed during his residency and authoritative reign over Fengu and Zulu peoples[58] in the Eastern Cape. Shepstone's objective, according to McClintock (1995), was to undermine Zulu male power and

[58] Fengu people were once more closely related to Zulus, but are now more absorbed into the Xhosa culture.

economic control by altering his wives' labor roles. Colonial administrators in other regions adopted this land confiscation policy to control African systems of production and women's agricultural labor owing to the excess labor that a Zulu man controlled through his wives; as women's work was seen as competition and an immense threat to the profits of the settlers. McClintock states, "Black women in Natal [KwaZulu Natal] became the ground over which White men fought Black men for control of their land and labor...pre-capitalist societies in southern Africa depended on the control of *labor power*, rather than the control of *products*" (254). McClintock describes how men's authority over the homestead and women's agricultural labor essentially translated symbolically into Zulu male social and political power. In other words, women's labor was the foundation of the Zulu economy, which directly threatened the economy of the settlers and their nascent systems of wage labor; essentially, Black women's agricultural labor exceeded the production capacity of White farmers. Magubane (2004) similarly describes how vagrancy laws were enacted to force Khoisan tribes in South Africa to adopt systems of wage labor over subsistence farming. Vagrancy laws were created to punish the nomadic, sometimes described as indolent Khoisan tribes, who retained subsistence living despite the colonial penchant towards wage labor and capitalism (Magubane 2004). White settlers thought it peculiar that Khoisan women were laboring in the fields, thus White settlers exerted control over Black women's work and the fruits of her labor.

This history explains the socio-cultural and economic changes that have affected the ancestral role of *makhadzi* throughout colonialism and into the post-apartheid era—particularly as it relates to *makhadzi* and her relationship to land and agriculture. *Vhomakhadzi* have been relegated from agricultural influence and as a cultural institution are limited in an increasingly industrialized and male dominated capitalist society. Multinational companies neither consult

them nor do they play a prominent role in public participation meetings, such as recent consultations for Coal of Africa, Ltd development plans. The next chapter explores the wide-ranging environmental threats *Vhomakhadzi* have identified, which are attributed to industrialization and local and international commercial business, and highlights their devaluation from agricultural and development decisions in the Vhembe District Municipality.

CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS II

An examination of media accounts, articles, interviews, website content, documentaries and Vhavenda student dissertations assisted in answering the third research question: What do *Vhomakhadzi* attribute to environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality? This chapter centers on Coal of Africa Limited (CoAL) and their development scheme and participation meetings hosted in Venda. *Makhadzi* share their experiences protesting CoAL's colliery plans with Dzomo La Mupo (DLM), and describe the impact that mining has had on ecosystems and wetlands in the region. In this section, *Vhomakhadzi* also compare and contrast mono-crop plantations with indigenous agricultural techniques, local food and seed systems, and explain their definition of food sovereignty. Lastly, the research and interview statements in this section underscore how global capitalist enterprises evade women's contributions and give way to hegemonic systems of power.

6.1 Vhomakhadzi Observations: Coal Mining

Environmental degradation is inherently intertwined, which is also true for Venda's Vhembe District Municipality. In Vhembe, one cannot describe deforestation without explaining the impact on rainfall, soil erosion, or sedimentation run-off that disturbs rivers, springs, and livestock. The cutting down of indigenous trees also impacts vegetation biomass and/or riparian vegetation growing along rivers—causing receding riverbanks, stunted aquatic wildlife, and an altered climate. Similarly, when discussing coal mining and extractive activities to excavate fossil fuels, environmentalists would be remiss to ignore the chemical bearing on rivers and quality drinking water, exorbitant water use, or the shock to human welfare. Fundamentally, any threat to one component of the environment – people, water, trees, or soil – is a danger to them all due to the delicate balance and connectivity of ecosystems. Metaphorically, it is like the game

Jenga as the more blocks you pull the closer you come to toppling the entire tower of biodiversity.

As self-identified ecologists, *Vhomakhadzi* of DLM are acutely aware of the interdependent relationship between people and nature. Therefore, they organize environmentally comprehensive campaigns that address multiple environmental dangers. For example, DLM's campaign against Coal of Africa Limited's (CoAL) Makhado Coking Coal Project, proposed in 2012, is a fight to protect health and human welfare and preserve water for communities, livestock, household farmers, and agricultural livelihoods. CoAL is an Australian company and one of several extractive enterprises that have submitted excavation proposals in the Limpopo Province. CoAL has communicated their development timeline and goals primarily with the local and provincial male leadership. The company projects production of 5.5 million tons of coal a year for domestic and export markets.[59] In addition to local tourism developments, CoAL represents an increased presence of multinational development companies with schemes for land in the Vhembe District Municipality and greater Venda region in Limpopo.

CoAL shareholders include ArcelorMittal Steel of South Africa, a subsidiary of the ArcelorMittal Steel group based in Luxembourg, which has ventures in 60 countries worldwide and the largest steel company in the EU.[60] Although merely one company, CoAL represents a larger network of multinational companies and strategic investors that rely on extraction and excavation in this indigenous community. The company has three operating coalmines: Vele Colliery, the Makhado Project, and the Mooiplaats Colliery. They also manage the Makhado hard coking and thermal coal resources project. After DLM observed the effects of other coal mining projects in the region, they joined community members to protest the proposal to protect

[59] See Ismail, "Coal of Africa suffers water blow" to read about the water license procedures required for mining.
[60] See ArcelorMittal Steel website for corporate information http://corporate.arcelormittal.com.

their communities.[61]

Figure 9: Photograph: *Vhomakhadzi* Wetland's Focus Group (2016)

In the March 18, 2012 *City Press* article, "BlackGold Versus Blue Water," by Yolandi Groenewald, Johnathan Mudimeli, chairperson of the Mudimeli Royal Council is quoted stating, "There is a huge fight coming…Our community will be surrounded by a mine and no one is talking to us." A delegation of local advocates, farmers, and community members accompanied Mudimeli to the Department of Mineral Resources in Limpopo to contest the mining plans. The entire community was alarmed about the impact that this proposed mining project could have on water. Although there are people supportive of the project because of the prospect of jobs—with a projection of 1,000 jobs alone expected during the operational phase of the mine[62]— regardless mining is still a huge threat to water supplies in the region. In her article, Groenewald infers that the project has initiated a water war. She describes an additional meeting the following day stating, "the workshop is packed and the greenshirts of Dzomo La Mupo…dominate the

[61] See Groenewald for extensive information on South Africa's impending water crisis.
[62] See Wallington's editorial, "The right perspective" to learn about one phase of Coal of Africa's development plan.

room…the group made up mostly of women is not popular with Coal of Africa. The company's chief executive John Wallington even suggested legal action against the group if it continued to oppose the mine." In addition to protests by *Vhomakhadzi* of DLM, CoAL has met up against other obstacles, including a R9.2 million fine for environmental offences indicated by Environmental Management Inspectors (EMIs), commonly referred to as the Green Scorpions, appointed under South Africa's National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) of 2008, and by farmers who acquired a court interdict to stop portions of work on the R4bn project in 2014 (Mantshantsha 2015).

Vhomakhadzi have been vocal about their water concerns and distressed about where the company will siphon the millions of gallons of water a day needed for coal production. CoAL has several phases of water plans they must traverse. First, they must acquire a water license to use groundwater, followed by applying for a bulk-water license from the department of water affairs—to pipe in 4.6 million liters of water from the Nzhelele dam. Lastly, they must buy water rights from regional farmers (Groenewald 2012). In anticipation of the company securing the necessary water licenses, CoAL began proactively negotiating the purchase of water rights from farmers in the area, despite the suspension of an integrated water-use license acquired in January 2015. The deferral followed an appeal by the Department of Water and Sanitation, and filed by the Vhembe Mineral Resources Forum, which is comprised of Limpopo citizens and farmers. According to reports, the "…appeal automatically suspends the IWUL in terms of Section 148 (2) (b) of the South African National Water Act No 36 of 1998" (Ismail 2016). In addition, 350Africa, a Johannesburg-based environmental organization, called for a climate change state of emergency, citing the destruction to surrounding communities, including the UNESCO world heritage site Mapungubwe.

Despite these protests, CoAL has not been deterred, and according to the current CEO David Brown, the company will file a counter claim with the minister of Water and Sanitation. Brown contends that CoAL's proposal will be a sustainable project that will also create socioeconomic transformation in the region (Ismail 2016) and will work cooperatively with local farmers and world heritage sites. Likewise, as Groenewald reports, Eugene O'Brien, Makhado Coking Coal Project site manager, reassured residents that no water will be taken to the detriment of farmers without compensation. The implication of these reassurances is that if these communities do suffer environmental harm, recompense is an equitable solution by the company, despite threats to human or environmental well-being.

If internationally recognized world heritage sites such as Mapungubwe cannot ward off mining, then what happens to smaller communities in the region, including sacred natural sites? According to the Makhado Coking Coal Project fact sheet, available on Coal of Africa's website, the project is situated on five nearby farms, identified as Fripp 645 MS, Tanga 648 MS, Windhoek 649 MS, Lukin 643 MS and Salaita 188 MT. The company claims the Makhado Project affects seven communities total, yet *Vhomakhadzi* believe that this is a modest estimation of the damage that the region will incur. To assuage fears about water supplies, CoAL's environmental consultant, Mias van der Walt, assured residents that Coal of Africa will pay for new connections of water for every household affected (Groenewald 2012); however, once again, this payment would be in exchange for certain environmental degradation. Of the various fossil fuel extractive processes, coal mining is the most water intensive. The project threatens an already water-stressed area, local livelihoods, and a network of sacred forests including Thathe.

Vhomakhadzi are particularly concerned about the Nzhelele river, which begins in Thathe and flows through many communities before feeding into the massive Limpopo river. Drinking

water, land-irrigation, and livestock would all be impacted. Vhembe and all of Limpopo province is already the driest region in South Africa, and *Vhomakhadzi* speculate that this mining proposal would finish the Nzhelele, which is already lower than in previous years. Nzhelele's river banks have already eroded, and its path and support have dissipated because of deforestation at its banksides. Deforestation in the region is largely due to commercial farms, but in this case, it is also due to residents who use firewood for cooking and for home dwellings and fields planted closer to the banks of the river, which also absorb the water.

Figure 10: Photograph: Residents collecting firewood in Vuwani (2015).

Consequently, *Vhomakhadzi* anticipate that this river will be further stressed, if not completely evaporated by coal mining. *Vhomakhadzi* interview statements about DLM's campaign against the Makhado Coking Coal Project provide additional insight about their environmental concerns and lack of public participation in the colliery planning phases:

Ross: I know that DLM has tried to get *makhadzi* the opportunity to participate in public participation meetings for mining projects, how successful have you been?

Makaulule: We went there to the public participation meeting. When we were there, they told us that they were going to mine the area because there is something there they want to take out from the ground. Then we asked them as DLM, when you dig down there, you're going to affect the Nzhelele river, and that will affect farming and many things because the river is already getting dry. Because we know they will dig deep and take more water, we asked them where they will get the water. They answered that the water which we will be using, we will clean it again which will be water that is drinkable. Then we say that we don't want their mining. They are quiet and no longer talking about it…There was a chief who was there, and the mining people bought him a car and a suit but we protested so much that the chief ran away.

Tshinakaho: These people are going far. They say they are starting where the Makhado Colliery is and we tell them, you are only starting here, but you are going to disturb the water all over like the spring there. It starts there from Thathe [yet] it's going to affect this river; we clarify them that we know how the system works, like ecosystem. And we ask them a lot about the water issue because they were mentioning the Thathe Vondo Dam…they said they are going to take the water from Thathe Vondo Dam, from Levubu, from Nzhelele dam; then we say don't touch that water, that is for us to use it.

Makaulule: They talk a lot about Zimbabwe. And we see the impact of mining. People no longer drink water there because mining is destroying the river; it's mud. We even told them that when you destroy these rivers, you're even going to destroy the animals, even the things we don't understand, we know how mining is going to bring a bad impact around here. And we showed them the way we understand the rivers, the wetlands, the springs, how mining is going to destroy them, because we remind them that in the past we [women] were not allowed to say anything…Now we have the right and we are telling you, as women, we will stand against your mining.

Vhomakhadzi are disheartened by CoAL's Makhado Coking Coal Project. Despite attempts to impart their eco-cultural knowledge onto the attending representatives, it would seem

that their cries fell on deaf ears. In fact, John Wallinton, the CEO of CoAL at the time, depicted DLM's protestations as "a circus"(Groenewald 2012). Nevertheless, *Vhomakhadzi* continue to educate the community, and raise important questions that are not addressed in full by CoAL's press releases, company literature, or public statements. For instance, DLM clarifies questions about the impact of mining on the connectivity of ecosystems, about water-use for household farmers, and the finite life of a mine.

Vhomakhadzi members of DLM try to envisage what will remain of regional biodiversity after Coal of Africa leaves and closes their mines. The women demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of ecosystem vulnerabilities, which contradict CoAL's public relations claims purporting sustainability. CoAL's assertions are also refuted by the frequent accounts of acid mine drainage, black lung disease, and contamination of drinking water due to coal mining. Water use is also a particular concern, as DLM members are fearful of contaminants and toxins in the water, the disruption of watersheds and fresh water aquifers, and the dangers to ecosystems that have ecological and spiritual significance. Ultimately, *Vhomakhadzi* are distressed about the socio-environmental effects of "mining water grabs" and the seizing of land and water by coal undertakings throughout rural South Africa.

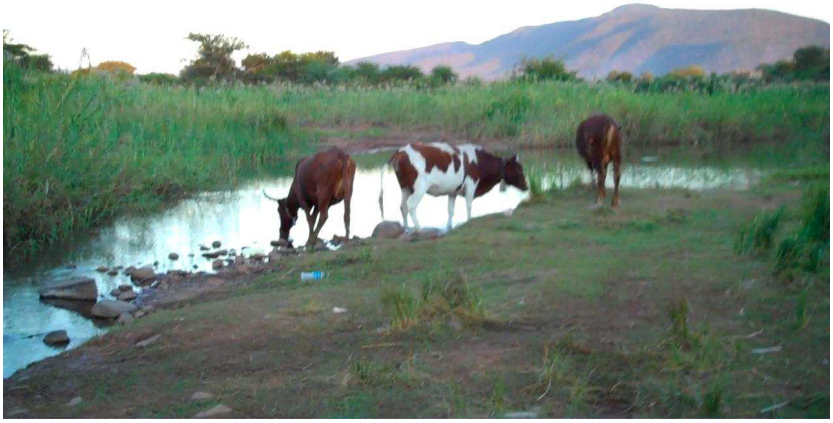

Figure 11: Photograph: Nzhelele River. (Picture by Mphatheleni Makaulule).

Many residents question where CoAL will get the amount of water needed for their enterprise, given that the average rain fall in Limpopo is low and has even been compared to the Kalahari Desert" (Groenewald, *Greenpeace Africa*, 2012). In the piece "How Coal Mining Already Threatens an Already Water-stressed Area, Local Livelihoods, and a Network of Sacred Forests," by Makaulule, for the Gaia Foundation, *Vhomakhadzi* express the hope that CoAL will come and see the communities whose water they will be using. In her editorial, Makaulule asks local community members, who rely on water for household needs and agriculture, if they know about the CoAL mine. "No-one knows!" she writes, "many people in the community do not know that the mine is coming and that it will take the water. They depend on the water of Nzhelele river. They take it to boil and drink. They use it for everything. They will simply wake one day and find that there is no more water" (Mupo Foundation). *Vhomakhadzi* demand transparency by Coal of Africa. Makaulule concedes that Coal of Africa has posted information on the Internet but states, "These villages don't have Internet connection! How can people know that there is an application for a water license to take the water from this river? They cannot

access this information." The Gaia Foundation and DLM videotaped[63] CoAL's 'Water Open Day' to share their concerns with the larger environmentalist community. In the video, the farmers present at the meeting express anger at the public participation program regarding the mining proposal. Wallington, however, refutes claims that CoAL lacks transparency with the community.

In a *News24* follow-up article in response to Groenewald's piece, Wallington rebuked the journalist's generalities. In addition, he was frustrated by Johnathan Mudimemli's assertion that there was no public participation stating, "It was disappointing to read a community leader saying 'no-one is talking to us' when I personally have attended meetings with this community, often in the presence of both local and provincial government representatives" (Wallington 2012). Wallington continues, describing the underdeveloped mineral wealth in the region that could assuage the socioeconomic problems of the historically disadvantaged Venda apartheid homeland. He cites examples of CoAL's dual memorandums of understanding with the Department of Environment and Sanparks, and the Save Mapungubwe coalition; evidence, he suggests, of the company's commitment to conservation and development. Wallington even alludes that the mining efforts will see an "enhancement" of the environment and regional biodiversity. For example, he contends that improvements to the bulk water pipelines will improve water reticulation systems, further claiming that over the lifetime of the mine only 3 percent of Nzhelele Dam's reserves will be utilized.

Wallington is correct that both local and provincial government representatives have been consulted, yet the public participation appears to be a pretense to communicate with local leaders exclusively for the purposes of launching their development project with expediency. When the

[63] To see footage of Coal of Africa's, "Water Open Day" see the YouTube clip http://youtu.be/CI2EebpiqNM

proposal was first made, *Khosi* Kennedy Tshivhase was king, but now CoAL is engaging in talks with the new Khosi, Khulu Toni Mphephu Ramabulana. The Makhado Coking Coal Project fact sheet online provides a pyramid chart of "Engagement Structures" where the company outlines forums of communication and public participation with provincial, regional, and local government assemblies. The "King's forum"— which CoAL seemingly uses to assure stakeholders of their community engagement—is chaired by Chief Musekwa and includes representatives and traditional authorities of affected communities, as well as other elected representatives. At the bottom there is a space that represents a nebulous set of community members.

Gender has not been a categorical consideration during the public participation process; nor has it been reflected in CoAL's fact sheet, which stresses their expected socioeconomic contributions and their community development approach. The company's priority above community and gender interests was to first secure a new-order mining right (NOMR) from the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR),[64] clearing a final hurdle of compliance with Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation. Therefore, CoAL entered an agreement with community BEE empowerment representatives to have them purchase 26 percent stake in the Makhado Coking Coal Project—20 percent held by the Makhado Colliery Community Development Trust, and 6 percent gained by Mike Nkuna's, Yoright Investments, which would include historically disadvantaged South Africans and Black entrepreneurs. Such community-based alliances and shareholders do not explicitly represent the interests of indigenous women. What is apparent, is that the most lucrative and advantageous approach for CoAL is to appeal to local and provincial male leadership and business partnerships, with powerful organizations that

[64] See *Odendaal*, for information on mining in the region.

can provide the legislative clearances and capital needed to proceed with operations. The public participation is ultimately tenuous and *Vhomakhadzi*, and other community members, must rely on rumors to understand what future development plans may be imposed on their communities:

> Tshinakaho: There is a rumors now, it will come out, that they have discovered gold there. At the tea plantations they discovered coal. They are going to mine the whole Soutpansberg. It's 5 projects of mining: Mapungubwe, Makhado Colliery, these three ones they are not disclosing them, but we have heard the other one is going to Kruger. Venda is going to be like Mpumalanga.

Coal of Africa's activities highlight the ways neocolonialism replicates hegemonic systems of exploitation and privilege shaped by colonialism and globalization (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993; McFadden 2001; Taiwo 2004; Haysom 2001; Chepyator-Thompson 2005; Turshen 2010; Chioma Steady 2002; Boko 2005). Research reveals how globalization erodes economic and social progress, resulting in explosive poverty, illiteracy, disease, and infant mortality rates that are aggravated by the stronghold of contemporary Western control over the Continent's resources. Multinational corporations inhibit African self-governance, and are intended to extract the Continent's wealth to the detriment of African people and the most vulnerable among them, women and children (Chepyator-Thomson 2005; Turshen 2010; Haysom 2001; Chioma-Steady 2002; Boko 2005).

CoAL's interaction with *Vhomakhadzi* of DLM and women in the region epitomizes globalization's link with gender-based discrimination. The study reveals in particular the marginalization of *Vhomakhadzi* in the public participation process for the proposed Makhado Coking Coal project, which is especially egregious given the historically vital role of *makhadzi* to the leadership of the chief as stewards of land and agriculture and as ecologists. When former

CoAL CEO John Wallington characterizes *Vhomakhadzi* protests as a circus, threatening legal action against the women for exerting their cultural roles within their own nation and ancestral land, it becomes clear how corporations supersede and delegitimize culture, and indigenous women's rights. An intersectional analysis of Vhavenda or *Vhangona* women's discrimination within these structures reveals a differentiation compared with the citizenship rights of men. CoAL ignores women by appealing almost exclusively to national, provincial, and local male leadership. This is unmistakable in the company's informational pyramid chart of community engagement structures, whereby CoAL showcases its hierarchal public participation with local populations. CoAL's pyramid chart[65] depicts the king, Khulu Toni Mphephu Ramabulana at the apex, followed by male chiefs and other leadership. This representation shows no explicit interaction with women, no consideration of environmental impact on gender, and no recognition of *Vhomakhadzi*. Likewise, CoAL circumvents community and *Vhomakhadzi* protests, using Black Economic Empowerment legislation and strategic investors to illustrate community involvement with historically disadvantaged communities and Black entrepreneurs, yet these sectors are not largely represented by women, and even fewer if any indigenous women among the *Vhangona*.

6.2 Vhomakhadzi Observations: Wetlands and Deforestation

Amid extractive industries, there are many environmental threats to water in the Vhembe District Municipality. *Vhomakhadzi* members of DLM disclose a correlation between mining, deforestation, modern agricultural practices, and commercial farming as threats to the wetlands. Although cultural safeguarding is referenced in the following sections, chapter seven more explicitly addresses cultural biodiversity preservation.

[65] See coalofafrica.com for stakeholder literature and community engagement structures.

The last section illustrated how much water has become a commodity amidst local mining politics. While noting the activities of Makaulule's family through participant observation, I witnessed other problems with access to water. In the townships, homes usually have one tap outside and there are few dwellings with indoor plumbing. As stated in chapter four, the townships are run by the municipality, while many of the villages managed by *Vhamusanda* or chiefs, have access to communal water pumps. Makaulule's home had one spigot in front of the house, connected to a hose to water the garden and to provide water for bathing, cooking, and drinking. Water was drained into a large, uncovered plastic barrel around four feet high. The family had a bucket system in which one small pail, used like a ladle, was dipped into the barrel to fill a series of smaller plastic buckets to be stored in the house for drinking and cooking—or carried off to fill up bathing tubs.

The Vhembe District Municipality is also fraught with water politics, rations, and strikes. The Department of Water Affairs (DWA) have periodically restricted water or shut it off completely while negotiating wages. On one such occasion, I accompanied the family to the house of a generous neighbor who was willing to share water from his tank. In 100-degree weather, we made two trips to the neighbor's home and loaded up the family's truck with as many buckets as we could. We then carried the water to the backyard using a wheel barrel. Whether transporting water to the family's house on that particular day, or managing the daily household water use, lifting heavy buckets together was an everyday routine.

Figure 12: Photograph: Vhavenda youth collecting water from a communal pump between Vuwani Township and village.

Water is sanctified among the varied sacred sites and forests or *zwifho,* such as Phiphidi Waterfall and Lake Fundudzi, yet regardless of the source water is consecrated. Whether groundwater, cascades, springs, pools, and watersheds, all aquatic ecosystems are culturally and environmentally significant. *Vhangona* culture is filled with taboos and myths represented as either blessings or "scary myths" used as conservation strategies to ensure sustainable land-use and to protect water. The wetlands are susceptible to many hazards of development and modern agricultural practices that negate *Vhomakhadzi* eco-cultural wisdom and methods of conservation. Participant discourse further reveals what *Vhomakhadzi* identify as environmental threats and how they face these challenges through efforts to preserve customary beliefs:

Ross: What are the urgent problems threatening water? What is threatening water, the most? All water; rivers, wetlands, springs.

Makwarela: Mining and boreholes are disturbing the water. The people who are cutting down trees near the rivers, the people who are making fires in the forest…There is government people they are going to the rivers and

cutting down the [indigenous fruit tree] because they say it is taking up a lot of water. We grow up eating the fruit of these trees and we don't understand why now they are saying that it is taking up a lot ofcwater. There are lots of people now patenting things— they say don't eat this fruits now, we are going to plant these new things. We have lots of wild fruits, you will see now that people are using GMOs, genetically modified food that we should eat these new fruits and things, disconnecting people from the wild fruits and vegetables.

Phophi: We can't survive. Rivers and wetlands are very important, we can't survive without them. Without them we are disrupting the traditional healers. Wetlands are very important for traditional healing. If a woman has a miscarriage, the healer must bury the fetus in the wetlands to keep them calm and that person will conceive again. But if we lose the wetlands, where are we going to do the burials of the unborn?

Phophi: They are very important we cannot survive without the wetlands. In that wet place, there is a lot of life there – it is a part of our life, too. There are things like frogs, small reptiles, insects, and the earthworms, it's their home. If we lose all these things we are losing a lot. There are frogs, there is grass, and trees, and it is important because they provide shade for the water and animals. The wetlands and springs work together.

Luvhani: *Mupo,* here in and around Venda in different places in villages and different territories. I will talk about the experiences in my home in Vuvha. In Vuvha, there are so many boreholes, and these boreholes are blocking people from going to the river, we used to have many wetlands, but that place they have destroyed. People are destroying the wetlands, they are making their homesteads on the wetlands, building them on top of the wetlands. In our rivers, we used to have many big trees that would attract rain and now the people have debushed them. We used to have the Marula trees, which is important for Venda people and our rituals, but now they are not there. They have been cut down.

Ross: How did *Vhomakhadzi* traditionally protect springs and wetlands?

Nyamuladelo: *Makhadzi* is the one who would go to the spring,
and then she would go back home and call the elders…
Then the elder men would go and get a big log, and then the elder women would clean the spring and touch the water.

The spring was not allowed to be cleaned by a woman who was still matured, only by the women who had menopause.

Mainganye: There was traditional way that you fetch water from the spring. You could not take just any container, only the calabash. And you would not take a pot that had already been put on fire, the black pot. The clay pot, which passes through fire, was not allowed; not enamel or anything. Only a clean clay pot or the calabash, that is how you fetched water. That's how the spring was protected. Now the children go to the spring and see the snake, the frog, the beetle and they kill. And once you kill those things the spring gets dry.

Muofhe: We used to protect the spring, because it was connected to our customs. Like when we grew up we did not know issues about birth, that a woman become pregnant and give birth. We were taught that the children came from the river. And this is why we respect the river because we know that this is where we get our little brother or sisters.

Masindi: We have taboos, but now children will say what is that taboo? People have made things upside down. Like if we say, don't kill this snake, they will say that you are a witch because they associate snakes with witches. We are saying that *Makuwa*[66] is allowed to do a snake park, where people pay to see the snakes, for them they say snake should be saved. For us it is witchcraft. We traveled to Durban for this permaculture training and they have a snake park, we say open the gate we know snake more than you; we cannot pay to see snakes. We can't pay money to see the snake we know the snake at home. There were persons there who said maybe you take the snakes from our mountains.

For *Vhomakhadzi,* cultural biodiversity preservation is an act of survival. It is evident from the interview statements how important particular taboos have been for protecting nature, including the cultural elements linked with water, such as womanhood, birth, and healing. The Gaia and Mupo Foundation websites have included *Vhomakhadzi* concerns about bankside

[66] This term refers to a Western/ White person.

erosion and dried up rivers throughout Vhembe. For example, *Vhomakhadzi* are alarmed about the condition of 24 rivers flowing out of the Thathe Holy Forest. *Vhomakhadzi* contend that deforestation and erosion of the rivers will eliminate the irrigation for household and small scale farmers, and eventually all farms. Makaulule writes, "Sacred sites are places that make evaporation that makes rain. If you don't protect the pools and waterfalls, where do the people get clean water to drink? Rituals aren't empty things. They're the Earth wisdom of hundreds of generations of wisdom" (Gaia Foundation). The negation of indigenous farming systems and the destruction of the surrounding rivers and springs is putting their communities at risk. The next interview statements reveal *Vhomakhadzi* knowledge about harvesting and traditional farming systems referred to as *Mutanga* and *Tshikovha,* which have changed over time through the introduction of Western farming and agricultural techniques

6.3 Vhomakhadzi Observations: Seed Security and Food Sovereignty

Ross: I've heard people mention *Mutanga* and *Tshikovha* as traditional farming methods. Do people still farm in the traditional way?

Luvhengo: People no longer respect the traditional ways of plowing because farms is near the wetlands. Because the way of ploughing near the wetlands is that people wait near the wetlands and when we plant there we have to make some furloughed where the water is not disturbed. But now people just plow and don't follow the traditional way of farming. There is no longer a place of *Mutanga* because people are making their homes at the banks of the river.

Makaulule: Who is responsible for *Mutanga* and *Tshikovha*? Who took away the power from these women and elder men, so that they no longer respect the *Mutanga* and *Tshikovha*?

Luvhani: The government, the agriculture people introduced an orchard, another farming system. If the government is demarcating that this is a field for mono-culture or for one crop, how can you fight

with the government, if they say people have to relocate and make room for the fields?

Makaulule: When the government makes this orchard, didn't the women have an opportunity to advise?

Luvhani: Over them like they are people who have nothing to say. They were not allowed to speak as *makhadzi.* That's why they even destroy the springs in front of our eyes.

Bele: There was a traditional gathering of women in the community. The women didn't advise. No women were allowed to say a word. It started during apartheid time; even the chiefs are keeping quiet because the government was imposing not giving space for people to speak or advise.

Vhomakhadzi statements explain how the National Party government under apartheid, prevented Vhavenda people from exercising self-determination over their own land. *Vhomakhadzi* corroborate historical accounts by recalling the removal of the *Nevhutanda* clan in place of the Tshivashe Tea Plantation. They also clarify Vhavenda people's marginalization from overseeing land-use strategies and policies, demonstrated by the implementation of mono-crop systems, Western agriculture, and commercial farming during apartheid. Moreover, interview statements explain how new agricultural systems have fragmented sacred sites and disrupted cultural practices like *Mutanga* and *Tshikovha*. Furthermore, during the traditional agricultural cycle, *Vhomakhadzi* conventionally summon *vhadzimu*, or the ancestral spirits at the first harvest. During this "first fruits" ceremony prior to the community's preparation of the harvest, *Vhomakhadzi* oversee ritual libation and pacification sacrifices, whereby they communicate to *vhadzimu* in a rite called 'u luma' (Matshidze 2013, Stayt 1931, qtd. in Matshidze).

Unsurprisingly, *Vhomakhadzi* have strong opinions about new agricultural practices and commercial farming due to the subversion of their roles linked with selecting and storing seeds,

and the relationship they have with agricultural cycles. They are essentially caretakers of the traditional knowledge of broader seasonal cycles, and abide by their own ecological calendar for planting, harvesting, seed selection, storage and saving seeds. Indigenous seeds, along with 120 species of wild greens eaten as vegetables, are threatened by mono-crop farming. These indigenous crops are under threat by Levubu farms, the Komatiland Forests (KLF) company, and the Tshivashe Tea Plantations, which rely heavily on chemical fertilizers that degrade the soil. As a result, *Vhomakhadzi* work to preserve the sacred plant *Mufhoho* (Mu-fofo), or Finger millet, to protect their rituals, food and seed security, and food sovereignty. For *Vhomakhadzi* the disturbance of their roles, attributed to Western interference, has severe consequences in their communities:

Ross: How do *makhadzi*, or DLM define seed sovereignty?

Nyadzawela: when we eat this food from the seeds we plant on our own we feel happy, and when we eat this food we feel healthy because we are eating the food which we have chosen to eat, not going to buy food which we have no choice and we are forced to eat, but the one that we plant. We feel happy when we plant, and feel happy when we eat, and in our bodies we also feel that health.

Avheani: In this seeds we love this seeds, and we want to keep these seeds, because these are the seeds of our ancestors; and when we look back at our ancestors they lived long life, healthy because they- we're eating food that was healthy. Yes, we know we have turned and gone to the Western way of food, and we were feeling that this food was not going well with our bodies. That's why we are reviving the food from these seeds. We are reviving what our grandparents were using.

Nyadzawela: When we plant these seeds we are not using the chemical fertilizers, we are using the manure and compost. We know that somewhere we have turned away from the ways of our ancestors, and turned to the Western ways of planting, but when we were planting the Western way, or the other way that was not

the way of our ancestors, we see the way they impacted our health and on the soil and environment and we have gone back to our ancestors' ways of planting and plowing, and we will never forsake their ways of planting again.

Ross: Why are seed varietals important? Instead of just mono-cropping?

Makaulule: When you see different seeds here, after we harvest we can mix different things here to produce one meal. Maize, peanuts, beans in that one meal we have mixed different seeds to create a healthy meal. And millet also, we can create different meals from millet.

Matodzi: When we have this variety of seed, when we plant them it is also determined by the ecological calendar, from these seeds we have different food, which are seasonal food. We have food we eat when it is fresh like in summer and autumn, we also have food which we save for winter and we also have food we save for spring. This variety of seed produce a variety of food which we can save for dry season, or cold season. And the whole year according got to the calendar, the ecological calendar, we have different seasonal food, we last it the whole year without lacking food, without shortage of food. We also get the leaves to eat them as greens.

Ross: What are the indigenous seeds that are most important in Venda?

Matodzi: Finger Millet is very important because we are doing different things by finger millet. We do the homemade alcohol and beer, we also do the *mpambo*, which is very important.
We also do the beverages, and the millet is important because you do it with your own strength, because we don't take it to a mill we have to do it on our own.

Alillali: Finger millet is the mother of all seed, because Mupo is the one that communicates with the ancestors and God to ask for good farming system or planting the growth of all these seeds, because we use *mpambo* [made from finger millet] to ask for a good harvest, that is why finger millet to me is the mother of all seeds.

Avheani: There is a very important issues around seed. As I have explained

that we learned from our ancestors, we learn from the elders, during the time we were children, they leave us with that knowledge. This knowledge of seed we must pass it on to the next generation. This knowledge must not be cut, this is about generation after generation for many times to come. And when we are here at Mupo organization we don't feel like it is a heavy job or burden, it is a responsibility, we must not leave this seed to vanish or get lost.

Figure 13: Photograph: Vhavenda indigenous Seed Varieties from Tshidzivhe Tree Nursery and Seed Project

Ross: In addition to Western ways, what else threatens seed sovereignty?

Nyawasedza: The other thing that contributed to the threat…Venda seeds take a long time to harvest. The other new seeds grow quickly and can be harvested very quickly. The Venda way is a long process. The new Western seeds, with chemical fertilizers, is harvested very fast, which has caused us to turn away from the old ways. The Venda harvest is less, but the Western harvest is big.

Alidzuli: What makes the Finger millet to vanish; the White people came with a book called bible. And they come with it to teach people not to do rituals- this millet thing, do away with *mpambo*. It's hidden, it's the issue of Satan. And they criticize. And this makes people to no longer value the millet, and the people turn away from millet and stopped planting it, because they were no longer allowed to do their rituals.

Nyawasedza: These Christian ways have eroded a lot, and the Christian way came and criticized millet, so that the Venda people would no longer do rituals in their sacred sites. But if you look at the Zulu people, they are holding onto their culture and if you look at the Zimbabwean people, they are still holding on to their culture and still planting finger millet. They don't have any problem with the millet, but here in Venda, if a person sees Finger millet they will say "hey I am a Christian. I don't do these hedon ways". People will say "I don't want this millet" and if you enter a person's house with the millet they will say "I don't want this millet here." I don't know why Venda culture has eroded so much when other cultures have remained.

Limani: People are going to the Western life and they are told that everything they like and need is in the shop. That's why they no longer care about the land, because what they want will be in the shop. We used to plant our indigenous seed and crops and we care about the land. But nowadays, we depend on the shop, and people are no longer healthy because the food in the shop is frozen like meat, and the mealie meal, which is full of chemicals which has a big impact on our bodies; like if you want to stand up and walk, we are not as strong because the bones are not as strong. They are destroying everything through this Western life.

Lalumbe: The diet of the population is deteriorating without these diverse wild foods and elders are expressing their concern that they are less healthy today and the new generations are dying young. With the introduction of seeds from foreign countries, advertising benefits of high yields or resistance to insects, our own indigenous crops are being polluted with their pollen and becoming contaminated. We need to save our indigenous seeds to retain biodiversity for the next generations. The Mupo Foundation advises and encourages seed saving and the benefits of growing indigenous seed.

The consensus among *Vhomakhadzi* is that food sovereignty is defined as having access to healthy and culturally appropriate food. *Vhomakhadzi* regard the seeds and food of their ancestors as purer and more nutritious compared to choices from the grocery stores and local shops. Likewise, they have observed that their ancestors did not have high blood pressure and diabetes the way people do in Venda today. Casual inspection could also link these modern day

diseases with the growing presence of Western fast food restaurants in the region. While in Venda, I observed a large consumption of soda, especially among people in Thohoyandou in the town. According to a recent analysis, South African "consumption of sodas was 104 liters per person per year in 2011 and volumes of consumption have increased by 4.3 percent between 2008 and 2012" ("Why South Africans need to can soft drinks"). Since 2012, South Africa became the most obese nation in Africa, with an estimated eight million people, largely attributable to processed foods and sugary drinks. What is more, that figure is expected to increase by 1.2 million people by 2017 ("Why South Africans need to can soft drinks"). In Venda, I saw fast food specials offering large pitchers of soda for certain meals at fast food chains, such as Wimpy's, KFC, Galitos, and Nandos. It was not uncommon to see a family of four seated at a fast food establishment with two pitchers of soda with their meals, or individuals walking around town with a liter of soda for personal consumption.

There was also heavily processed, packaged food in the shops. While grocery shopping, I tried to buy healthy food, selecting an assortment of vegetables packaged in Styrofoam and wrapped in cellophane from nearby farms; I was unclear where other produce may have come from. There was however, a nearby outdoor market where women sold fresh produce, grains, Mopane worms, and termites, which are also common foods and snacks. It was also typical to see women selling roadside vegetables and fruit. Yet I could not help but think that the fresh organic food from outdoor markets may diminish over time as well.

Life in Thohoyandou, and access to food, was markedly different than in Vuwani with Makaulule's family, where household farmers and home gardens were prevalent. Nevertheless, they too had challenges accessing the food they preferred. To assist with preparing meals, I picked vegetables out of the home garden, and went grocery shopping with the whole family.

However, some of the townships and villages could be characterized as food deserts as local shops carry limited items, and the closest large grocery store was 30 minutes away in either direction in the towns of Elim or Thohoyandou. Makaulule cooked traditional food, *vhuswa nad muroho*, or *pap* and *tanga* which is sautéed pumpkin leaves with onions, tomatoes, pumpkin flowers, and peanuts, which her eldest son crushed in a large mortar and pestle—some variation of which is served in many parts of Southern Africa.[67] She also cooked three types of organic starchy pap made from maize— yellow, a sour fermented pap, and a White pap that was much softer and more desirable to the family than the store bought and processed kind; I also ate sorghum pap at a family friend's home. For meat, we typically bought live chickens to slaughter— available in the community by the many breeders who have backyard chickens for sale, indicated by a sign visible from the road that reads *Khuhu*. Healthy eating was very important to Makaulule's family, but I could see that they struggled with options especially in inconvenient times or for example, when I returned to visit the family after research in Pretoria, only to find that their vegetable garden dried up due to the intense heat and ongoing drought.

Again, *Vhomakhadzi* favor their indigenous seeds over non-native plants and vegetation due to rituals, health, and food quality. Through indigenous tree nurseries, such as the Tshidzivhe Tree Nursery and Seed Project, *Vhomakhadzi* and DLM are recuperating seed varieties. In particular, the sacred *Mufhoho* Finger millet plant is very important to maintain for Vhavenda culture and *Vhomakhadzi*. Mupo Foundation literature describes the plant's use "for rituals *mpambo,* as well as for *Vhuswa* and the traditional drink *Mabundu*. *Mufhoho*, native to Africa, was the staple crop in Southern Africa before maize." However, as *Vhomakhadzi* describe, plants that are faster and easier to grow are relied upon the most now. Thus, the agricultural practice

[67] Vhuswa nad muroho is a pap and pumpkin vegetable dish.

and reliance upon GMOs, chemicals, and pesticides is the norm. There are many practical reasons to revive Finger millet, such as conservation of biodiversity and food security; the seeds are resistant to insects and can be stored for up to 10 years without decaying or losing value, and it is not affected by cross-fertilization or debilitating diseases ("Lost crops of Africa"). Finger millet is one of the healthiest cereals rich in minerals and calcium, with 5000 percent more calcium than maize, and 350 percent more iron. The protein and minerals are imperative to maintaining human welfare, compared to most cereals ("Lost crops of Africa").

A salient viewpoint in the interview statements, once more equates the colonial and missionary presence with the destruction of *Vhavenda* culture, seemingly setting a precedent for the erosion of indigenous agricultural practices and harvesting. Specifically, the inference that Christianity devalued nature and *mupo* was a striking statement. I will speak more to this concept in the next chapter. Still, it continues to be clear how the women construe Western domination as an uninterrupted occurrence, past to present. Throughout *Vhomakhadzi* oral accounts and reflections on *Vhavenda* history, no distinction is made between colonialism and neocolonialism. The subsequent interpretation is that the elder *makhadzi* of DLM believe that colonialism never ended but rather transmuted, validated by the occurrence of multinational companies and plantations that occupy their land.

As the participant discourse reveals, *Vhomakhadzi* use many strategies to preserve cultural biodiversity through DLM. This is demonstrated through their activism to protect the Phiphidi Waterfall and other nearby sacred sites through litigation and formal appeals to government agencies, and through protests against Coal of Africa—including their insistence to attend public participation meetings. The next chapter explores the community and educational component of DLM's organizing in more depth to bring awareness about environmental issues. Through

supplementary discourse, the following outreach activities shape a prescriptive lens to begin a dialogue about what *Vhomakhadzi* see as women's empowerment within the organization, their cultural biodiversity preservation goals, and long-term solutions for maintaining environmental sustainability in the Vhembe District Municipality.

CHAPTER SEVEN DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS III

A review of primary sources, interview data, and direct participant observation allowed me to gather a strong body of information to answer the fourth and final research question: How do *Vhomakhadzi* construct cultural biodiversity preservation? Observing a number of Dzomo La Mupo (DLM) activities was imperative to understanding *Vhomakhadzi* cultural biodiversity preservation strategies. In particular, co-constructing a grant proposal for DLM, evaluating the organization's community dialogue notes, watching video recordings of community mapping, and analyzing the maps in person with *Vhomakhadzi* all proved to be essential for the research.

7.1 Dzomo La Mupo Community Outreach

In November 2015, as a volunteer research assistant, I co-wrote a grant proposal with Makaulule for the EcoCatalyst Foundation to secure future funding for capacity building and to lend support to Dzomo La Mupo (DLM) as a newly independent community-based organization. The proposal has become a template to revise and edit for future grant applications, as the organization needs greater ongoing help to survive. The process of co-writing the grant proposal as a direct participant and through participant observation was an invaluable research opportunity to learn in detail about DLM's objectives and strategic programs; therefore, that process must be discussed here. In addition to interviews and other data, assisting with the grant gave me deep insight into *Vhomakhadzi* values and perspectives about cultural biodiversity preservation strategies. To write the proposal, Makaulule and I had long dialogues over the course of approximately three weeks, whereby adhering to a grant writing schematic, she explained her vision, we reviewed program literature, and I wrote paragraphs based on our conversations with her oversight and editing. The process was arduous, as the weather was very hot and we were all attending to Makaulule's youngest son too, who was two years old at the time. Each paragraph

was meticulously revised based on over a decade of Makaulule's community work and generations of ancestral wisdom that had been passed down to her. Parenthetically, I have never witnessed anyone as dedicated to one's community as Makaulule and DLM is her life's work and intellectual and spiritual pursuit.

DLM's efforts to raise awareness around environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality is apparent in the data. In addition to emphasizing their public activism, the grant proposal describes how DLM's grassroots organizing has worked to restore indigenous agricultural practices through seed revival, permaculture training, and the restoration of traditional agricultural skills to educate communities about agro-ecology (Makaulule and Ross 2015), seed and food security, and land-based livelihood strategies for household farmers. This is achieved through the preservation of indigenous seeds, mulching, and the promotion of fertility beds and gray water[68] for irrigation. By co-writing the grant proposal, I learned that since 2008 with the support of the Mupo Foundation, the African Biodiversity Network, and the Gaia Foundation, DLM has worked with 13 villages and 15 schools, providing outreach that has assisted approximately 90,000 people. Additionally, DLM is heavily engaged in the tactical efforts of their strategic programs on seeds, sacred forest, intergenerational learning and indigenous forests and wetlands. They continue to organize workshops, tree planting initiatives, territorial eco-cultural mapping workshops, wilderness retreats, community discussion, and paralegal training on land and environmental rights (Makaulule and Ross 2015).

[68] This refers to non-sewage or toxic recycled water from household use.

GOALS:

The goal of Dzomo la Mupo is to protect nature in all its form, and especially indigenous forests, rivers, wetlands, sacred sites and enhancing indigenous skills of traditional agriculture which support agro ecology. The aim is to enable the communities to take responsibilities for orientating community knowledge towards the future that is ecological socially and spiritually sustaining. This transition is needed to stop the destruction and to heal the suffering of the Earth through community's ecological governance dialogues.

Figure 14: Excerpt from Dzomo La Mupo Constitution.

Further review of the grant proposal reveals that by way of 200 community meetings and intergenerational workshops, DLM has educated the public about the linkages between the loss of cultural biodiversity, indigenous knowledge systems, traditional ecological governance, and the detrimental impact this has had on the quality of life in the Vhembe District Municipality (See Figure 14).

This public outreach is a growing movement to revive Vhavenda culture and preserve indigenous knowledge and traditional agricultural practices to combat these various environmental problems (Makaulule and Ross 2015). For example, after witnessing the problem at the Nzhelele River and after subsequent ecological education programs and workshops, 3,000 of DLM's members, principally women, revived 7,000 indigenous saplings in community nurseries with the hope of restoring Nzhelele's bank-side and to regenerate the river and its surrounding indigenous forest. Moreover, through community workshops, DLM facilitates intergenerational dialogue for younger community members to learn about indigenous knowledge systems, cultural biodiversity, and traditional ecological governance from the elders. Lastly, "by co-constructing territorial ecological maps and traditional ecological calendars, community members are learning through ancestral maps of the past that show the land before development and environmental degradation. These maps also document current problems and

outline a vision for sustainable land use through traditional farming practices" (Makaulule and Ross 2015).

Figure 15: Photograph: *Makhadzi* Tree Nursery

Figure 16: Photograph: indigenous Tree Saplings

The work that *Vhomakhadzi* have dedicated themselves to is something that is much greater than merely a community-based organization. Just as this is Mpthathe's passion, these labors are also an integral part of *Vhomakhadzi* daily lives as members of the organization. For *Vhomakhadzi,* it is essential to restore *mupo*, revive Vhavenda indigenous practices, and return pride to the institution of *makhadzi* after vehement denigration due to inter-ethnic conflict, colonialism, missionaries, and present-day Christian fundamentalism. DLM encourages indigenous women's leadership roles in the community through wilderness retreats and seasonal community gatherings to discuss the role of *makhadzi* as ecologists and community advocates. The grant outlines efforts to achieve these goals through the integration of annual five-day wilderness retreats, guided by a leader trained in indigenous knowledge skills. The retreats,

through discourse and activities, help restore *makhadzi* confidence as conservationists—including a separate wilderness retreat for men, emphasizing the belief in Vhavenda/*Vhangona* culture that through *mupo*, women, men, and children have distinctive roles in society. DLM also coordinates four seasonal meetings associated with the traditional ecological calendar to examine corresponding seed and food systems. The expressed aim is to revive the traditional role of *makhadzi* in community life. In the following interview statements, Vhomakhadzi share the importance of their work with DLM and how it has impacted their traditional roles:

Ross: What is DLM doing to preserve or restore *mupo*?

Mudanalwo: DLM is doing a lot because DLM has raised awareness all over as now we are hearing on the radio that people should protect *zwifho*, people should no longer cut down trees, people should protect *mupo* and the environment. I think DLM has done a big awareness because the radio is talking about protecting these things. People were destroying rivers, and now there is a big awareness because people were throwing away the napkins in the river.

Connie: DLM is doing a lot. DLM is planting trees, like you see these trees here. They are the trees from the nursery. DLM is reviving the indigenous seed for food. We were using the chemical seed and buying food from the shops only, but now through DLM we are able to plant things in our own homes. There are many things which DLM is doing in relation to seed, in relation to food, in relation to the trees. DLM is doing a lot, it has revived the Finger millet. Planting again the Finger millet, DLM has restored back the role of *makhadzi*; *makhadzi* was undermined, and we were only a *makhadzi* because I was sister to my brother [the chief].

Joyce: DLM has restored different roles of *makhadzi* to the rituals, *makhadzi* to the Finger millet, *makhadzi* to the soil, and marriage. And it has really bring back the strength of *makhadzi*.

Alidzuli: The value of *makhadzi* now is a big dignity. They know now if *makhadzi* is happy or unhappy. She says DLM has fought

for us to bring back to the role of *makhadzi*. Even in marriage, if they can't do marriage without the *makhadzi*, if they don't go to us, things weren't work well. We now feel our strength. Now every-one greets us saying "*makhadzi, makhadzi…. makhadzi."* Like people were associating *makhadzi* with the drama Muvhango.[69] That one at the drama is not a *makhadzi*. That drama is not talking about the real *makhadzi*.

Mutshekwa: DLM has revived the role of *makhadzi*. DLM we love it because it help us in our sacred site. Because there was a lot of trespassing in the sacred sites, but through DLM we bring back the value. And DLM encourage a lot about the value of trees and the forest and the environment. A lot of people now respect the environment. Even our children know that it is wrong to cut down trees through our meetings.

Denga: We thank *makhadzi* Makaululeleni because she has the courage to address the nation about how everything is vanishing. Why can't we come together to value our ancestors? And we are able to do that and we will never give up, and we will continue to value our ancestors and we will continue to protect *mupo* and sacred sites, because the next generation should continue to maintain that way of life.

Nyawasedza: DLM has enabled us to stand. And we will never give up, and through DLM we will win this struggle. That's why even while we are sitting here, our strength is DLM. Because DLM has opened our eyes and our mind to see where we are going. We thank DLM. Even our children now, they are aware now since we started this work with DLM. They know now and respect sacred sites. Because they were no longer knowing the value of sacred sites.

Throughout participant discourse and casual conversation, the sentiment of restored confidence owing to Dzomo La Mupo's (DLM) work was restated numerous times. DLM has been a literal revival of spirit for many *makhadzi* members. The efforts of *Vhomakhadzi* through DLM is

[69] Luvenda language "Soapie."

motivated by their expressed desire to ensure their survival and continued way of life as an indigenous community.

Figure 17: Photograph: Makaulule at DLM Meeting (2016)

Figure 18: Photograph: Vhomakhadzi at DLM Meeting (2016)

Figure 19: Photograph: Makaulule and Dima (2015)

Figure 20: Photograph: DLM Meeting. Makaulule and VhoJoyce, center-left. (2016)

Figure 21: Photograph: Vhavenda men and *Vhamusanda*, chiefs at DLM Meeting (2016)

7.2 Empowering Vhangona Clans

In addition to the work DLM has done to protect the sacred sites of the *Ramunangi (Madau), Nevhutanda*, and *Tshidsivhe* clans, they began expanding their work to safeguard the

territory and sites of the *Khwevha* clan beginning in 2013. DLM meeting minutes transcribed by Makaulule provide insight into community dialogues on these topics and the consultation with the elders—often referred to by Dima and Makaulule as "living libraries." The meeting minutes also provide a brief oral history account of the story of the *Khwevha* clan. The clan originated in the *Khwevha* territory yet due to forced removals through varied historical periods by *Masingo,* as well as Afrikaner's during apartheid, they have since scattered. According to the record, new settlements were developed (years were not specified) with new chiefs and territorial precincts. The newly formed boundaries of *Tshisaulu* and *Itsani* are the new *Khwevha* villages. The original *Khwevha* chieftainship is engulfed by *Tshisaulu*, an occurrence that mirrors similar events that have affected other *Vhangona* clans, such as *Nevhutanda*. Makaulule and DLM conducted dialogues to understand the state of their *zwifho* and the clan before they dispersed. Elder accounts describe how the development of roads has fragmented the *Khwevha* clans' sacred sites or *zwifho*, with only a few old trees remaining. In the report, the elders describe how the trees are far apart from each other, indicating that there is no longer a forest. In other areas, fragmented *zwifho* still have forest cover, surrounded by homesteads and roads with some development of businesses and a vegetable garden. The *zwifho* is now used as the graveyard of the *Khwevha* clan but in previous years they faced challenges when the government wanted to make it a public graveyard or develop homesteads.

Development of homesteads by the municipality, or approved by local leadership, creates an additional set of problems demonstrated by deforestation and the unintentional desecration of gravesites and cracked tombstones. The notes reveal that there has been a court case, and a commission assisting them in these matters. Makaulule even asked them how the

clans distinguish between what is a sacred site and what is a burial site, *Tshiendeulu.*[70] The group expressed wanting more time to discuss this distinction as a matter to be pondered among the entire clan. There is concern about tombstones overlapping into sacred spaces, which according to the notes, was determined to be unlawful by custom. On the topic of the *Khwevha's zwifho* and territorial changes, Makaulule's transcription included remarks by a *Khwevha* elder:

Khwevha Elder:

> It was because people were removed and were denied to stay according to the laws of origin, the Western life and governance system came with the rule of making many homesteads in our territory. By those new laws we were denied to bury our loved ones at home as it was our ways, traditionally that we burry at home, we were forced to go to graveyards done by new government and new chiefs who overcome us, the Indigenous people. They said we should use one graveyards. As clan we explained that we cannot be buried mixed with other people as our spirits knows only our homes and the *zwifho* and again we have different ways of burials. That become difficult and we end up using our *zwifho* portion as burials place. In the clan, this new way disorganized us and our *zwifho* become what you see this day. That *zwifho* is not a burial site, it was only forest for rituals alone.

From the transcript, the major concerns that remain for the *Kwhevha* clan and their elders, is encroachment of development onto their *zwifho* zones by the construction of homes and private yards, roads, and public graves. The local government in particular is not abiding by burial customs and wants to continue installing public graveyards and burial sites, all without out the clan's permission.

Through DLM's community interviews with the *Khwevha* elders, and other Vhavenda elders knowledgeable about *zwifho zwa Venda* — as well as a dedicated young *makhadzi*

[70] See Makaulule, for more information on tshiendeulu (pl. zwiendeulu). Zwiendeulu are the demarcated sacred burial forests of the (vhakololo) royalties.

described by Makaulule as a leader, *phangami*—the group deepened their understanding of the *Khwevha* clan's story of origin and the contemporary challenges they are facing. Through continued gatherings, the clan formed a committee, The *Khwevha* Council for the Protection of *Zwifho zwa Khwevha* and has since drafted a sacred site profile and clan constitution for the protection of the remaining territory. The profiles and constitutions are similar to those documents previously submitted to SAHRA for the consideration of provincial heritage status for *Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu, La Nwadzongolo, Zwifho zwa Thathe, and Zwifho zwa Vhutanda, and, therefore, serve as* a precursor for lobbying for formal protection of their original ancestral lands. In the clan constitution, the council describes their clan, their totem, and the families which comprise *Khwevha* clan members—also *Vhomakhadzi* define their rituals and the expressed importance of the *Khwevha* rituals to the clan and community at large (See Figure 22).

Figure 22: Photograph: Makaulule dialogue with *Khwevha* Clan (2014)

Ongoing visits with the community included drafting ecological maps and calendars to draw out the elders' knowledge on environmental sustainability, seasonal cycles, and agriculture,

as well as to help determine the location of *Zwifho zwa Khwevha* and larger landscapes that have changed over time. *Khwevha* elders contributed their knowledge to the maps to sketch a relationship between past conditions and present-day challenges in order to track the destruction of their land and to chart future action. DLM has also begun dialogues with the chiefs of other *Vhangona* clans from *Vuu* and *Malale*, with the hope that by instilling confidence in them about their rights, and through paralegal training and conversation, that they will be empowered to use the law through their own independent organizing.

Through the *Khwevha* conversation notes, Makaulule also expressed happiness to report the mentoring of the young *makhadzi*, because it is the younger generation that has drifted away from culture; without intergenerational interchange, DLM will only make limited progress. All the elders interviewed continuously expressed concern about the younger generation's lack of awareness about culture, and their hope that DLM will nurture intergenerational learning and reach out to young people. On this point, Makaulule remarks:

> Intergenerational learning is not in the classroom. Inter-generational learning is life experience. Trusting the indigenous knowledge is intergenerational learning. The knowledge passed through generation to generation from children like NdiMashudu, my little boy, he already knows that when he sees the moon, he says *makhadzi.*[71] He will already know it's *makhadzi,* it is a part of intergenerational learning. He will grow up knowing the moon is *makhadzi*, not in the classroom. We are told as little girls when you go to the river don't kill the frog. The elders will tell you just that. We know that you must not kill the frog. When you grow up, you will hear the sound of frog and you will see the rain coming.

The construction of ecological maps and calendars are the tools DLM uses for inspiring intergenerational engagement and to draw out the elders' knowledge and observations, such as

[71] Vhavenda/Vhangona often refer to the moon as *makhadzi.*

those just highlighted among the *Khwevha* clan. Ecological maps and calendars also help communities understand the progression of environmental degradation and the changes in land-use in the community due to development. Makaulule states:

> We work with schools [around Venda] on the ecological calendars and eco-mapping. We take the school children for five days in the lodges far from town, we do meetings, dialogues and start to disconnect them from technology, their cell phones. Not to force them, we take the remote controls for their rooms. When they arrive there, it is a room without a remote, TV cannot play, but we do it in the form of song then we do first two days' dialogues to bring the ecological calendar maps. Then we divide them, the children. The other group was doing it – a water map. The children do a water map. We just do a dialogue to talk about water, but it will end up on the table on the water map. When we do the water map, it's just like frogs you will see them in the map, rain, mountains, everything connecting to water.

7.3 Community Mapping

Western maps represent images of conquest and imperialism in Africa. Cartesian Atlases are accepted as objective, scientific data used to inform; nevertheless, such maps represent knowledge validation and a legacy of social stratification (Kelso 1999). Kelso (1999) explains the implications of analyzing maps subjectively, from a post-structuralist or reflexive lens, "...the map is viewed as a subjective, socially-produced image which reflects, not reality, but the social, political and cultural context from which it emerged" (Kelso 15-16). Thus, it is helpful to understand that standard maps used today come from a cultural context of European exploration and empire building. Likewise, geographical information systems (GIS), which represent modes of Western technology, are also socially constructed within a cultural context of European dominance and land grabbing. GIS, although a map of the digital age, continues the legacies of patriarchy and power associated with traditional maps.

As demonstrated in the data, during apartheid, South Africans endured volatile and violent shifts in residency due to landscape politics. These changes are distinctly reflected in the country's geography today. Yet, in the context of participatory or community mapping, ownership of the land, as it is defined in a Western sense, is not a requisite for delineating boundaries in Indigenous communities. Indigenous rights advocates describe ancestral titles to land in ways that contrast with estate laws and European-derived legal systems and dominion (Alison 2006). Such land claims by Indigenous populations are categorized as Indigenous human and civil rights, recognized under international law, which, in the scope of the study, supports religious or cultural traditions and sacred areas, community livelihoods, food security, food and seed systems, and sovereignty, and self-determination over sustainable development and conservation (Alison 2006). For Vhavenda people, particularly the *Vhangona*, ancestral titles may also be described as *laws of origin*, as there is no legal record of how the community came to be stewards of their land, or what may be more aptly described as a cultural and spiritual belonging to an area for hundreds of years from time immemorial (DLM SAHRA Application 2012).

According to the United Nations Environment Programme and World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), mapping territorial boundaries is a crucial step towards building capacity and sharing knowledge for Indigenous peoples and their land. In UNEP-WCMC's published toolkit for conservation (2013), multiple mapping methods are outlined as tools for managing what the Centre calls Indigenous Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) including, kite mapping and balloon mapping to create aerial photos, and computer technology such as participatory geographic information systems (PGIS) whereby participants are trained to make scientific measurements and assessments of land. Based on the

presentation of data, mapping and boundaries is an especially relevant concern in countries historically embedded in land conflicts and/or conflicting land claims. Within the study, this is substantiated by the presence of multinational development companies and extractive industries, threats to all sacred areas epitomized by the Phiphidi court case and encroaching tourism developments onto *Ramunangi* sacred sites, or the *Kwhevha* clan's disputes with development, construction, and the private graveyards that overlap onto their sacred areas. This is also evidenced in general by Vhangona elder historical accounts of forced removals of clans by both *Masingo* leadership and the Apartheid regime.

UNEP-WCMC promotes documenting territorial presence and cultural boundaries for communities that wish to establish a clear relationship between Indigenous people and their land. The justification (Corrigan, et al. 2013) that coincides with DLM's purposes for using eco-cultural and GPS mapping include:

- The transfer of knowledge between generations.
- Providing information about the existence of a community and the management of biodiversity.
- Facilitating effective management by providing a spatial reference for monitoring and assessment.
- Creating opportunities for the community to "come together" and discuss future plans for the ICCA.
- Registration of ICCAs within the UNEP WCMC Global Registry; or other forms of national and international recognition.
- Generating photos as evidence and presence (Corrigan, et al. 2013).

Additionally, mapping Indigenous territories is essential because it documents current boundaries and traditional dwellings, clarifying a relationship with the land and changes over time. Corrigan and Edie (2013) explain that maps are significant for securing protection and land titles from the government. By using traditional eco-cultural mapping, and supplementary technology, such as Global Positioning Systems, DLM is creating intergenerational dialogue,

clarifying the evolution of unsustainable development projects, and creating a sustainable land-use plan for the future in the Vhembe District Municipality.

Through DLM's international partnership with the Gaia Foundation, Makaulule first learned the eco-cultural mapping technique in the Northwest Amazon— through the Columbian based NGO, Gaia Amazonas.[72,73] Following that experience, Makaulule and DLM returned to Africa, and through the non-profit organization, African Biodiversity Network (ABN), shared the mapping process with communities from Benin, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia. *Vhomakhadzi* use simple materials to compose the maps, including construction paper and markers. The final product is a colorful collage of pictographs and images, portraying the remaining Indigenous forests and wetlands in Venda that need protection from mining, chemical and pesticide-dependent mono-crop farming, and unsustainable tourist ventures.

DLM members trained in territorial eco-cultural mapping and traditional eco- calendar composition, like VhoJoyce, Makaulule, Alillali and select others, have led trainings with many villages and schools. The process begins with community workshops where students and residents are taught instructional methods to chart landscapes through drawings and sketches to characterize the progression of land-use. The maps, which are conceptualized by *Vhomakhadzi*, elders, and students function as an intergenerational tool to empower Venda communities. The elders, both men and women, lead this process by first constructing an ancestral map of the past to develop awareness about the territory before environmental degradation and harmful development projects. The ecological calendars require similar training based on traditional food and seed systems to teach communities about traditional agricultural practices.

[72] To see footage of Makaulule's trip with Gaia Amazonas to the Amazon, visit https://youtu.be/NrPuzEQomiw
[73] See the inter-cultural indigenous exchange in South Africa, documented in the short film, *Reviving our Culture, Mapping our Future*, https://youtu.be/l5Drol4kmMA.

The mapping and calendar construction are practical tools that supplement hands-on fieldwork experiences. For instance, DLM's previously funded work provided environmental education on the value of trees and supported work with students to plant trees on their campuses. Moreover, through DLM's 5-day wilderness retreats with educators, teachers reconnect with nature through intergenerational exchange about *mupo*, "preparing them to transfer knowledge about cultural biodiversity and eco-systems through the curriculum, and by leading educational forest walks with students" (Makaulule and Ross 7). *Vhomakhadzi* are integral to the mapping process and they find that both the intergenerational and inter-cultural exchanges energize their efforts to preserve culture and the environment:

Ross: I would like to ask about the ecological maps. What was the process like for you to make the maps?

Mudanalwo: I enjoyed that a lot – the process of mapping. Because since the Amazon [Indigenous Columbians] came to teach us the mapping process, I have learned a lot about my territory. How the connection of the land there, rivers that they start there, and I have learned through the mapping process where are the rivers and where they are flowing to. Through the mapping, I also see that the rivers that start there at Thathe they flow up to Kruger park, to different places in Venda. And many rivers there – they are the tributaries there – flow from Thathe. And through the mapping, I also learned that at Thathe is a watershed area. Like there is a pool, that is flowing down to make the other springs in other areas as Thathe is the highest peak there. I learned a lot about the territory. Before eco-mapping I didn't know the connection in the land.

Joyce: In that process we learned about the ecological calendar, and we know how the connection between the calendar and what happened in this season, and that season. And our children know about the ecological calendar. For me I learned a lot about the ecological calendar and the mapping, Like I myself am able to teach about the ecological maps and calendar; I went to Kenya and I teach them, I also went to Zimbabwe and teach them. We the Mupo people, the process of the mapping is an important thing,

now we're are teaching the people in Zimbabwe and Kenya. We are spreading that knowledge.

Ross: Was it intergenerational or were *makhadzi* leading the process?

Bele: It was mixed: men, women, girls, elders. Like here at Vu, they have mapped the whole area of the township. Like we started by mapping the ancestral map of the past. That is when the elders were showing us what was here before all the development. Then we rely on the elders' knowledge because we were not there. Then when we draw the present, the young people were drawn the roads and everything that was here, and it was a mixture of ourselves and the youth. In maps, there are three maps that should be drawn. The map of the past, present, and future.

Ross: So the maps have been very empowering for the *makhadzi*. How will you use them moving forward?

Bele: These maps are to show how the disorder came. Ourselves living now, we have that knowledge and we explain by our mouths, but the children – we have the maps to show what we left them and explain what they mean. It's nice today, we are back where we belong, our minds were getting tired, we were no longer gathering we are very happy. We are happy to meet you.

Ross: How are the ecological maps and calendars important for establishing seed sovereignty?

Avheani: The eco-calendars have assisted us to remember about planting different seeds and the eco-calendar assisted us to remember how long from when you plant the seed to when it needs to be harvested; and it teaches about all the seeds need to be planted and harvested. In the ecological calendar we have revived the knowledge about this seed, like now we are in the moon setting. It is October now, but through eco-calendar, we have determined that it is germinating season and now we know it is time to plant and we only have three months for planting all these seeds. In December, when the moon goes to darkness – then according to the eco-calendar, when is the right time to plant which seeds.

Ross: How does constructing the eco cultural maps help protect the wetlands?

Joyce: The maps help a lot because while we were drawing the maps we were also drawing the boundaries, and when we draw this, this is where we see that here there was a spring, and here there is a wetland. Maps help us to discover where are the wetlands and springs. The other thing, when we were drawing the map, we were seeing the disorder – the people were building a house where there was a wetland. Because people were putting their homestead on top of the wetlands. We also discovered that farming systems by plowing by the river is making the springs dry. Because people have put a field of maize where there was a wetland that's why the spring is no longer there.

Marandela: When we were drawing, we also see in the map of the past that when people make homestead, they don't make homestead on the top of the wetlands, they put them on the side, not on the top, and we see that people are no longer on the right side.

Makaulule: We see through mapping that the bluegum pine plantation – we see that they are also causing the wetlands to be dry because we see that they are absorbing the water. That was a big disturbance. Sacred sites should be protected. Are we not breathing fresh air from these trees? If you go to another home with no trees, you will see there is no fresh air. That's why we are fighting with them not to cut the trees in the sacred sites.

The interview statements clarify the value of the eco-cultural maps as preservation tools. Through the maps *Vhomakhadzi* show community members the evolution of land-use, the origins of eco-systems and reinstruct the community on the indigenous agricultural techniques. Through the mapping workshops *Vhomakhadzi* of DLM are empowered as educators as they instruct people from nearby townships and villages, and even other indigenous African communities about their traditional roles and agricultural techniques. In this sense they are both preserving their culture and reestablishing their voice of authority.

Figure 23: Photograph: Eco-Cultural Map of Thathe Forest, Communities, and Rivers at Tshidzivhe

Figure 24: Photograph: DLM's Vuvha River and Mountain Envirocare Project

Figure 25: Photograph: Vho-Joyce Explaining Map

Figure 26: Photograph: *Makhadzi* explaining Eco-Calendar

Figure 27: Photograph: Makaulule Discussing the Purpose of Ecological-Calendars

Figure 28: Photograph: Eco-Cultural Map of Nzhelele River and its numerous tributaries

Figure 29: Photograph: Eco-Cultural Map Indicating Development Changes

Figure 30: Photograph: Eco-Cultural Map Indicating Present-day Development Changes

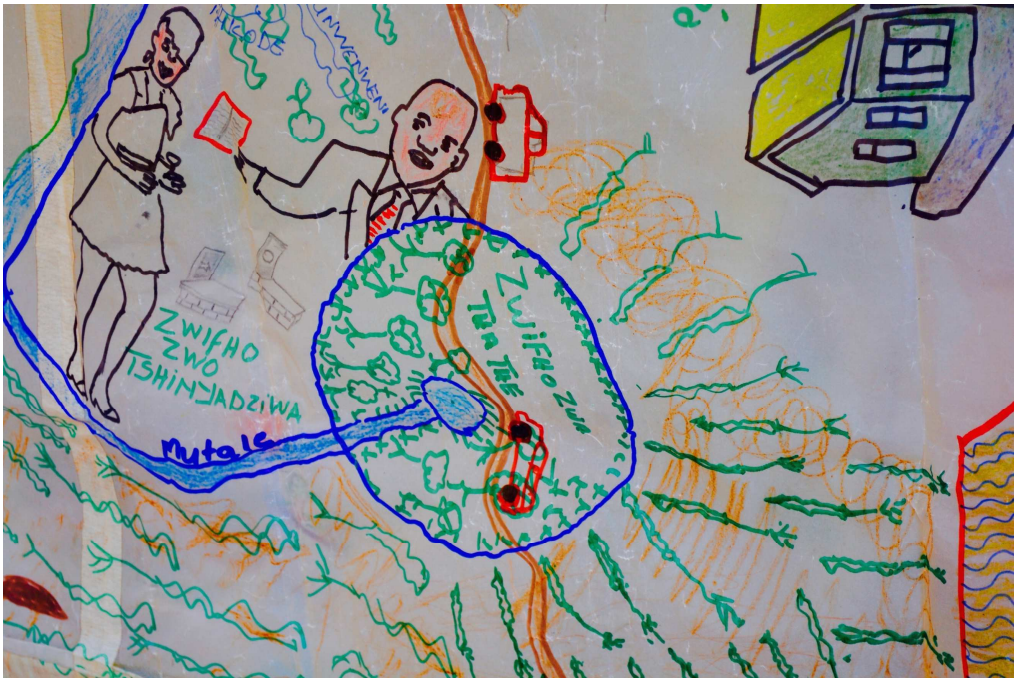

Figure 31: Photograph: Eco-Cultural Map Indicating threats to sacred sites.

What is exceptionally powerful about the maps is how they encompass the lived experiences of *Vhomakhadzi* and their perception of land use as the drawings tell a story of industrialism and modernity. As illustrated in Figure 28, the various springs and tributaries that emerge from

Nzhelele River— a valley area that many Vhavenda people were forced to relocate to during apartheid, which remains a water-stressed region. The communities there contend with low rainfall and receding riverbanks, which impact household farmers and the hydration of cattle. Again, future plans to mine in this area by Coal of Africa would further devastate the Nzhelele River and its residents due to the large use of groundwater needed for mining coal. Moreover, through these maps, a culture under threat becomes evident. For example, in Figure 31, as it was explained by VhoJoyce, "This is a business man who offers money for a development project while a woman, no longer wearing the [traditional] *Nwenda*, stomps around the sacred forest in high heels— but here *we* come [pointing to the drawing of a car or Kombi], *Vhomakhadzi*, to stop this destruction." Her interpretation of the map shows *Vhomakhadzi* perceptions about Western influences and the destruction of land, culture, and the environment. In her statement, she positions *Vhomakhadzi* within their cultural roles, and as self-identified ecologists, as the remedy for these problems. Of all the data presented, this simple statement is the most effective in demonstrating how *Vhomakhadzi*, as women, frame both the environment and cultural biodiversity preservation.

Indigenous maps represent epistemological and ontological perspectives (Pearce and Louis 2008). They differ from Western maps in that they denote various conceived dimensions of the material and spiritual world, and may represent past, present, and future. Local cultures have their own mapping traditions that deviate from the standard Western mapping techniques, which surface within these eco-cultural atlases. Indigenous maps, for example, are often times more multifaceted, referred to by researchers as *process cartography*, which "connects oral, written, performative, and experiential modes of mapping as a means to transmit situated indigenous, cultural knowledge from one generation to the next" (Pearce and Louis 2008).

Aboriginal mapping may appear in various genres of art such as storytelling, dance, poetry and even carvings. Such methods of revived cultural practices and knowledge are increasingly proving to be very applicable means in articulating self-determinism in Indigenous communities. Indigenous mapping, or eco-cultural mapping, is being used as a tool for resource management and for restoring sustainability in many communities around the world. What is more, the integration of this mapping method with GPS, GIS, and other technologies provides further strategies to map local territory and protect local communities.

In December 2012, DLM, chiefs and *Vhomakhadzi* worked with environmental consultant, Phillipa Holden, to map the boundaries of the three sacred sites whose profiles were being drafted at that time for SAHRA's consideration for Provincial Heritage Status. Thus, Holden accompanied community members to sacred site regions, and utilized a GPS system to create digital maps of original territories and sacred sites of: (1) *Zwifho zwa Guvhukuvu, La Nwadzongolo* (Phiphidi Waterfall), (2) Zwifho zwa Vhutanda, and (3) Zwifho zwa Thathe. The following data derives from the boundary mapping report released from Holden's firm, shared with me by Makaulule.

Each clan is responsible for maintaining their sacred sites. The clans lead ceremonies in thanks for rain and land, and to talk to the ancestors to thank *mupo* for the well-being of the *shango* and territory. Clans abide by traditional ecological calendars to determine which prayers to use, and *Vhomakhadzi* adhere to ecological patterns and the flow of seasons to communicate with the ancestors using prayers connected to seeds and plants. Yet, there are both environmental and political reasons for mapping boundaries and protecting the sacred areas. In his report, Holden explains the political necessity of maintaining the network of sacred sites: "…if they fail to protect one sacred site, the others will also become vulnerable. In addition, the intention is to

reclaim the areas of the sacred sites that have been lost to development." Preserving the sacred locations, and the moisture and water within, are vitally important for regulating the climate, and therefore make the mapping process important in protecting the overall network of sites, and locating and restoring fragmented areas. The goal would be to rehabilitate fragmented areas such as those among the *Zwifho zwa Vhutanda* within the Tea Plantation. Restoring connectivity could increase sacred site biodiversity and provide the necessary landscape to resume suitable clan rituals (Tshiguvho 2008, DLM SAHRA Application 2012). Holden and community members set out on foot and in vehicles to clarify boundaries, utilizing his mapping methodology – in collaboration with *Vhomakhadzi* and community perspectives site visits, discussions with *Vhomakhadzi* and elders, and by utilizing traditional eco-cultural maps.

Borderlines were recorded with a standard Garmin GPS unit. Some areas were inaccessible due to rivers and jagged roads, in which case areas were recorded on a 1:50,000 topographical map. According to Holden (2012), "Photographs were also taken of specific natural, environmental and man-made features as well as the surrounding land-uses. The GPS information was then downloaded and mapped using Arc View and satellite imagery" (8). and the final report provides the coordinates and topography descriptions. To honor my agreement with the informant who gave me access to the SAHRA applications, I will not include a written or visual depiction of the sacred site locations and boundaries. Also, clans ask that pictures of the sacred sites not be included in any research or supplementary materials. The integration of the eco-cultural maps and the contemporary technological and digital maps together are essential methods as both an intergenerational tool, and a way of working within South Africa's democratic structures to claim Indigenous rights.

7.4 Final Synthesis

This section of the data presentation is a final synthesis of results, supplementary historical context, emergent themes, and interpretation. Guided by all four research questions: (1) How do colonial and apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies manifest in South Africa's land act legacies? (2) What impact has South Africa's land acts, in conjunction with traditional leadership, had on cultural biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality? (3) What do *Vhomakhadzi* attribute to environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality? and (4) How do *Vhomakhadzi* construct cultural biodiversity preservation? In other words, what do their efforts or positions reveal about gender and cultural biodiversity and how they as women frame culture and environment? From there, I then examined the data. From *Vhomakhadzi* participant discourse and attending data related to their community organizing, environmentalism, and cultural biodiversity preservation efforts in the CBO, Dzomo La Mupo (DLM), the predominant emergent themes include: *Globalization and Gender-Based Discrimination*, *Western Patriarchal Claims to Nature*, *Vhomakhadzi Environmental Epistemologies* and through DLM membership, *Makhadzi Political Praxis*.

7.5 Globalization and Gender-Based Discrimination

Analyzing the data, it is patently clear that varying development projects and extractive industries in the Vhembe District Municipality are driven by a complex, interconnected outgrowth of globalization that systematically excludes women and *Vhomakhadzi*. This is evidenced by a confluence of land acts and traditional governance legislation spanning the colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid eras that have historically disadvantaged women within the land administration process. Beginning with the Native Administration act of 1927, and the

Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, these acts catalyzed unaccountable authority[74] in the former apartheid homelands, setting a precedent whereby local leadership could abuse traditional courts, often to deprive communities of natural resources and land. These land policies live on in the post-apartheid era, through key legislation such as the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act* (2004), the *Communal Rights Bill* (2004), the now defunct *Traditional Courts Bill* (2008), and the *National House of Traditional Leaders Act (2009),* thus compromising South Africa's democratic structures. This legislation is why South Africa's commission on gender equality has made multiple inquiries about these laws, highlighting legislative statutes that conflict with gender protections as outlined in the country's constitution – and which were historically absent during the colonial and apartheid eras.

The evolution of laws, as they exist today, stifle public involvement and equitable arbitration and there remains a consistent struggle between the separation of powers of courts, traditional governance and land administration. Further, through statutes, such as the *Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act* (SPLUMA) and the *Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act,* many land advocates and citizens are concerned about far-reaching land claims and the extension of powers to the traditional councils and local municipalities in the former apartheid homelands. Comprehensively, this results in structural inequalities that disempower women due to poor legal representation, cases of patrilineal inheritance, low ratios of female political influence, female exclusion from select traditional courts, tenuous access to land, insecure housing tenure, lack of public participation for proposed development plans, degraded livelihoods, and lack of women's access in shaping customary law, environmental policy, and conservation.

[74] Custom Contested is a blog/website affiliated with the Land Accountability Research Centre.

This convergence of legislation empowers local leaders to uphold a network of legislative gaps and democratic ambiguities that embolden multinational corporate development schemes, land acquisitions, and rural-based extractive industries. South Africa possesses vast mineral commodities in the form of platinum and the largest world reserves of diamonds, gold, vanadium and chromite ore— vital for mineral exports, foreign exchange, and manufacturing. Within fossil fuel commerce, the country has the fifth largest mining industry internationally, all of which attracts multinational conglomerates. Platinum, for instance, has sparked vehement land conflicts in the rural areas of North West Province among the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela tribal authority area (Sonwabile Mnwana 2016) and among the Royal Bafokeng Nation, which receives royalties in exchange for its deposits from the Impala Platinum Mining Corporation. Moreover, as demonstrated in the study, large interconnected multinationals, such as Coal of Africa (CoAL), extend their global reach through shareholders, strategic investors, and clients such as the Arcelor Mittal Steel Group, which traverses multiple industrial markets in Australia, Canada, Europe, the United States and other countries worldwide. In the context of South Africa, this web of activity depends on national, provincial, and local powers to support their enterprises to the exclusion of community interests; and in this scenario, no one is more vulnerable than women and children.

Globalization and gender-based discrimination is rooted in colonial and apartheid gender ideologies. Frenkel (2008) references colonial influences on gender roles in Africa stating, "In most histories of colonial conquest, the colonising power refused to negotiate with women or acknowledge women as leaders in a public context. The collusion between colonial powers and indigenous male leaders led to female exclusion from higher structures of power..." (Frenkel 3). This historical and continental phenomenon not only altered labor divisions, but also

gender roles in the context of state-making and political contributions in public and household spaces – i.e. *Vhomakhadzi* leadership roles within the clan, family, and community. It is this calcified attitude in the 21st century that Vhavenda women and *Vhomakhadzi* find themselves entangled with today. The reinstitution of traditional courts and the assemblage of local, national, and multinational actors – who appropriate imperialist authority and gender ideologies – now unify men of different colors and classes to control Vhavenda women and *Vhomakhadzi* in a colorblind global patriarchy in the post-apartheid era. (McFadden 2001).

McFadden (2001) recognizes the historical forces that shape present day neocolonialism and globalization in reifying an old colonial and imperialist world order, which has especially challenged the rights and citizenship of South African women in rural areas (McFadden 2001). Examining notions of patriarchy in a post-colonial context, in both public and private spaces, reveals the limitations of women as fully functioning citizens, as they contend with global and local gender stratification. McFadden (2001), upon analyzing these concepts, does not excuse "African patriarchy" or gender-based discrimination in her critique of colonial and neocolonial oppression. Rather, she ignores binarisms of oppressor and oppressed to portray a comprehensive scenario where global patriarchy has colluded to absolve women's rights. This is ever more present in the former homelands and amidst Venda's traditional leadership structures, land act legacies, and the presence of multinational companies.

Upon analyzing participant discourse, the commentary likewise dismantles binarisms. Although *Vhomakhadzi* acknowledge abuse of power among chiefs, mainly Masingo traditional leaders, they also maintain a distinction between the Masingo chiefs and other political and multinational corporate actors – suggesting that patriarchal structures also maintain their own hierarchy given the economic disparities that many chiefs themselves endure. The commentary

reveals a perception by *Vhomakhadzi* that chiefs are less culpable in discrimination compared with Western/White influences because they are also impacted by structural inequalities in their society. Interpretation of the interview statements uncover disparate or hierarchal expressions of patriarchy in the Vhembe District Municipality, among Vhavenda local leadership – and national, international, political and corporate actors. Furthermore, the neo-traditionalist ideology which fuels extensive land claims by chiefs, who use culture as a pretense to manipulate democracy in order to acquire more land, is reliant upon the intertwining, vituperative laws that disenfranchise women. Thus, in another example of colorblind global patriarchy by redefining custom, traditional male leaders silence women.

7.6 Western Patriarchal Claims to Nature

Upon analyzing statements concerning *Vhomakhadzi* and cultural biodiversity preservation efforts, the emergent and prominent theme is Western authoritative claims to nature, both past and present. Through the literature, it has become clear that cultural biodiversity is the expression of cultural, linguistic, and environmental knowledge, which coevolved over many centuries (Maffi and Woodley 2010; China Bioreserve Network 2008) a process which *Vhomakhadzi* have been intimately connected. Language has therefore been a point of contention for Vhavenda traditional healers, medicinal practitioners, and *Vhomakhadzi* who see that Luvenda and Tshivenda words have been devalued. *Vhomakhadzi* frequently reminded me with great pride, that it was Vhavenda people who had myriad Luvenda names for flora and fauna well before the arrival of Whites. They were also adamant that the best indicator for tracking, planting, and harvesting seasons was through the Indigenous ecological calendar as opposed to Western calendars. The *Vhangona* people claim to have originated in Venda with the Luvenda language and, through oral accounts, describe how their ancestors gave names to the

rivers, forests, caves and pools (SAHRA Application 2012). The *Vhangona* confirm that all forms of life in the *shango* (territory) have a name in Luvenda with deep meaning. This is especially important due to both cultural and linguistic attacks – a tragic outcome of the National Party government during the apartheid regime. The apartheid government accordingly pushed for instruction to be in the Afrikaans and English languages – a notion subsequently met with vehement social unrest and protests throughout the country. The point being that even African languages, including the Luvenda words to describe nature, were also depreciated. Understanding the historical context clarifies Dzomo La Mupo participants' frustration with Western dominance over nature and the words that describe environmental phenomena.

Participant discourse also revealed feelings of frustration at the audacity of Western domination over environmental policies, conservation, control of land, and agricultural practices. This frustration was perfectly exemplified in VhoMasindi's statement about a White-owned snake park in Durban, visited by *Vhomakhadzi* and DLM. To restate:

> We have taboos, but now children will say what is that taboo? People have made things upside down. Like if we say, don't kill this snake, they will say that you are a witch because they associate snakes with witches. We are saying that *Makuwa* is allowed to do a snake park, where people pay to see the snakes, for them they say snake should be saved. For us it is witchcraft. We traveled to Durban for this permaculture training and they have a snake park, we say open the gate we know snake more than you; we cannot pay to see snakes. We can't pay money to see the snake we know the snake at home. There were persons there who said maybe you take the snakes from our mountains.

VhoMasindi's observation is a commentary on how nature and conservation are socially and culturally constructed. *Vhomakhadzi* here discern both the irony of Vhavenda people's convoluted relationship to nature due to Westernism – and the hypocrisy latent in Western conservationism. Vhavenda culture – once portrayed through a reverence for nature and sacred

sites as exemplified by Indigenous agricultural skills, *Vhomakhadzi* eco-cultural knowledge, and through a complex system of taboos that assisted the management of sustainable land-use – now associates snakes with witchery. Accusations of sorcery are still common, as I frequently heard people speculate that misfortune encountered by community members may have been a result of witchcraft. The irony is that snakes and nature, which were once respected, have now become a cultural distortion first created by missionaries and now perpetuated by present-day Vhavenda Christian fundamentalism. For example, some Vhavenda Christians have referenced biblical scriptures as evidence of witchcraft in Exodus 22:18, Deuteronomy 18:10-1, or Acts 8:18-20 (Ralushai 1996). Through a dominant Western framework, the snake park becomes emblematic of control, owing to a historical struggle to define nature and its value as a commodity in which *Vhomakhadzi*, who have been robbed of their roles to protect biodiversity, must now pay to see the snakes from their own mountains. This simple example and *Vhomakhadzi* observations that "…for them [Westerners] they say snake should be saved. For us it is witchcraft," underscores how conservation fits into a post-colonial narrative as *Vhomakhadzi* reveal an acute awareness of double standards that have been created by the West, but are now reinforced by Vhavenda people.

These concepts are equally apparent in the emergence of the witch as a symbol representative of woman's suspicious relationship to nature cross-culturally – including in Venda, as police statistics reveal during a resurgence of witchcraft accusations in the late 1990s, women were predominantly accused of being witches (Ralushai 1996). Although a belief in witchcraft is a fear substantiated in cultural belief, this takes on new connotations through the parallel accusations of *Vhomakhadzi* demonic kinship to sacred plants and indigenous customs. The conclusion drawn is that these symbols, as vestiges from the past are still used to manage

women's interaction with the environment. In the broader scope of the study, the challenge for feminists and environmental scholars, then, is to "seek to overcome metaphors and models which feminize nature and naturalize women to the mutual detriment of both nature and women" (Warren introduction).

Vhavenda Christian fundamentalist positions about *Vhomakhadzi* and their relationship to nature is a result of *colonial Africanist discourse*, or what I refer to by contrast as an Africanist Discourse of inferiority, or the internalized other, which perpetuates cultural denigration, silencing, and shame. Through Kirkaldy's (2005) review of the Berlin Mission Society records and missionary newsletters, he likewise likens this shame to the "Missionary gaze" or the "distorting missionary ethnographic lens..." (Kirkaldy 13), which depicts Vhavenda people as barbaric and unsophisticated. Similarly, these accounts reveal how the missionaries connect the 'wild' and untamable land with the perceived primitiveness of the people. Kirkaldy examines the intricate relationship between these perceptions of the land and an enduring legacy that connects all wilderness with a sort of Christian-less wilderness of the soul. His take on the iconography of forest people and dwellings, as it has been conjured by missionaries and explorers, explains Western justification for land grabbing and a patriarchal moral position, or manifest destiny. This missionary gaze can be further expanded within the context of gender, exemplified by deviant portrayals of sexually deviant African women – thus validating through a logic of domination the need to control African women and land.

Ultimately, eco-cultural knowledge practices over time have been stifled by Western patriarchal claims to nature. Thus, the systematic devaluing of *Vhomakhadzi* is in essence a devaluing of women and nature, in view of the fact that the elimination of their ancestral rituals of *thuvela* and *u pasa* and their responsibilities, such as ritualistic use of snuff from the tobacco

plant and the use and cultivation of the sacred finger millet plant to make *mpambo*; the disregard of taboos and myths used as conservation strategies; and the disdain for the custodianship of sacred sites has subverted an entire generation's environmental consciousness and understanding of Vhavenda women's ties to ecology.

7.7 Vhomakhadzi Environmental Epistemologies

As the study reveals, historically within Vhavenda culture, the role of *makhadzi* has been central among the clans as she advises chiefs on community and family affairs and presides over customs linked with environmental sustainability and agronomy. Vhomakhadzi, of both the royal and non-royal families, conduct rituals for their own kin, but *makhadzi* of the royal-house perform both public and private rituals of *Thevula* in thanksgiving for the harvest, and to ask for rain in the coming year (Matshidze 2013). Additionally, *makhadzi* are mediums between this world and the ancestral one, and are custodians of sacred sites where many of the rituals take place. Their customary roles and responsibilities support vast eco-cultural knowledge and understanding of harvesting and traditional farming. For example, the two farming strategies of *Mutanga* and *Tshikovha,* incorporate harvesting crops in strategic areas away from the wetlands and not in areas that absorb the water. Another example of traditional roles and farming is evidenced by protection of the wetlands, when menopausal *makhadzi* were selected to protect springs and water – accordingly communicating with the community of elders when debris and branches needed removal. Then a clean, unused calabash bowl was the only receptacle pure enough to collect the water from the spring. *Vhomakhadzi* and women in Vhavenda culture also customarily manage seed selection and storage. Among these many Indigenous agricultural skills, *makhadzi* also observe the myths and taboos used to maintain a harmonious (*Shothodzo*) balance among people-environment relations.

These ancestral rituals and activities have shaped *Vhomakhadzi* understanding of environmental sustainability, ecosystems, and food systems for healthy living. The women of DLM are the only *makhadzi* sampled for the study, although informal conversations with two non-DLM *makhadzi* corroborate the customary links with the environment and agricultural cycles as previously described. Adhering to a traditional ecological calendar, *makhadzi* observe the customary methods of harvesting food. The traditional ecological seasons in the Luvenda language include: *Nyendavhusiku, Phando, Luhuhi, Thafamuhwe, Lambamai, Shundunthule, Fulwi, Fulwana, Thangule, Khubvumedzi, Tshimedzi,* and *Lara*. Selecting and storing a variety of seeds is important for a healthy meal of proteins and organic wild fruits and vegetables. Plus, different plants are harvested for different seasons based on preservation under different weather conditions. And although Finger Millet is a sacred plant used for important rituals and ceremonies, it too has very nutritious value. From this knowledge *Vhomakhadzi* believe in planting an assortment of crops for a diverse yield. Diverse crops planted through Indigenous agricultural methods or within an agro-ecological model is good for the quality of the food *and* the soil, compared with DLM's perspectives about GMOs or chemical pesticides used in mono-crop farming and commercial agriculture. This access to the Indigenous and culturally appropriate food is what *Vhomakhadzi* refer to today as food and seed sovereignty, which is essential for good health.

Vhomakhadzi of DLM, as indicated previously, rely on their cultural roles to discern many areas of environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality today. In addition to the subversion of their roles, they are concerned about deforestation, commercial and mono-crop farming, mining, degradation of wetlands as the root causes of climate change, reduced food and seed security, and food sovereignty. They regard sacred sites as holy environs rich in

biological diversity. Therefore, the separation or fragmentation of these sites disturbs the ecosystems and biodiversity within the zones, as well as the larger landscapes around them.

7.8 Makhadzi Political Praxis

Dzomo La Mupo (DLM) does not advocate an ecofeminist or African feminist politic. Yet African feminism(s) and Ecological feminist philosophies are useful theoretical positions for analyzing the broad based themes that emerge from *Vhomakhadzi* interview statements—and for deconstructing DLM's grassroots organizing. Juxtaposing *Vhomakhadzi* community-based organizing with aspects of ecofeminism and feminist political ecology, and their associated strategies, frames *Vhomakhadzi* preservation efforts and reveals a critical standpoint. What is evident through this analysis is that they possess their own distinctive political praxis, environmental epistemology, and an environmental ethic that positions their Indigenous Knowledge Skills (IKS) and eco-cultural practices within contemporary conservation efforts. DLM, through their international partnerships from 2008-2014, established community wilderness retreats for *Vhomakhadzi* and education programs grounded in the revival of traditional agricultural practices, ecological governance, and cultural biodiversity preservation. Together they formed a platform that focuses on the ecosystem, seed and healthy food systems, and cultural biodiversity continuation. DLM addresses degraded ecosystems by strategically focusing on ways to maintain indigenous forests, rivers, wetlands, and sacred natural sites/ forests. Efforts on seed and healthy food systems is realized through securing food sovereignty, protecting indigenous local seeds, establishing tree nurseries, and by reviving traditional agricultural knowledge and indigenous farming systems; additionally, DLM approaches cultural biodiversity preservation through intergenerational learning in schools – working with elders, teachers, curriculum advisors, and students.

Now, as an independent community-based organization, DLM intends to: empower women; strengthen community resilience to retain food sovereignty and communities through increased land-based livelihood strategies grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems; and significantly reverse the effects of climate change and the deterioration of biodiversity in the Vhembe district municipality in Venda (Makaulule and Ross 2015).

Vhomakhadzi of DLM rely on their cultural roles to discern many areas of environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality today. In 2013, Makaulule received the Global Leadership Award through the International Indigenous Women's Forum, or Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indigenes (FIMI). At the ceremony in New York City, her acceptance speech gives insight into how *Vhomakhadzi,* concerned with a loss of cultural biodiversity, envision their roles as environmentalists:

> To all women around the world, we must remember our role as mothers and healers. Today, we need to heal our Earth from all challenges we are facing through climate change, biodiversity extinctions, water shortages. We need to learn from our knowledge-able women, elder women, before they pass away….Venda people know that they cannot be chiefs or leaders without the leadership of the makhadzi, the women. We women are natural leaders; our leadership is a sacred role (Makaulule Global Leadership Award acceptance speech).

This speech reframes *makhadzi* responsibilities within a global context as a call to all women and mothers to protect nature worldwide. Makaulule sees her role as a *makhadzi* and mother as the impetus for protecting life, similarly to how Catherine Acholonu's theory of *motherism* positions African women's empowerment and civic engagement in the context of motherhood. By identifying as ecologists in the post-apartheid era, *Vhomakhadzi* members of DLM are energizing their cultural roles as women and reasserting their authoritative knowledge about nature and the environment. Makaulule conveyed further, "We as women hold the responsibility

for custodianship of life, because the ancestors chose us to be Makhadzi. Makhadzi is not just a name or title; it is a role – a spiritual role. We are the custodians of water, soil, seed and forests, and traditional medicine that come from Indigenous trees…we cannot stand back and watch life be destroyed" (Makaulule Global Leadership Award acceptance speech). Through her leadership as a *Phangami*, Makaulule is restoring confidence to *Vhomakhadzi* of DLM to regain their leadership roles to advocate for their communities in the Vhembe District Municipality.

DLM's community grassroots organizing begins with women's empowerment by restoring confidence in *Vhomakhadzi* to resume their roles within community ecological governance. Women's empowerment in this context is defined in conjunction with the community and its well-being. Therefore, to rebuild *makhadzi* roles includes targeted educational cohorts for women, men, youth, and intergenerational dialogue. Intergenerational learning is a crucial component of DLM's community education programs because it is the young people who are losing culture, as they are influenced the most by Westernism and modernity. Vhomakhadzi and DLM see their roles as *makhadzi* as closing this gap to fortify the community.

Likewise, the traditional eco-cultural maps also serve as an intergenerational tool. By constructing an ancestral map of the past, and one of the present and future, all generations can come together to discuss the evolution of the land over time, as well as the changes due to unsustainable development projects and future land-use plans as envisioned by the whole community. DLM members, trained in territorial eco-cultural mapping and traditional eco-calendar composition, facilitate the workshops with villages and schools. These maps also become practical tools when educators use them to teach students about nature through forest walks and in Earth sciences curriculum.

Through an integrated model, utilizing Indigenous knowledge and skills with modern

conservationist practices, DLM seeks to educate the community about sustainable agricultural practices. Through continued capacity building and fundraising, the CBO intends to establish community-wide research teams, to document the elder's knowledge of traditional farming systems adapted within an agro-ecological framework. DLM's hope is that through continued capacity building of their organization, they will one day be able organize research teams to exchange this knowledge about permaculture, seed saving, mulching, composting, and the use of gray water with household farmers across towns and villages (Makaulule and Ross 2015). They specifically wish to raise awareness about ecological knowledge with Vhavenda citizens, household farmers, and schools, but also among commercial farmers and government departments.

Finally, in 2012, DLM began offering paralegal training to educate community members about customary law and to protect sacred natural sites and forests. At this time, the organization submitted applications for registration of three sacred forests as protected areas under the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). Although SAHRA has appeared unresponsive, according to community accounts, and while there has been perceived hindrances over the years, Makaulule and DLM are still optimistic and intend to continue lobbying for the protection of sacred forests. DLM's intention is to expand legal training through a lawyer or community organizer, well versed in environmental and indigenous law, to educate community members about customary and constitutional rights, the integration of indigenous knowledge into the Vhembe school curriculum, and environmental policies, including policies on seed and food systems, and health and nutrition.

Figure 32: Photograph: 'Profesa' with Mphatheleni Makaulule (2012)

I end this section by sharing the words of Makaulule's mentor Vhomakhadzi Vho Tshavhungwa Nemarude Ramunangi, known as 'Profesa.' Profesa died in 2012 at 87 and was an important friend to Makaulule, a link for her to the ancestral ways of the past, and an important *makhadzi* in the formation of Dzomo La Mupo. In a speech about the destruction at Phiphidi Waterfall, given on October 20, 2012 during Mupo-Zwifho Day, Profesa stated:

> I thank the people who allow and arranged for me to have the opportunity to speak here. We are in pain, we are in a very painful situation. For me, the way I look at what happened to our clan, is that we are left naked, we have been undressed from our clothes. We have been left naked, and where shall we go to hide? In our Zwifho, it is now a place of tourists to visit, a place for people to play and entertain themselves…I am amazed and surprised by people when they say today's youths are misbehaving. People should not blame the children and youths. The people who should be blamed are those who are destroying the zwifho… I am requesting assistance. Let's find way to bring order to zwifho so that zwifho remain zwifho (Mupo Foundation).

Profesa eloquently offers a metaphor for the vulnerabilities *makhadzi* face and all women who are susceptible to unwarranted exposure either through the stripping of one's clothes or one's culture.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This empirical study has examined the environmentalism and cultural biodiversity preservation efforts of *Vhomakhadzi,* the paternal aunts/women who are members of the community-based organization Dzomo La Mupo (DLM). Through ethnographic-style interviews, participant observation, and archival research, the study has investigated the historical and present-day land legacies and gender politics that have contributed to the erosion of cultural biodiversity, and DLM's subsequent preservation efforts.

8.1 Review of Findings

The analysis focused on three program areas within DLM's organization: (1) Indigenous agriculture, (2) cultural biodiversity preservation, and (3) community organizing. Accordingly, through the research I evaluated the organization's strategic efforts to protect ecosystems, seed and healthy food systems, litigation to protect the sacred Phiphidi Waterfall, subsequent efforts to register a total of three sacred areas and forests as Provincial Heritage sites and finally, the study included a review of DLM's campaign to stop Coal of Africa's colliery development plan. Concurrently, I investigated the following research questions: (1) How do colonial and apartheid frameworks and gender ideologies manifest in South Africa's land act legacies? (2) What impact has South Africa's land acts, in conjunction with traditional leadership, had on cultural biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality? (3) What do *Vhomakhadzi* attribute to environmental degradation in the Vhembe District Municipality? and (4) How do *Vhomakhadzi* construct cultural biodiversity preservation? More precisely, how do they envisage cultural linkages with the environment?

The results presented in this conclusion emerged from archival research, interviews, participant observation, and were further extrapolated within a combined African feminist and

ecological feminist theoretical framework. The major findings disclosed several ways that South African politicians, chiefs, and multinational corporations reinforce colonial or White settler ideologies that undermine *Vhomakhadzi* traditional roles and eco-cultural knowledge practices. From these findings I make recommendations to conservation-based United Nations agencies and programs in the region and make suggestions to scholars for future research.

As the testimonies reveal, all *Vhangona* women are generally *makhadzi*. Yet some *makhadzi* have been bestowed by their ancestors to assist with royalty and customary governance or serve as custodians of sacred sites and forests. As custodians of sacred natural sites, *makhadzi* environmental knowledge derives from ancestral insight, Indigenous customs, and ecocultural wisdom. *Vhomakhadzi* officiate over traditions interconnected with environmental sustainability and agriculture. They also customarily manage seed selection and storage and adhere to ecological calendars to determine harvesting for different seasons. The elders in particular preserve their approaches to harvesting, traditional farming, and agriculture, which determines healthy food and seed systems and their conception of food sovereignty.

Vhomakhadzi ecological interpretations of sacred sites are formed through a spiritual lens. It is believed that only women can communicate directly with ancestors and for the purpose of rituals their presence at sacred sites is essential. The power of these locations is explained in horizontal and vertical dimensions, which is culturally and environmentally significant. The soil, sky, and surrounding air are a part of a sacred space. Therefore, even minerals and metals in the subsoil are critical. Removing such minerals through the extraction of gold or coal through mining infringes on Vhavenda Indigenous laws of origin that determine what are sound practices (SAHRA application 2012). The very soil of the sacred site is revered in that this is where they bury their dead in the ancestral way. Therefore, Indigenous *Vhangona* believe that digging into

the soil and damaging the ecosystem impacts their ancestors and will bring misfortune due to the destruction of plants, animal life, and water. *Vhomakhadzi* recognize many taboos that aid in sustainable land-use practices as well. From all of these various traditions, *Vhomakhadzi* as members of the community based organization, Dzomo La Mupo (DLM), identify as ecologists and assert that they have important perspectives to add to the dialogue on climate change, agroecology, and modern conservation techniques.

DLM is working to reverse the effects of climate change and the deterioration of biodiversity in the Vhembe District Municipality. The study reveals a distinctive political praxis and environmental ethic among DLM members grounded in *makhadzi* environmental epistemologies and customary beliefs. Accordingly, DLM members work to empower women and restore *makhadzi* traditional roles, strengthen community resilience through retaining food sovereignty and by expanding land-based livelihood strategies grounded in indigenous knowledge systems. DLM founder and director, Mphatheleni Makaulule, has orchestrated her vision for defending the environment and culture based on her desire as a mother to protect her children and the next generation. As a mother, Makaulule regards her work as a call to action to mothers worldwide to protect nature and the environment. Therefore, it is unmistakable that safeguarding Venda's sacred sites are important, as is protecting larger landscapes and the whole Earth community.

With regards to their activism, interviews with *Vhomakhadzi* revealed micro and macro forms of gender-based discrimination that infringe on women's citizenship rights in Venda's Vhembe District Municipality. During DLM's efforts to protect the Phiphidi Waterfall and a total of three sacred sites and forests in the Municipality, their legal representation met with opposition from local headmen, chiefs/*Vhamusanda* and Venda royalty—and dealt with

ineffectual local and national government agencies, such as The Limpopo Heritage Resources Agency (LIHRA), The CRL Rights Commission or Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religion and Linguistic Minorities, The Department of Land and Traditional Affairs, and the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). Internal correspondences with DLM staff suggested that some of these agencies did not want to engage with local leadership on controversial land and cultural issues. This denotes a conflict of interest between traditional leadership and democratic structures. Through these thwarted appeals to government agencies evidenced by e-mail correspondences, DLM meeting minutes, and letters, what is revealed is that neocolonialism manifests through the presence of international companies and is further supported by local and national leadership. This is also illustrated when companies like Coal of Africa use Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislative benchmarks to circumvent women's public participation– alternatively appealing to male community leaders and entrepreneurs to secure the strategic investors needed to proceed with development plans. It can be deduced from these accounts that by ignoring the centuries-old traditional role and cultural institution of *makhadzi*, contemporary legislation that portends to work within customary frameworks is calculatedly discriminating against the roles of women in the post-apartheid democratic era.

Gender-based discrimination as an outgrowth of globalization has been studied at length. African gender scholars (Chepyator-Thomson 2005; Turshen 2010; Haysom 2001; Chioma Steady 2002; Boko 2005) have noted a trajectory of exploitation and marginalization of African women in development paradigms from colonialism to today. In the former apartheid homelands, specifically in Venda, this systematic exclusion is rooted in colonial and apartheid gender ideologies expressed through the country's land acts which are heavily influenced by ongoing

discriminatory scaffolds. Examination of the evolution of South African land legislation shows explicit provisions that disenfranchise women not only through a confluence of inequitable land policies but in way that the laws function within traditional leadership structures and courts. Now, owing to unaccountable governance in many rural areas, this legislation empowers local, provincial, and national politicians to arrange development schemes that leave the former homelands and rural areas intensely vulnerable to multinational companies such as commercial farming or extractive industries that seek the nation's high deposits of fossil fuels and mineral wealth. This negatively impacts Indigenous Vhavenda communities and women especially.

8.2 Gendered Implications

Historically, female power in Venda was reflective of the gender flexibility of many pre-colonial African societies. As articulated in chapter three, in pre-colonial Venda households married women enjoyed privileges of land and agrarian decision-making. Additionally, Vhavenda populations in the Soutpansberg region had assorted lineages of female leaders from petty chieftainships and headwomen, to advisers known as *nduna* or *mukoma*. Likewise, historians and gender scholars (Lestrade 1930; Schlosser 2002) have examined the matrilineal leadership of two spirit mediums, Tshisinavhute of Mianzwi, an Mbedzi who are among a succession of female leaders/mediums since the 18th century, including the Lovhedu Rain Queen, Modjadji, all of whom held power through their rainmaking gifts (Lestrade 1930; Schlosser 2002). Lastly as described at length, among *Vhangona, makhadzi* historically played a critical role in the family and the royal leadership within customary governance. Nevertheless, following contact with White settler colonialists and missionaries these constructions of gender and women's power receded.

The manifestation of colonial gender ideologies in Venda, particularly at the intersection

of the Church, the nuclear family, and wage labor critically impacted the corporeal existence of *makhadzi.* Interview statements describe *makhadzi* as a conduit between this realm and the ancestral one, a belief particularly contested within colonial and apartheid social formations. Her role is a multi-layered example of gender flexibility and this, paired with her connection to the sacred, challenged the cultural values of White settlers and missionaries. *Makhadzi* was heretical in nature and her added ascendancy to 'female father' and an authority figure in pre-colonial Venda society was disparaged. The moral and social denigration of *makhadzi* in colonial Venda is not surprising, as the literature attests that African female embodiment that conflicted with colonial social conventions was considered deviant. This also reflects the post-colonial analysis of gender-based violence in South Africa that again focuses on women's bodies and sexuality as potential political and cultural landscapes in the process of political transformation. In the context of colonial social formations and the impact on the role of *makhadzi*, I would add that her relegation is a form of symbolic violence in an attempt to control her citizenship rights and physical relationship to the sacred. This is substantiated by the demonization of sacred site practices, which explains the subordination of *makhadzi* with a male priest and the replacement of sacred land with the sanctity of the Church. Whether it be the contempt of girl's initiation rites into womanhood, gender flexibility, or matrilineal customs, these flexible gender expressions were not acceptable to colonial societies forged on Christian, male, and capitalist values.

Further, the agricultural implications of introducing wage labor also disrupted *Vhomakhadzi*. While it is true that approximately 80 percent of small-scale agricultural farmers in Africa today are women, colonial social formations dismissed women's input on agricultural systems and recanted female inheritance and access to communal land. Accordingly, *makhadzi* were cleaved from their pastoral roles, including guardianship of sacred environments. This is a

reflection of women's overall removal from land and agrarian decision-making due to colonialism and the gender divisions of labor within capitalist economic systems. These social progressions are clarified, "Recognizing that gender roles are, in part, a product of wider social, economic, and political processes, and that those processes are likewise affected by prevailing gender norms, thus generates a more complex understanding of the foundations and forms of power in…Africa" (Osborn 4). Hereafter, these gendered and social arrangements of the colonial and apartheid eras exist in Venda today and determine gendered power disparities. This is revealed through the agreement of local, national, and international actors who enact development schemes with little input from women, particularly Vhomakhadzi who were once so integral to Venda communities.

Analyzing the advancement of corporate activities in the Venda region from the colonial era to today exposes an authoritative and patriarchal relationship between Westernism and nature. Colonial and apartheid era land policies, ranging from the displacement of indigenous communities for designated protected areas and wildlife reserves, forced removals based on racial ideology and segregation, and the country's overall spatial politics, have altered people-environment relations and access to resources. For example, the rejection of indigenous agriculture and traditional ecological knowledge in place of commercial farms and mono-crop-plantations, or the extraction of the country's mineral wealth exposes a dominance of Western ideology manifest in food and seed systems, and economic and development paradigms. Further, dominant metaphors about gender and nature have co-evolved within a Westernized global capitalist agenda. Christian fundamentalism as an integral component of Western patriarchal claims to nature is deeply engrained in South Africa's White settler philosophy of authority. This analysis of the erosion of *Vhomakhadzi* roles helps to explain women's marginalization from

land and environmental legislative decision making.

The imposed gender norms of White settler colonialists have become embedded in local, provincial, and national governing structures in South Africa post-apartheid. As local Vhavenda male leadership increases through capitalist means, *Vhomakhadzi* by contrast lose power. This claim further supports the notion that global patriarchy is a dominant characteristic of capitalism— which determines economic models, land-use strategies, global food and seed systems, and environmental and conservation approaches. Furthermore, in an effort to gain capitalist power by acquiring land and authority through traditional governance male leaders recast culture and manipulate South Africa's democratic structures.

This legacy has been particularly detrimental to women in rural areas in the former homelands. Women's citizenship rights have been diminished due to poor legal representation, dominant systems of patrilineal inheritance, low ratios of female political influence, female exclusion from select traditional courts, tenuous access to land, insecure housing tenure, and degraded livelihoods. Furthermore, in this scenario women disproportionately lack access to shape customary law, environmental policy, and conservation, especially in Venda's Limpopo province. The presence of multinational corporations and their current development paradigms merely exacerbate these issues due to shoddy public participation meetings, unsustainable development practices and meager career opportunities for women. In Venda, the study reveals that these discriminatory frameworks and multinational development schemes have impacted the role of *makhadzi* uniquely given her traditional positon as custodian to sacred natural sites, and her role overseeing customs integral to ecological systems.

8.3 Recommendations

The implications of the study and recommendations are directed towards conservationists, United Nation environmental and cultural agencies, and scholars. As illustrated, multinational corporations and extractive industries exploit South Africa's land acts and enact a legacy of discriminatory frameworks. By examining DLM's community organizing and legal action what can be further gleaned is the probability that government agencies likely feel restricted to enact full protection for its citizens against local and corporate development due to the complicity of traditional and provincial leaders with the national government. In the government's ostensible attempt to ensure constitutional protections for former homeland residents, they are actually reinscribing colonial and apartheid era laws and philosophies that are weakening South Africa's democracy. Although agencies faced challenges in the past, today there is a greater opportunity to include a radical platform to protect women and *Vhomakhadzi* in The Vhembe District Municipality, among a second generation of protected areas and biosphere reserves.

Recently, the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme (GEF, SGP) in South Africa selected the Vhembe Bioshphere Reserve (VBR) as its focus landscape for operational phase 6 (2015 – 2018) to determine its community conservation initiatives in the Municipality. This could be an important opportunity for the biosphere. Based on the findings of the study I make four recommendations for regional NGOs, U.N. agencies, programs, and the VBR to create more progressive, gender inclusive, and culturally relevant development objectives, including: (1) developing a participatory VBR platform for the protection of sacred sites and forests (2) utilizing consistent language about sacred sites across U.N. agencies and supporting programs (3) integrating social science and gender research; and (4) generating policy recommendations to protect women in the region crafted by Vhavenda women and

Vhomakhadzi. These suggestions support the VBR's mission to establish a development framework that integrates socio-economic opportunities for the people of the area. This approach is reinforced by the U.N. Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) and MAB's African regional network of biospheres—AfriMAB—both of which encourage human-centered models of conservation. Recommendations (1) and (2) are consistent with The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), including:

(1) Recognizing sacred natural sites already located in protected areas

(2) Integrate sacred natural sites located in protected areas in planning processes

(3) Promote stakeholder consent, participation, inclusion and collaboration

(4) Encourage improved knowledge and understanding of sacred sites

(5) Protect sacred sites whilst providing appropriate management and access

(6) Respect the rights of sacred natural site custodians within an appropriate framework of national policy (Wild, Robert G. Table of Contents).

In Limpopo province, The Vhembe District Municipality is an outlier compared with other regions, as it encompasses the remaining indigenous sacred site cultures in the country. Accordingly, the VBR would benefit from adopting language consistent with other agencies that have sacred site guidelines as it expands its development model.

Recommendation (3) to integrate social science and gender research is necessary to highlight the socio-political causes of poverty in the region, and to underscore the gendered implications of environmental degradation. This will help broaden the scope of the VBR's

research and platform. Thus, social science studies produced at The University of Venda should be prioritized for publication followed by international scholarship. Ultimately, the plurality of biosphere development models should not be considered complete without social science and gender research.

The fourth and final recommendation for South Africa's regional U.N. agencies, programs, and the VBR, again incorporates Vhavenda women and *Vhomakhadzi* in key policy proposals—as indigenous women's equality and decision making are also outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As a progressive model of development for the biosphere this approach addresses gender and culture, as *Vhomakhadzi* possess vast eco-cultural knowledge grounded in centuries old traditions and ancestral wisdom. In fact if the VBR collaborated with organizations such as Dzomo La Mupo, such a collaborative effort would garner community based organizations more international funding opportunities and aid in the preservation of cultural biodiversity.

As the present research disclosed, colonial social formations reordered African customs and society, which created lasting metaphors about African women's corporeal existence parallel to the domination of land and nature. These representations have been further solidified in Western liberal democracies and within a global capitalist agenda. To further analyze African women's lived experiences as they intersect with topics such as unsustainable development, globalization, global capitalism, agriculture and food justice, I encourage scholars to construct a paradigm specific to African women's environmental experiences. To begin thinking about such a theory, I make two suggestions: (1) expand research that combines an African gender studies and Ecological feminist and/or a political ecology, methodological framework and (2) incorporate corresponding analysis of both nature and gender as socio-cultural constructs

through the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras to further clarify symbolic representations of African women's bodies in relationship to land and the environment.

African women's environmental experiences are most often framed within a critique of exploitation, economic development, and global capitalism. Creating a paradigm specific to African women's environmental experiences as a socio-cultural construction brings new analysis to Africana and post-colonial studies that would track the trajectory of African women's relationships to land and nature in different historical eras. The benefits of such a model include theories that may be applicable across disciplines and a paradigm for comparative research throughout the African diaspora, supporting Patterson's (2015) assertion that, "Africana studies is uniquely positioned to educate and prepare students for African transnational projects, if not Pan-African projects related to environmental sustainability" (Patterson 173-199). Further, deconstructing the symbolic representations of African women's bodies contrasted with environmental degradation provides an additional interpretive lens to understand the pathological depictions that might impede African(a) women's health and wellness in both urban and rural areas globally.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Community Organization Profile

In 2008 the community based organization (CBO) Dzomo La Mupo (DLM), formed international partnerships with the African Biodiversity Network of Kenya, and the Gaia Foundation in the United Kingdom to create the Mupo Foundation. Before that period, the network of NGOs was already actively working on the ground based on Makaulule's vision as founder of DLM, to protect local eco-systems and biodiversity. DLM ultimately works to restore community ecological governance and foster greater awareness about environmental degradation in the region. DLM's mission strategically focuses on:

1. *Ecosystems*—particularly indigenous forests, rivers, wetlands, and sacred natural sites/ forests.
2. *Seed and Healthy Food Systems*— achieved through food sovereignty, protecting indigenous local seed, establishing tree nurseries, and by reviving traditional agricultural knowledge and indigenous farming systems.
3. *Cultural Biodiversity Preservation*—through Intergenerational learning in schools by working with elders, teachers, curriculum advisors, and students.

Vhomakhadzi members of DLM have occupied varying roles depending on organizational need and subsidy. At the time that the research was conducted, shifts in the CBO's structure and their emergence as an independent organization apart from their international partners, required additional capacity building and funding. Through their previous network they received many grants from the international conservationist and environmentalist community, which yielded some paid positions for *Vhomakhadzi*. Yet today DLM is mostly run by volunteers until they gain additional support. Despite this, DLM has dozens of members and their work has impacted thousands of people within a larger linkage in the Vhembe District Municipality. It should also be emphasized again that the former Mupo Foundation was/is a distinctive organization from Dzomo La Mupo (DLM), nevertheless *Vhomakhadzi* interview statements sometimes refer to past activities from their joint collaboration interchangeably, as "Mupo" with a capital "M", not to be confused with its lower-case Luvenda namesake *mupo*, meaning Earth, nature, or creations of the Universe. Although the goals and strategic programs of DLM are essentially the same as what was achieved with their international partnership organizations— my observation and participation with the CBO during the research period is reflective of this transition to an independent organization, which further impacted certain activities and interviews. For example, pending funding to conduct new community mapping workshops limited my observations to videos of previous workshops—with the exception of one specially arranged, in-person mapping lecture by *Vhomakhadzi*. Lastly, the three focus groups were delineated according to the organization's outreach programs on seed, sacred site/forests, and wetlands. This arrangement had dual benefit for my research and the organization itself which had not had the opportunity to meet and discuss these topics in some months due to funding. Organizing the focus groups this way provided the transportation and refreshments necessary for proper meetings. Since that period, the organization is receiving marginal support.

Thus, focus groups were often followed by long fellowship, sharing stories, and even ongoing and overnight stays for *Vhomakhadzi* who lived far away from the township and had traveled by public transportation. This provided the opportunity for follow up questions, additional interviews, and conversation that benefited the research. *Vhomakhadzi* participants hail from different *Vhangona* clans and communities, but again the interviews were conducted primarily in the township of *Vuwani*, in the Vhembe District Municipality. Again to ensure anonymity, participant information regarding clans may not match pseudonyms— yet more broadly represent the general diverse clan membership among the *Vhangona* who participate in the organization.

Appendix B Select DLM Staff Interviewed[75]

VhoMphatheleni Makaulule

Makaulule is an award-winning, internationally known environmental and indigenous-rights activist from Venda, South Africa. Her first name, Mphatheleni, means "build for me." She strongly believes that through this name, her father was setting her on a path to rebuild the ancestors' knowledge and restore the order of *mupo,* meaning Earth, nature, or creations of the Universe, within Vhavenda culture. Therefore, like her father, Makaulule is a traditional healer and leader in her community. After graduating from the University of Venda with a B.A. in Education, Makaulule began working with elders, chiefs, and schools to build an intergenerational model of learning that respects the value of Vhavenda culture and its connection with nature through the Luvhola Cultural Village. In 2004, Makaulule was selected for a Clinton Democracy Fellowship at City Year and spent two months in the United States deepening her vision and program goals. In 2013, she received a Global Leadership Award by the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI) for her work to empower indigenous women.

VhoConnie

Mrs. Ratovhowani Ntshengedzeni Constance is a representative of the *Malale* clan and the custodians of Tshishokoshwe sacred lake and *Malale* hills. She is a traditional healer; within DLM she focuses on the role of *makhadzi*, medicinal indigenous trees, and the role of sacred sites. Constance is a *makhadzi* in her paternal clan, as well her maternal clan of *Netshituni*. Through her experiences in DLM meetings and workshops, Constance began documenting information on forests and sacred sites for the *Malale* and *Netshituni* clans. She has also been instrumental in recruiting *makhadzi* from various clans to join DLM. In 2014 Constance was elected to be the vice chairperson of DLM. With basic computer skills, she has assisted by recording, filing, and organizing DLM meeting minutes.

VhoAlillali

Alillali is a representative of the Tshidzivhe clan and the custodians of Thathe sacred forest. She has been a member of DLM since 2011 and her work focuses on the role of indigenous forests and sacred sites. Through DLM community outreach, program work, and conference presentations, Alillali highlights the importance of indigenous forests and women's critical roles in forests and rituals. Most recently she presented on the role of youth and forests at the World Forest Congress. She has also received permaculture and agro-ecology training through urban farming workshops. Through DLM, Alillali has gained experience in composing and teaching ecological cultural mapping, constructing ecological traditional calendars, and seed and food systems programs of DLM. Additionally, Alillali studied Credit Management, Management Communication, and End-user computing at Tshwane University of Technology. She and Makaulule are the only *makhadzi* interviewed who have a formal and technical education.

[75] Mphatheleni Makaulule and Kimberly B. Ross (2015), DLM Grant proposal, submitted to the Ecocatalyst Foundation.

VhoJoyce

VhoJoyce focuses her work on the role of indigenous forests, rivers, and sacred sites. She is a leader of the *makhadzi* group of the Tshidzivhe Tree Nursery and Seed Project. VhoJoyce is a *makhadzi* to the *Netshidzivhe* clan of the Tshidzivhe territory of the Thathe Sacred forest. VhoJoyce has been trained to draw cultural ecological maps of the territory and lead mapping workshops. She received training on constructing ecological maps and ecological calendars and has shared her knowledge with communities in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Botswana in collaboration with the African Biodiversity Network. VhoJoyce was featured in a short film called *Reviving our Culture, Mapping our Future* for the Mupo and Gaia Foundations.

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