

SELFHOOD, IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN SELECTED TSHIVENDA POETRY

**by
MOFFAT SEBOLA**

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**SUPERVISOR: PROF O.J. ABODUNRIN
CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF R.N. MADADZHE**

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DECLARATION

I, **MOFFAT SEBOLA**, declare that the thesis titled **SELFHOOD, IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN SELECTED TSHIVENḌA POETRY** hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for a PhD degree in TshivendḌa has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature:



Date:

12/10/2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved son, Rofunwa Lehlogedi Sebola. I dedicate this study in hopes that it will prod you towards knowing *who* and *whose* you are:

*Ndi ha Tshivhula tsha matshokoṭiko,
Tsha gumba ḽo fhelaho nga mipfa.
Ke tloukgolo ya mmadirokana,
Seoluma sa thatha (ḽaḽa) marumo.
Ke motho wa mabambo ḽa Rakhulungwane,
ḽa ha Ramvuvhu yo midza ngweṇa,
Yo midza mukoma wa maḽi,
A ili tsha u pamba ngweṇa.
I ila tshi ḽaho nga mulonga.*

*Ndi vha ha mpangu wa Ramadinyane,
ḽa zwivhumbu u ṽuwe,
Matshelo zwi ḽo ḽa iwe.
Ndi vha Tshiṇoni tsho ḽaho Maḽadzhe.
Ramusunzi (Kgoṣi Sebola) muthu wa ha Ranzwogoḽi,
Wa tshiulu tsha vhukati ha shango,
Vhuḽihuṽi ha zwilalume.*

*Ke motho wa go tshetshema go lema
Wa mphane wa go khuma lodi.
Ke motho wa bo Matlhasela wa bo Toporo,
Kgaetṣedi ya Makhumisane,
Yena yo moṣweu le diatla ga a phalwe.*

*Kgomo o hlaba le tṣe di ntṣhitṣego (memeru)
Ke motho wa bo Mohlabasedi wa Sebola,
Mohlaka mooka serole.
Ke motho wa Sakodi sa Ramotsomi,
Se ohlole o tlo se tṣhabišetṣa dibatana.
Sebola ndi Gumbu debele ene,*

Mungona wa ha Maqala.

*Ba kae boMosholompe wa Sebola,
Ya tladi ya tia seolwana masitha a fhalala?*

*Ba kae boSelabe sa Mmatsena,
E tlang le dithuthu tša mohlaka wa thaba selabe,
Sa mankg se nkgetše Mamadi motswala wa gagwe?*

Ba kae boMaphari ke mpharalala motswala wa bo Seipei?

*Ba kae boLeshiba ke mmana Setapo,
Kubu ya Malala e sepela sethwa se baka dintwa le mokuwe?*

*Ba kae boRaleathaupa Lesilo la ga Machete,
Le phonyokga Matebele tladi ya maleswika?*

*Ba kae boMakhumisane wa bo Toporo,
Mothomi difoka seoluma sa thathamarumo?*

Ba kae boMotsholane wa Ratlou?

Motho wa go dya letswai.

Ge o boya Borotswi ga ba mmona.

*Ba mmone a sepela shuping la mong wa gagwe,
A nka Tloukgolo ya Mmadirokana setlola sa marata,
Go bonwa ba kgahla ba manamelela thaba.*

Tshivhula tsha Matshokoṭiko,

Mutwanamba weeeee....

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ABSTRACT

The issue of African identity in African literature has been receiving considerable attention in recent times. However, comparatively speaking, the focus has largely been on texts written in English, whereas texts written in (African) indigenous languages have received minimal attention. Moreover, critics who cannot understand the language of indigenous writing ignore such writings in their criticisms, which culminates in the treatment of indigenous writings as palimpsests on which the *other* records their story. Consequently, perspectives and philosophies shared by indigenous literature are marginalised and only those conveyed in European languages are considered. Against this backdrop, this study aimed to, firstly, attempt to draw Tshivenda poetry from the periphery to the 'centre' of conversations on issues of selfhood, identity and culture in the postcolonial context. Secondly, it sought to show that a representative selection of Tshivenda poetry can provide indices into the trajectories and nuances of the Vhavenda people's selfhood, identity and culture.

Undergirded by a trifocal theoretical framework, namely Afrocentricity, the hermeneutical approach and postcolonial theory, the study shored up various aspects that were thematised by the selected poets as indices into the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture. The study employed a qualitative research approach and the descriptive method to analyse sixteen (16) purposively sampled poetry texts. Textual and thematic analyses were relied on in the analysis of the selected texts. The study found that Tshivenda poetry demystifies the meta-narratives propounded by colonialists and exponents of apartheid about African people's selfhood, identity and culture. Tshivenda poetry attains this, firstly, by demonstrating that the indigenes have always had ways through which they expressed their selfhood, identity and culture, and secondly, by agentively challenging hegemonic discourses on selfhood, identity and culture.

The analysis of the selected texts also revealed that the Vhavenda poets derive their sense of selfhood, identity and culture from two main sources: God (*Nwali*) and their ancestors. It was noted that most of the modern Vhavenda poets' concept of 'God' gravitates more towards the Judeo-Christian worldview, while those who espouse 'ancestor veneration' promote the Africanist traditional religion as their base for

identity formation and articulation. The former observation in particular should be ascribed to the influence of Christian missionaries. Other themes, such as Tshivenda mythology, religion, agitations for self-identification and representation, marriage, socio-cultural traditions, selenology, cosmology, cosmogony, dance, and ritual, are mainly anchored to the Vhavenda's notions of theocentricity and anthropocentricity. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on politics of identity and discourses interested in how the formerly colonised indigenes seek to assert their presence and agency after decades of marginalisation and repression. The study recommends that aspects of selfhood, identity and culture that are encapsulated in Tshivenda poetry should form part of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) that need to be studied in institutions of basic and higher education. For the sake of knowledge preservation and perpetual transmission, communities should be proactive in passing this knowledge to the younger generations.

KEYWORDS: Culture; Identity; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Poets; Poetry; Selfhood; Tshivenda; Vhavenda

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CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study, defines the key concepts of the study, elucidates the research problem and outlines the aim, objectives and research questions of the study. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpinned the study, particularly in relation to notions of selfhood, identity and culture as encapsulated in literary outputs. Noteworthy, the foregoing aspects have recently been receiving substantial attention within scholarly circles (Gabie, 2014; Kanu, 2013; Kochalumchuvattil, 2010; Mahasha, 2014; Makobela, 2019; Marco, 2012; Mashige, 2004; Mogoboya, 2011; Mokgoatšana, 1999, 2021; Motseki, 2019; Moyo and Mpofu, 2020; Ndubuisi, 2013; Raditlhalo, 2003; Sebola¹, 2020; Tembo, 2016). A quick glance at the cited studies confirms that the issue of identity has remained an essential theme, particularly in the postcolonial context of South Africa. For instance, Mokgoatšana (Ibid) relies on Nkomo Samuel Puleng's writings to examine notions of postcolonial identity, focusing on the issue of African writing and the relevance of 'africalogical discourse', the idea of home in apartheid South Africa as well as the apposition of power between indigenes and colonisers. Raditlhalo (Ibid) looks at how individuals construct their identities by writing themselves into existence through first-person texts in the context of South Africa. In Mokgoatšana's (Ibid) and Raditlhalo's (Ibid) theses, autobiography as a literary genre is appreciated for its effectiveness in expressing the identities of the indigenes of South Africa.

Mashige (Ibid) examines the conception and articulation of identity and culture in an archetypal collection of modern South African poetry. Kochalumchuvattil (Ibid) cogitates the significance of ubuntu philosophy in the reclamation of African identity and self-respect, and concurrently argues that this philosophy is inadequate in itself to reliably yield the freedom and responsibility that may be perceived as the indicators of real personhood. Mogoboya (Ibid) investigates the leitmotif of (African)

¹ Elsewhere the present researcher published a reflection on some aspects of the Vhavenḁa's selfhood with special reference to Tshivenḁa poetry by W.M.R. Sigwavhulimu, N.A. Milubi and R.F. Ratshiḁanga.

identity in Es'kia Mphahlele's fictional and nonfictional novels, paying particular attention to the search for the lost identity of African cultural and ideological veracity. Marco (2012) explores the social interactions that occur between Black women and their hair and how these women represent their hairstyle choices in contemporary society. Among its thematic interests, the study also addresses hair uncurling, wearing weaves, and further discusses the factors linked to mimetic practices for Black women (cf. Sebola, 2022).

Kanu (2013) proffers that the quest for identity embodies the value of the principle of being, that is, the principle of identity. Kanu (Ibid) further observes that if the identity of the African is not clarified and sustained, Africans will live at the risk of being unknown or unnamed in the global stage. Ndubuisi (2013) notes that the tragic experiences of racial discrimination, slavery, colonisation and ideological corruption of postcolonial leaders have caused disturbances and instability. These aspects are said to have contributed to the loss of African identity.

Gabie (2014) states that in the dispensation of democracy in South Africa, there have been burgeoning voices of Khoisan revivalist groups that are geared towards reassertions of identities connected to particularity. Mahasha (2014) explores (African) identity and its accompanying constituents within the South African setting as captured in Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* and Bessie Head's *Maru*. The study further examines the flexibility of individualities in both societal and political domains and reveals how the repression of identities upsets persons and countries. The study reveals that as a miniature of Africa, South Africa mirrors dreadful inequalities of the past, which found expression through colonisation and apartheid, resulting in an altered kind of African people's identity.

Tembo (2016) proffers that the concept of African identity, in its essentialist and anti-essentialist notions, does not have the theoretical and conceptual power to envision socio-political and cultural spaces of action in modern African situations. Makobela (2019) designed a study to gain an understanding of how young Black men see "yellow bones" (women with light skin tones) in the Katlehong township of South Africa. According to Makobela (Ibid), serious interest has been shown in complexions in Black societies, and it was found that a person with a light complexion has a higher social status than a person with a darker complexion. The study found that because of the glorification of a lighter skin tone, some Black

women go to prodigious lengths to attain a light skin. Similarly, Motseki (2019) found that skin whitening has become a prevalent norm among Black women in South Africa. Apparently, celebrity performances of skin bleaching have an enormous effect on the perception of light skin as a standard of attractiveness among ordinary South Africans (Motseki, 2019). In a compendium of research articles from various contributors, Moyo and Mpofu (2020) extend the discourse on identity politics to an international level by looking at how xenophobia can be mediated in Africa. The articles investigate mainly the media's contribution to issues of migration, belonging and the depiction of 'the foreign other' in Africa, where the foreign other is presented as that distressed, and in many ways also distressing, child of the global interstate system.

The foregoing summations of previous studies reveal that the concept 'identity' has myriad forms ('individual subject', 'identity formation', 'identification') and that these forms receive considerable attention from the disciplines of literary criticism, sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis and political science (Raditlhalo, Ibid:22). Mokgoatšana (Ibid: vi) ascribes this attention to the fact that "communities, groups and individuals tend to ask themselves who they are after the colonial period". Mokgoatšana's (Ibid) thematic fixations are in tandem with the present study because among its central objectives this study sets out to highlight aspects of identity formation and articulation among the Vhavenda people of South Africa.

The central thesis of this study is to reflect on singular and manifold identities depicted in selected Tshivenda poetry written during the colonial and apartheid era and after the colonial and apartheid era in South Africa. Appended to the reflection is the desire to appreciate how the selected poets lean on their memory and imagination as tropes that are effective in the creation and/or recreation of identity, history and culture. In the study, it is believed that the Vhavenda's narratives of self-invention and self-legitimation can be located within Tshivenda poetry. Therefore, this study foregrounds the notion that Tshivenda poetry depicts the Vhavenda people's construction and articulation of selfhood, identity and culture across epochs.

The study stemmed essentially from the realisation that literature and culture are inextricably interconnected (Azuonye, 1995; Lo Liyong, 1997; Mafela, 2003; Mogoboya, 2011; Rañanga, 1997; Sebati, 2003; Sebola, 2020; wa Thiong'o, 1981). Put succinctly, where there are people, there is culture, and where there is culture,

there is literature (Maḡadzhe, 1985a). It is also believed that by situating and examining Tshivendḡ poetry within an Africological discourse, this study could reveal selfhood, identity and culture as significant aspects of a postcolonial condition. The term ‘postcolonial condition’ connects with the concept ‘postcolony’, which for Mokgoatšana (1999:8) refers

to a place of suffering from a condition, a state of affairs in which colonial subjects find themselves as a result of colonisation. It is basically a difficult stage, for the colonised are trapped in the culture of the colonial power, and the[y] attempt to maintain their own cultural identity.

Mokgoatšana (Ibid) further asserts that this state is essentially repelled by colonial subjects who, in their intent to redefine their real identities, strive to undo what the colonial power has already established as a dominant authority. As part of the resistance, the colonial subjects create their own narratives as a strategy and tool “to counteract the *master narrative* which has dominated their lives for so long” (Mokgoatšana, *ibid*, original italics). In this instance, the enfranchised narrative of European supremacy and the ‘underdevelopment’ of the colonised are no longer acknowledged as common parlance (Mokgoatšana, *Ibid*). Arguably, linked to the key concepts that undergird this study which include, but are not limited to, selfhood, identity and culture, is the notion of the marginality of the indigenes, which per Mokgoatšana (*ibid*: vi), “occurs by coercion, inferiorisation, tabooing certain political and cartographical spaces, harassment, torture and imprisonment”.

Most of the selected poetry texts in this study were produced during the apartheid (colonial) regime in South Africa, and so, it would be interesting to locate the selected poets’ conception of self and cultural agency in a context where the coloniser and the colonised were juxtaposed. The juxtaposition of the coloniser and the colonised is in a geometric sense elucidated best by Memmi (1974) in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. To begin with, Memmi (*Ibid*) gives an account of the circumstances of colonised people to understand himself and to identify his society, although he also discloses that he later found out that the portrait he painted resonated with not only his Tunisian readers but also other readers spanning the globe. Memmi (*Ibid*: 5) further submits that the colonial relationship that he attempts to define manacled the colonised “into an implacable dependence, molded their respective characters and dictated their conduct”. In Memmi’s (*Ibid*) view, incoherent

and contradictory events that essentially metamorphosed into dynamic patterns are also characteristic of the portrait of the coloniser and the colonised.

Such dynamic patterns necessitated questions such as (1) “How could the colonizer look after his workers while periodically gunning down a crowd of the colonized?”; (2) “How could the colonized deny himself so cruelly and yet make such excessive demands?”, and (3) “How could he [the colonised] hate the colonizers and yet admire them so passionately?” (Memmi, *Ibid*: 6). Memmi’s (*Ibid*) book henceforth tries to find coherence in the diverse facts and experiences appended to the colonial relationship, and further reconstructs them into portraits that are answerable to one another. Among the myriad epiphanies one may have in reading Memmi’s book is the realisation that the “*deprivations* of the colonized are the almost direct result of the advantages secured to the colonizer” (*Ibid*: 8, original italics). In showing the actual intricacies of the lives of the coloniser and colonised, Memmi (*Ibid*: 8) also avers that:

To observe the life of the colonizer and the colonized is to discover rapidly that the daily humiliation of the colonized, his objective subjugation, are not merely economic. Even the poorest colonizer thought himself to be—and actually was—superior to the colonized. This too was part of colonial privilege.

During apartheid (1949-1994) in South Africa, the context from which most Tshivenda poetry emanated, the juxtaposition of the coloniser and colonised was characterised by a racialised ideology — “a petrified ideology” that devoted itself “to regarding [Black] human beings as talking beasts” (Sartre, 1957:23). Thus, colonial privilege found its vivid expression in “the mere fact of skin color [which] guaranteed kith-and-kin privileges decreed by the colonial power” (Gordimer, 2003:31). Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* essentially sheds light on such grades of privilege, which he says are accorded by the colonial situation. Therefore, this study attempts to capture the once colonised Vhavana poets’ arduous and uphill efforts to produce literature while trapped physically and otherwise in a system that privileged colonialists. This is why Section 2.2 (Chapter 2) is devoted to the discussion to the Tshivenda literary background. Furthermore, the study seeks to demonstrate that despite the repressive and oppressive measures set by the colonial era, among other factors, the poetry of the Vhavana continued to challenge the fetish of colonial subjugation.

Colonial disempowerment and disenfranchisement breed a sense of alienation precisely because “this Manicheanism reaches its logical conclusion and dehumanises the colonised subject. In plain talk, he [the colonised] is reduced to the state of an animal. And consequently, when the colonist speaks of the colonised he uses zoological terms” (Fanon, 1961:69). Fanon (Ibid) also notes how this colonial alienation extends to and pervades even the religious sphere, that is, in a church where the coloniser and the colonised are juxtaposed, one will note that:

Triumphant reports by the missions in fact tell us how deep the seeds of alienation have been sown among the colonised. I am talking of Christianity and this should come as no surprise to anybody. The Church in the colonies is a white man’s Church, a foreigner’s Church. It does not call the colonised to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor (Ibid: 69).

It is in this juxtaposition of the coloniser and the colonised where one realises that chief among the colonised’s aspirations, “is the most meaningful, [which] is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (Fanon, 1961:71). Irele’s (1987) inaugural lecture titled “In Praise of Alienation” adds a unique perspective to the discussion of the term ‘alienation’ (see also Abodunrin and Yerima, 2020:48-60). In fact, the title of the lecture alone concerned Bjornson (1989). Bjornson (Ibid: 143) says the title “appears to be a contradiction in terms”, further inquiring “how can anyone ‘praise’ alienation?”. For Bjornson (Ibid: 143)), the contradiction in terms emanates from the common knowledge that “alienated individuals have been diverted from their ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ state of being”. However, instead of foregrounding the term ‘alienation’ as estrangement, derangement of mind or insanity, as the characteristic pathology of Western societies through 20th century literature, Irele (Ibid), according to Bjornson (Ibid), prefers to use the term as a denotation of societal evolution and progress. In this denotation, Irele (Ibid) locates contemporary Africa in the following two major socio-cultural attitudinal dispositions: (a) A sense of cultural nationalism tied to an impotent nostalgia for the past, and (b) a cynical acceptance of superficial Western values (Bjornson, ibid). These socio-cultural attitudes are intellectually bankrupt to Irele (Ibid) for the following two reasons: (1) Retreating into the past is implausible and ill-disposed; and (2) “the corruption and conspicuous consumption of Western materialism clearly leads to a dead end for the majority of Africa’s population”

(Bjornson, *ibid*: 144). Poised as antagonistic to predispositions that tend to make Africans reason and act in ways that are injurious to their own sustained self-interest, Irele (*ibid*) assumes a stance that encourages Africans to embrace some of the Western values that may better lives in Africa. The caveat here, and where the apparent contradiction in terms in the title of the essay is resolved, entails a momentary embrace of one's own alienation for the 'greater' good. It is important to note "Irele does not advocate the synthesis of two static modes of being" such as "African emotivity" and "European rationality", but instead encourages the formerly colonised who were/are considerably overwhelmed by a sense of alienation to "embrace the dialectical process that enabled Europeans themselves to assimilate Roman ways of organizing society, manufacturing goods, and structuring aesthetic experience" (Bjornson, *ibid*: 144).

However, Irele (1987) is quick to warn that the assimilation of Western values by Africans must not leave Africans without an authentic African consciousness. In subsection 4.6.4, an analysis of poems by Mashuwa (1972), Matshili (1972), Rasila (2006) and Ratshitanga (1987) reveals how a sense of alienation is exploited in Tshivenda poetry, particularly in their articulation of the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture. The Vhavenda are, according to Khorommbi (1996:13), "a people who choose to respond to life albeit at times with fear, to take their powerlessness as a cue, to create a new structure of power within them, confronting their own humanness and that of their neighbours, people who choose the womb from which life, hope and decency might issue". Khorommbi (*ibid*: 13) asserts further that the Vhavenda authors in general "are so close to the Vhavenda's soul that to reject their works is to reject their experience". It is in view of Khorommbi's (*ibid*) latter assertion in particular, that a close examination of sixteen (16) Tshivenda poetry anthologies in this study intends to appreciate not only the selected poets' aesthetic hold in their creative oeuvre, but also to reveal how Tshivenda poetry as a potent imaginative tool assumes its distinctive texture in reflecting selfhood, identity and culture. To attain this, the analysis of the selected poets' works assumed at least the following three poignant ideological presumptions: (a) Tshivenda poetry is a source of information on the Vhavenda's construction and articulation of selfhood, identity and culture over time; (b) Tshivenda poetry is an index of the Vhavenda's assertion of their uniqueness and presence in the world across epochs (i.e., precolonial, colonial and

postcolonial eras); and (c) Tshivenda poetry is a lynchpin upon which one may construct a contextualised understanding of the Vhavenda's life, history and worldview.

Although there is a broad discussion in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), it is imperative to highlight from the onset that the examination of the selected poetic texts is done bearing in mind how Tshivenda traditional and/or 'oraloric' poetry serves as a foundation and dominant influence in the thematic preoccupations of Tshivenda modern poetry (Milubi, 1988). By modern, it is meant the "written and contemporary as opposed to traditional and oral" (Orhero, 2017:148). As shown in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.3), notable in the selected poets' works are both similar and dissimilar trends that reflect diverse layers of understanding on the meaning of individual and collective selfhood in Tshivenda culture. The study attributes this diversity to numerous and varied factors that may have contributed to the ideological outlook of each selected poet. These factors include colonialism, apartheid, the clash and/or interface between tradition and modernity, the influence of missionary Christianity in Venda, protest, and the need to (re)assert identities, particularly during the colonial and postcolonial contexts (Khorommbi, 1996; Mogoboya, 2011; Mokgoatšana, *ibid*; Orhero, 2017). Given the essence of certain key concepts that undergird this study, it is imperative to provide their operational definitions in this chapter.

1.2. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

The concepts 'selfhood', 'identity' and 'culture' must not be looked at from a reductionist or essentialist panorama where aspects can be itemised and held down to a single theme for explanation (Mokgoatšana, *Ibid*:5). The reason for making the foregoing assertion is that concepts such as selfhood, identity and culture, for instance, are complex entities that tend to be fluid and ubiquitous (Khapoya, 2010; Mogoboya, 2011). Therefore, the colonial notion of 'fixity' cannot be appropriated in the definition of these concepts because it will yield misguided definitions (Mokgoatšana, *Ibid*). Defining the term 'identity' is in itself a perfidious act because the notion itself is so abstruse that it resists the unanimity of explanations across disciplines (Mokgoatšana, *Ibid*). Notwithstanding, the present study provides operational definitions of the concepts selfhood, identity and culture.

1.2.1. Selfhood

According to Gaines (1982, cited in Sodi, 1998:11), the two terms that can be used to delineate the notion of self across cultures are referential and indexical. The referential self is viewed as 'egocentric', whereas the indexical is viewed as 'socio-centric' (Sodi, Ibid: 11). According to Sodi (Ibid: 11), the referential self as understood in virtually all Western psychological theories and psychiatry entails "an autonomous, independent, and separate entity that is presumed to be the originator, creator, and controller of behaviour". The indexical self, on the other hand, entails the inclusion of an individual within the societal setting, and thus, opposes the Western individualistic or egocentric tendency of viewing the self (Sodi, Ibid: 14). This study prefers the indexical notion of the self because (1) it does not isolate the individual from the societal setting, and (2) Tshivenda culture is socio-centric, allowing the indexical self to take the form of social roles. In a socio-centric culture, persons are seen as beings whose identities are created by their social locations, which essentially means subjects cannot be defined apart from the world in which they live (Sodi, Ibid:14). Escudero (2014:10) interprets selfhood as "the substantial core which gives identity to the manifold experiences of a human life. The self thus is the unchanging inner reality of a person". In this study, the concept selfhood is used to describe literary creations that are propounded by the collective imagination in poetry in an attempt to describe the essence and uniqueness of subjects, i.e. Vhavenda, irrespective of how such constructions are made and irrespective of whether such constructions are accepted or rejected in a socio-centric context.

1.2.2. Identity

Mahasha (2014:4) regards identity as "an integration of one's meaning to oneself and one's meaning to others; it provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one's life". Identity can also be regarded as "the state of having the same nature or character which defines one's absolute individuality. It may also mean a person's essential self or a set of characteristics which people recognise as belonging uniquely to themselves and constituting their individual personality" (Mogoboya, 2011:1–2). Mokgoatšana (1999:6) argues that "an ontological definition of identity would as far as possible trace the ancestry of the subject, its attributes and history". An ontological definition

would thus shore up the notion of 'sameness', particularly in the application of the concept 'identity'.

In the ontological sense, identity could then be considered to be responsible for harmonising those features that are indispensable in the description of what *is*. Thus, "without sounding reductionist, identity is a mental construction of what one perceives of a subject" (Mokgoatšana, *Ibid*: 6). Mokgoatšana (*Ibid*) concedes that this view of identity is not ineludibly constant among all people but is contingent on what each one of them considers as the most significant kernel for the explanation of the *self*. This conception complicates the definition because at its core, the construction and definition of identity simply becomes a matter of perspective.

In this study and in consensus with Mokgoatšana (*Ibid*), identity is viewed in relation to two points of reference: A subjective frame of self-definition, and a social frame of self-definition. Thus, in this study, the concept identity is used to describe the selected poets' understanding of who the self is and the purpose for which the self exists, which by implication, links the self with purpose and values, and with the need for the self to assert itself ostensibly in an endeavour to attain a public recognition of its distinctiveness and importance.

1.2.3. Culture

Culture is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour. It entails the manner in which humans live with others, how they treat others and how they develop or react to changes in their settings (Eyong, Mufuaya and Foy, 2011). Culture encapsulates "languages, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works or art, rituals and so on" (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002:26). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993: xii–xiii) asserts that,

Culture means two things in particular. First of all, it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economy, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history. Second, and almost imperceptibly, culture is a concept

that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.

In the first sense of Said's definition of the concept 'culture', it is noteworthy how culture affords one the latitude to be informed about what has been believed and acknowledged, and also "to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights" (Ibid: xiv). Of course, over time, culture may come to be connected, often belligerently, with the nation-state; this distinguishes 'us' from 'them', nearly continuously with some degree of dislike of foreigners (Said, Ibid; cf. Abodunrin, 2018a). In this first sense, culture is a basis of identity, and rather an aggressive one at that. In the second sense, culture may be viewed as a sort of playhouse where various dogmatic and philosophical causes engage one another. Conceived this way, (Said, Ibid: xiv) states that culture can become a shielding enclosure: "Check your politics at the door before you enter it".

Eagleton (2000) focuses on discriminating different meanings of 'culture' and notes that culture, which is often viewed as one of the most multifarious words in the English language, essentially derives from nature. Hence, according to Eagleton (Ibid), one of the original meanings of 'culture' is 'husbandry', that is 'the tending of natural growth'. Eagleton (Ibid: 4) further argues that "if culture originally means husbandry, then it suggests both regulation and spontaneous growth". In this sense, culture becomes a matter of following rules, which fundamentally involves "an interplay of the regulated and unregulated" (Eagleton, Ibid: 4). Therefore, for Eagleton (Ibid: 4–5), "the idea of culture signifies a double refusal: of organic determinism on the one hand, and of the autonomy of spirit on the other". In these two polarities, Eagleton (Ibid) foregrounds the idea of culture as a rejection of both naturalism and idealism.

In this study, the concept culture is used to describe the selected poets' conceptual awareness and endorsement or opposition of the Vhavenda social constructs and articulation of their scheme of values and ideological outlook(s). Tshivenda culture, as embedded and reflected in the selected texts, is considered to be representative of the Vhavenda's codified stock of lore and the hub of the best that has been acknowledged and believed, culminating in the construction and articulation of identity. Within this construction and articulation, the study brings into critical focus

how the Vhavenda's 'idea of culture' in terms of 'husbandry' also undergirds their engagement with their environs.

1.2.4. Indigenous Knowledge System

An indigenous knowledge system (IKS) is a bodies of historically (and traditionally) organised knowledge that is indispensable in the long-term adaptation of a community or human groups to the biophysical environment (Purcell, 1998). This system entails the mode in which people have understood themselves in relation to their natural environment (Ejike, 2020). Such an understanding of 'self' encapsulates, among other things, experiences, skills, insights and innovations of people in their respective local communities, amassed over years and applied to sustain or develop their livelihoods (Masoga and Kaya, 2012). In essence, IKS is a manifold accrual of local context-relevant knowledge that embraces the essence of ancestral knowing and the heritages of sundry histories and cultures (Akena, 2012). These definitions lend credence to the fact that IKSs cannot be severed from the social, cultural, spiritual, political, and economic realities of the indigenous people (Ejike, Ibid:22). The systems comprise a set of ideas, beliefs and practices, most of which have indigenous religious substructures, of a specific locale that has been used by its people to interact with their environment and other people over a long period of time. These systems are largely used to pronounce the ontological (aesthetic and ethical), spiritual, and social values of a society or community. These values, often transferred from one generation to another, include teachings about communal beliefs, practices associated with botany, human nutrition, sex, pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, food preparation and preservation, medicine, animal husbandry, and others (Mawere, 2015). Indigenous knowledge systems can therefore be defined as systematic *ways of knowing* in a lived world constituting its indigenes' experiences, insights, and reasoning which enable them to make their homes in a local flair and for their continual existence and sustenance (Akena, Ibid). These ways of knowing include, but are not limited to, knowledge of deities/beings/forces, divinities, cosmology/cosmogony, universe, human relationships, traditional technologies, time, and others (Ejike, Ibid). In this way, the systems aid the indigenes to sustain their ancestral environment as a community with highlighted distinctive features such as culture(s), language(s) and worldview(s).

As a result of their being contextually bound to specific locales, these “systems of knowledge and production of knowledge [...] are sometimes perceived as antithetical to the Western empirical systems” (Abodunrin, 2016:1). Implicit in Abodunrin’s (ibid) observation is that, as a multidimensional body of understandings, these systems have been viewed by European culture as superstitious, inferior and primitive, especially in the wake of the European scientific revolution of the 17th and 19th centuries; hence, their being poised or counterpoised as antithetical to Western imperialism. In this study, these systems are appraised as viable tools for reclaiming Africans’ context-relevant modes of knowing which, for the most part, have been desecrated, devalued and deemed as primitive, superstitious, inferior and anachronistic by Western scholarship (Ejike, Ibid).

1.2.5. Poetry

According to Kirszner and Mandell (2004:550), part of the problem of defining poetry is that poetry has many guises. In lieu of this, Kirszner and Mandell (Ibid) assert that a poem may be short or long, accessible or obscure; it may have a familiar poetic form, a sonnet, a couplet, a haiku, or follow no conventional pattern; it may or may not have a regular, identifiable meter or a rhyme scheme; it may depend heavily on elaborate imagery, figures of speech, irony, complex allusions or symbols, or repeated sounds, or it may include none of these features conventionally associated with poetry. Notwithstanding, poetry,

for many people, in many places, ... is the language of emotions, the medium of expression they use when they speak from the heart. Despite the long-standing place of poetry in our lives, however, many people—including poets themselves—have difficulty deciding what poetry is One way of defining poetry is to say that it uses language to condense experience into an intensely concentrated package, with each sound, each word, each image, and each line carrying great weight. But beyond this, it is difficult to pin down what makes a particular arrangement of words or lines a poem (Kirszner and Mandell, Ibid: 550).

Mphahlele and Moffett (2002: xxii) concur with Kirszner and Mandell (2004) on poetry being “an intensely concentrated package”, and define poetry as “a particularly dense and concentrated form of expression. Every single word is chosen for effect, and then combined with others and shaped with a specific end in mind”. Milubi (1988:146) proffers that “poetry, then, is a response to, and an evaluation of,

our experience of the objective, bustling world and our ideas about it. Poetry is concerned with the world as responded to sensorily, emotionally and intellectually". Opland (1998:5) regards poetry as "a living organism reflecting the aspirations of a people or nation". For Lewis (in Mathivha, 1972:356), poetry is "that art which seeks to express a peculiar fusion of ideas and emotions which are normally on the edge of consciousness or even beyond it". In a general sense, poetry may be defined as "the expression of the imagination" (Mathivha, *Ibid*: 358). In this study, poetry is taken as a mental and textual construct and representation of the Vhavenḍa poets' conception and imaginative expression of essential tenets that reflect selfhood, identity and culture.

1.2.6 Poets

As already indicated, providing a working definition of a poet and poetry is a Herculean task (see Kirsznner and Mandell, 2004:550). In exploring the relationship between poets, their audience and the attendant performative mode of praise poetry, Kgobe (1995:2) restricts his definition to an oral poet, concluding that a poet is a "performer who composes each poem in the act of performance by means of a traditional poetic language". Finnegan (1977), on the other hand, submits that a poet can be anyone in the community, which implies that poets can be self-appointed and have their success determined by the response of the people who listen to them (cf. Kgobe, *Ibid*). According to Milubi (1983:8), poets "are those [people] who are able to stand still to capture the passing actions and ideas of the traffic of life and to shape them, turning impermanence into permanence". Milubi's (*Ibid*) definition encapsulates the notion that poets naturally carry with them somewhat supersensitive apparatus that records best the acute feelings and experiences of human life and living.

Appended to Milubi's (*Ibid*) definition is the idea that poets generally poise (or counterpoise) themselves as social commentators who embrace their function as interpreting public opinion and organising it, failing which, does not afford such a poet the status of national poet (Kgobe, 1995). In accord with this, Manyaka (2000:260–261) views a poet as "the spokesperson of the society or the community in which he/she lives". Assuming this posture for a poet necessitates the commitment to both confront and change the status quo (Mogoboya, 2011:56). The

word 'commitment', as far as epochal categorisations of South African poetry are concerned, possesses such an insightful acuity for Alvarez~Pereyre (1979) that he incorporated it in the title of his book *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa*. In the book, Alvarez~Pereyre (Ibid) studies the rich tradition of protest poetry that emerged from Black poets in South Africa since the World War 2.

As if in consonance with 'the poetry of commitment' and its associated protest in mind, Goodwin (1982:vii) extends the discussion to the fact that African poets in particular are propelled by "a belief that poetry [is] not confined to beautiful materials but [can] equally well deal with anything, even the sordid". Emanating from this protest and use of poetry to address a wide range of issues is essentially the aspect of relationship between the artists (poet) and their society with regard to social problems (Milubi, 1994:1). The poetry that exudes from poets who position themselves as social commentators, according to Milubi (Ibid), not only responds to the challenges in a given social context but also reveals the mental agony of the very poets who are often faced with a society in disintegration. Thus, the impact poets make on their readers and on society depends on the significance of what they have to say about social reality and how effectively they communicate their vision (Makhubela, 1999:3).

What poets say then about social reality depends largely on their social vision (authorial ideology), and how they successfully communicate that vision is largely a matter of their stylistic stance (aesthetic ideology) (Makhubela, 1999). Notable in the preceding definitions of a poet is the gravitation towards the role and function of a poet rather than the organic and concrete definition of a poet. In such definitions, the poet is projected, even in arbitrary terms, as an observer and active participant in their immediate context, critically responding to the very context and its attendant situations with the intention to illuminate on its potentialities, virtues and vices. Here, the poet's output is thus, as a matter of necessity, expected to reverberate at every level with social realities.

1.2.7. Tshivenda

The Tshivenda language is spoken mainly by the Vh Venda people in the Vhembe District and further north of the Limpopo Province in South Africa (Dakalo, 2009; Mulaudzi, 1987). The language belongs to the Bantu² language family (a sub-category of the Niger-Congo family). According to some scholars, Tshivenda emerged as a distinct dialect in the 16th century (Loubser, 1988, 1989; Stayt, 1931; Wentzel, 1983). The Bantu language family is found in the area which runs from about 3 degrees north latitude southwards as far as the Cape (Ziervogel and Ferreira, n.d.:5). Ziervogel and Ferreira (Ibid) further state that the languages of the northern areas have been much influenced by the Nilotic and Sudanic languages, the languages of the Northern neighbours of the Bantu (Madiba, 1994). As a result of the genetic relationship that exists among Bantu languages, Tshivenda shares similar linguistic features such as specific noun classes, an open syllable structure, an extensive agreement system and a vocabulary similar to Sesotho, although its grammatical structures are closer to Chishona, which is spoken in Zimbabwe (Madiba, 1994). Tshivenda is a tonal language and acoustic prominence is awarded to the penultimate syllable of the last word in a sentence. Tshivenda is also an agglutinative code with a very complex morphology and its orthography makes an extensive use of diacritic symbols for the representation of speech sounds foreign to languages such as English. Tshivenda has the following dialects: *Tshiilafuri*, *Tshironga*, *Tshilaudzi* or *Tshimanḁa*, *Tshiphani*, *Tshimbedzi*, *Tshilembethu* and *Tshiguvhu* (Mulaudzi, 1987; Dakalo, 2009). Standard Tshivenda in South Africa is *Tshiphani*.

1.2.8. Vh Venda

The noun Vh Venda is used in this study to refer to the aboriginal people who have since time immemorial occupied the land of Venda and were known as Vhangona, Vhongwaniwapo, Vhontangiwakugala, Vhotshidzatshapo, Zwisike, VhoNemashango

² I am deeply aware that the noun 'Bantu' has become stigmatised in South Africa (Madiba, 1994). However, the noun is used in this paper on purely linguistic grounds and also to avoid any ambiguities of reference.

(N̄eluvhalani, 2017). Most of the Vhavend̄a people currently inhabit the north-eastern part of the Limpopo Province in the Vhembe District along the Soutpansberg mountain range, northwards into the southern part of Zimbabwe (Hanisch, 2008; Jones, 1962; L'abbe, Ribot and Steyn, 2005; Liesegang, 1977; Mmbara, 2009; Mugovhani, 2007; Muthivhi, 2010 Nettleton, 1985). Soutpansberg translates into "mountain of the salt pans" (Kruger, 1989:392). This area is just south of the Limpopo River, the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa (Kruger, 1989). In the community survey conducted by Statistics South Africa (2016:15) in 2016, 971 080 people who lived in the Limpopo Province were Vhavend̄a. The mid-year population estimates by Statistics South Africa in 2019 indicate that 5 982 584 currently live in Limpopo (2019: vi). However, there is no specification in the 2019 estimation of how many Vhavend̄a people form part of the statistics.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The colonisation of Africans resulted in a notable obliteration of many aspects of the cultural identity of Africans (Mandende and Mashige, 2018; Mokgoatšana, 1999). Hence, the supposition held in this study is that the modern-day Muvend̄a is not as well-versed in their cultural identity and heritage as they should be (Maḡadzhe, 1985a). Furthermore, the postcolonial/postmodernist generation appears to be projecting an indifferent and negative attitude toward their culture, heritage, mother tongues and other aspects related to indigenous knowledge (Maḡadzhe, 2019; Makamu, 2009). If this indifference and negative attitude persist, the Vhavend̄a young people may end up incapable of articulating the critical tenets of their own culture and selfhood. Implicit in this is that the very Vhavend̄a would have contributed to their own cultural emasculation by not documenting their history, cultural difference and identity formations and reformations over time. Of course, much of this indifference and cultural schizophrenia (Abodunrin, 2018a) can be linked to the colonial era that inculcated an inferiority complex on the psyche of Africans (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006; Maḡadzhe, *Ibid*; Mahasha, 2014; Mlama, 1995; Mogoboya, 2011).

The colonial era essentially embodied the spirit of Western Eurocentrism, which tends to regard every idea that does not originate from Europe as lacking universalism in content (Anaso and Eziafa, 2014; Asante, 1998; 1999; N̄etswera,

2012). At its core, Eurocentrism exhibits a sense of cultural superiority and negative attitude towards Africans (Khorommbi, 1996:1). It is for this reason that Asante (1998:8) argues that Africans lost their cultural centredness; that is, Africans have been moved off their own platforms, and therefore, cannot truly be themselves or know their potential since they exist in a borrowed space. To the present researcher's knowledge, the study of selfhood, identity and culture in Tshivenda poetry has not received sufficient scholarly attention, and therefore, this study probed a field less traversed and yet fertile for research. In the subsequent sections and chapters, the researcher tried as far as possible to lay a foundation in the study of the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture from an Africalogical (Afrocentric), hermeneutic and post-colonialist vantage points.

The study also made inroads into autobiographical poems, among other poetry types, as a way to (re)present and (re)appropriate the self, and linked self-(re)presentation with the presentation of the Vhavenda's identity. As intimated earlier, Tshivenda poetry represents indices into the Vhavenda's conception of selfhood, identity and culture in a series of representations, and so, this study journeys towards uncovering this series of representations. It is further argued in this study that the selected poets create and recreate history, identity and culture, which at times masquerades as 'fiction'. Generally, this study examined selected Tshivenda poetry as a genre that has a desire "for space in the sun" while conscious of "its ever present enemies who gang up to smash its efficiency and effectiveness" (Khorommbi, 1996:13). It is hoped that by examining the selected poetry texts, some theoretical perspectives on the history, identity and cultural uniqueness of Vhavenda would emanate, creating an empowering space for Tshivenda poetry, and ultimately, Tshivenda literature in general.

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1.4.1. Aim

The aim of this study is to examine how Tshivenda poetry reflects the Vhavenda people's selfhood, identity and culture.

1.4.2. Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- To identify aspects that characterise the Vhavenḁa people's concept of selfhood, identity and culture in selected Tshivendḁa poetry texts.
- To reflect on the thematic concerns that the selected Vhavenḁa poets advance as indices into the Vhavenḁa people's life and worldview in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts, respectively.
- To foreground the various strategies that the selected Vhavenḁa poets employ to galvanise their kin folks towards embracing and celebrating their own selfhood, identity and culture.
- To propose new theoretical postulations that may be employed in future analyses of selfhood, identity and culture in Tshivendḁa poetry.

1.4.3. Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

- What are the essential aspects that the selected Vhavenḁa poets thematise in their poetry as delineations of the Vhavenḁa's concept of selfhood, identity and culture?
- Which thematic concerns do the selected Vhavenḁa poets advance as significant indices into the Vhavenḁa life and worldview in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts?
- What are the strategies that the selected Vhavenḁa poets deploy to galvanise their kin folks towards embracing and celebrating their own selfhood, identity and culture?
- What are the new theoretical postulations that may be proposed for application in future analyses of selfhood, identity and culture in Tshivendḁa poetry?

1.5. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In its intent to access the selected texts, this study latched on a trifocal theoretical framework, namely Afrocentricity, the hermeneutic approach and the postcolonial theory. The subsequent subsections describe each theoretical approach and how each was suitable for the present study.

1.5.1. Afrocentricity

The crystallisation of the critical perspective named *Afrocentricity* by Molefe Kete Asante means the placement of African ideals at the centre of any analysis that encompasses African culture and behaviour (Asante, 1998; Shai, 2021). To Asante (Ibid: 137) “Afrocentricity is the most complete philosophical totalization of the African being-at-the-centre of his or her existence”. In other words, Afrocentricity is the repositioning of Africans to a place of agency, where instead of being spectators to others, African voices are heard in the full meaning of history (Asante, 1999). In *The Afrocentric Idea*, Asante (Ibid: xi) avers that “the main aim of Afrocentrists is to seek ways to *unite* the country based on mutual respect for the cultural agency of all its peoples” (original italics). To propound their theoretical thrust, Afrocentrists essentially pose two important questions: “How do we see ourselves and how have others seen us?” and “What can we do to regain our own accountability and to move beyond the intellectual plantation that constrains our economic, cultural, and intellectual development?” (Asante, 1999:3–4).

As a cultural configuration, Afrocentricity is set apart by the following five features: (a) a concentrated concern for psychological location as determined by symbols, motifs, rituals, and signs; (b) an obligation to locate the subject-place of Africans in any social, political, economic, or religious phenomenon with implications for questions of sex, gender, and class; (c) a defence of African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, and literature and defence of a pan-African cultural connection based on broad responses to conditions, environments, and situations over time; (d) a celebration of ‘centredness’ and agency and a commitment to lexical refinement that eliminates pejoratives, including sexual and gender pejoratives, about Africans or other people; and e) an imperative from historical sources to revise the collective text of African people as one in constant and consistent search for liberation. Thus, Afrocentricity seeks to demonstrate the illogic in empiricist epistemologies while at the same time questioning the conceptual cosmologies that give rise to the concept of the foundation of civilisation in Eurocentric spheres (Asante, 1998).

Asante admits that he finds his position in the thinking of Cheikh Anta Diop, whose argument is that Africa can never be understood until Africans are linked to their

classical past (Asante, *Ibid*: xiii). To do as both Diop and Asante ask, necessitates the abandonment of the notion of Africans as people who are merely peripheral to Europe, standing on the sidelines of Western triumphalism; as people merely acted upon rather than acting; and as people who are culturally and historically subjugated (Asante, 1998:xiii). In this way, Afrocentricity is presented by Asante (1998) as both a moral and intellectual outlook that positions Africans as subjects rather than as objects of human history, further establishing a reasonably valid and scientific basis for the description of African experiences.

Per Mokgoatšana (1999:30), “Afrocentricity in itself implies taking a perspective from African experience and there is no way in which these experiences can be left out in an attempt to recreate an identity”. Thus, Afrocentrists view themselves as cultural analysts who are committed to the systematic exposition of cultural behaviours as they are articulated in the African world. For the Africalogist, contends Mokgoatšana (1997, in Mokgoatšana, *Ibid*: 30), “The African experience should be the axis of our social analysis of reality. In interpreting phenomena, be it African or otherwise, the African worldview should guide us into a meaningful understanding of that aspect of reality”. Therefore, Afrocentrists contend that there are other ways in which to experience phenomena rather than observing them from a Eurocentric vantage point (Asante, 1998).

Firstly, Afrocentricity was preferred as a theoretical lynchpin in this study because it constitutes a drastic criticism of the Eurocentric ideology that charades as a universal outlook in the fields of intercultural communication, rhetoric, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, education, anthropology, and history (Asante, *Ibid*). Yet the critique is drastic in the sense that it advocates a turnaround and an alternate viewpoint on phenomena. This turnaround entails, for example, taking the globe and turning it over so that all the prospects of a world where Africa is subject and not object are seen. This stance, argues Asante (*Ibid*), is necessary for both Africans and Europeans. Secondly, Afrocentricity was helpful in generating an understanding of the ways in which people construct substantial realities, irrespective of whether those realities are constructed on class or race conditions (Asante, *Ibid*). Thirdly, Afrocentricity allowed the present researcher the latitude to offer a critical (re)evaluation of the Vhavenḡa’s selfhood, identity and culture on the basis of

Afrocentric orientation, a stance assumed against the Western criteria that are enforced as interpretive methods of other cultures (Asante, *Ibid*).

Fourthly, anchoring this study to Afrocentricity enabled the present researcher the freedom to insert the agency of the Vhavenda (Africans) into the equation of social and political transformation. In this sense, the theoretical impetus of Afrocentricity purports that the people who have been consigned to the peripheries of society must now be perceived as actors on stage, albeit actors who have functioned from a position of less power for centuries (Asante, *Ibid*). Fifthly, Afrocentricity's intellectual attack on the supremacy of dogma is firstly historical because it proffers a set of facts recounting events and phenomena, allowing a more valid explanation of the agency of African people to surface, even in the condition of subjugation (Asante, *Ibid*). Apart from the historical assault, Afrocentricity is also analytical because it scrutinises the theoretical frames of domination and makes an assessment of domination in the linguistic, social, aesthetic, cultural, political, and economic spheres (Asante, *Ibid*).

The present researcher concurs with Asante (*Ibid*) that only a complete metatheory can amply cogitate the multi-dimensions of the African cultural experience; and this metatheory ought to be grounded on Afrocentric bases. Metatheory is an idea that comprises an array of theories, allowing a researcher, for example, to provide better explanations, wider considerations, and more operative enunciations of the meaning of selfhood, identity and culture (cf. Asante, *Ibid*:45). In summation, Afrocentricity as a paradigm, performs several functions that are necessary for the advancement of African studies, namely: (a) it supplies the grammar or notational system that gives a succinct base to key concepts and ideas; (b) it makes it possible to trace the logical development of arguments because they derive from clear components of the paradigm; (c) it allows Afrocentrists to build upon existing foundations, that is, a school of thought or paradigm based upon works since the 1960s; and (d) it promotes scrutiny and synthesis rather than mere description (Asante, *Ibid*). In tandem with Asante (*Ibid*: 192), the present researcher believes that attention to these functions makes it possible to have a significant theoretical perspective for examining any branch of human science. The deployment of Afrocentricity in this study also informed the present researcher's coinage of Ethno-personalism as a theoretical approach that can best aid the interpretation of selfhood, identity and

culture in Tshivenda literature. Perhaps it is best that this section expounds the concept Ethno-personalism from in fulfilment of the fourth objective of this study.

1.5.1.1. Ethno-Personalism

Put briefly, Ethno-personalism is proposed here as primarily a theoretical philosophy of the person within a people's cultural matrix. For taxonomic convenience, the many strains of personalism are proffered here, both as a philosophical and theological movement, in two essential categories: 'personalism in a strict sense and personalism in a broader sense' (Williams and Bengtsson, 2020). According to Williams and Bengtsson (Ibid), strict personalism places the person at the centre of a philosophical system that originates from an 'intuition' of the person themselves, and then goes on to analyse the personal reality and the personal experience that are the objects of this intuition.

Personalism in the broader sense, on the other hand, does not consider the person as the object of an original intuition, nor does it conceive of philosophical research as beginning with an analysis of immediate personal experience and its context (Williams and Bengtsson, Ibid). Ethno-personalism purports that instead of constituting an autonomous metaphysics, this theoretical postulation in the broader sense provides an anthropological-ontological shift in perspective within an existing metaphysics and sheds light on the essence of ethnicity and culture as key features in the conceptualisation and articulation of selfhood, identity and culture.

While one appreciates the emphasis on the agency of Africans, it is also necessary to emphasise formulations of ethnocentric critiques of Africans' discourse. By 'agency' is meant "the evolving ownership of action or the subject role, of Africans" (Asante, Ibid: 177). When emphasising this agency, however, one should be wary of the tendency to depict African people as mere reactionaries and not as people who define the grounds of discourse. Afrocentrists' acknowledgement of the pressure on Africans to always defend themselves as human beings while agitating for equal rights, combined with the need to correct false and demeaning characterisations of Africans, is necessary in the project of decolonisation and Africanisation.

Therefore, the researcher proposes ethno-personalism as a philosophical consideration mainly because it allows for an 'emic' approach to the study of African selfhood, identity and culture. An emic approach views perspectives from within the

same culture as the discourse (cf. Asante, 1998). In this sense, ethno-personalism advocates that to better understand a people's identity, culture and philosophy, it is best to view these aspects from within the culture itself rather than by employing 'etic' approaches to criticism that are undergirded by methods that are from outside the discourse's perspective. This theoretical postulation works best from an understanding that Africa is not a village where one ethnic group lives in one hut; no, Africa is a continent. Within this continent there are people whose cultural, traditional and philosophical outlooks may resonate but are not necessarily the same. For example, the cultural and ideological outlook of the Yoruba in Nigeria is essentially African, but it is not necessarily the same as that of the Vhavenda in South Africa. Each African culture has its own salient features that make it distinct from other African cultures. Therefore, understanding the uniqueness of each ethnic group's intellectual and cultural orientation necessitates looking at each group individually and uniquely. This will enable the critic to avoid approaching Africa and African people with the bias of singularisation, and the opposite of bias singularisation is the consideration of each African society's unique cultural experience and history. This can be best understood when one approaches African cultures from within and not from an outside-looking-in posture.

An emic approach to culture, therefore, allows for an authentic and even accurate exposition of selfhood, identity and culture, whereas an etic approach gravitates towards an imposition of foreign views upon a people's indigenous culture. Imposition emanates from the misguided belief that one culture possesses the right to impose its set of values on other cultures and to insist on the 'rightness' of its frameworks that often view other cultures and peoples in a junior light, implying that all other cultures are subsets of the imposing culture. Ethno-personalism, on the other hand, emphasises an exposition of culture for its own sake and not to assume an imperialistic stance geared towards marginalising or trivialising other cultural experiences.

When an emic approach is employed to study a people's culture, the critic needs the following convictions: (a) People's lore possesses an epistemological, etiological and eschatological content that can be seen as an interpretation of those people's reality; (b) people's peculiarity can be studied and understood more as a philosophical than a biological issue from their own perspective(s); (c) a critic can come to terms with

the fundamental cultural differences because they appreciate people's ownership of values, knowledge and culture; and (d) people have the latitude to gain a total reclamation of their philosophical ground without being victims of assumptions and stereotypes that support established value systems and critical theories with little regard to their own significant historical experiences. The researcher's claim here is that a proper understanding of Tshivenda culture in particular and African culture in general can only be achieved by looking at them through emic eyes.

1.5.2 The Hermeneutic Approach

The hermeneutic approach is quite a unique way of perceiving the self because its stance is that human beings have some sort of self-comprehension (Escudero, 2014). The self is viewed as a narrative construction. According to the hermeneutic approach, to have a self, or even better, to be a self, is something in which one is existentially involved. The self, so to speak, is "the product of conceiving and organizing one's life in a certain way" (Escudero, Ibid: 8). As such, when confronted with the question 'Who are you?', one can share a certain narrative that describes who they are and present themselves to others for recognition and approval. Implicit in this is the idea that people construct a narrative self, which encompasses a multifaceted social interaction; they build an identity that starts in early childhood and continues for the rest of their lives. Who they are depends on the story they and others tell about them. In the hermeneutic approach, one cannot be a self on one's own but only together with others as part of a community. And so, one might be both the narrator and protagonist when they tell a story about themselves, but they would not be the only author. In the end, who the person is depends on the stories told about them, both by themselves and by others. This theoretical approach was relevant to this study because the researcher's assumption was that the Vhavenda people possess some kind of self-comprehension and are able to articulate this comprehension in a variety of forms, one of them being poetry.

1.5.3 Postcolonial Theory

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:1) write:

More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism. It is easy to see how important this has been in the political and

economic spheres, but its general influence on the perceptual frameworks of contemporary peoples is often less evident. Literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions are expressed and it is in their writing, and through other arts such as painting, sculpture, music, and dance that the day-to-day realities experienced by colonized peoples have been most powerfully encoded and so profoundly influential.

Thus, “writing by those peoples formerly colonized by Britain, though much of what it deals with is of interest and relevance to countries colonized by other European powers, such as France, Portugal and Spain” (Ashcroft et al, 1989:1). According to Ashcroft et al (Ibid: 1), the semantic basis of the term ‘post-colonial’ might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. While the term is occasionally used to distinguish between periods before and after independence (‘colonial period’ and ‘post-colonial period’) by some scholars, for Ashcroft et al (Ibid:1-2), however, the term ‘post-colonial’ is used to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. Ashcroft et al (Ibid) use the term this way because they believe that there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. The authors also suggest that ‘post-colonial’ is the most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted (Ashcroft, 1989). In this sense, Ashcroft et al’s (Ibid) book deals with the world as it exists during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effect of this on contemporary literatures.

Postcolonial discourse in general aims to engage in dialectical redefinitions of the relations between the so-called ‘imperial/colonial’ state and the indigenous/colonised subjects. This relationship is marked by a pursuit to rewrite the place of the colonised in the land of their birth (Mokgoatšana, Ibid: 13). It is for this reason that Mokgoatšana (Ibid:14) posits that South Africa needs clearly defined programmes that are geared at correcting the mistakes of the past, and subsequently, accord Africans a proper place in the history and development of the country. In appropriating such programmes, however, token affirmative action is merely cosmetic because it does not address the serious issue of identity crisis and inferiorisation that has been institutionalised (Mokgoatšana, Ibid).

Mokgoatšana (Ibid) asserts that such an inferiorisation is deeply rooted in the minds of the oppressed, which essentially means that the postcolonial subjects are faced with such Herculean tasks as redefining their place in the new postcolony. In the uphill efforts of redefinition and decolonisation, it is vital, therefore, “to design academic programmes which aim at altering the psychological impact of colonisation/apartheid. These programmes should deliberately assert an African experience” (Mokgoatšana, Ibid: 14). Mokgoatšana (Ibid) also says: “Without positive moves to challenge the pseudo-scientificism which relegated African people as *personae non gratae*, South Africans will fall into the trappings of unknowable indoctrination by their colonial masters” (original italics). Thus, in the theatre of decolonisation, the daunting task of postcolonial writing and other forms of discourse is to unmask and demystify the myth of European/imperial superiority and to reverse the inferiorisation of the colonial subject (Mokgoatšana, Ibid:16).

According to Mogoboya (2011:31–32), “postcolonialism is a tool, a method used by postcolonial theorists to falsify and debunk the myths and stereotypes the centre (Europe) has about other continents (Africa in this case). It is a discourse through which the colonised resist colonial domination” (original insertions). Mogoboya (Ibid) further avers that this tool or method denotes the colonised asserting their sense of cultural difference and particularly from their imperial masters. Hence, this discourse is a corpus of literature of protest against imperialism. Such a corpus of literature, whether in Africa or elsewhere, distinctively falls within the category of ‘post-colonial’ because it materialised in its present form out of the experience of colonisation and asserted itself by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasising its difference from the moulds of the imperial centre (Ashcroft et al, 1989:2). Mokgoatšana (Ibid: 17) concurs with Mogoboya (Ibid) in viewing postcolonialism as a tool and method to fight colonial portraiture and distortions. Themes of colonisation, neo-colonisation, decolonisation and transformation are salient in this literature (Mogoboya, Ibid). Hence, postcolonial texts are often subjected to the historical discourses that produced them. The analysis of such texts, argues Mokgoatšana (Ibid: 18), should pay attention to the manner in which the dominant and subjugated write and interpret their own scripts and how they use these scripts to create meaning for the world around them.

Hybridity is another dominant literary theme or concept, particularly in postcolonial literature. It is essentially identified as a common feature in postcolonial texts (Harawa, 2015). Harawa (Ibid) asserts that when two or more cultures encounter one another, hybridity affects the new emergent culture socially, linguistically, historically and politically. Hence, hybridity can be regarded as “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft et al, 2006:118). It must be indicated, however, that hybridity does not necessarily mean coming up with completely new aspects of (African) culture but implies coming up with mixed cultures since different histories and cultures affect each other in order to come up with a new brand. In this way, hybridity is opposed to cultural purity (Harawa, Ibid: v).

The postcolonial concept hybridity is considered in the analysis of Tshivenda poetry in an attempt to identify aspects of acculturation or the confluence of cultures, if any, and their influence in the selected poets’ attempts at foregrounding cultural difference against hybridity. This is essential, particularly in a study of selfhood, identity and culture, because implicit in hybridity as a social reality is also belief and attendant ideological outlooks, and for this, “men bear arms—preparing to go to war over a matter of belief!” (Abodunrin 2003: xii). Yet, “it is extremely difficult to truly and completely divorce one’s environment” where “we are all ‘hybrids’ of one kind or another” (Cloete and Maḡadzhe, 2007:44). Hence, it is important to consider the pervasion of belief and hybridity in the selected poetry and comment on how they impact selfhood.

It must be stated, however, that postcolonialism is not without criticism. Mokgoatšana (1999) criticises the brand of postcolonial criticism for its tendency to push indigenous languages to the periphery. Per Mokgoatšana (Ibid: 20), “writing in ‘*English*’, for instance, is seen as a way of ‘writing back’ as if it were necessary to write”. Here Mokgoatšana argues that the colonial subjects have always objected to imperial/colonial domination through various art forms such as (rock) paintings, sculptures, singing and dancing, as well as the various verbal forms of orature. Hence, Mokgoatšana (Ibid) sees any form of postcolonialism that creates a Manichean chasm between orature and (written) literature as attempts to glorify the West with a view to relegating orature to a precolonial activity that dies away with the advent of writing. In Chapter 2, Sections 2.3 and 2.4 are devoted to a discussion on how Tshivenda ‘oraloric’ lore serves as a foundation for the so-called Tshivenda

modern (written) literature. This study will hopefully demonstrate that some of the selected poets' poetry is custom-made, emanating from both rural and urban and traditional and modern bases, and is still reflective of an apparent customary mode that remains unperturbed by the theoretical complexities of postcolonial theory. All in all, the theoretical approaches adopted in this study complement each other in facilitating an understanding and articulation of the Vhavenḁa's selfhood, identity and culture as reflected in Tshivendḁa poetry.

1.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since this was a desktop research, there was no need for the researcher to elucidate on the ethical considerations upheld when engaging with research participants, for instance. However, in principle, the researcher sought permission to conduct the study from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limpopo prior to the write-up of the study. Permission was granted (Ethical clearance certificate attached). To combat plagiarism, the researcher also ensured that the final draft of the thesis was run through the Turnitin computer programme to look for any similarities with previous studies, and where similarities were noted, the researcher either paraphrased or duly acknowledged the sources.

1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is envisioned that this study will serve a pedagogical purpose by helping lecturers, teachers, scholars, researchers, cultural activists, learners, and students, among others, understand the thematic concerns of Tshivendḁa poetry and the Vhavenḁa's textual constructions and articulations of their selfhood. In this way, the study might enrich the area of Tshivendḁa literary studies since it exposes other essential areas that have not been examined or investigated in-depth on the life and worldview of the Vhavenḁa in Tshivendḁa poetry. The study may also enhance and fortify the Vhavenḁa's confidence in their uniqueness and affirm their sense of 'being-in-the-world'. The Vhavenḁa writers, in particular, may also be encouraged by this study to produce literary works that not only depict the aesthetic hold of Tshivendḁa poetry opulently but also strive to encapsulate the essential tenets of the Vhavenḁa's selfhood, identity and culture. Chapter 2 (Sections 2.6 and 2.8) shows that the examination of Tshivendḁa folklore in the form of poetry and aspects of the

Vhavenda's mythology may, to a large extent, bear testimony to the phases of their (the Vhavenda's) history, attempts to explain the universe, the forces governing life and death, and their experiences of good and evil. This may help future researchers in their probes into the Vhavenda's ideal milieus and the centrality of their culture in the formation of social structures and the historic process that helped and still help in the construction of their identities.

1.8. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and orientation to the study. Operational definitions of key concepts undergirding the study are also provided, accompanied by the elucidations of the research problem. Afrocentricity, postulations of ethno-personalism, the hermeneutic approach and the postcolonial theory are introduced as theoretical frameworks that are used to access and synthesise the selected Tshivenda poetry texts. The chapter concludes with sections that encapsulate ethical considerations and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presents this study's literature review. In this chapter, the literary background of Tshivenda literature, in particular Tshivenda poetry, is presented by leaning on previous studies. The chapter further locates Tshivenda poetry, with its thematic preoccupations, within the ambit of African poetry. The Vhavenda's ideological outlook/worldview, belief system and concept of 'God' is discussed. The symbiosis between literature and selfhood, literature and identity, and literature and culture is also expounded in this chapter. Lastly, Pan-African aspects of selfhood, identity and culture, and Vhavenda's socio-cultural traditions, which guide the analysis of the selected poems in Chapters 4 and 5, are described in this chapter.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodological approaches adopted in this study. The research approach, research design, sampling of the texts, the data collection process, and data analysis of this study are broadly described.

In Chapter 4, the selected poetry works are analysed. The themes highlighted in Chapter 3 serve as the base for the analysis.

Chapter 5 focuses on the selected Vhavenda poets' thematisation of the Vhavenda's socio-cultural traditions and their attendant ideologies. Particular focus is on the poets' thematisation of Tshivenda traditional marriage along with its preparatory

ceremonies or rituals, followed by Vhavenda poets' appraisals of Tshivenda traditional dances, perceptions of traditional leaders, constructions of men's and women's images, the poets' appreciation of Tshivenda anthroponymy and onomastic creativity, their encapsulation of Tshivenda cosmology, selenology and ethnoastronomy, meanings of months and seasons in the Vhavenda's calendar system as well as their allusions to Tshivenda star lore. The reader is equipped with a sufficient sociological background, which illuminates the ideology behind the issues raised in the selected texts.

Chapter 6 presents the summary, findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter commences by presenting the Tshivenda literary background and orthographic development, which although a tangential aspect in this study, is important because it helps in tracing the uphill efforts of Tshivenda literature towards accessing 'centre space' in the South African literary scene. The documentation of this literary background will serve an archival purpose by capturing the Vhavenda's literary achievements for future researchers on Tshivenda literature to conveniently access in this study. Apart from archival convenience, the Tshivenda literary background will also help the reader understand the influences that shaped the nature of Tshivenda poetry. Furthermore, in this chapter, Tshivenda poetry is also located within the ambit of African poetry, with a particular focus on literary canons or trends in African poetry and Pan-Africanist themes.

The chapter further provides a reflection on the interlocking allegiance between literature and culture, highlighting how this allegiance ultimately manifests the linkage of history, belief, identity and selfhood. Also connected to this is a discussion of some of the keystones of the Vhavenda's religion and belief systems. These keystones are viewed in this study as significant indices into the selected poets' thematic foci in their creative oeuvre and the Vhavenda's life and worldview. In this way, the chapter would have established a foundation to anchor the notion that Tshivenda poetry contains indices into the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture. For this reason, this chapter serves as a springboard into the analysis of the selected texts in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

2.2 TSHIVENḌA LITERARY BACKGROUND

This subsection first briefly focuses on the factors that simultaneously propelled and hampered the development of Tshivenda literature in South Africa. As a point of departure, it presents a summary of the forces that may be considered to have caused the minimal output of literary works by the Vhavenda writers, particularly during the colonial/apartheid period in South Africa. From there, a survey of European missionaries' influence and role in the development of Tshivenda orthography and literature is presented. Subsequent to this is a broad discussion on

Tshivenda poetry, including its nature and thematic preoccupations, in light of African poetry in general.

2.2.1 Tshivenda Literature's Struggle for Access into the Centre Space of South African Literary History

Khorommbi (1996) not only believes that Tshivenda literature is highly impoverished, but also bemoans what he terms “the absence of a plethora of things” in the world of Tshivenda literature, which culminates in his view of Tshivenda literature as monolithic. Perhaps this is why *Rethinking South African Literary History* (Smit, van Wyk and Wade (1996) did not even consider Tshivenda literature in its documentation of South African literary history. Hence, Milubi's (2000a) contribution to the book *Constructing South African Literary History* (Lehmann, Reckwitz and Vennarini, 2000) on Tshivenda literary history is an important one in this regard. Milubi's (2000a) chapter provides a survey of Tshivenda orthographic development in 1872, Tshivenda publications in the period 1901-1940, publications in 1920-1950, publications in 1954-1966, publications in 1966-1989 and publications from 1989-1996, respectively. One may only entertain Khorommbi's assertion on the awareness that the Vhavenda writers were (and are) essentially victims of four influential forces. The first force, as explained later, was the missionary stance assumed in Venda. In this epoch, the missionaries, being human, had their own biases and prejudices towards the Vhavenda, which were rooted in the notion that the mission field (Venda) itself comprised dark, barbaric and backward heathens (Khorommbi, 1996). In accord with this, Fanon (1961:68) aptly observes the following:

Colonised society is not merely portrayed as a society without values. The colonist is not content with stating that the colonised world has lost its values or worse never possessed any. The “native” is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, dare we say it, the enemy of values. In other words, absolute evil.

Against this ideological backdrop, the missionaries also perceived “the customs of the colonised, their traditions, their myths, [as] the very mark of ... indigence and innate depravity” (Fanon, *Ibid*: 69). The colonisers justified their situation by asserting that they (the colonisers) brought enlightenment, technical as well as religious, to the indigenous people living in the heart of darkness (Gordimer, 2003).

In agreement with Gordimer (Ibid) on the perpetuation of this perception, it is almost obligatory to make a bow to Conrad here. Certainly, missionaries preceded colonisers in most African territories, including in Venda: “Conquest advanced, gun in one hand and the Bible in the other” (Gordimer, Ibid). The lingering effect is that to the colonised Africans, the colonisers became the paragon of all civilisation and all culture (Memmi, 1974).

The colonised African thus turns their back on Africa, chooses, at best, the coloniser’s language, dresses in the coloniser’s style and joyfully adopts every idiosyncrasy of the coloniser, which “by the way is what all the colonized try to do before they pass on to the stage of revolt” (Memmi, 1974:10). In the end, the colonised who aspire to master the mannerisms and ideologies of the coloniser find themselves one small notch above other fellow colonised peoples on the pyramid, which is the basis of all colonial societies (Memmi, Ibid). Such colonised people’s privileges in the colonial society may be derisory, but they are enough to make the colonised proud that they are not part of other colonised people who constitute the base of the pyramid. This is enough to make the colonised feel endangered when the structure begins to crumble (Memmi, Ibid).

Secondly, the apartheid government in South Africa passed repressive laws, such as the Suppression of Communism Act of 1955, which enabled the Minister of Justice to ban South Africans living in or outside the country (Visser, 1976:54). This principally fuelled the censorship of numerous people in South Africa. Such banned and censored people, the majority of whom were writers, could not be quoted and neither could their writings be perused (Khorommbi, 1996:7–8). Thus, this approach that the government had to literature and all information distributing agencies meant very few voices could be registered who were ‘troubling’ people. In fact, Olaoluwa (2008:10) records that

by the mid 1960s, apartheid had succeeded in banning all publications by black writers that reflected the injustice of the system. The situation was worsened by the fact that most of these writers had been forced into exile or committed to prison. As a result, between this time and the early 70s there was a dearth of any form of literary creativity by black writers.

The result was that not only was South African Black writing in general affected but also Tshivenda literature in particular became devoid of “holistic life reflections”,

which meant that the Vhavenda writers left certain issues unaddressed, including any topics that could embarrass the government of the day (Khorommbi, 1996:8). However, despite the censorial and inhibiting space Black South African writers inhabited, poetry became a propitious medium through which they could ventilate upon the verities of their context (Olaoluwa, 2008). It was essentially their yearning against a creative vacuum that produced what Olaoluwa (Ibid:10) calls “a second generation of Black poets sometimes referred to as poets of Black Consciousness or Soweto Poets in South Africa”. For a detailed discussion on this type of poetry, Chapman’s (1982) *Soweto Poetry* might prove itself both insightful and helpful.

The third force could be deemed the most perilous: Lack of skills (Khorommbi, 1996). At the time of the development of Tshivenda literature, quite a few Vhavenda people had the skills that would help them formulate their thoughts into articles or books, for instance. Lack of skills was equally preceded by lack of interest, which was the result of lack of motivation (Khorommbi, 1996). Thus, when the whole circle is considered, it finally means that the Vhavenda writers would have neither the reason nor the know-how to write down their response to either the missionary or colonial and or apartheid periods.

The fourth force was unsympathetic publishers (Khorommbi, 1996). Even before the bans, publishers rejected manuscripts on the legal advice that they would probably be banned if published, which equally affected writing in the African vernacular (Visser, 1976:55). Still, Tshivenda literature slowly but surely saw the light of day, as the next subsection illustrates.

2.2.2 Missionary Influence and Tshivenda Orthographic Development

Mathivha’s (1972) doctoral study presents a general survey of the literary achievements in the Tshivenda language from the earliest times up to and including 1970. As stated above, Milubi (2000a) specifically traces Tshivenda literary history from 1901 to 1996. Thus far, scholarly documentations of Tshivenda literary history from 1996 to 2020 are rare. However, Sengani’s (2019b) article, ‘A Brief History of Tshivenda’ captures Tshivenda literary productions from the 1800s to 2001, with a disheartening lament that Vhavenda “writers have not been as active of late” (www.alasa.org.za/Tshivenda.html). Mafela (2005) presents a historical sketch of the bibliography of Tshivenda literature, which includes folklore and missionary

adventures from 1954 to 1970, Tshivenda literature and the homeland system from 1971 to 1989, and Tshivenda literature from 1990 to 1994.

Although Mathivha (1972), Milubi (2000a), Sengani (2019b) and Mafela (2005) do not offer a detailed treatment of each form of literature, they do, to a notable extent, give a general appreciation of the attempts made by the early writers to draw Tshivenda literature from the margins to the centre of the South African literary sphere. Remarkable in the aforementioned scholars' documentations is the consensus that it is unthinkable to discuss the development of both Tshivenda orthography and (written) literature without mentioning the role played by the early European missionaries (Maqadzhe, 1985a; Makhado, 1980; Mathivha, 1972; Milubi, 2000a; Sebola, 2020; Sengani, 2019b). Khorommbi (1996) adds to the discussion by reflecting on how missionary Christianity has influenced the people it formerly came to call, i.e. the Vhavenda. In his study, missionary Christianity means the Christianity that was brought into Africa, and in this case, into Venda by missionaries. Hence, for Khorommbi (1996), looking into Tshivenda literature is another way of re-establishing the ties between the missionary initiative in the beginning and the present Tshivenda literature. Studying their literature enables one to witness how the Vhavenda go about in their daily activities after a whole century of Western missionary showering.

Mathivha (1972) states that the Tshivenda language developed from some form of Chishona, Shambala, Nyanja, Sena, Swahili, Bemba and Ndaui, and further mentions that the Tshivenda language had already crystallised as a means of communication when the first missionaries arrived at Maungani HaTshivhasa in Venda in 1872. Mathivha reveals that the Tshivenda language was recorded for the first time in 1872 by Beuster, a Berlin Lutheran Missionary, who was sent together with Schwellnus and Klatt by Wangemann, the Director of the Berlin of Missionary Society. Mathivha further records that Beuster paid little attention to the lore of the Vhavenda, disclosing that it was actually the missionaries who came to Venda after Beuster who recorded the lore of the Vhavenda.

Since the Berlin missionaries came from a civilisation that had apparently developed its own system of writing, the missionaries developed an interest in some of the aspects in the Tshivenda culture, which they sought to record. Among this was the "store of traditional lore which had not been submitted to writing" (Mathivha, 1972:14). To concurrently convert the Vhavenda to Christianity and commit some of

their lore to writing, Beuster had to learn the Tshivenda language, which he did by pointing at things and had the Vhavenda people give him names and/or concepts while he recorded them in his exercise book (Mathivha, 1972; Milubi, 2000a). Henceforth, Beuster consistently collected Tshivenda words and arranged them systematically until he could form simple sentences in Tshivenda (Mathivha, Ibid). In writing the Tshivenda names and concepts, Beuster used the various letters and symbols of his mother tongue, the German language, to make combinations that could convey the meanings of the Vhavenda's utterances (Mathivha, 1972). In 1876, Beuster was helped by some of his converts to translate the Bible into Tshivenda, beginning with some chapters of Genesis (Mathivha, 1972; Milubi, 2000a).

Mathivha (1972) notes that in Beuster's handwritten Bible translations he was either influenced by Sesotho or Sepedi and Lepsius orthography. This linguistic influence, for Mathivha (Ibid), emanates from the fact that the early Lutheran missionaries who were sent to the Transvaal (Limpopo) had to be acquainted with the Bapedi because the Lutheran Church had Sepedi as its official language in its early history. Also, Beuster is said to have been accompanied by evangelists who were Sepedi speakers (Mathivha, 1972). Furthermore, Beuster's translations exhibited the orthographic characteristics of the 'Luphani' or Tshiphani dialect, which is now standardised into Tshivenda (Dakalo, 2009).

Beuster's handwritten manuscripts led to the printing of the early books in Tshivenda. After the translations of the Bible books, Beuster translated hymns and psalms from German into Tshivenda. Upon realising that his converts were unable to read and that their children were neglected in the teaching and learning of the Bible in the church, Beuster taught the early Vhavenda Christians how to read, and subsequently wrote *Spelboek ea Tšewenda* in 1899 (Mathivha, 1972; Milubi, 2000a). This book was the first school book or school reader printed in the Tshivenda language. Mathivha (1972) says this book paved the way for Tshivenda to be used as a medium of instruction in schools.

Between 1899 and 1900 there was a pause in the production of Tshivenda literature, although the orthography depicted notable changes, such as the use of diacritic marks (Mathivha, 1972). Mathivha (1972) ascribes the pause to the war that was raging between Mphedu Ajjali Tshilamulele Ramabulana and the armies of the

South African Republic. Around this time, Mathivha claims, Chishona words found their way into both the Tshivenda language and literature, supposedly brought by Mphephu and Milubi who had returned from Mashonaland (Zimbabwe). Apparently, the duo had fled to Zimbabwe, as was the norm, whenever there was trouble in Venda (Mathivha, 1972). The Schwelnus brothers, Theodor and Paul, although German by descent, were essentially Vhavenda by birth (Mathivha, 1972). By virtue of being born in Venda, the Schwelnus brothers were proficient in the Tshivenda language and concurrently well-versed in the ideas and concepts of the Vhavenda's cultural heritage and ideological outlook. Hence, the Schwelnus brothers are credited for giving Carl Meinhof credible material for the phonetic and phonological analysis of Tshivenda, as evinced in Meinhof's *Das Tšivenda*, which was published in 1901 (Mathivha, 1972; Milubi, 2000a).

Meinhof's *Das Tšivenda*, as a first scientific article on Tshivenda, contributed significantly to the transformation and stabilising of Tshivenda orthography to what it is today, more or less (Mathivha, 1972). In this period of transition of the orthography of Tshivenda, *Katehisma Duku ea Dr. Martin Luther* was published in 1902 for teaching adults who were new converts about the moral code of the Christian religion (Mathivha, 1972). In 1903, Beuster published a new edition of his hymn book that, apart from being divided into sections (hymns and liturgy), also encapsulated improved orthographic changes. In 1904, the Schwelnus brothers published *Die Verba Des Tšivenda (The Tshivenda Verbs)*. The latter is important in Tshivenda literary history not only because it may be regarded as the first Tshivenda-German Dictionary but also because it marks a transitory phase of Tshivenda orthography and a break from Sepedi speech sounds, that is, the 1895 Tshivenda orthography and 1918 Tshivenda orthography.

The disappearance of Sepedi speech sounds may be ascribed to the fact that the Schwelnus brothers were not particularly influenced by Sepedi, and therefore, the Sepedi symbols were gradually vanishing from Tshivenda orthography (Mathivha, 1972). Between 1904 and 1911 there was no publication in Tshivenda (Mathivha, 1972). Although no literature was produced, the period is nonetheless viewed as a phase where Tshivenda literature was not only transiting from Beuster to the Schwelnus brothers but also as a time when the church in Venda was undergoing some changes. For instance, the church was establishing mission farms that,

according to Mathivha (1972), formed the centres of influence in the civilisation of the Vhavenda. In 1911, *Mikanzwo ya Vhuswa ha Vhutshilo ya Maḡuvha a Murena Oṭhe a Nwaha* was published in Berlin, depicting both the standardised (written) and idiomatic forms of Tshivenda as far as religious literature was concerned (Mathivha, 1972). In 1913 and 1918, *Nyimbo dzo Khethoaho dza Vhatendi na dza Vana nga Tsiwenda* by Beuster and *Ndede ya Luambo Iwa Tshivenda* by Schwellnus were published. It is presumed that Giesekke (1918) translated the book *Mafhungo a Buguni ya Mudzimu*.

The Schwellnus brothers' book *Wörterverzeichnis Der Venda-Sprache* was published in 1919 and gave German nouns and words with their Tshivenda equivalents. This book also gave German-speaking people an opportunity to read and write Tshivenda (Mathivha, 1972). In 1920, Beuster published yet another new edition of his hymn book, titled *Evangeli na Mishumo ya Vhaapostola*. In 1923, Schwellnus translated the New Testament, and he published the modern Tshivenda hymn book *Nyimbo dza Vhatendi* in 1924 (Mathivha, 1972). Endemann published *Midzimu ya Malombo* in 1927, which was the forerunner of anthropological publications on the Vhavenda (Mathivha, 1972). The complete translation of the Holy Bible into Tshivenda by Schwellnus appeared in 1937, and in 1940, he published *Mudededzi I* and thereafter produced a series of *Ndededzi* from Sub A to VI (Mathivha, 1972).

In 1937, Van Warmelo (1937b) published the first dictionary in the Tshivenda language, *The Tshivenda-English Dictionary*. In collaboration with Phophi, Van Warmelo published *Venda Law Part 1*, *Venda Law Part 2* and *Venda Law Part 3* in 1948 and *Venda Law Part 4* in 1949. Marole and de Gama published *English-Tshivenda Vocabulary* in 1937. Van Warmelo also published quite notably in the sphere of traditional and historical accounts of the Vhavenda. In 1932, for instance, he published *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*. In 1938, Marole published *Phindulano*, a translation of English phrases and idioms into Tshivenda. In 1939, Schwellnus systematised health rules for his congregants and published them in a book titled, *Mutakalo*. The second book on hygiene, *Nguda-Mutakalo*, which Mangoma translated from *Health Education*, was published in 1962. Endemann and Mudau published *Phendaluambo ya Zwikolo zwa Venda* in 1940 (Mathivha, 1972). In 1954, Ngwana published *Kha ri Ambe Luvenda*, Phophi

published *Phusuphusu dza Dzimauli* in 1956, and Mulangaphuma published *Denzhe la Luvenda* in 1958. In 1960, Ziervogel and Dau published *A Handbook of the Venda Language*, which was the first book written scientifically for the study of Tshivenda at a university level (Mathivha, 1972). Shortly after Ziervogel and Dau's publication, Mukhuba published *Ndilana dza Luvenda* (not dated). Mathivha and Makhado published *Thahulela Luvenda* in 1966 and a series titled *Nzhele ya Luvenda*.

The Tshivenda literary inventory does not have many translations besides religious books, with only two translations, *Makhathula-Mbilu a Julius Caesar* (Nemudzivhadi) and *Lwendo Iwa Muendi* (Giesekke), coming to the fore. The early beginnings of Tshivenda literature are crowned by the translation of the Bible into Tshivenda (Mathivha, 1972). It is this Bible, according to Mathivha (1972) that laid the foundation of the Tshivenda language as a medium of communication, not only between man and man, but also between man and God the Almighty. Hence, the early records of Tshivenda traditional literature or what Theal (1886) called 'Kaffir³ folklore' were generally produced by white missionaries and other interested individuals who wrote for the sole aim of extending mission work among the 'pagans'. In terms of the genres of literary works produced by the early writers in Tshivenda, the prevalent ones are religious books, school readers and/or school language books, accounts on traditional history, translations, novels, drama and poetry (Mathivha, 1972).

Overall, in the Tshivenda literary history, Beuster may be regarded as a pioneer of Tshivenda literature, Schwellnus as a pioneer of Tshivenda folklore, his brother as the father of Tshivenda literature (mostly by virtue of his commendable translation of the Bible into Tshivenda) and Van Warmelo as the preserver of Tshivenda culture and lexicographer, as far as committing the Tshivenda language to writing is concerned. Giesekke may be regarded as a pioneer of Tshivenda school readers and other religious books (Mathivha, 1972). Ngwana is also classified in Mathivha's survey as one of the significant contributors to the authorship of Tshivenda reading and language books, some of which are *Muratho B*, *Muratho I*, *Muratho II*, *Muratho*

³ 'Kaffir' is an appellation for Blacks [Africans] which today is considered disrespectful, and even derogatory.

IV and *Muratho V*. Motenda-Mbelengwa is counted as a pioneer writer of western Venda, Dzivhani was a Muvenda writer on folklore, Mudau was a mythical writer on Tshivenda prose, and Phophi was an ethnologist (Mathivha, 1972). Maumela pioneered Tshivenda modern novels, followed by Madima, a novelist and essayist, and Masekela who published *Nungo dzi Mulomoni*. The development of Tshivenda school readers not only paved the way for Tshivenda to be recognised as an official language both in Venda and South Africa, but also saw the notable publication of Tshivenda poetry.

2.3. The Emergence of Tshivenda Poetry Publications

The first published book on Tshivenda poetry is *Zwirendo na Zwiimbo zwa Vhana vha Vhavenda*, followed by *Nndela Zwixele*, both were by Nenzhelele (Mathivha, 1972). Nenzhelele's first book divides into two parts, poems and little songs. The poems are also grouped into different kinds and subject matter, namely (a) poems about animals, birds and insects, (b) poems about places and objects; (c) poems for morals and instructions; (d) poems on religious topics; (e) poems on war; (f) poems on natural phenomena; and (g) poems on human beings. The children's songs are composed for the Vhavenda children to sing. His second poetry book, which befits the understanding of an infant, is arranged according to (a) domestic things, animals and persons, (b) wild animals and natural phenomena and (c) games and duties (cf. Mathivha, 1972).

Ngwana's *Vhakale vha hone* is the third poetry book, which contains mainly collected poems. The poems divide into two main categories, traditional (oral) poems and modern poems. These two main groups can be further divided into subcategories of modern poetry, such as historic poems, praises, nature poems, and those which concern themselves with animals (Mathivha, 1972). Traditional poems in Tshivenda culture were meant to be sung, usually in the evenings around the fireside or by herdboys while looking after cattle, sheep and goats (Mathivha, 1972). In 1967, Matshili, a Muvenda poet and novelist, published *Zwiala zwa Venda*, which contained 50 poems. Henceforth, a considerable number of poetry publications appeared from prominent (modern) Vhavenda poets such as Sigwavhulimu, Ratshiřanga, Ratshiřanga, Mařadzhe, Milubi, Ladzani, and others. Some of the well-known publications of modern Tshivenda poetry are shown in Table 2.1.

Table 0.1: Well-known publications of modern Tshivenda poetry

Author	Title	Publisher	Year
R.R. Matshili	<i>Zwiala zwa Venda</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1967
W.M.R. Sigwavhulimu	<i>Tsiko-Tshiphiri</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1971
M. Tshindane	<i>Mutambo wa Muhumbulo</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1972
R.R. Matshili	<i>Fhulufhedzani</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1972
M.N. N̄emukovhani	<i>Tshibvumo</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1972
T.R. Ratshitanga	<i>Vhungoho na Vivho</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1972
R.F. Ratshitanga	<i>Tsengela-Tsiwana</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1973
T.R. Ratshitanga	<i>Ndi N̄he Nnyi?</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1973
E.S. Madima	<i>Ndi Vhudza Nnyi?</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1974
E.T. Maumela	<i>Tshiwandalani</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1975
W.M.R. Sigwavhulimu	<i>Mirunzi ya Vhuvha</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1975
J.R. Makhado	<i>Thetshelesani</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1977
E.T. Maumela	<i>Mutakadzi</i>	Shuter & Shooter	1979
N.A. Milubi	<i>Muhumbuli-Mutambuli</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1981
N.A. Milubi	<i>Vhutungu ha Vhupfa</i>	Shuter & Shooter	1982
N.N. N̄etshivhuyu	<i>Nyangalambuya</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1982
N.M. L̄igege	<i>Dziedzi</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1983
N.N. N̄etshivhuyu	<i>Ntivhiseni Khulo</i>	Shuter & Shooter	1984
M. Tshindane	<i>Zwa Vhutshilo</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1984
R.N. Maḡadzhe	<i>Khonani Yanga</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1985b
N.A. Milubi	<i>Ipfi ja Lurere</i>	Morester	1986a
E.T. Maumela	<i>Zwiombo Ngomani</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1988
N.A. Milubi	<i>Muimawoga</i>	NAM	1990
N.E. Phaswana	<i>Ipfi Sogani</i>	NAM	1991
M.W. Mbulaheni	<i>Lwendo Iwa Mutshinyali</i>	Via Afrika	1992
T.T. Mudau	<i>Khando Gala</i>	Macmillan	1992
M.R. N̄evhuḡalu	<i>Miḡodzi ya Vhutshilo Hanga</i>	Via Afrika	1993

Author	Title	Publisher	Year
N.W. Tshamano	<i>Mutingati 2</i>	Shuter & Shooter	1994
A.F. Netshivhuyu	<i>Mihumbulo Yashu</i>	J.L. Van Schaik	1995
Milubi, Sigwavhulimu and Ratshitanga	<i>Muungo wa Vhuhwi</i>	NAM	1995
M.J. Mafela	<i>Tshitodzimare</i>	Via Afrika	1995
K.Y. Ladzani	<i>Khaṅo ya Khunyeledzo</i>	Via Afrika	1995
T.Z. Ramaliba	<i>Nwana ndi Khosi</i>	Via Afrika	1996
W.M.R. Sigwavhulimu, N.A. Milubi, L.R. Ndhlovu, and N.K. Phalanndwa	<i>Khavhu dza Muhumbulo</i>	NAM	2001
K.Y. Ladzani, M. Nemaṅangari and B.N. Rasila	<i>Vhutungu ha Mutambuli</i>	Bard Publishers	2006
N.A. Milubi et al	<i>Luvhandeni Iwa Vhurendi</i>	NAM	2008

Per Milubi (1988), these Tshivenda modern poetry texts possess the traditional and modern spirit of poetry. Anchored on this premise, the next section looks at the nature, subdivisions and thematic interests of Tshivenda traditional and modern poetry.

2.4 THE NATURE, SUBDIVISIONS AND THEMATIC INCLINATIONS OF TSHIVENDA POETRY

Tshivenda poetry can be divided into two main categories, namely traditional (oral) poetry and modern (written) poetry (Mathivha, 1972; Milubi, 1988, 1997, 2004). As already hinted at, Tshivenda modern poetry is established on Tshivenda 'oraloric' foundations (Milubi, 1988; cf. Olaoluwa, 2008). In fact, Milubi's (1988) doctoral thesis demonstrates that Tshivenda 'orature' is the premise upon which Tshivenda modern literature is built. Mathivha (1972) concurs with Milubi that Tshivenda 'oraloric' foundations became the springboard for the stories that modern Vhenda writers incorporated into their books, either as school books or as novels. Tshivenda oral (traditional) poetry is "a survival of the indefinite past and on its basis the [Tshivenda] literature of today developed". For Mathivha (1972:1),

the traditional lore of any nation or community is that unwritten body of diffuse knowledge of the people which functions in complete independence of outside which pertains to the preceding generations and which has been kept alive by being orally handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. In this diffuse lore one finds prose forms (genres) composed of stories short as well as long apart from poetry.

Zeiss (1995:v) regards the term 'folklore' in its broadest sense as a condensation of varied "fields which impinge on folk culture, such as mythology and all the customs, rituals and other structures of human society, the origins of which can be related to oral transmission". Zeiss (1995: v) further states that the impact of literacy on an oral community radically alters the dissemination and perception of learning. Mathivha (1972) asserts that each form or genre of traditional lore covers a variety of subjects or themes that interpret the life of the people. This interpretation predominantly depends on mnemonic devices such as rhetoric and oratory to convey knowledge in a traditional society. This study selected poetry as one of the mnemonic devices used to convey aspects of the Vhaventḁa's body of thought on their selfhood, identity and culture because "it is through poetry that many good cultural aspects of human life have been preserved ever since the earliest days" (Mathivha, 1972:359). Mogoboya (2011:61–62) concedes that "African literature derives its distinctive origin from story-telling and traditional poetry" because in the African past, poems and stories were vocally diffused and passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth through music, dance, myth and dress.

This oral transmission of cultural heritage to posterity, according to Mogoboya (2011), attests to the indisputable truth that there is oral birth to any written work. Hence, Tshiventḁa traditional lore is the basis of the Vhaventḁa's code of law and philosophy (Mathivha, 1972). Mathivha further states that this lore not only contained stories that were concepts of beliefs but also aimed to explain and unravel the mysteries of nature that surrounded the human race. Needless to say, the stories also fundamentally depicted the Vhaventḁa "people's imaginative status" (Mathivha, Ibid: 1). Furthermore, the stories formed a guide to the nature of the Vhaventḁa's religious beliefs, the form of their government and all that related to both the inner and outer life of those by whom they were told or related. Generally speaking, Tshiventḁa traditional lore comprises myths, fables, folktales, proverbs, riddles, blessings, greetings and the ordinary daily forms of idiomatic expressions (Mathivha,

Ibid; cf. Milubi, 1988, 2004). One may also add that the Tshivenda traditional lore includes chants, folksongs, folk speech and the poetry of the Vhavenda's ancestors. Kgobe (1999:3) defines traditional poetry, in particular, as

a subdivision of traditional literature which is generally known as verbal art. It is a study that is understood to be the product of a forgotten past and is also handed down from generations immemorial and is still remarkably persistent. It is delivered by one person to the others by word of mouth and for proper performance to take place, it demands the presence of an audience and an occasion. The participants must also be actively involved in the presentation of the material. The dynamic of traditional poetry emanates from the fact that no presenter of praise poems is capable of reciting in the same manner all the time. His style differs from occasion to occasion.

Most notable in Kgobe's definition of traditional poetry is one of the characteristics of oral traditions that relates to the nature of poetry performance which, according to Bodunde (2001), is the involvement of the community in the creative process as well as in the criticism. Kgobe (Ibid: 5) adds that "the non-static nature of traditional poetry is noticeable in the manner in which the audience responds to the actual performance". Kgobe also highlights, however, that the audience's response is never the same. The response fluctuates with the performer's varied insertions of interesting dynamics and histrionics, which the audience will respond to differently if they love it, sometimes to the enhancement of the performance (Kgobe, Ibid).

In *Oral Traditions and Aesthetic Transfer*, Bodunde (2001:1) captures Adedeji's (1971:134) definition of oral tradition as the "complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past". This oral tradition, for both Bodunde and Adedeji, is based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of peoples. Concerning its mode of acquisition (and aesthetic transfer), oral tradition assumes a process of learning or initiation whose purpose is to condition social action and foster social interaction (Bodunde, Ibid). Hence, in Tshivenda culture, young people and children assimilate these forms by listening, watching and participating without being formally or verbally instructed (Mathivha, 1972). The typology of oral tradition, as enumerated in Adedeji (1971) and later replicated in Bodunde (2001), recognises two main categories oral tradition, namely literary and historical types.

The literary category includes poetic genres such as *oriki* (praise and totem chants), *odu* and *ifa* (divination poems and songs) (Bodunde, 2001). The literary category, according to Bodunde, also includes verbal formulae such as incantations, parables and proverbs. The historical type includes narratives based on myths, legends and historical genres like sagas and epics (Bodunde, 2001). In view of these categories, Tshivenda traditional lore may thus be explained as (a) myths, which is stories concerning the supernatural and the myth of *Jiduxwani*; (b) fables which is etiological stories, amusing stories and stories with a moral; (c) legend and folktales; and (d) poetry (Mathivha, 1972). This chapter later discusses myth in Tshivenda culture as a term that covers all the stories that deal with the creation of the world, with the origin of things, with natural phenomena, with gods and with religious beliefs, with the hope of locating these aspects in the selected Tshivenda poetry. Prior to that, modern poetry as a subdivision of Tshivenda poetry is discussed in the next subsection.

2.4.1. Tshivenda Modern Poetry and its Resonance with African Poetry Trends

Per Orhero (2017:148), “Modern African poetry is a hard concept to define The difficulty in generating an acceptable definition implicates issues such as: language, form, theme, technique, socio-political and economic realities, etc.” Notwithstanding, Orhero proffers that “by modern, we simply mean written and contemporary as opposed to traditional and oral”, “by African, we mean produced by an African, for Africans and sharing the African experience” and “by poetry, we simply mean a genre of literature written in verse form using grand and figurative language in order to express feelings and emotions” (Ibid). If the terms, ‘African’, ‘modern’ and ‘poetry’ are harmonised, “modern African poetry can simply be said to mean written poetry emanating from the African continent, written by Africans, for the African audience and authentically portraying the African experience” (Orhero, Ibid). For Milubi (1988:120), “modern poetry is the kind of poetry written according to the norms and principles that govern western poetry”. Orhero’s and Milubi’s definitions of modern poetry exclude the medium of composition. Be that as it may, this kind of poetry is categorised by Orhero (2017) into various canons, and the categorisation is predicated on the background of periodisation in African poetry. Consequently, Orhero identifies eight broad canons of modern African poetry, namely pioneer poetry, modernist poetry, disillusionment poetry, civil war poetry, alter/native poetry,

apartheid poetry, Niger Delta/eco poetry and contemporary poetry (2017:145). The next subsection relies heavily on Orhero (2017) for the definition of each of these canons.

2.4.2 The Canonisation of African Modern Poetry

The canons or trends of African poetry as identified by Orhero (2017) in some respects accommodate Tshivenda poetry while in other respects Tshivenda poetry does not fit conveniently. For instance, Tshivenda poetry does not easily find resonance with what Orhero terms 'pioneer poetry', particularly in terms of stylistics, techniques, themes and periodisation. Pioneer poetry, per Orhero (Ibid: 153), encapsulates two major traditions, namely "Nationalist Poetry and the poetry of Negritude". Nationalist and Negritude poetry developed almost simultaneously from Anglophone and Francophone countries (Orhero, 2017).

Orhero (Ibid) considers pioneer poetry as "the earliest phase in modern African poetry [which] is generally regarded as the point when African poetry started to use the written medium for poetic expression". This period spans the 1920s until the 1940s (Orhero, 2017). According to Orhero, "poets who wrote in this tradition were largely amateurs who had just acquired European education and decided to write for various reasons, mostly nationalistic" (Ibid). Orhero regards these poets' poetry as 'apprentice poetry' that reflected Western forms and styles. Nationalist pioneer poetry is ascribed mainly to Anglophone African poets who had finished receiving Western education in England and had returned to face the realities of colonisation and self-denigration (Orhero, Ibid). Negritude poetry is treated with nationalist poetry in Orhero's article because of the similarity in themes and style as well as the period in which the poems were written. Succinctly put, "Negritudism is a philosophical and artistic movement that evolved in France through the writings of Leopold Senghor, Leon Damas and Aimé Césaire" (Orhero, Ibid).

Orhero (2017) states that in African poetry, Negritude evolved as a response to France and her hypocritical system of assimilating Blacks and making Frenchmen out of them. In this way, the French system suppressed African identity and culture and portrayed African culture as inferior (Orhero, Ibid). It was in light of this that Negritude poets revolted against the French system and consequently wrote poems that romanticised and idealised Africa, personifying the continent as a woman

(Orhero, Ibid). In terms of thematic thrusts and stylistic techniques, Negritude poetry employed imagery, symbolism, satire and hyperbole to highlight the greatness of Africa, with emphasis on the landscape, history and culture. The themes also touched on the hypocrisy of the colonial masters (Orhero, Ibid). Senghor's poem 'Black Woman' may be considered representative of Negritude poetry with its thematisation of African innocence and pristine beauty.

Modernist poetry, according to Orhero (2017), is a canon influenced by the European Modernist period. African poets in this tradition are said to have written mainly through the 1950s and early 1960s. Orhero states that these poets wrote obscure and private poems with techniques that resembled the modernist poems of Pound, Eliot, Hopkins and Yeats (Orhero, Ibid: 155). Orhero adds that this poetry was not only "imitative and full of novel techniques" but was also "the beginning of serious and academic poetry in Africa" (Ibid). Modernist poets in Africa were not concerned with propaganda or idealising Africa, but centred their themes on "private thoughts, emotions, loss, love, hopefulness, anticipation, experiences and the environment" (Orhero, Ibid). Also notable in this poetry is that the aforementioned themes were engineered using Eurocentric techniques such as imagism, allusiveness, fragmentation, syntactic jugglery, neologism and symbolisms (Orhero, 2017:155).

Disillusionment poetry was produced in the 1960s, a "period [which] was coloured by the experiences of independence" (Orhero, Ibid: 156). After the struggle for independence, most African countries were finally free from European rule by the year 1960, and the prospect of independence and self-rule brought high expectations (Orhero, Ibid: 156). Africans believed and expected that "self-rule would bring an Eldorado and the continent would transform into utopia", unfortunately, this was not the case, since "African leaders became grossly corrupt and dictatorial" (Orhero, Ibid). Because of this, expectations were shattered, leading to disappointment which metamorphosed into disillusionment; hence, the poetry of this period was socio-political and poets decried the corruption of African leaders (Orhero, Ibid). The poets wrote to address the failure of the leaders to meet the people's expectations, with their themes centred on bad leadership, tyranny, corruption, and social commitment.

Civil war poetry in Africa was informed by the numerous civil wars fought in the African continent, most notable being the Nigerian civil war, which was fought

between 1967 and 1970 (Orhero, Ibid). Civil wars in Africa were caused by socio-political and ethnic tensions. Corruption, nepotism, military incursion and dictatorship usually serve as background to the outburst of a civil war (Orhero, Ibid: 157). This poetry thematises pain, the horrors of war, grief, anguish, hunger, famine, and death. The techniques used in this poetry include realism, symbolism, imagery and satire.

Alter/native poetry refers to a generation of poets that wrote in the 1970s and 1980s (Orhero, 2017). Per Orhero (2017), these poets were tutored and influenced by the poets of the earlier generation. Their poetry was mass-oriented and it employed the Marxist ideological stance. The themes of this poetry centred largely on corruption, disillusionment, military dictatorship, revolution, nepotism and adopted techniques such as realism, oral aesthetics and satire (Orhero, 2017).

Niger Delta/ecopoetry developed mainly in the 1990s (Orhero, 2017). Orhero (2017) states that the poets in this tradition are mainly from Nigeria's Niger Delta Region, although there are other poets from other backgrounds who write ecopoetry. The common characteristic among these poets is that they decry the constant destruction of the natural and environmental habitats by human activities and modernisation (Orhero, Ibid).

Apartheid poetry is informed by the South African Black experience (Orhero, Ibid). Apartheid was instituted as a form of racial segregation in South Africa. The white South Africans instituted racially discriminatory laws that limited the freedom and total life of Black South Africans (Orhero, Ibid). Blacks were not allowed to go to the same schools, attend churches and live in the same places with whites. According to Orhero (Ibid: 161), "Blacks were not allowed to vote or to be voted for. The aboriginal Blacks were thus reduced to mere tenants in their land". Some poets wrote to address these divisions and to talk to the conscience of the white oppressors, although most of these poets were harassed, censored and detained. The themes of apartheid poetry include segregation, protest, pain, inequality, racism, and oppression and rely on protest forms, critical and socialist realism, imagery and symbolism (Orhero, Ibid). Stylistically, visual imagery is used to present the extremities of the conditions of the Black person in apartheid South Africa.

Contemporary poetry is a ubiquitous term used to cover the writings of the poets who started writing from the 1990s and the 21st century poets (Orhero, Ibid).

Contemporary poetry addresses issues of globalisation, corruption, information communication technology, migration, and exile. The poets in this tradition were influenced and taught by alternative poets. Stylistically, the poetry uses repetition, apposition and parallelisms to express the gravity of experience (Orhero, *Ibid*).

Orhero ascribes the emergence of these various canons to the fluidity of African modern poetry. Tshivenda poetry clearly finds resonance with apartheid poetry or 'colonial poetry' (discussed in the next subsection), precisely because most modern Vhavenda poets produced and published their poetry during the apartheid regime, as indicated by the list of publications above. Also, the missionaries had a tremendous influence on both the music and the poetry of the Vhavenda in that the Vhavenda were obliged to adapt their traditional poetry to new standards in the same way they were obliged to forsake their traditional way of life and adapt to a new religion (Milubi, 1997:69). It is because of this that Mafela (1997:61) recognises that:

Present praise poetry in the Vhavenda community differs both in content, values and performance from that of the period before when their practices were considered heathen and primitive. With the arrival of the Europeans, the Vhavenda adopted foreign ways and practices. Even if praise poetry is still performed for divining bones, chiefs, political leaders, and to some extent *thevhula*, the development thereof is stagnant.

The lament is that the traditional spirit that characterised Tshivenda poetry has been diluted, although still pervasive in Tshivenda modern poetry (Milubi, 1997). In distinguishing traditional poetry from modern poetry, Cope (1968:24) says: "Traditional literature differs from modern literature not only in that it is oral but also in that it is essentially the product of communal activity, whereas a work of modern literature is the result of individual effort and bears the stamp of its author". It becomes difficult to discuss Tshivenda modern poetry without thinking either in implicit or explicit ways, about the lie told by colonial history that, (African) history (literary or otherwise) began with the coloniser's arrival (cf. Musvoto, 2010:17). Anyway, Tshivenda poetry (traditional and modern) assumes its distinctive texture in that it resonates with the thematic concerns of African poetry in general. The next section foregrounds modernisation, radicalisation and indigenisation as some of the processes that African poetry has undergone in its struggle to establish its uniqueness across epochs.

2.4.3. The Modernisation, Radicalisation and Indigenisation of African Poetry

In *Understanding African Poetry*, Goodwin (1982: v) considers how African poetry at the time of his writing had undergone “the processes first of modernization, and then of radicalization and indigenization”. In that transitional period and process, the emphasis in African poetry had shifted from the English nature of the medium to the African nature of the content (Goodwin, *Ibid*: v). African poetry’s transit from modernisation to radicalisation and ultimately to indigenisation essentially entailed writers urging “each other to turn away from international models and materials to local, national, or Pan-African ones and to politicize their writing so that it bears on contemporary social and political problems” (Goodwin, *Ibid*:x). By Pan-Africanism, Goodwin means the notion of Africa not as a mere continent or a European geographer’s term but as a group of countries having, partly through a common colonial experience, the need and potential for social and political solidarity (Goodwin, *Ibid*: xvii). Furthermore, in this transitory period and process, African writers unsurprisingly derided ‘art for art’s sake’ in their need to assert that African poetry, for example, has by the nature of the society from which it springs an essential communality or functionalism (Goodwin, 1982).

Of course, one may argue (although it is beyond the scope of this work to elucidate) that the very African writers’ own works have not always run parallel to the manifestos they espoused (cf. Goodwin, 1982). Of particular interest here is how Tshivenda poetry resonates thematically with the poetry produced locally or provincially (Limpopo Province), nationally (Black South African poetry) and continentally (Africa). Tshivenda poetry clearly reverberates with both South African and African poetry through its encapsulation of Pan-Africanist themes. This is echoed by Makhado (1980) who, although focusing mainly on Tshivenda prose, situates Tshivenda literature within the realm of Pan-Africanist themes. Such themes, among others, include:

prearranged marriages, married life, divorce, witchcraft, death, disputed succession, religious beliefs, raids by other ethnic groups, the conflict between the Tshivenda cultural marriages and monogamy as practiced by Christian converts (monogamy versus polygamy), the conflict between the traditional medicine man/woman and the treatment of patients at hospitals, faction fights between Vhavenda rulers in Venda, death and the smelling-out of culprits (Makhado, 1980:4).

Tshivenda poetry in particular captures a wide range of themes such as love, death, deceit, nature and almost all life forms (Makhado, 1980). Other themes of Tshivenda poetry are nature and animal life, t⁴ribal history, clashes with other tribes, prominent chiefs in Venda and those of other ethnic groups, and folklore (folktales and fables). Ditties, nursery rhymes and short poems concerning wildlife and hymns and short passages from the Bible have also been produced in Tshivenda poetry (Makhado, 1980). Apart from the intersection of Tshivenda poetry's themes with those of African poetry, Tshivenda poetry interfaces with African poetry in that it thematically manifests what may be termed 'colonial' poetry.

The historical context that informs the consciousness evident in Tshivenda poetry can generally be seen in three phases: Precolonial, the colonial and postcolonial South Africa. These are in the main, the periods which form the historical bank on which the selected Vhenda poets draw to provide the past context of their works. Precolonial Tshivenda poetry generally assumes oracular, proverbial and cosmic images, among other distinctive features, that are "found in indigenous African traditions, deep mines of almost inexhaustible riches" (Goodwin, 1982: xvii), as already indicated. The colonial period depicts the fecundity of Tshivenda poetry as produced in a time of social upheaval, that is, a period of intense political activity in South Africa (cf. Makhubela, 1999). Emanating from this period of lively artistic activity is the notion that Tshivenda poetry is a product of observed reality. This artistic activity is also notable in other African countries. In Zimbabwe, for instance, poets such as Musaemura Zimunya, Chenjerai Hove, Dambudzo Marechera, Philip Zhuwao, Freedom Nyamubaya used their poetry to reimagine and rewrite Zimbabwean history to create new identities both during and after colonial conquest (Musvoto, 2010). In this political terrain of Zimbabwe, Wasosa (2012:291) reveals that, "just like other colonies, the society in Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] was racist as the Blacks were segregated as the other race, inferior to the whites, coloureds and

⁴ I am quite reluctant to use the terms 'tribal' and 'tribes', precisely because among the Americans in particular, these terms connote 'primitive', 'superstitious' and 'native' (Khapoya, 2010:13), all of which may be read as derogatory.

Indians. The discrimination experienced by Blacks was in all spheres of life be it politics, economic structures, social life and religion”.

In South Africa, the apartheid philosophy, which Fanon (1961:77) sees as nothing “but one method of compartmentalising the colonial world”, also succeeded in naturalising ethnic discrimination to such an extent that even within the borders of South Africa, Africans would still be considered aliens in certain African communities. Per Mokgoatšana (1999), this fallacy yielded the narcissistic stereotyping of people as *makwerekwere* (foreigners) and *isilwane* (animal), which are fundamental labels for discrimination and rejection (cf. Abodunrin, 2018a). In such a terrain, colonialists would both perceive and literally refer to Blacks (Africans) in bestial terms to emphasise their inferiority (Fanon, 1961; Wasosa, 2012:291). Hence, in the definition of their identity, subjects in the postcolony tend to be haunted by the legacy of colonialism, which forms a fundamental aspect of their history from which they cannot unwind themselves (Mokgoatšana, 1999).

Because of the relevance of history in identity formation, the historical conditions in South Africa in the days of apartheid in particular also form a subtext to the selected poetry texts. This projection of colonial society is crucial because it may help explain some of the problems bedevilling post-independence South Africa as some of them can best be understood in the context of colonial history (cf. Wasosa, 2012:291). Although Tshivenda poetry may to a certain extent be seen as assuming a detached non-political stance, the analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate how this detached non-political stance against repression in all forms is replaced by a political commitment, at times, negative protest against abuses in the poet’s immediate context (local sphere) and in the broader context of South Africa. In the analysis of the selected texts, it is also evinced that, as the definition and description of a poet above reveals, “the notion of the poet as visionary, diviner, oracle, prophet, and social conscience has come to seem much more immediate” in the Tshivenda literary scene (Goodwin, 1982:x).

Tshivenda poetry essentially resonates with (colonial/apartheid) African poetry, particularly in its gravitation towards protest (Milubi, 1988). The aspect of protest is also prevalent in Northern Sotho poetry, for example, as Moleleki’s (1988) and Mogale’s (1994) investigations highlight. Although Goodwin (1982) observes that the

most ironic result of the dissimilarities of African cultures is that the commonest image in African poetry is no longer the yam, the palm-tree, the cooking pot, the sacrifice at dawn, or the ancestors, most of these aspects, however, assume their idiosyncratic texture in Abodunrin's (2018b) analysis of Yoruba poetry. In his analysis, Abodunrin reveals that "it is uncommon to discover that 'time' (period or periodization) is feasted on in the Yoruba poetic imagination" (2018b:93, original insertions), which is also an interesting concept in the life and worldview of the Vhavenḁa. Looking at the concept of 'time' as a key to the interpretation of African religions and philosophy, Mbiti (1989) synthesises potential time and actual time, time reckoning and chronology, the concept of the past, present and future, the concept of history and pre-history, the concept of human life in relation to time, death and immortality, space and time, and discovering or extending the future dimension of time. Abodunrin' and Mbiti's delineations on the concept of 'time' are scrutinised in the subsection devoted to the Vhavenḁa's belief systems, particularly linked to Lake Fundudzi (see Section 2.7.3). Another distinctive feature that qualifies Tshivendḁa poetry to fall under the ambit of African poetry is the aspect of 'praise'.

2.4.4. 'Praise' as a Pervasive Aspect of Tshivendḁa Poetry and African Poetry

Tshivendḁa poetry in particular and African poetry in general are dominated by the aspect of praise (Mafela, 1997; Milubi, 1988, 1997). In Tshivendḁa, praise poetry is regarded as *zwikhodo*, which is derived from the verb stem *-khoa* (praise). Praise poetry is an important form of oral literature in African life because it gives value to society and awakens the awareness and induces a sense of good feelings (Mafela, 1997; Milubi, 1988). Murwamphinda (1993:7) says "praise poetry is chanted in response to emotional pressure, especially when the poet feels anger, grief or happiness". Mogoboya (2011:62–63) adds:

In the African past, the oral tradition was characterised by praise poetry which was recited by the praise poets (griots). Their poetic interest was diverse in the sense that their objects of poetic examination varied broadly. The poet would praise heroes of the communities such as chiefs, and the strongholds of the community such as caves and mountains as well as traditional tools such as spears and calabashes. His poetry would also manifest the dramatic experiences of the day such as celebrating the arrival home of the initiates from the mountain school, welcoming

regiments home in both victory and defeat from the war or encouraging them before they leave for the battlefield.

Generally, one can view praise poetry as a means of extolling human achievements in African culture to a point where, according to Jadezweni (2000:56), this type of poetry may be used to extol “chiefs and prominent men ... dogs, horses, cattle and clans”, among other subjects. Somniso (2008:140) notes that “praises today are not only performed at traditional gatherings. These praises are also performed in many places such as schools, churches and funerals”. In Tshivenda culture, the dominance of praise is most notable in traditional ritual ceremonies such as *thevhula* (harvest celebrations), *Murundu* (initiation ceremony) and ancestral veneration as well as other events such as graduation ceremonies, weddings, and referential praises (Mafela, 1997; Milubi, 1988, 2000b; Mmbara, 2009; Sebola, 2019, 2021b; Sengani, 2008; Somniso, 2008).

In Chapter 5 (Section 5.7), the researcher reflects on praise poetry for chiefs, names and naming, individuals, places, traditional dances, and initiates; and for domestic and wild animals, seasons, months, the moon and the stars and natural phenomena. Other functions of praise poetry are entertaining, rebuking, warning, celebrating heritage, celebrating plentiful harvest, and ancestral worship (Jadezweni, 2000; Mafela, Mandende, Ladzani and Raselekoane, 2003; Milubi, 1997). Broadly speaking, Tshivenda poetry resonates with African poetry on the following dimensions: Its incorporation of Pan-African themes and the prevalence of praise and protest, with the latter aspect most notable during the colonial and post-/neo-colonial era.

2.5. THE HARMONISATION OF LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Manyaka (2005) recognises that modern Setswana poetry “reflects a great deal on traditional or oral tradition and cultural aspects (influences)”. Makhado (1980:3) proffers that Vhavenda “authors have clearly been influenced by [Tshivenda] tradition and culture”, which is best illustrated in the common themes pervading their literary outputs. Makhado (1980:6) says that “it is needless to state that [the Vhavenda] authors found throughout the lengths and breadths of the globe, have been greatly influenced by their various forms of culture. This is the reason why the background (setting), plot, milieu, characterisation, as well as diction, all appear to

have been to a large measure influenced by [Tshivenda] culture". This is generally so because writers, according to Moleleki (1988:15), "mature within a culture; they learn their skill and their craft within that culture; and so inevitably reflect some aspects of that culture in their writing". This is true of the selected Vhavenda poets who demonstrate, exhibit traditional and cultural influences in their poetry texts. In this sense, the selected poetry texts were viewed and treated as mirrors of the environment within which the selected poets live(d). It is critical to define literature at this juncture. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1991:26, cited in Ladzani, 1993:6) says:

Literature is imagination in words. Literature looks at reality through images, but those images reflect certain realities. They reflect what is happening on the land ... they reflect social, economic, political relationships, struggles and cultural values. Literature reflects the life of the people.

Ngugi (1981:6) maintains a similar view in *Writers in Politics*, where apart from arguing that literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape people's everyday life, Ngugi also protests against "the general tendency of seeing literature as something belonging to a surreal world, or to a metaphysical ethereal plane, something that has nothing to do with man's more mundane, prosaic realm of attempting to clothe, shelter and feed himself". Ngugi (1981:6) asserts that literature is more than just a mechanistic reflection of social reality, it is also part of "man's artistic activities, [literature] is in itself part of man's self-realization as a result of his wrestling with nature; it is, if you like, itself a symbol of man's creativity, of man's historical process of being and becoming". Literature, for Ngugi, is also an enjoyable end-product of man's artistic labour. But most important is that literature shapes people's attitudes to life, to the daily struggle with nature, the daily struggles within a community, and the daily struggle within their individual souls and selves (wa Thiong'o, 1981:6). It follows then that because social character and literature as creative process and also as an end is conditioned by historical social forces and pressures: it cannot elect to stand above or to transcend economics, politics, class, race, or what Achebe calls "the burning issues of the day" (wa Thiong'o, 1981:6). Ngugi essentially foregrounds the social significance and wholesome nature of literature. According to Mathivha (1972:1), literature "covers a variety of subjects or themes which interpret the life of the people". Anaso and Eziafa (2014) believe that literature has an immense value and plays a formidable role in scholarship and

furthering the intellectual development of the entire world. Thus, literature may be regarded as a mirror of a people's life, cultural and philosophical dispositions.

2.6. LINKAGES OF HISTORY, SELFHOOD, IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Musvoto (2010) argues that the concepts of history and identity occupy central positions in current African literary representations and in theoretical debates that focus on their discussions. Given the complexity of 'the history-identity dialectic' and the attendant presumption of the selected poets' need to "construct and locate identities in the context of a usable past, and the plasticity of narrative" (Musvoto, 2010:15), it is imperative to highlight the linkage between history and identity. Also, in order to highlight how poetry features in identity formations, reformations and articulations, it is necessary to first centre the interface of the concepts history, historicity and identity in Tshivenda literature, seeing that a brief historical background has already been provided on the Vhavenda people.

Musvoto's (2010) study builds its central arguments around the multiple ways of ordering the past and asserts that poetry is also a form of representing history that uses its own rhetoric to authorise its versions of the past and construct identities in its own unique ways. Musvoto further alludes to the paradox of identity formation or re-formation, which is that people can be the stories they tell about themselves as well as the stories told about them by others. For Musvoto, this implies a cultural infiltration of identities by other intrusive and powerful ideologies. Stemming from this is also the realisation that identities are ever-shifting, contested and malleable, or 'manipulable', by different people for different ends (Musvoto, 2010), as notable in the discussion of the Vhavenda's origin and political history. If anything, the discussion on the origin and political history of the Vhavenda demonstrates that a people's identity (or identities) is/are "subject to power dynamics which cannot be simplistically plotted on a continuum of power and powerlessness, rich and poor, Black and white as well as right and wrong" (Musvoto, 2010:15).

Musvoto (2010) maintains that these categories serve not only to exhaust, include or exclude all known or knowable identities but that they also highlight the existence of multiple identities at multiple levels, as is the case with the multiple clans among the Vhavenda. It is this broad-based nature of the concept 'identity' and its subset of varied parts and dimensions (i.e. social, cultural and personal identity) that makes it

difficult to provide a watertight definition of identity as a concept (cf. Mogoboya, 2011; Mokgoatšana, 1999; Musvoto, 2010; Tembo, 2016).

The plurality of elements that constitute identity as a concept reaffirm the notion that it functions at different planes and highlights the suggestion that the significance attached to any identity depends on the level and sensibility from which it is perceived (Musvoto, 2010). Musvoto (2010) posits that the caveat is that there are other identities that are sidelined in any given context because of the monologue of dominant narratives of culture that attach importance to certain identities, such as national or other group identities. With regard to the Vhavenda, this is notable in how the Singo-centric ethnographers, such as Phophi and Van Warmelo, told the history of the Singo clan as if it was the history of the whole nation of the Vhavenda (Hanisch, 2008). Thus, with this condition of subalternity experienced by other Vhavenda clans, it becomes difficult to capture and analyse the marginal identities of such clans through poetic narratives, among other modes of representation. It exacerbates the matter that African identity has been caught between the polarities of essentialism and anti-essentialism (Tembo, 2016). The essentialist view of African identity, according to Tembo (Ibid), succeeds only at highlighting contemporary socio-political ills, while the anti-essentialist view only advances the fluid notion of identity. Overall, the idea of African identity has in different historical moments been used to affirm the humanity of Black [African] people and to imagine socio-political and cultural spaces of agency, free from white racism and demeaning colonial forms of political intercourse (Tembo, Ibid).

Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3 in particular, foregrounds the selected poets' quest for identity as representative of the collective quest for identity by the Vhavenda in general. For polemical reasons, this quest was premised on the following three dimensions: (a) The poet's identity as encapsulated in a network of other poets' identities; (b) an assertion, recreation and discovery of self-identity in a repressive context that perpetuates alienation and cultural schizophrenia (i.e. apartheid); and (c) a broader articulation of identity by the selected poets in their own individually unique ways, which denotes the collective Vhavenda's search for autonomy and recognition in an oppressive context that propounds the coloniser's narrative and thus controls the centre space (cf. Mokgoatšana, 1999).

It was further argued that the need to access the centre space occupied some of the selected poets' minds. This search for both territorial and ideological authority by the Vhavenda poets is geared towards a subversion of subjugation, dislocation and displacement. With this in full view, one would assume that previous studies on Tshivenda poetry would have captured how such texts evince the interface of selfhood, identity and culture. However, the thematic interests of previous studies did not gravitate towards the reflection of selfhood, identity and culture in Tshivenda poetry as the present study did. For instance, in both his Master of Arts dissertation (1983) and doctoral thesis (1988) Milubi explores the theme of protest in Ratshitanga's poetry and aspects of Tshivenda poetry, respectively. In the former study, Milubi (1983) demonstrates that Ratshitanga's poetry falls within the ambit of protest in Tshivenda literature. In his doctoral study, Milubi (1988) not only reflects on the development of Tshivenda poetry from oral to modern forms but also proves that oral tradition is a vital foundation for the modern forms of Tshivenda literature.

Milubi (1991) examines the aspects of defamiliarisation in Sigwavhulimu's poetry. His conclusion is that Sigwavhulimu's poetry is excellent in its employment of literary techniques that yield 'ostranenie' or the aspect of defamiliarisation. Mafela (2008) also analyses Sigwavhulimu's poetry with a special focus on the themes of creation and death. Mafela notes that Sigwavhulimu's Christian background has a significant impact on his perception of creation and death in his poetry. Ramakuela (1998) focuses on the dilemma of transition in Tshivenda poetry, considering three prominent Vhavenda poets, namely Sigwavhulimu, Ratshitanga and Milubi. Ramakuela highlights that these poets belong to distinct ideological strands and have diverse voices through which they seek to find hope in the new world, that is, democratic/postcolonial South Africa.

Makhavhu (1987) analyses Milubi's poetry in search of the themes of protest and ultimately classifies Milubi as a protest poet. N̄emukongwe (1995) evaluates Milubi's poetry in an effort to determine whether or not Milubi's poetry satisfies the premises of Russian Formalism as a literary theory; his conclusion is that it does. Sebola (2019) bases his analysis of Milubi's poetry on the New Criticism theory and finds that Milubi's poetry meets the requirements specified by the theory's exponents, such as stylistic aesthetics. The present study, unlike the aforementioned studies,

draws the themes of selfhood, identity and culture as reflected in Tshivenda poetry into critical focus.

Implicit in the Vhavenda's notion of selfhood, identity and culture is their traditional religion as well as other attendant cultural beliefs and practices. The next section is devoted to a discussion on some of the prevalent aspects connected to the life and worldview of the Vhavenda.

2.6. 'MYTHISTORY' AS A SOURCE OF TSHIVENDA LITERARY (RE)PRESENTATIONS

Smart (1989) asserts that the experiential dimension of religion is often conveyed by means of myths (cf. Degenaar, 1982). Although according to Le Roux (2009), the common parlance reckons myth to be false while history is, or aspires to be, true, other scholars concur that the mythical does not necessarily imply that which is fictitious (see Finnegan, 1976; Georges, 1968; Jobling, 1987; Smart, 1989). The genre of myths consists of a variety of explanatory, marvellous and improbable stories that are believed and narrated in good faith (Mathivha, 1972). Myths are essentially prose narratives told in society as truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past (Bascon, 1965). Mathivha (1972) further states that stories in this genre account mainly for the existence of life and death, of the universe, of all sacred rites and ancestral customs of the origin of natural phenomena and how certain food stuffs were adapted as food by humankind. These narratives are accepted on faith; taught to be believed; can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt or disbelief; are usually sacred; and are often associated with theology and ritual (Bascon, 1965; Lincoln, 1989).

In Tshivenda culture, these tales that set out to explain the origin of cultural traits and natural phenomena without including religious factors can be differentiated from the rest and be classified as *ngano dza tsiko* (etiological myths) (Mathivha, 1972:3). In this sense, myth is intimately entangled with the hardest problems of thought of religion and of early history. This hard part, of course, entails attempting to explain the relationship of man to man (used generically here) in his environment and to solve the problems that have baffled him since time immemorial. In this explanation, myth is compelled to deal with what Deist (1985:110) regards as "the primeval, eschatological or cosmic time and conveying a universal message or responding to

questions that cannot be answered within the category of real time". This attempt also includes providing answers to the mysteries of life and death and love and hatred, to name but a few (Mathivha, 1972:2–3; cf. McNeil, 1986). In myths, stories in which the high figures of the great gods play the main role are understood (see Gunkel, 1987). In the narration, myths and history interconnect; hence, the term 'mythistory' (Le Roux, 2009:109; cf. McNeil, 1986) acknowledges the close kinship between myths and history. The next sections, although devoted solely to the traditional religion of the Vhavenda, implicitly shows how the interlace of myth and history informs the Vhavenda's belief system(s).

2.7. THE VHAVENDA'S TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND ATTENDANT BELIEF SYSTEMS

Although most of the Vhavenda are quite secretive about their religious beliefs (Khorommbi, 1996:25), oral traditions and scholarly works generally hold the notion that there are essentially four types of deities in which the Vhavenda believe, namely Nwali, Raluvhimba, Tshisinavhute and Khuzwane (Khorommbi, 1996; Le Roux, 2009; Mafela, 2008; Makhado, 1980; Mathivha, 1972; Matshidze, 2013; Schutte, 1978). Nwali is sometimes equated with the Hebrew deity, Yahweh (Jehovah) (Rodewald, 2010). Von Sicard (1952) submits that the name 'Mwali', which is used for God in the Kilimanjaro region, may well be related to the name 'Mwari' and Nwali. In some instances, the supreme being in whom the Vhavenda believe is ascribed different names such as Nwali, Raluvhimba and Khuzwane (see Khorommbi, 1996:26), and hence, the names are sometimes used interchangeably, where Nwali/Raluvhimba is viewed as the God of the earth who is responsible for all life (every living thing) on earth (Mashau, 2004:67; Van Rooy, 1971).

Stayt's (1931:232) informants identify Nwali with the deity Raluvhimba, who revealed himself at Mubvumela in the Matoba hills. It is said that this deity would reveal his desires to the chief in a voice of thunder and in a fire near the chief's kraal (Schutte, 1978). Apparently, as Schutte (1978) records, the fire disappeared before anyone could reach it. In such instances of Nwali's appearance, the chief entered a hut and addressed the deity who either replied from the thatch of the hut or from a tree nearby (Khorommbi, 1996; Schutte, 1978).

Some accounts, however, distinguish Mwali from Mwari (see Rodewald, 2010) and Nwali from Raluvhimba, while other accounts blur the boundaries, unifying Mwari/Mwali/Nwali as the God of fertility, mainly of crops and women; his most popular praise name being *Dzivaguru* (great pool) (Daneel, 1970, 1974; Schutte, 1978). The distinction between Mwali, Mwari and Nwali, however, may be accounted for purely on linguistic grounds in that most African languages use variations of the /r/ and /l/ speech sounds when referring to the same entity (Khorommbi, 1996). The /r/ speech sound is used by the Vhokalanga and Vashona of Zimbabwe whereas the Vhavanḁa use the /l/ speech as its variant.

Rodewald (2010:24) claims that there is “a perceived mutual history that claims the [Vhavanḁa] and [Vhokalanga] worshipped Mwali together during the time of the Munumutapa Empire”. According to Bhebe (1979:78), also supported by Rodewald (2010), Mwari is speculated to have originated from Vevḁa in northern South Africa and established himself at Nzhelele in the Matopo Range on the Shashe River during the time of the Mambo ruler (Rozvi Dynasty). It seems here that there are blurred boundaries between Mwari in Zimbabwe and Nwali, suggesting that Mwari is Nwali. The blurred boundaries between Mwari and Nwali were created to a large extent by scholars who perceived the names Mwari and Nwali as referring to one deity (Stayt, 1931; Schapera and Eiselen, 1959; Mashau, 2004; Munyai, 2016), with the orthographic distinctions between *Nwali*, *Mwali* and *Mwari* ascribed only to some linguistic variations between the Tshivḁa language and the Chikaranga language in Western Zimbabwe (Madiba 1994). Khorommbi (1996:10) proffers that, the connection between Vhokalanga in Zimbabwe and Vhavanḁa in South Africa is attributable to the Vhavanḁa who were scattered to Zimbabwe during the Mphephu war with the Boers from 1895 to 1899 (cf. Nnemudzivhḁi 1977). Upon coming back, apparently the Vhavanḁa had picked up many Shona words (Khorommbi 1996:10), including the name Mwari. Certainly, the view that Nwali is Mwari still needs to be further interrogated.

Among the Vhavanḁa, Nwali is viewed as follows:

The father of creation who manifests himself in lightning or in a shooting star coming from above. He is personal beyond and above ancestral hierarchies and could only be approached

through the mediation of the senior lineage ancestors (*mhondoro* or *vharudzi*) or through his special messengers. (Schutte, 1978:110; cf. Nḡou, 1993:31).

Mwari in particular is believed to have great curative powers (Schutte, 1978). He has both male and female attributes; he is regarded as the rain giver (Khorommbi, *Ibid*). Khorommbi (*Ibid*: 29) further states that “since the Vhaventḡa were agricultural people, water was very important to them. Their whole life depended on rain He [Nḡwali] was therefore taken to be the one responsible for changing seasons”. As a male, he reveals himself as *Sororezhou*, “head of the elephant” and as a female, “in the pool, the dark recesses of fertility” (Schutte, *Ibid*: 110). Nḡwali is closely associated with the Mbire tribe within the Shona tradition (cf. Schutte, *Ibid*). His shrines or ritual headquarters are situated at Matopo Hills near Bulawayo, hence he is known as *Mwari weMantonjeni* (the God of the Matopo Hills). The Tshiventḡa equivalent of the name Matonjeni is Matongoni (Schutte, *Ibid*: 121). One of the keepers who served at Matonjeni shrines was a Muventḡa called Peura (Mashau, 2004:67). As far as the Vhaventḡa are concerned, no sacrifices are offered to Nḡwali (Makhado, 1980). Nḡwali is believed to have appeared at least at the following three places: At a cave at Luvhimbi, at Musekwa and among the Tshivhula people who in the 19th century lived near Saltpan (Khorommbi, *Ibid*; Schutte, *Ibid*).

Stayt (1960:230) regards Raluvhimba as “the mysterious, monotheistic deity of the [Vhaventḡa] [who] is connected to the beginning of the world”. According to Stayt (1960), *luvhimba* means ‘eagle’, that is, the bird that soars aloft. Raluvhimba is said to live and move among the (Vhaventḡa) people and functions as the intermediary between Nḡwali and the Vhaventḡa (Makhado, 1980; Mathivha, 1972). Stayt (1960) records that Raluvhimba appeared in a cave at Luvhimbi on a mountain called ‘Tshawadinda’. Nḡwali, on the other hand, appeared in a great flame on a platform of rock above the cave (Schutte, 1978:115). The Vhaventḡa believe that Raluvhimba at times reveals himself in the form of fire, which does not burn vegetation. Raluvhimba’s habitation is believed to have been at a place called ‘Mubvumela’ and at Makonde (an area that was once under the jurisdiction of Headman Ravhura, situated in the north-eastern part of the Royal Head-Kraal of Tshivhase, from whom the name ‘Sibasa’ has been derived) (Makhado, 1980).

Stayt (1960:230) links Raluvhimba to the beginning of the world, supposedly living somewhere in the heavens and connected to all astronomical and physical

phenomena (cf. Mafela, 2008). Mafela (2008:109) asserts that “Raluvhimba is closer to the God of the Christians in that he is connected with the beginning of the world and lives somewhere in heaven”. Mafela (2008:109) also notes that Raluvhimba differs from the God of the Christians in that he is not linked to eternal life.

Another deity that the Vhavanḁa are said to have believed in (or believe in) is Tshisinavhute (The Rain Queen). Tshisinavhute is regarded as the descendant of Luvhimbi, the Rain King, who belongs to the Vhambedzi ethnic group in Venḁa (called Bapedi by the Basotho of Sekhukhune, who also adopted the same name after having noticed that the former were distinguished iron-smiths) (Makhado, 1980). The ability to cause rainfall is also accredited to the Rain Queen, Modjadji, to whom brides from different rulers were sent so that rain might also fall in their areas (Makhado, 1980).

There is also a story of Khuswane or Khuzwane who is supposed to be the equivalent of Nwali among some Vhavanḁa tribes. Khuswane/Khuzwane is said to have the characteristics of great powers ascribed to Nwali (Mafela, 2008; Mathivha, 1972). Mafela (2008:109) asserts that “although Vhavanḁa people believe that there is a supreme being who created all things on earth, this being is not God”. Mafela further states that the Vhavanḁa “speak of a creator of the world who was a good god” and called him Khuzwane (Mafela, 2008:109). The Vhavanḁa believe that “after creating the world and all that is therein, he [Khuzwane] retired to a lazy rest, and allowed everything in the world to proceed as it pleased” (Mafela, 2008:109; Wessman, 1908). The relationship between the Vhavanḁa and their God across epochs is spanned by the legend of Nwali and Raluvhimba more than by the legend of Tshisinavhute and Khuzwane. The attributes ascribed to the name Nwali “are those of an immanent and transcendent being. He is seen as being concerned and involved in the social welfare of his people” (Khorommbi, 1996:28). In surmising the legend on the relationship between the Vhavanḁa and their deity (or deities), the following observations of Schutte (1978:115) are preferable when one wants to be selective in favour of those elements that essentially relate to the emphasis of the features of Nwali:

- Nwali was originally a sacred king and apex of the ancestral line of the Vhasenzi/Vhavanḁa.

- Nwali disappeared under the earth (in an uncited account; at Mubvumela) and so did a series of chiefs who were faithful to him.
- Obedience to him and respect for his symbol, the Ngoma Lungundu (see the next section), are of supreme importance. Discord and factionalism, especially in regard to chiefly succession, was to be avoided. National or tribal unity and the purity of stock had to be upheld.
- Nwali's concern for fertility is not a central theme.
- Communication between religious functionaries and Nwali varied through time. First, there was the high priest, then Tshilume, the successor to Nwali as king. The ritually pure Vhalemba and the wife-giving lineage of the Vhandalamo gained in importance until direct communication was established with Tshishonga. A priesthood of kingship seems to be installed with God without having any direct links with Nwali.
- The appointment of successors to chiefly positions passed from Nwali, probably to the high priest then to the Mundalamo chief and then to the Makhadzi (aunt) in conjunction with the priest (for lineage ancestors).
- Nwali also revealed himself directly to chiefs (Hwami, Ravhura and of course, the oldest, Tshilume).

It is worth mentioning here that Hwami and Tshilume are also the names of the two male divining bones in the basic set consisting of four dice. *Hwami* represents the old man and *Tshilume* represents the young man whereas the other two, *Thwalima* and *Lumwe*, represent women (Davhana, 2020; Milubi, 1988; Schutte, 1978:114). According to Rodewald (2010:22), "just how the worship of Mwali [Nwali] came to be established in western Zimbabwe and eastern Botswana is a matter of conjecture—its history hidden behind oral tradition and people movements". Rodewald (2010) compiled linguistic and emerging scientific data as well as oral tradition and posited that the worship of Nwali as practised by Vhakalanga, finds its roots in the Israelite relationship with Yahweh. Compounding the issue is that Nwari/Nwali is venerated as God by the Ndembu of Zambia, the Shona and Ndebele of Zimbabwe, the Shoko and Rozvi (Khorommbi, 1996:28). Bhebe (1979) records that the early European missionaries rejected the worship of Mwali/Mwari/Nwali as superstition.

A significant point to consider here is that local relationship with Nwali as deity preceded the encounter with Christianity (Rodewald, 2010). It is for this reason that

Rodewald (Ibid: 22) also argues that “beliefs about Mwali cannot be lightly dismissed as a reinterpretation based upon knowledge brought by European missionaries”. But, even with the scant evidence presented above, one can hardly come to a harmonious synthesis on the beliefs and legends surrounding the Vhavenda’s relationship with the aforementioned deities. In light of this, it is best to just conclude with the observation that Nwali’s visitations to the Vhavenda are believed to have mysteriously come to an end in the mid to late 1920s (Schutte, 1978).

Schutte (1978) assumes that the Rhodesian (Zimbabwean) connection (with the Mbire dynasty) may have broken down when the cult suffered a decline after 1923. Furthermore, internal political developments and white interference in the power structure may also have been responsible for this (Schutte, 1978:122). Another lament possibly linked to the disappearance of the name Nwali is the missionaries’ translation of the Tshivenda word for God, Nwali, into the Sesotho word, ‘*Modimo*’ (‘Mudzimu’ in Tshivenda), which, according to Khorommbi (1996), “is very disturbing indeed”. According to Khorommbi, the Vhavenda’s natural name for God is *Nwali*. In this sense, Nwali in Tshivenda resonates with Mwari in Shona because the Tshivenda language had a strong Karanga connection and influence. That is why Karanga words such as *denga* for ‘heaven’, and Nwali for ‘God’ show this connection (Khorommbi, 1996:10), which is notable in the first religious booklet that appeared in 1902 in Venda:

Ndi no tenda ko Modimo Bambo

Oe simba rose

Mosiki oa Denga na Pase

[I believe in the Heavenly God

The Almighty One

The Creator of Heaven and Earth]

(see Mathivha, 1972:16)

The Karanga connection could also have been influenced by the Vhavenda who were scattered to Zimbabwe during the Mphephu war with the Boers. Upon coming back, the Vhavenda are said to have picked up many Shona words (Khorommbi, 1996:10). Since Mafela (2008:109) asserts that all the Vhavenda deities, that is Nwali, Raluvhimba and Khuzwane, “all will join the ancestors in the spiritual world”, it is important for this section to provide a summary of the Vhavenda’s perception of

the 'spirit world'. It is imperative because Tshivenda culture, like other African cultures, considers ancestral spirits, among other spirits, as an integral part of their cosmology (Le Roux, 2009).

2.7.1. The Vhavenda's Perception and Understanding of the Spirit World

In Venda, "certain places are reputed to be inhabited by spirits who are able to influence the lives of the people" (Stayt, 1960:236). In fact, in Venda "every chief has a place in which the spirits of his ancestors are reputed to abide" (Khorommbi, 1996:29). Such places were/are mainly burial places for the chiefs. Furthermore, the Vhavenda also believe that there are spirits that are reputed to abide in rivers and lakes, such as Lake Fundudzi. Lake Fundudzi as a habitation of the ancestor spirits of Ntshavha, who is said to be the guardian of the lake, is briefly discussed in this chapter and broadly in Section 4.4.1.

Phiphidi waterfalls and Guvhukuvhu waterfalls in Venda are also associated with spirits (Khorommbi, 1996). These spirits generally include, but are not limited to, (a) dissociated spirits, (b) transmigrated spirits, (c) *Midzimu* (ancestor cult), and (d) individual spirits (Khorommbi, 1996). According to Stayt (1960:238) and Khorommbi (1996:30), dissociated spirits are termed thus because they are believed to be disconnected from a particular image. Apparently, "*zwidudwane* (mountain spirits) fall into this category" and "these [*zwidudwane*] are the most feared spirits among Vhavenda" (Khorommbi, 1996:30). *Zwidudwane* are described by traditionalists as malevolent spirits inhabiting the environs of sacred watering places, and they are naked and sometimes have partial human bodies, but they are always frightening at best or murderous at worst (Nettleton, 2006; Phophi, n.d.). In this case, the Vhavenda believe that when a person dies, some people with evil power may take the corpse and cut off the tongue and then use the person to plough the fields at night (Mathivha, 1972:4). It is this belief that causes some of the Vhavenda people to put branches of a thorn tree called *mutshetshete* or buffalo thorn (<http://southafrica.co.za/ve/buffalo-thorn.html>) over the new grave or to literally keep watch over the grave for the first few days (Mathivha, 1972). Mathivha (1972) further indicates that sometimes the graves are made in the huts or in the village where the people who are related to the dead person live. The aim is to protect the corpse (Mathivha, Ibid: 4).

Concerning the transmigration of spirits, the Vhavenda believe that some people such as chiefs return to the earth after death in the form of animals, such as lions or leopards (Khorommbi, 1996:30; Stayt, 1960:239). *Midzimu* (ancestor cult) are linked to the Vhavenda's belief that they can communicate with Nwali (supreme God) through their 'living-dead' ancestors (Khorommbi, Ibid: 31). Thus, to the Vhavenda death is viewed as a transition between life on earth and life in the spirit world where the ancestors are believed to continue to live, exerting a strong influence on living relatives (Khorommbi, Ibid). The Vhavenda even believe that such ancestor spirits can avenge themselves and ultimately bring misfortune on people (Stayt, 1960). In Tshivenda culture, the ancestor spirit may be represented by a sacred animal or an object, like a cow, a goat or a sacred stone (Khorommbi, Ibid: 31).

With regard to individual spirits, the Vhavenda believe that when a man dies, he is represented by a spear, which is brought by his son from the first wife. Even a woman after death may have a small iron ring made from an old hoe (Khorommbi, 1996). These iron rings, according to Khorommbi (Ibid), are called *malembe* (hoes), and there are different types of *malembe* such as *tululu* and *lunamo* (cf. Stayt, 1960:247). The idea here is to show that the family history is preserved through hoes and spears. The different objects that the Vhavenda use in their worship are called *zwitungulo* (artefacts or insignia) (see Matshidze, 2013). The Vhavenda believe that the abovementioned spirits inhabit such *zwitungulo* (Khorommbi, 1996). In tandem with this, Mokgoatšana (1996:117–118, 135) states that

African religions, like other religious forms are characterised by symbols and rituals which should not be taken literally for what they seem to be, but should be contextualised in their conception to reveal the inner philosophical and religious meaning embedded in them It is not strange in African societies that departed relatives are consulted for definition and explanations of the complexities of life. The living-dead are to be updated during ceremonies and rituals of the misfortunes and luck that strike their dependants on earth.

Connected to *zwitungulo* is the Vhavenda's belief that "every sickness, death, misfortune, or danger" has "a spiritual cause" (Khorommbi, 1996:31). The diviner or traditional (medicine) doctor who uses *thangu* (divining bones) plays a prominent role in the prevention or alleviation of misfortunes (Khorommbi, Ibid; Davhana, 2020). Other misfortunes are believed to be prevented through the prayers of *makhadzi* (senior sister of the family's head or chief's father; the big sister who

serves as a priestess in the family). In Tshivenda culture, *makhadzi* plays critical roles “in succession, resolution of disputes, regency, initiation of girls and spiritual roles” (Matshidze, 2013: ii; cf. Mudau, 2012). In fulfilling her spiritual role, among other things, *makhadzi* serves as a priestess during the ritual ceremony called *u phasa* (pouring libations) (Khorommbi, 1996; Matshidze, 2013). It is believed that through these libations the ancestor spirits are invoked and propitiated before sowing and reaping (Stayt, 1960:252).

The reaping ceremony or celebration of harvest is called *thevhula*, and during it the ancestors are thanked for the harvest (Khorommbi, 1996; Matshidze, 2013). To the Vhavenda, some of the strong pillars that support these ideas and views are communal living and interdependence; *ubuntu*; and a strong spiritualistic worldview, which in most cases tends to revolve around magic, witchcraft, spirits, life and death, misfortune, sterility, respect, gods, and God (Khorommbi, 1996). All in all, the Vhavenda generally believe in the supreme deity, Nwali/Raluvhimba and spirits (Matshidze, 2013). Munyai (2016) observes that African Christianity, including in Venda, is at crossroads because a large number of African Christians in sub-Saharan Africa profess to be Christian but cling tenaciously to their traditional beliefs. Munyai’s (2016) research is geared towards enlightening Christian missionaries and evangelists on how to present the Gospel to the indigenes. Munyai’s main findings include the following:

- Christian missionaries operated under the assumption that the Vhavenda’s religious and cultural experiences were mere paganism. As a result, the missionaries totally rejected the name Nwali (God) in Venda and replaced it with Mudzimu. They rejected this name because they regarded Nwali as a pagan god or an idol. Consequently, the Vhavenda who embrace Judeo-Christianity regard Mudzimu as God, the Supreme Being, while the ‘unconverted’ Vhavenda regard Mudzimu as part of the family ancestors, thus bringing confusion within the same tribe.
- The missionaries saw local religious beliefs, conceptions about *vhuloi* (witchcraft) and beliefs in the power of *dzihangas* (traditional healers), *mingome* (seers) and other specialists as being manifestations of the power of Satan or arising from superstition. The missionaries also thought the

Vhavenda worshipped their dead ancestors. However, the Vhavenda simply pay homage to them.

- The separation of the people at the mission station became a revolutionary factor, which implied breaking up the solidarity of the indigenous people and the community at large. The new state of affairs at the mission station enticed the Christians not to have anything to do with their fellow people and to shun them as heathen and uncivilised. Family relations were cut off.

Although Munyai (2016) advises Christian missionaries on how they can succeed in presenting the Gospel, he also acknowledges that there is currently a syncretic approach to Judeo-Christianity among the Vhavenda. This syncretism is most notable in African Initiated Churches (AICs; cf. Mlambo and Mukahlera, 2014). Mlambo and Mukahlera (2014) examine AICs' unique conceptualisation of deity and the place of humanity in the universe. Both Mlambo and Mukahlera (2014) and Munyai (2016) note the resoluteness, tenacity and innovative originality of AICs in the context of a congested and contested religious space where Western Christianity has, with some degree of success, obliterated African cultural and religious beliefs to substitute them with foreign ones. In this way, "AICs represent the African classical example of religious institutions, which protect some fundamental elements of original African religious thought and spirituality within modern trends of worship" (Mlambo and Mukahlera, 2014:80). Needless to say, the introduction, spread and growth of Christianity went hand in glove with the process of acculturation of Judeo-Christianity to the colonist order in Africa. African traditional religion was, for the most part, eroded. In essence, Christian missions instilled in Africans who converted to Western-type churches distaste for African traditional values (Mlambo and Mukahlera, 2014).

On the aspect of syncretism, it can be noted that although African Christians adopted a new identity based on the colonial Judeo-Christian order, AICs served as shock absorbers to the massive wave of colonialism. Thus, AICs developed various attitudes and approaches to Judeo-Christianity, without having to conform to boundaries of missionary orthodoxy. The discussion thus far has given the impression that in present-day Venda there are only those Vhavenda who believe in Judeo-Christianity, African (Tshivenda) traditional religion or those who adopt a syncretic approach to religion. However, there are also those who believe in

Hinduism, Islam and other religions (Mashau, 2004). African traditional religion and Judeo-Christianity are discussed at length here because they appear to be the prevalent religions among the Vhaventḁa (Khorommbi, 1996; Mashau, 2004; Munyai, 2016). One can conclude that the present-day Vhaventḁa either adhere to African traditional religion, Judeo-Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and other sects of religion.

2.7.2. Drums and Belief: The Case of *Ngoma Lungundu* in Tshiventḁa Mythistory

Kruger (1996) asserts that drums generally symbolise political and religious authority in sub-Saharan Africa. In the mythological and cultural pantheon of the Vhaventḁa, the noun *ngoma* (drum; singular form) or *dzingoma* (drums; plural form) also denotes 'mysteries' or things not easily divulged such as what happens during the initiation ceremonies (Nettleton, 2006). In the Singo tradition, all *dzingoma* (drums) are perceived as replicas of one original *Ngoma* called *Ngoma Lungundu*, given to the Singo by the creator, Mwari/Raluvhimba (Nettleton, 2006). *Ngoma Lungundu* is the name of the drum that accompanied the Vhaventḁa on their journey to the south, recorded and published in the thirties by the teacher, Mudau (see Schutte, 1978). Schutte (1978:8) also indicates that at the time of its publication, the authenticity of the tradition(s) was questioned because of certain parallels that the drum had with the Ark of the Covenant of the proto-Israelites in the Old Testament.

Scholars ascribe the carriage of the *Ngoma Lungundu* to the Vhalembe (see Le Roux, 2009). Le Roux (2009:102) recognises the 'Lemba' or Vhalembe not only as a specific group of people with unique traditions regarding Israelite origins and/or extraction but also for the leading role played by their priestly family in carrying the drum, *Ngoma Lungundu* or "the drum which thunders" (Bloomhill, 1960:165) from the north into the Arabian Peninsula and eventually into Africa. *Lungundu* is derived from *thundundu*, an onomatopoeic expression for thunder in Tshiventḁa (Nettleton, 2006). In the Vhalembe's migratory journey, *Ngoma Lungundu* seems to have played a role similar to that of the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament for proto-Israelites (Le Roux, 2009). Le Roux's article essentially shows how the Vhalembe constructed their own set of beliefs around biblical myths in the context of marginalisation among other African communities.

The Vhalemba's oral culture, according to Le Roux (2009), constitutes their worldview and self-understanding or identity. Of particular interest in this section, however, is "the mysterious and fearsome role that the *Ngomalungundu* played in African tradition" (Le Roux, 2009:103 original italics). According to Bloomhill (1960:165), "no other legend is so imbued with the mystic enthrallment of African folklore as that of Ngoma Lungundu". *Ngoma Lungundu* is described by Nettleton (2006) as an extremely large drum that caused lightning, rain, and extreme weather conditions that helped the Singo to overcome their enemies. In what Le Roux (2009) terms "the famous migration myth of the Vhalemba and [Vha]venda", Nwali, the spirit of creation, presents a chief with *Ngoma Lungundu*, a magic drum, where the reception of the drum formalises his status as "king of the country" (cf. Kruger, 1996:49; Van Warmelo, 1940:16). Thus, the *Ngoma Lungundu* was and is to the Vhavenda a sacred object that was carried by the priestly family of the Vhalemba (Le Roux, 2009).

According to Le Roux (2009:106), *Ngoma Lungundu* is "a single-headed drum with a hemispherical resonator carved out solid wood" (cf. Nettleton, 2006:72). The drum is named *Ngoma Lungundu* because of the thundering sound it makes when smitten (Le Roux, 2009). The upper portion of the drum is ornamented with four 'handles' that interlace in pairs, and the spaces between the handles are filled by a band of carving in relief (cf. Kirby, 1953; Nettleton, 1984; Parfitt, 2008; Von Sicard, 1952). Apparently, *Ngoma Lungundu* was so large that it had to be carried by 10 men (Nettleton, 2006). Probably because of its thundering sound, *Ngoma Lungundu* has been described as the "voice of Mwali" (Le Roux, 2009:107). Kirby (1953) and Stayt (1931) state that *Ngoma Lungundu* was used as a war-drum in the days when there was fighting in the northern Transvaal (now Limpopo Province) (cf. Le Roux, 2009). Tradition has it that "in the past, it [*Ngoma Lungundu*] had a specific effect on the enemy when beaten" (Le Roux, 2009:107). It is said that the drum caused the enemies to sleep when they heard the beat (Du Plessis, 1940; Nettleton, 2006). In such times of war, *Ngoma Lungundu* was carried by the Vhalemba because of the Vhalemba's magic skills during warfare and the drum's magical properties (Le Roux, 2009). During other ceremonies, however, only women were allowed to touch the drum, bearing in mind that the drum was not supposed to be touched improperly or

be allowed to touch the ground at all, hence during rest periods, the drum was put on laps (Le Roux, 2009; Möller-Malan, 1953).

Ngoma Lungundu could not be dropped or placed on the ground without causing extraordinary misfortune (Nettleton, 1985; Van Warmelo, 1932). Möller-Malan (1953) records the tradition that holds that in 1700 a fire leaped out of Mwali's presence and destroyed the *Ngoma Lungundu* and many disobedient Vhavenda people. It is believed by both Vhalemba and Vhavenda that the original *Ngoma* or a replica of the original drum might still be in one of the caves in Dumbghe Mountain in Zimbabwe (see Von Sicard, 1943). Other traditions hold that the drum is somewhere in the Soutpansberg Mountains (cf. Le Roux, 2003, 2009). It is difficult to corroborate the claim, especially when Von Sicard (1952) says he found *Ngoma Lungundu* in Zimbabwe and took it to a museum in Bulawayo, whereas Van Heerden (1959, cited in Le Roux, 2009) says *Ngoma Lungundu* is in a cave in Tshiendeulu in Soutpansberg, close to Dzata I in the former Venda (cf. Le Roux, 2009). Apart from its rumoured magical properties, *Ngoma Lungundu*, according to Kruger (1996), is famous because of its value as a symbol of ruling power. Bloomhill (1960) says the origin of the legend on *Ngoma Lungundu* can be traced back to the Chasenzil of Matongoni (from where the Vhavenda and Vhalemba were driven) while carrying the drum to the south (cf. Le Roux, 2009). This happened before missionary influence. Tradition holds that the Vhalemba experienced the sound of the drum with awe and fear since it was perceived as the voice of the great god (Great God?), *Mambo wa Denga* (King of Heaven) who was also called *Mutumbuka-Vhathu* (Möller-Malan, 1953:1) or the Creator of Humankind (Le Roux, 2009).

Concerning the parallels between *Ngoma Lungundu* and the Ark of the Covenant in the Bible, Le Roux (2009:110) highlights that the Vhalemba themselves never make a connection between the two objects, despite numerous scholars' insistence on the parallels. Von Sicard (1943, 1952), who is said to have spent his missionary career working among the Vhalemba in Zimbabwe (Le Roux, 2009:111), was possibly the first scholar to draw definite parallels between the Ark and *Ngoma Lungundu*. Although one may be tempted to affirm the parallels between the Ark and *Ngoma Lungundu* on the basis of their functional similarities, one may do so with hesitation because of the significant differences between the two objects. For instance, the Ark, as described in the Bible (see Exodus 25:10–22), was seemingly some kind of a box,

coffer or chest (cf. Le Roux, 2009:117), while *Ngoma Lungundu*, although it carried objects inside just like the Ark, was a drum. Furthermore, *Ngoma Lungundu* was not only a ritual object but was also a musical instrument (Kruger, 1996). There have never been any suggestions that the Ark was a drum (Le Roux, 2009:117). Even with the apparent distinctions, one cannot dispute the fact that parallels between orality in proto-Israelite and African religions can be drawn, specifically between the story of the *Ngoma Lungundu* and that of the Ark of the Covenant (Le Roux, 2009:120). Since some of the selected poets thematised drums, including *Ngoma Lungundu*, subsection 4.4.1 is devoted to a discussion of the roles and significance of drums in Tshivenda culture. From the drums, we proceed to the Vhavana's belief that rivers and lakes are inhabited by ancestral spirits.

2.8. Mystery and Mythology: Traversing into Lake Fundudzi

Nettleton's (2006) article on Samson Mudzunga, the Vhavana's *dzingoma* (drums) and new mythologies presents an insightful account on Lake Fundudzi. Recognised as the only natural lake in South Africa, Fundudzi is unsurprisingly central to the old mythologies of the Vhavana (Nettleton, 2006). Lake Fundudzi, according to Nettleton (Ibid), is important in both oral and written histories and in the continuing customs of the different groups who constitute the Vhavana. In Tshivenda mythology, Lake Fundudzi is recognised as the origin of the world and the sacred space of ancestors (Nettleton, Ibid). As a leitmotif referring to the genesis myth at whose centre it stands, the image of Lake Fundudzi recurs through Vhavana's thinking about social issues and relationships, reserved for some, guarded from others, and prohibited to the most powerful. These restrictions surrounding Lake Fundudzi in the traditions and customs of the Vhavana are deeply and deliberately rooted and shrouded in mystery, exacerbated by the fact that the lake has, for the longest time, been hung about with old mythologies.

Lake Fundudzi is believed by the Vhavana to be the 'swimming pool' of Raluvhimba (the creator), who left his giant footprints in the mountains around it at the moment of creation, while the earth was still soft (Nettleton, 2006). Lake Fundudzi is surrounded by a number of natural features that are identified as belonging to Raluvhimba, including some boulders that are believed to be his 'drums'. It is worth mentioning that in Tshivenda culture, it is unthinkable to be a king without drums (Nettleton,

1985, 1989; Stayt, 1931; Van Warmelo, 1932). In essence, it is a prerequisite of the Vhavanḁa's rule that all Vhavanḁa kings of Singo descent have replicas of the drums, but no one else can own them (Nettleton, *Ibid*). Possession of such drums empowered kings not only through their magical properties but also by symbolically embodying Lake Fundudzi through various details of form, materials and relief.

Lake Fundudzi is connected with the disappearance of the first Singo king of Venḁa, Ṭhohoyanḁou. It is said that Ṭhohoyanḁou disappeared into Lake Fundudzi to live there with his court, replicating the courts of his descendants still on land (Nettleton, 2006). Apparently, those who ventured close could hear Ṭhohoyanḁou's *Tshikona* bands' music, the drumming on his *Ngoma* coming from the lake and his young women performing the *Domba*, an initiation school for young men and young women (Mulaudzi, 2001; Nettleton, 2006). It is also believed that Ṭhohoyanḁou was a newcomer to the lake, a leader of the invading Singo who had arrived from the north and taken control of the Soutpansberg area sometime around 1700 (Nettleton, *Ibid*). As mentioned in the first chapter, the Singo were the last of a number of invasions of Shona-speakers and they, together with the Vhaḁavhatsindi and Vhangona, make up the different strata with the Vhavanḁa society (cf. Nettleton, *Ibid*). Legend has it that the Vhavanḁa's cultural hero Ṭhohoyanḁou's disappearance into Lake Fundudzi, and spirit occupation of the waters established the Singo hegemony within the lake sacred to the earlier inhabitants, the Vhangona (Nettleton, *Ibid*).

Nettleton (2006) records that the Singo was unable to take physical possession of the lake, which meant the Nḁtshiavha lineage of the Vhangona remained the guardians of Lake Fundudzi even after the Singo invasion. Nettleton (*Ibid*) further reveals that the Singo were believed likely to die from contact with the lake's waters, while ordinary people (in the sense of not being royalty) could be attacked by the mischievous, grotesque spirits, the *zwiduḁwane* (discussed in Section 2.7.1), who inhabited the lake's parameter (Nettleton, 2006). Annual offerings to the spirits of the lake are said to have been made by the head of the Nḁtshiavha lineages on behalf of the major Singo chiefs, the Ramabulana and Tshivhase (Nettleton, *Ibid*:70).

The Vhavanḁa regard Lake Fundudzi as a metaphorical womb, the origin of life (Nettleton, 2006). Linked to this metaphor, Nettleton (*Ibid*) further avers, is the *Ngoma*, which is an image of the Lake Fundudzi or womb, within which swims the crocodile (the king), represented in the drum by two pebbles, *mmbe*. *Mmbe* are

taken from the stomach of a live crocodile in the water by a powerful healer or diviner and the king swallows them on his investiture, where they remain in his intestines until his death (Nettleton, 1985, 2006). When the pebbles rattle in the drum, they are likened to the crying of the baby (Nettleton, 2006). Furthermore, it is believed that the python writhes on the perimeter of the lake, signifying the powers of the healers, of members of other lineages, and of members of the Vhavenda communities politically disempowered by Singo dominance. Hence, in Tshivenda culture, a lake and a pregnant woman's womb are both containers, and the belts worn by pregnant women that 'tie' the baby in its place are likened to a python (Nettleton, 2006:74).

2.8.1. Contemporary Disillusionment with the Lake Fundudzi Mythology

Recently, much in Venda territory has changed, particularly since the democratic elections of 1994. Disillusionment with the old mythology that shores up chiefly privilege, according to Nettleton (2006:70), has crept into people's dealings with political and cultural dimensions of rural life in this former ethnic stronghold. Nettleton (Ibid) avers that the smattering of missions and hospitals and a few modern buildings were minor indices of change. According to Nettleton, this was part of the systematic underdevelopment and ingrained poverty engendered by apartheid, a system that entrenched the traditional rights and customs of a small aristocratic class by buying out the traditionalist leaders and conferring on them special powers claimed to be cultural and historical. It was in this instance, according to Nettleton (Ibid), that the house of Ramabulana was made the 'paramount' house, and its head Patrick Mphephu was appointed its chief minister and prime minister after the homeland was given 'independence' in 1981. With this privileging of chiefly power came the obliteration of the other Vhavenda clans' oral histories and traditions (Nettleton, 2006). Hence, the pre-Singo commoners, specifically the Vhangona and Vhaxavhatsindi, "were effectively silenced and to some extent effaced from the ethnographic record" (Nettleton, Ibid: 71).

In the present-day context, Lake Fundudzi has become the centre of controversy in the new power struggles that are related to the question of land distribution (Nettleton, 2006). The issue is characterised by the re-emergence of older traditions and divisions that set out to challenge Singo hegemony and "urbanisation which disrupts older forms of authority" (Nettleton, Ibid: 71). The analysis of the selected

texts reveals both the disillusionment with ethnic mythology as a source of poetry as well as the successful exploitation of ethnic heritage in the production of poetry in the Tshivenda literary scene.

2.9. CONCLUSION

This chapter comprised two broad categories. The first category defined poets and poetry, discussed the Tshivenda literary background and orthographic development where missionary influence was accredited for the commitment of the Tshivenda language into writing. The first category also captured some of the poetry publications in Tshivenda, elucidated the nature of Tshivenda poetry with particular emphasis on oral (traditional) and modern Tshivenda poetry. Scant attempts were made to situate Tshivenda poetry in the ambit of African poetry on the basis of Tshivenda poetry's consistent encapsulation of Pan-African themes, protest and praise.

The second category discussed the intersection/interface of literature and culture, linkages of selfhood, identity and culture, and extended the discussion to the relationship between myth and history. In the latter aspect, the Vhavenda's 'mythistory' was discussed in light of their belief in Nwali/Raluvhimba and spirits. The chapter also emphasised the notion that Tshivenda traditional religion cannot be discussed thoroughly without mentioning the significance and role of drums. *Ngoma Lungundu* became the apex of the discussion on this aspect. To corroborate the 'mystery' and 'mythology' that the Vhavenda believe that spirits inhabit water, Lake Fundudzi became an appropriate point of reference. Venda's river systems (like her lakes), as elsewhere in Africa, have also been crucial to people's growth and survival (Khapoya, 2010). The hope was that by laying this foundation in this chapter, the analysis of the selected texts in Chapters 4 and 5 have a solid basis. The next chapter is solely devoted to discussing the methodology adopted in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discussed the research methodology of this study. A research methodology encompasses the procedures that are followed by researchers to find answers to the research problems they have identified (Chivanga and Monyai, 2021). Chivanga and Monyai (2019) mention that a research methodology represents the point at which methods, facts, and epistemology amalgamate and coalesce in an overt manner. Therefore, it can be said that the task of a methodology is to explain the particularity of the methods used for a given study (cf. Clough and Nutbrown, 2002).

This chapter commences with a brief description of types of research methodologies and their differences, advantages and disadvantages. The chapter proceeds to give an account for the research approach and paradigms adopted, the sampling of the texts, the data collection process and analysis, as well as a discussion on how the study ensured that it meets the rigours of quality criteria. The chapter also discusses how the study attained and sustained ethical considerations in the research writing.

3.2. TYPES OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In relation to its approach, research can be qualitative or quantitative (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). Queirós et al (2017) aver that the qualitative and quantitative methodologies are adopted mainly in the modelling and analysis of phenomena. The qualitative methodology aims to understand a complex reality and the meaning of actions in a given context. On the other hand, the quantitative methodology sets out to acquire accurate and reliable measurements that allow statistical analysis. Both methodologies offer a set of methods, advantages and disadvantages that must be explored and known by researchers. The essential differences between these two types of research methodology are in the ways the data is analysed (Chivanga and Monyai, 2021). Some of these differences are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 0.1: Differences between quantitative and qualitative research methodologies

Dimension	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Focus on understanding the	Smaller	Bigger

Dimension	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
context of the problem		
Dimension of group studies	Smaller	Bigger
Proximity of the researcher to the problem being studied	Closer	Further
Scope of study in time	Immediate	Longer range
Researcher's point of view	External	Internal
Theoretical framework and hypothesis	More structured	Less structured
Flexibility and exploratory analysis	Lower	Higher
Scope and focus	Quantitative methodologies are predicated upon replicability in that it is assumed that different researchers who use the same data under similar conditions will obtain similar results.	By contrast, replicability is not an essential criterion for qualitative research as qualitative studies prioritise obtaining results that are representative of the perceptions, beliefs or opinions of the participants in relation to the phenomena being investigated.
Assumption	Quantitative research is based upon the ontological assumption of objectivity.	Qualitative research acknowledges the existence of multiple interpretations of reality in the sense that every person who participates in a research will have their own interpretation of the event, occurrence, or phenomenon being investigated.
Researchers' stance	In the interest of maintaining objectivity, researchers position themselves as outside observers.	Researchers place themselves within the contexts of the events, occurrences or phenomena they are investigating.
Aim	Quantitative research aims to test and to prove or disprove the correctness of theories by	By contrast, qualitative research is developed to enable theories and insights to emerge after

Dimension	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
	commencing with clearly articulated hypotheses.	data has been analysed, without endeavouring to prove or disprove any particular hypotheses.
Purpose	Quantitative research methodologies are developed to generalise, predict and explain causal relationships.	Qualitative research methodologies are based upon contextualisation, interpretation and understanding the perceptions, beliefs and opinions of participants in research studies.

Sources: (Chivanga, 2016; Chivanga and Monyai, 2021)

In quantitative research, data can be quantified because these data are generally large and considered representative of the population. The results are taken as if they constitute a general and sufficiently comprehensive view of the entire population. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is not concerned with numerical representativity but with deepening the understanding of a given problem (Queirós et al, 2017). Furthermore, each of these two research methodologies has its own advantages and disadvantages in terms of application in research. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 list the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, respectively.

Table 0.2: Advantages and disadvantages of a quantitative research methodology

Advantages	Disadvantages
Involves a large sample.	Takes snapshots of a phenomenon and not an in-depth look. It measures variables at a specific moment in time and disregards whether the snapshot catches everyone looking their best or looking unusually disarranged.
Does not require a relatively a longer time for data collection.	Overlooks participants' experiences as well as what they mean by something in highly controlled settings because there is no direct connection between the researchers and the participants when collecting data. As a result,

Advantages	Disadvantages
	the collected data is objective.
Findings are likely to be generalised to a whole population or sub-population because it involves a larger randomly selected sample.	The positivism research paradigm leaves out the common meanings of a social phenomenon. It also fails to ascertain deeper underlying meanings and explanations.
Data analysis is less time consuming as it often uses statistical software such as SPSS.	Positivism cannot account for how the social reality is shaped and maintained or how people interpret their actions and those of others.

Table 0.3: Advantages and disadvantages of a qualitative research methodology

Advantages	Disadvantages
Produces a thick (detailed) description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences; and interprets the meanings of their actions.	Sometimes, contextual sensitivities are left out, and the focus is placed more on meanings and experiences.
The qualitative research approach (interpretivism) holistically understands human experience in specific settings. It is an interdisciplinary field that encompasses a wider range of epistemological viewpoints, research methods, and interpretive techniques of understanding human experiences.	The results of qualitative research may have low credibility because purely qualitative research may neglect the social and cultural constructions of the variables studied.
The interpretivism research approach is regarded as an ideographic research or the study of individual cases or events; and it can understand different people's voices, meanings and events.	A smaller sample size raises the issue of generalisability to the whole population in research.
It admits the researcher to discover the participants' inner experience and to figure out how meanings are shaped through and in culture.	The analyses of the cases take a considerable amount of time, and one can generalise the results to the larger population in only a very limited way.
Qualitative research methods, such as participant observation, unstructured interviews, direct observation and describing records, are most commonly used for collecting data.	

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>A qualitative research design (interactive approach) has a flexible structure as the design can be constructed and reconstructed to a greater extent. Thus, the thorough and appropriate analyses of an issue can be produced by using qualitative research methods, and therefore, the participants have sufficient freedom to determine what is consistent for them. As a result, complex issues can be understood easily.</p>	

Sources: (Chivanga and Monyai, 2021; Maxwell, 2013; Queirós et al, 2017; Rahman, 2016; Silverman, 2015)

Despite the shortcomings indicated in Table 3.3, this study opted for the qualitative research methodology. The subsequent subsections explain the nature and scope of the qualitative research and provide justifications for its suitability in this study.

3.3. The Nature and Scope of Qualitative Research

This study is purely qualitative in nature. The most basic definition of qualitative research is that it uses *words* as data, as opposed to quantitative research which uses *numbers* as data and analyses them using statistical techniques (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Consequently, the term ‘qualitative research’ was used in this study to refer to both techniques of data collection or data analysis and to a wider framework for conducting research or a paradigm. By paradigm is meant “the beliefs, assumptions, values and practices shared by a research community, and it provides an overarching framework for research” (Braun and Clarke, 2013:3). Admittedly, qualitative research is a rich, diverse and complex field (Madill and Gough, 2008), but it is essentially characterised by 10 fundamentals (Braun and Clarke, 2013). These 10 fundamentals of qualitative research are the following: (a) It is about meaning, not numbers; (b) it does not provide a single answer; (c) it treats context as important; (d) it can be experiential or critical; (e) it is underpinned by ontological assumptions; (f) it is underpinned by epistemological assumptions; (g) it involves a qualitative methodology; (h) it uses all sorts of data; (i) it involves ‘thinking qualitatively’; and (j) it values subjectivity and reflexivity (Braun and Clarke, 2013:19).

In its encapsulation of some or all of the 10 fundamentals listed above, qualitative research can aim to do one or more different things, such as 'give voice' to a group of people or an issue; provide a detailed description of events or experiences; develop theory; interrogate the meaning in texts; identify discourse or demonstrate the discursive features of a text; and/or engage in social critique. It is the flexibility of qualitative research in accessing and analysing all sorts of data that undergirded the researcher's choice of accessing the selected texts through the qualitative framework. Apart from this study being purely qualitative, it was also necessary to take a stand on which two strands of qualitative research, experiential qualitative research or critical qualitative research, were appropriate for the study (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Braun and Clarke (2013) say that experiential qualitative research validates the meanings, views, perspectives, experiences and/or practices expressed in the data. It is called 'experiential' because the participants' interpretations are prioritised, accepted and focused on, rather than being used as a basis for analysing something else. Although there were no research participants in this study, the researcher ensured that the poets' views, perspectives, experiences and interpretations, as captured in their poetry, were prioritised and reflected upon. Critical qualitative research, on the other extreme, takes an interrogative stance towards the meanings or experiences expressed in the data, and uses them to explore some other phenomenon (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Typically, critical qualitative research seeks to understand the factors influencing and the effects of the particular meanings or representations expressed. It is called 'critical' because it does not take data at face value, which means that analysts' interpretations become more important than the participants. Critical qualitative research was therefore the preferable stance because it allowed the researcher the leeway and autonomy to identify and interpret the selected poets' reflections of selfhood, identity and culture in their works. Closely interwoven with qualitative research are the research approach and paradigms adopted in this study, which the subsequent section discussed.

3.4. Research Approach and Paradigm

Although there are basically three types of research approaches, namely quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Kubayi, 2013:101), scholars concede

that the two main research approaches are qualitative and quantitative (Edlund and Nichols, 2019; Msweli, 2011). Msweli (2011:58) regards these two main research approaches as the deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive (quantitative) research is often adopted when a researcher is asking questions that require explanation of incidences that can be quantified, whereas the inductive (qualitative) research approach provides the mechanism for understanding latent, underlying or non-obvious issues in organisations, societies or communities (Msweli, 2011).

In an effort to unravel and understand selfhood, identity and culture as literary phenomena, this study adopted the qualitative approach. It was adopted because it is not only useful in textual critical analysis (Mahasha, 2014), but also “enables the researcher to obtain a good grasp of why things are occurring the way they do” (Nkhwashu, 2011:4). Mokgokong (2004:5) adds that “the qualitative research paradigm is usually used when a researcher’s aim is to understand human behaviour, and wants to probe into the meaning that people attach to specific events and their own experiences”. Blanche, Kelly and Durrheim (2006:272) proffer that the qualitative research method tries “to describe and interpret people’s feelings and experiences in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement”. Thus, the qualitative research approach was preferred in this study because it is interpretative as opposed to being numerical in nature and is concerned with inductive analysis, exploration, explanation, uncovering phenomena and generating new theoretical insights (Kubayi, 2013).

Furthermore, the inductive (qualitative) research approach allows the researcher to raise questions such as *why*, *how* and *what* differently from the deductive (quantitative) approach that provides well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable contexts (Msweli, 2011). Also, the scope of qualitative analysis covers a spectrum from *descriptive* (and exploratory) through to more interrogative, theorised, *interpretative* analysis; this spectrum closely aligns with the experiential/critical orientation discussed earlier (cf. Braun and Clarke, 2013). This study synthesised the descriptive and interpretative designs in the analysis of the selected Tshivenda poetry works. The two designs were harmonised because where the one is found wanting, the other becomes helpful in fortifying the analysis. For instance, descriptive work aims to ‘give voice’ to a topic or a group of people, particularly those we know little about, whereas qualitative analysis, which is

interpretative, aims to go further than descriptive analysis, unpicking the accounts that are given and asking questions like 'What is going on here?' and 'How can we make sense of these accounts?' (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Through this harmonisation, the researcher tried to gain a deeper understanding of the data that were gathered and had the freedom to look 'beneath the surface' of the data (selected texts).

The interpretive paradigm, in particular, involves taking people's subjective experiences as the essence of what is real for them (ontology), making sense of people's experiences by interacting with them (in this case, engaging the selected texts critically), 'listening' carefully to what they say (epistemology), and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and interpret information (methodology) (Blanche et al, 2006). In this way, the interpretative paradigm (also referred to as the phenomenological paradigm) is characterised by skills and techniques such as 'understanding in context' and the positioning of the researcher as the primary 'instrument' by means of which information is collected.

Employing the interpretive paradigm necessitated the researcher's commitment to understanding aspects of human phenomena (selfhood, identity and culture) in context as they are lived and articulated in context-derived terms and categories. This was done in an attempt to understand how and why the particular accounts were generated. Noting these accounts enabled the researcher to provide a conceptual account of the data and/or some sort of theorising around the data.

3.5. SAMPLING STRATEGY

Data can be drawn from people, objects, textual materials, and audio-visual and electronic records, among other sources (Msweli, 2011). Hence, with intellectual salience in mind, 16 Tshivenda poetry anthologies (textual materials) were purposively selected for analysis in this study. Purposive (judgemental) sampling, according to Patton (2002:230), entails selecting data cases (texts) on the premise that they will provide 'information rich' data to analyse (cf. Braun and Clarke, 2013; Kubayi, 2013). The 16 Tshivenda poetry anthologies were selected irrespective of whether they are classified as protest, praise, satire, lyric, song, dirge or epic.

The primary texts that were selected for analysis and interpretation are *Vhakale vha Hone* (Ngwana, 1958), *Zwiala zwa Venda* (Matshili, 1967), *Tsiko-Tshiphiri*

(Sigwavhulimu, 1971), *Mutambo wa Muhumbulo* (Mashuwa, 1972), *Vhungoho na Vivho* (Ratshitanga, 1972), *Fhulufhedzani* (Matshili, 1972), *Tsengela-Tsiwana* (Ratshitanga, 1973), *Ndi Nne Nnyi?* (Ratshitanga, 1973), *Mirunzi ya Vhuvha* (Sigwavhulimu, 1975), *Khonani Yanga* (Maqadzhe, 1985a), *Ipfi la Lurere* (Milubi, 1986a), *Vhadzimu vho Tshenuwa* (Ratshitanga, 1987), *Muimawoga* (Milubi, 1990), *Muungo wa Vhuhwi* (Milubi et al 1995), *Khaṅo ya Khunyeledzo* (Ladzani, 1995), and *Vhuṅungu ha Mutambuli* (Ladzani et al, 2006).

The texts were selected not only because they were conveniently accessible for analysis but also because their thematic foci maximised the chances of representing the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture. For a study of this nature, it would have been helpful to categorise the selected texts into three epochs, namely the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial periods, and assign each epoch a certain number of poetry texts on an equal basis. However, most of the selected texts fall within the colonial and postcolonial epochs. The only texts saturated with the Vhavenda's precolonial 'oraloric' outputs that may thus serve as indices into the Vhavenda's construction and articulation of selfhood, identity and culture before imperialism are *Vhakale vha Hone* (Ngwana, 1958) and *Zwiala zwa Venda* (Matshili, 1967). The titles of the texts translate into: 'The Ancient [People] Exist/The Ancient [People] Are Present' and [The] 'Crowns of Venda', respectively.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION

For analytical expediency, data was collected from the selected anthologies because of the texts' encapsulation of autobiographical, historical, ethnological, anthropological and self-referential aspects, among other distinctive features. The aforementioned aspects were further categorised into a predetermined set of leitmotifs, namely (a) theocentricity in Tshivenda culture and poetry; (b) anthropocentricity in Tshivenda culture and poetry; (c) myth, mystery and religion in Tshivenda culture and poetry; (d) concepts of marriage in Tshivenda culture and poetry; (e) appraisals of Tshivenda traditional dances in Tshivenda poetry; (f) constructions of men's and women's images in Tshivenda poetry; (g) some aspects of anthroponymy and onomastic ingenuity in Tshivenda culture and poetry; and (h) some aspects of cosmology, selenology and ethnoastronomy. The study was wholly a desktop study and secondary sources in the form of dissertations, theses,

textbooks and journal articles were consulted where necessary to buttress the claims made in the analysis and interpretation of the poems.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

According to Kubayi (2013:114), there are five types of data analysis, namely content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, semiotic analysis and thematic analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2016:221), on the other hand, list the following seven qualitative approaches to data analysis: phenomenology, discourse analysis, grounded theory, ethnography, action research, narrative analysis and thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2013:174) also acknowledge seven methods of qualitative data analysis, namely thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, grounded theory, discourse analysis, discursive psychology, conversational analysis and narrative analysis. Thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, grounded theory and discourse analysis are pattern-based, and discursive psychology, conversational analysis and narrative analysis are methods that require more advanced skills to use (Braun and Clarke, 2013). With these varied methods of qualitative data analysis at the researcher's disposal, this study was nevertheless restricted to thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis method was preferred because it is a flexible foundational method to qualitative data analysis and it afforded the researcher the leeway to identify themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Prior to its adoption in the study, it was imperative for the researcher to consider that there are different types of thematic analysis, namely (a) inductive thematic analysis; (b) theoretical thematic analysis; (c) experiential thematic analysis, and (d) constructionist thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The preferable and suitable variety of thematic analysis for this study was inductive thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2013) state that inductive thematic analysis aims to generate an analysis from the bottom (the data) up. Analysis is not only shaped by existing theory but also to some extent by the researcher's standpoint, disciplinary knowledge and epistemology. In crafting the analytical and interpretive prose, the researcher ensured that the analysis of the voluminous body of raw data gathered followed a particular sequence. The sequence entailed five phases (adapted from Kubayi,

2013:114–15), namely (a) organise, sort, classify or categorise the raw data obtained from the selected texts; (b) going through all the data to get a general sense of the ideas expressed by the poets; (c) detailed analysis undertaken by ‘coding’ the emergent patterns and themes; (d) integration and summary of data, mainly through inductive reasoning, and (e) interpreting or understanding the data. Guided by these steps, the researcher did the following:

- Categorised the data, which entailed organising the (raw) data in such a way that the researcher could go through each concept and theme in the data to be familiar with the data. The data was organised according to the recurrent literary themes observed from each poetry text.
- Perused the data to find and organise ideas and concepts in the hopes of locating salient themes, which upon being found were organised using words, phrases and expressions that denote aspects of selfhood, identity and culture in the selected works.
- Coded the data to build overarching themes in the data. As a result, categories and associated themes that gave a deeper meaning to the data were collapsed under three main overarching themes, selfhood, identity and culture.
- Synthesised the data to ensure the reliability and validity of the data analysis. In presenting the findings, diligent efforts and commitment to consistency were made to ensure the accuracy with which the findings and analysis of the selected texts represent the ‘reality’ of the Tshivenda culture, the Vhavana’s identity and ideology. Where possible, scholarly works related to the topic of this study were consulted and cited to substantiate the researcher’s claims, and where inconsistencies or contradictions emerged, justifications, conclusions or explanations were provided.
- Provided possible and plausible explanations for the findings by summarising the findings and themes. The findings and themes were re-evaluated to see if they could be related to the cultural experience of the Vhavana and their concept of their selfhood and identity.
- An overview of the final steps entailed a revisit to the findings and themes, which eventually led to the organisation of the information into a final report.

3.8. QUALITY CRITERIA

Since qualitative research must ensure quality and demonstrate integrity, competence, clarity, completeness and the legitimacy of the research process (Kubayi, 2013), the researcher took great care to safeguard this study's merits and rigour. The criteria that were considered to ensure the quality of this study were credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

3.8.1. Credibility

Cameron (2011:6) says the credibility of research is one of the important factors that established the research's trustworthiness and determines the congruence of the findings with reality. In other words, credibility emphasises the accuracy of data. This study ensured its credibility by comparing its approach and findings with the approaches and findings that were used successfully in previous comparable studies. The comparison was done to confirm congruencies or incongruences and to correct any claims that may have been inaccurate or hazy in the study.

3.8.2. Transferability

Transferability requires the researcher to provide sufficient data and context to enable the audience to judge whether the findings can be applied to other situations and contexts (Cameron, 2011:6). The researcher provided a thorough description of each theme and subtheme under study and appropriated them into the Tshivenda culture and the Vhavenda's general understanding of it. A thorough literature review was also helpful in fortifying the researcher's claims and ensured that scholarly justifications were provided on the subject. The researcher was aware that the technique of transferability may not always be applicable because the Vhavenda people fall into numerous clans (see footnote 6 in Chapter 1), and therefore, may not always exhibit similar ideological outlooks. Apart from the probable cultural and ideological disharmonies among the Vhavenda themselves, Tshivenda culture may possess attributes that are essentially foreign to Xitsonga culture, for example, which implies that what may be 'true' and 'real' may not necessarily be true in other cultures.

3.8.3. Dependability

Dependability refers to having sufficient details and documentation of the methods used so that the study can be scrutinised and replicated (Cameron, 2011:6). A detailed description of the methods used to gather and analyse the data was provided to ensure that the findings were factual and representative of the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity constructions and articulations, and culture. This might aid the replication of this study.

3.8.4. Conformability

Conformability refers to ensuring that the study's findings are the result of the experiences of the informants rather than the preferences of the researcher(s) and can be achieved through an audit trail of the raw data, memos, notes, data reduction and analysis (Cameron, 2011:6). The research findings were clearly linked to the raw data gathered. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 undergirded the confirmability of the study. The researcher also fully disclosed all the decisions taken and steps followed from the study's conception to its completion, including the collection and analysis of the data gathered in the final report.

3.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study did not involve research participants because it was solely desktop research. Data was acquired from primary texts and corroborated by secondary sources, such as theses, dissertations, journal articles and textbooks. However, in an effort to comply with and uphold ethics in research, the researcher sought permission to conduct the study from the Turfloop Ethics Research Committee at the University of Limpopo prior to the write-up of the thesis. Permission to conduct research was granted by the Turfloop Ethics Research Committee. Aspects such as harm, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent that often characterise ethical considerations cannot be addressed or appropriated in this study because there were no human research participants. Nevertheless, the researcher ensured that all the sources consulted in the study were duly acknowledged and further ran the thesis through the Turnitin programme to note any plagiarism and similarity indices to other studies prior to the final submission of the thesis.

3.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the research methodology used in the study. It proffered the nature of qualitative research and identified the research approach and paradigms that the researcher deemed the most suitable to the study. A section was devoted to explaining how the primary texts were sampled for analysis and on what basis. The data collection and analysis processes were elucidated, along with the method of data analysis adopted in the study. Attention was also paid to the quality criteria in an effort to highlight how the study ensured its rigour in as far as the quality of research is concerned. The ethical considerations for this study were discussed, although the common features of this aspect could not be appropriated in this study because of its nature. The next chapter is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the selected texts.

CHAPTER 4: SELFHOOD, IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN SELECTED TSHIVENḌA POETRY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the various techniques the selected poets used to articulate aspects of selfhood, identity and cultural understanding. The themes of selfhood, identity and culture are considered from both the Africanist and Euro-modernist views. Furthermore, the chapter divides into three broad categories, namely (a) theocentricity in Tshivendḍa culture; (b) anthropocentricity in Tshivendḍa culture, and (c) myth, mystery and religion in Tshivendḍa culture. Each of these categories further subdivides into five subsections. At the end of each category, deductions are made in light of the discussed aspects. These deductions form the fifth section of each of the three broad categories listed above. The subsections that constitute the second category include the selected poets' notions of humanity's origin, their agitations for self-identification and (re)presentation, and their linkage of identity, memory and place (home) as a means to reimagine their return to Matongoni (their ancestral home). The third category subdivides into Tshivendḍa drums and belief systems as heavily exploited leitmotifs among the selected poets and the legitimacy of discussing Tshivendḍa poetry within the frameworks of Afrocentricity, the hermeneutical approach and the postcolonial theory.

4.2. THEOCENTRICITY IN TSHIVENḌA CULTURE AND POETRY

Religion fundamentally comprises people's beliefs and encapsulates their self-definition. Mokgoatšana (1996) regards religion as the means through which humanity seeks to find the cause of its existence and how it relates to that cause. Religion, according to Mokgoatšana (Ibid), enables humanity to relate to the divine world that is inhabited by spirits, God and other celestial bodies that have control over the universe. Furthermore, religious beliefs give people a sense of security and hope (Mokgoatšana, Ibid: 97). A recurrent aspect in the definition or description of religion is the place of ultimate power. The notion of ultimacy presupposes the existence of an absolute power, a transcendental power that is above all creation. Christians believe in the existence of the only God whose gateway is his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. Mbiti (1969:90) posits that "African ontology is basically

anthropocentric: man [a person] is at the very centre of existence, and African peoples see everything else in its relation to this central position of man” (author’s insertion). Consequently, a person can be studied from an Africanist perspective in terms of the created person, the corporate person and the changing person (Mbiti, *Ibid*). Practically every African society has its own myth or myths concerning the origin of human beings. In both African and Christian ontology, God is often cited as the explanation of people’s origin and sustenance: it is as if God exists for the sake of human beings (cf. Mbiti, *Ibid*; Soyinka, 1976). In the ideological framework of African traditional religion, the spirits are ontologically in the mode between God and human beings and believed to possess the ability to describe or explain the destiny of man after physical life (Mbiti, *Ibid*: 90).

It must be emphasised that African ontology being anthropocentric does not mean that Africans are not theocentric in their own unique ways. For this reason, this section brings into sharp focus the selected poets’ projection of the traditional and modern conceptions of God among the Vhavenda. In the discussion of such conceptions, it is not only illustrated that “God is no stranger to African peoples” (Mbiti, *Ibid*: 29) but also that the Vhavenda’s traditional view of and belief in God generally juxtaposes with their view of and belief in *vhadzimu* (gods). The dialectics of God (Nwali) and ancestors (*Midzimu/Vhadzimu*) are considered first because most of the poets primarily gravitate towards a linkage of their sense of selfhood, identity and culture with either a deity or deities.

The discussion about God in Tshivenda culture would be incomplete if the Vhavenda’s perception of and relationship with Nwali/Raluvhimba is omitted. The Vhavenda’s belief in Nwali/Raluvhimba has been purported in most of their oral traditions since time immemorial (Mashau, 2004; Munyai, 2016; Stayt, 1931; Wessman, 1908). That different names are ascribed to the deity is still a subject of curiosity and even contention among scholars (see Rodewald, 2010). Schapera and Eiselen (1959), Mashau (2004) and Munyai (2016) regard Nwali and Raluvhimba as the same God whose attributes are one and the same, but Mafela (2008) only mentions Khuzwane and Raluvhimba as the two deities in whom the Vhavenda believe. According to Mafela (2008), Khuzwane is a good god who created the world and thereafter retired to a lazy rest, while Raluvhimba is closer to the God of the Christians in that he is linked to the beginning of the world and connected to

astronomical phenomena. Mafela (Ibid) does not comment on whether Raluvhimba is Nwali or not, leaving the impression that either it is a common parlance that Raluvhimba is Nwali among the Vhavenda and therefore does not need elucidation or he deliberately avoids contributing to the discussion to avoid exacerbating the ambiguities of reference. Notwithstanding, the names Raluvhimba and Nwali are used interchangeably in this study.

4.2.1. Nwali/Raluvhimba in Tshivenda Culture and Poetry

The noun 'Raluvhimba' constitutes the prefix *Ra-*, which is honorific and connected with the idea of 'father' (Munyai, 2016). *Luvhimba* is an eagle, that is, the bird that soars aloft and symbolises great power that travels through the cosmos using heavenly phenomena as instruments (Mafela, 2008; Munyai, 2016). Munyai (Ibid: 22) indicates that "a shooting star is Raluvhimba travelling; his voice is heard in the thunder, comets, lightning, meteors, earthquakes, prolonged drought, floods, pests, and epidemics; in fact, all the natural phenomena affecting the people as a whole are revelations of the great God". The Vhavenda believe that Raluvhimba appears in thunderstorms as a great fire near the chief's kraal, whence he booms his desires to the chief in a voice of thunder. Apparently, this fire always disappears before any person can reach it (Munyai, Ibid).

As for the name Nwali, its etymology and historical links have resonance with the Shona language in Zimbabwe where the name for God is 'Mwari'. Apparently, the Mwari referred to here is the *Mwari weMatonjeni* and not *Mwari weDenga* (Munyai, 2016:21; cf. Mashau, 2004). If this is anything to go by, then Milubi's poem titled "Mwari weDenga", which is analysed shortly, is certainly pregnant with meaning. *Mwari weMatonjeni* has historical links with the Singo people (one of the tribes among Vhavenda), and accordingly, there are links to and continuation in terms of the past because even before they migrated to the southern parts of Rhodesia and northern Transvaal, the Singo had been closely associated with the Mbire tribe and regularly sent delegations to the Matonjeni shrines (Daneel, 1970:44; Munyai, 2016:21).

The Tshivenda equivalent name for Matonjeni is Matongoni. Peura, the keeper at Matongoni shrines who was a Muvenda, is said to have remarked that the Vhavenda people only run to the shrines when a severe drought has convinced them that

Mwari is angry (Munyai, 2016). Although Mwari and Nwali were separated by the Limpopo River (Vhembe), which forms a boundary between the Limpopo Province and Zimbabwe, this river was regarded as an artificial boundary that failed to stop their regular movements to and from (Munyai, 2016). Information can also be drawn by comparing the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the Vashona, who are domiciled in Zimbabwe, and the Vhavenda. They share the same name for their supreme being. As noted in the analysis of Matshili's (1972:26) poem "Matongoni", the Vhavenda also refer to Raluvhimba (Nwali) as *Makhulu* (grandfather). It is possible that the reference to Nwali as *makhulu* (grandparent) emanates from the Vhavenda's view of their ancestors as mediators between them and Nwali. In this sense, it seems there is a hierarchy of authority in the religious view of the Vhavenda with Nwali as the most senior ancestor who occupies the immediate rank and the Vhavenda at the most junior level.

In a time where most Vhavenda have embraced Christianity, it is possible for one to presume that there is a distinction between Raluvhimba (Nwali) and the God of the Christians (also known as Jehovah). One would be justified to come to that conclusion, particularly considering that missionary 'invasion' and subsequent indoctrination entailed distinguishing African traditional religion from Christianity. The central thesis of this indoctrination was predicated on the denigration of the former worldview as pagan, heathen and false and the latter as both true and universal (Khorommbi, 1996; Mbiti, 1969; Mokgoatšana, 1996).

The missionaries genuinely believed that Africans had no concept of God and therefore needed to be taught about him (Khorommbi, 1996; Mashau, 2004; Mbiti, 1969; Mokgoatšana, 1996; Munyai, 2016). For this reason, the noun Nwali slowly but surely vanished from the Vhavenda's narratology (Khorommbi, 1996). Consequently, the name 'Nwali' was replaced by the noun '*Mudzimu*', which was a translation of *Modimo*, that is, *Mo-(go)dimol/Mo(ho)limo* ('The Place Where God Is', Setiloane, 1986:22). Therefore, the noun Mudzimu should be read with the foregoing meaning in mind. Evidently, the replacement of the natural name for God, Nwali, with Mudzimu was wrong. In Shona, the noun Mudzimu refers to "the ancestral spirit or spirit elder" (Gelfand, 1959:74). However, since the noun Mudzimu was used to refer to 'God' in Tshivenda by the missionaries, it eventually became a 'natural' name for God in Venda, despite it being an inaccurate designation, as will be noted shortly.

While the missionaries may have perceived Nwali as a pagan god and replaced his name with a wrong one, Ratshitanga (1972:24–25), however, revisits the noun Nwali and equates with Jehovah (the God of the Hebrews):

Jehova ndi u ri mini?

Nga Tshihevheru ndi u ri Nwali.

Kha Testamente Ntswa li siho ndi mini?

Ndi nge kani li sa tañwe nga vhañwali?

[What is meant by the designation Jehovah?

In Hebrew, it means Nwali.

Why is this name not there in the New Testament?

Is it probably because the writers did not like it?]

Vhañwali a huna (sic) tshe vha nanga,

Vhunga zwe vha ñwala a si zwe vha tama,

Vho tovhela zwe Muimeleli na Vhafunziwa vha kwanga,

Musi shango li tshi ri kha pfunzo yavho a li na vhuṭama.

[The writers did not write according to their own dictates,

Since what they wrote was not what they desired,

They followed what the Advocate and the Disciples prescribed,

When the world saw no need to embrace their doctrine.]

Musi Murena dzina ili a songo li londa,

Ndi nge shango a tama li tshi ñivha,

Uri u ira Mudzimu dzina a si u mu tonda,

Nge hu u ñikhetha na u ñivha.

[The Lord's neglect of this name,

Was because he wanted the world to know,

That giving God a name is not doing him good,

All of it was to separate and identify himself.]

Murena ene o ri ri mu ite Khotsi,

Vhunga roṭhe ri vhana Vhawe,

Na vhaḷa vhane shangoni vha ñiita mahosi,

Vha ralo u shengedza vhathu Vhawe.

[The Lord said we must make him our Father,

Since we are all His children,

Even those on earth who regard themselves as kings,

And thus tormenting His people.]

*Na tovhela dzina ilji ni si na vivho ni muxeli,
Ngavhe-ha ni muthu ni tende ndila u vhoneiswa,
Vhunga u tendelela izwo ndi hone vhutendi.
Tovhelelani zwenezwi ni talifhele u vhudziswa.*

[If you follow this name without a sense of jealousy, you are lost,
If only you, as a human being, consented to being guided,
Since such consent is true faith.
Follow this and always watch out for interrogations.]

(Ratshitanga, 1972:24–25)

The claim that Nwali is Jehovah is an aspect that deserves an independent study. Of particular interest here is that, as his point of departure, Ratshitanga wonders why the New Testament writers and translators disregarded the name Nwali in the first place. His dismissive conclusion is that this omission must have been due to the sovereign will of God. The poet resorts to this conclusion because he believes that the writers and possibly even the translators were inspired by the Holy Spirit in their writing and translation of the Bible. Unlike Ratshitanga who only wonders about the replacement of Nwali with Mudzimu, Khorombi explicitly blames the missionaries and Bible translators for this issue. Etymologically, *Mudzimu* resonates with the Sesotho word ‘*Modimo*’, as explained above. For the Vhavenda, ambiguities of reference may emanate from the noun ‘*Mudzimu*’ because *Mudzimu* formerly meant an ancestral spirit and now is commonly (wrongly) used to refer to ‘God’ (Nwali), the Supreme Being, as evident in Ratshitanga’s (1987:5) poem:

*Vhabebi vhashu vho ri vhudza,
Uri Mudzimu ndi muṅe washu,
Vhathu na zwithu zwoṅhe.
Ndi ngoho ndi muṅe washu.*

[Our parents told us,
That God is our master,
All people and all things.
It is true, he is our master.]

*Vho ri ndi ene fhedzi.
A divhaho zwithu zwoṅhe.
Riṅe ri divha zwe ra vhudzwa fhedzi,
Ene muṅe a divha zwithu zwoṅhe.*

[They said besides him, there is no other.
Who knows all things.
We only know what we were told,
He Himself knows all things.]

*Vho ri ndi ene mudzi,
Wa vhathu na zwivhumbwa zwothe.
A vha ene mudzimuli,
Wa ndala na dora zwothe.*

[They said he is the root,
Of all people and created things.
He is the one who alleviates,
All hunger and thirst.]

*Vho ri ha dzi u wanala,
Nga vha mu toḏaho.
Vhe avho vhe vha takala,
Avho vha mu divhaho.*

[They said he is easy to find,
To those who seek him.
The ones who are joyful,
Are those who know him.]

In the poem, Ratshitanga admits that he came to know God as 'Mudzimu' through oratoric transfers when he says *Vhabebi vhashu vho ri vhudza* (Our parents told us). Through this disclosure the poet reveals that the individual and corporate knowledge of God among the Vhavanḏa was before the advent of writing in Tshivendḏa sustained by means of oratoric transfers. In this transference, God was apparently introduced as Mudzimu and no longer as Nwali. God as 'Mudzimu' was introduced by the poet's parents as not only the absolute but also as the only true God. Ratshitanga uses the noun 'Mudzimu' (The Place Where God Is) to refer to God, but does not reflect on the etymology and contextual meaning of the noun among the Vhavanḏa. Sigwavhulimu (1971:53), on the other hand, provides what might be taken as both the etymological and contextual understanding of how the noun '*Mudzimu*' came to be used as a reference to God (Nwali) in Tshivendḏa culture:

*Iwe mudzi
Mudzi-mudzi
Mudzimu*

Mudzi-muthu

Mudzi wa muthu

[You are the root
The real root
Mudzimu (God)
The person's root]

U thoma muthu,
U fhedza muthu,
U mudzi wa u thoma,
U mudzi wa u fhedza
Mudzimu.

[You begin a person,
You finish a person,
You are the first (top) root,
You are the last (ultimate) root,
Mudzimu]

Through this poem Sigwavhulimu discloses how the Vhavenḁa came to understand, embrace and interpret a foreign concept of God that was brought to them by the Western missionaries. Sigwavhulimu illustrates how the noun 'Mudzimu' framed the Vhavenḁa's understanding of God. To begin with, Sigwavhulimu views and addresses Nwali as the root, *Iwe Mudzi* (You root). The root's fundamental function is to attach a plant to the earth. The same root transports nutrients/nourishment from the soil to the plant. As the root, God is the basis and foundation of all life and living. To the poet, *Mudzimu* is not just an option among many roots, he is the real and ultimate one; the one without whom nothing and no one can live. Thus, to Sigwavhulimu *Mudzimu* is the real root of a person. Ratshifanga (1987:5) concurs with Sigwavhulimu when he speaks about how he came to see Nwali as 'Mudzimu' by saying:

Vho ri ndi ene Mudzi
Wa vhathu na zwivhumbwa zwoḁhe.

[They said he is the Root
Of people and the whole creation.]

Although Sigwavhulimu's and Ratshifanga's descriptions of the meaning of the noun Mudzimu are insightful, they do not, however, elucidate the ontological and essential

nature of the personhood of this Mudzimu who has replaced Nwali. One would expect that as Christian poets (Khorommbi, 1996; Mafela, 2008), Sigwavhulimu and Ratshitanga would explain the Trinitarian personality of God as purported by Christians (Mafela, 2008). Phaswana's (1991:24) poem "Mudzimu na vhuvha hawe" (God and his nature) evinces the complexity that surrounds his nature and personhood, particularly his personality.

*Mudzimu U Mudzimiraru,
U Murwa, U Khotsi, U Muyamukhethwa,
Mudzimu, A u ho fhethu,
Vhuvha Hau vhu kunda ngelekanyomuthu
u tumbula.*

[God, You are Three-rooted,
You are Son, You are Father, You are Holy Spirit,
God, You are not anywhere,
Your nature is past finding out.]

*A hu na he Wa thoma,
A hu na hune Wa do fhelela,
U Murangi,
U Mukhunyeledzi.*

[You have no beginning,
You have no ending.
You are the First,
You are the Last.]

*Thalukanyo ye Wa ri nea,
Ndi tshifanyiso tsha Yau,
A si ya u divha Hau vhuvha,
Vhunga kha Yau yo tukufha[la].*

[The understanding You gave us,
Is a mere reflection of You,
It is not to know Your nature,
Since in that regard, human understanding is finite.]

*Ra kombetshedza u divha Zwau,
Ri pikisana na Hau vhuhulu,
Vhune ngaho ra do hatulwa,
Ra itwa zwa Lusifa.*

[If we insist on knowing Your attributes,
We compete with Your greatness,
Through which we will be judged,
And end up like Lucifer.]

Phaswana (1991) struggles to explain the Trinitarian personality of God and ultimately concludes that God's nature is too complicated a mystery for him or anyone else to explain effusively. Although other attributes of God such as omniscience and omnipresence are alluded to, in the final analysis God is knowable only to the extent that humanity's intelligence can reach. God is described as without a point of origin and cessation, and yet he is the first and the last in the scheme of existence. Humans can only partly understand the idea of God's existence and personhood. To the poet, God is without descent; he always was, always is and always will be. The poet prods his readers to refrain from probing any further into the person and nature of God because God will not fit within their finite minds.

According to Phaswana (1991), if people insist on trying to fully define and describe God, they will end up as Lucifer. In the Christian worldview, Lucifer is an archangel who was the epitome of beauty and was at some point domiciled with God (cf. Isaiah 14). Apparently his pride and selfish desire compelled him to attempt to dethrone God. As a result, he was cast out of heaven. Upon his fall, Lucifer (Morning Star) became Satan (God's sworn enemy). The poet warns the readers to tread carefully where it concerns investigating the personality and nature of God, lest they end up being puffed up with pride and selfish ambition, all of which might culminate in their separation from God.

In Tshivenda culture, Nwali/Raluvhimba is viewed as the supreme, eternal, creative and personal being from whom all beings and things emanate. Thus, any reference to the so-called 'Mudzimu' (beginning with a capital letter 'M') is inaccurately meant brings into light the Vhenda's conception of the creator God (Nwali), the source, agent and goal of all creation. People can and do communicate with God (Mokgoatšana, 1996). Although God is too complex to fully explain, God is within the reach of his creation (people). The basic means through which people reach God is prayer (ritual in the African context) and supplication, and we now turn to this aspect.

4.2.2. Communion with God in Tshivenda Poetry

When there are problems in and around creation on earth, the Vhavaṅḁa poets, chiefly those who espouse the Christian faith like Ratshiṅḁanga, Sigwavhulimu and Milubi, often offer solutions based on their Christian beliefs. For the purpose of this subsection, Sigwavhulimu's espousal of the Christian faith sets the tone for the other selected poets' communion with the God. In his poem "Khumbelo kha Yehova!" (Petition to Jehovah) Sigwavhulimu (1975:7) illustrates that the basic means through which a human being generally communes with God is prayer:

*Yehova! Iwe Yehova!
Ri sikele vhuthu vhu sa tshili;
Vhuthu vhu sa fi.
Ri sikele maṅḁo a sa vhoni;
Maṅḁo a sa kombodzali,
Maṅḁo a sa pofuli.*

[Jehovah! You Jehovah!
Create for us humanity that does not live;
Humanity that does not die.
Create for us eyes that do not see;
Eyes that do not become blinded,
Eyes that do not become blind.]

*Ri sikele nḁevhe dzi sa pfi,
Nḁevhe dzi sa dzingi.*

[Create for us ears that do not hear,
Ears that do not become deaf.]

*Ri sikulule Yehova,
Ri si tshile,
Ri tshile ri Muhumbulo.*

[Recreate us Jehovah,
So that we do not live,
We live being the Mind.]

Prayer, according to Mokgoatšana (1996), is a mode of communication between people and their creator. This communication can be direct or indirect, depending on the cosmogonic view of those praying (Mokgoatšana, 1996). In the poem above, Sigwavhulimu does not plead with the gods, as would be expected among the

Vhavenḁa; on the contrary, his plea is directed to Jehovah, equated with Nwali by Ratshiḁanga earlier. Sigwavhulimu believes that Jehovah is capable of providing his imagined creation and make them the kind of creation that neither lives nor dies. These contradictory terms, 'creation that neither lives nor dies' in Sigwavhulimu's poem are intended to depict the notion that such a creation does not yet exist in the present context.

The creation Sigwavhulimu suggests to Jehovah seems to be the kind that will not experience earthly problems and imperfections. He further pleads that his suggested creation should have eyes that do not see and do not become blinded. In this contradiction of terms 'eyes that do not see' are representative of faith, an idea that is premised on the Christian belief that the followers of Jehovah do not walk by (natural) sight but by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7 NKJV). Thus, for Sigwavhulimu, spiritual perception is true sight, whereas relying on only one's natural senses is blindness. To the poet 'eyes that do not become blind' are reserved for those who believe in Jehovah's ability to provide them with eternal life—the life that essentially comes by shunning carnality and embracing the life of Jehovah.

By 'ears that do not hear', the poet refers to the kind of creation that will not fall prey to distracting voices like the present creation does, in the poet's view. He states that his imagined creation should have 'ears that do not become deaf', implying that the kind of creation Jehovah should provide must always have its ears tuned to the frequency of Jehovah's voice to obey His statutes. In other words, this imagined and suggested creation will not live in disobedience to and disregard of Jehovah. Although the poet is displeased with creation in its present form, he does not doubt that Jehovah can still transform it into his imagined and suggested form. Hence, he pleads that Jehovah recreates humanity into a community of believers who will live in faith, obedience and harmony with their creator. The imagined and suggested recreation entails humanity assuming a living state that resonates with the state of Jehovah with neither beginning nor end.

That Nwali occupies the highest rank among the Vhavenḁa is captured in the poem "Mwali-We-Denga" (Mwali/God of Heaven) where Milubi (1990:59) addresses Nwali thus:

*Sa kholomo dzi itaho mavhuyahaya
Na riḁe dzashu mbilu dzi ralo dzo livha ha iwe*

*Ri phuphe ntho dza mbilu dzo rungwaho
Dzi sa do vhuya dza pfuka murango – dza vuva.*

[Like cattle heading home
So do our hearts direct themselves to you
Heal the wounds of the pierced hearts
Prior they cross the divide – and become rancid.]

As indicated earlier, Milubi's identification of God as *Mwali-We-Denga* (Mwali of Heaven/Above) is pregnant with meaning, particularly considering that there is *Mwali weDenga* (God of Heaven) and *Mwali weMatonjeni* (God of Mantonjeni/Matongoni), and by implication, *Mwali weMatonjeni* is not *Mwali weDenga* (Mashau, 2004:67). Mashau (Ibid) does not explain the distinction between the two deities and does not cite any sources to validate the assertion. Milubi's poem also merely designates Mwali as domiciled in heaven. Furthermore, most of the other selected poets make no distinctions between *Mwali weDenga* and *Mwali weMatonjeni*. Instead, they simply identify God either as *Nwali* or 'Mudzimu'. In this study, *Mwali weMatonjeni* and *Mwali weDenga* are viewed as one and the same deity in Vhavenda's traditional religion.

The foregoing assertion is made in light of the observation that *Mwali weMatonjeni* was also assigned qualities that designated him as *Mwali weDenga*, such as *nyadenga* (possessor of the sky/heaven); *wokumosoro* (the one above); *musiki* (from *kusika*, to create); *musikavanhu* (creator of humankind); *muumbapasi* (moulder or fashioner of earth); *mutangakugara* (you who sat or settled first); and *Mawanikwa* (you were found to exist) (Daneel, 1970; Mukonyora, 1999; Taringa, 2004). The interpretive notion emanating from these names is that of a deity who is both immanent and transcendent. According to Daneel (1970:17), "Mwari's close association with the apex of the ancestral world has contributed both towards His anthropomorphic image and has made Him the transcendent God, the One above".

In the above stanza, Milubi likens people to herds of cattle that after grazing in the faraway lands, find their way home. Likening people to cattle is not intended to bestialise them but to front the idea that in their countless multitudes all people eventually find their way back to *Nwali*, the creator. The people mentioned in the poem return to *Nwali* in sincerity of heart because they seek healing from him. Implicit in this idea is that *Nwali* of heaven possesses curative powers. According to

the poet, the healing needed is that of the heart, and although the poet does not disclose who or what pierced the hearts, an inference can be made. Milubi, as a protest poet (Ramakuela, 1998), speaks of the acerbic wounds inflicted on the Black masses during the apartheid regime in South Africa. Such an inference is made in light of the second stanza where the poet says the following:

*Iwe Mwali-we-Denga
U ɔo ri pfela-vho lini vhuṭungu
Wa ri kudza pfumo, ra ḽi doba
Ngaḽo ra runga – ra pfa ṭhodzi yaḽo i tshi nzwatimela mbiluni
Sa mufakwa we sinini mavuni a muṭavha.*

[You, Mwali of Heaven
When will you feel compassion for us
And throw us a spear, that we will pick up
And through it we pierce – and feel its tip sinking deep into the heart
Like a hoe sinking into sandy soil.]

The poet pleads for Nwali's compassion upon the wounded people. The question '*U ɔo ri pfela-vho lini vhuṭungu[?]*' (When will you feel compassion for us [?]) highlights the predicament in which Black people lived during the apartheid era. The poet suggests to Nwali that he should provide a *pfumo* (spear) to the wounded. The wounded will use this weapon to fight back and defeat their enemies. Nwali is thus depicted as the healer and a just God who defends the defenceless.

In the poem "Ri khathutshela" (Have mercy on us) Maḽadzhe (1985b:1–2) demonstrates proximity to divinity through an intercessory (prayer) mode of communication with God. Unlike Sigwavhulimu he does not invoke the name of the God to whom he pleads, but Maḽadzhe is nevertheless explicit in his allusions to God the creator. Maḽadzhe's omission of the name of the God to which he prays is noticeable because prayer usually has two main aspects, namely invocation of the name of the ancestor, god or God whose attention is sought, and announcement, which is the plea or request (Mokgoatšana, 1996). Maḽadzhe's poem is in consonance with Sigwavhulimu's poem in that both poems topicalise the belief that God can be approached and communed with. Sigwavhulimu imagines and suggests new creation to Jehovah, but Maḽadzhe's intercession first aims to mollify God and then to plead for his mercy on behalf of humankind. Maḽadzhe's appeals largely thematise humanity's defamation of God, as evinced in the following stanza:

*Milomo yashu yo u sema,
Zwanḡa zwashu zwo u paḡukanya,
Milenzhe yashu yo u kandekanya,
Hezwi zwoḡhe ndi tsumbo ya vhuhana,
Ri khathutshela.*

[Our mouths cursed you,
Our hands ripped you apart,
Our feet stomped on you,
All of this is indicative of infantile behaviour,
Have mercy on us.]

In this stanza the poet does not exclude himself from the vilification that humanity has directed at God. He says humanity not only derided God but also wilfully assumed an antagonistic stance against Him. The use of the *sema* (insult/curse), *paḡukanya* (rip apart) and *kandekanya* (stomp repeatedly) shore up the view that humanity has desecrated the name and personhood of God. This behaviour, in the poet's mind, is nothing but a reflection of humanity's immaturity. Hence, the poet not only acknowledges humanity's infantile understanding but also views humanity as desperately in need of its creator's patience and mercy. The poet hopes that with the extension of God's mercy to humanity, humanity will in turn eventually come to maturity and gain a true and possibly full understanding of who God is. This understanding will subsequently propel humanity towards reverence of God. The second stanza highlights God's indifference to humanity as a result of its irreverence to Him.

*Thabelo dzashu dzo u sinyusa,
Nyimbo dzashu dzo u hoya,
Zwiito zwashu zwo ri fhandekanya
Na iwe u funaho vhugala,
Ri khathutshela.*

[Our prayers have angered you,
Our songs have been pretentious to you,
Our deeds separated us
From you who loves glory,
Have mercy on us.]

The confession '*Thabelo dzashu dzo u sinyusa*' (Our prayers have infuriated you) fronts the poet's awareness that when God is not infuriated by his people, he

delights in their prayers. This advances the idea that God delights in communion with His people but that this communion is based on people's respect for God. Therefore, where God is dishonoured, humanity is left in misery and infantile behaviour. In the next stanza, the poet shows humanity's forgetfulness of its limitations.

*Ro hangwa zwauri vhutshilo ndi hau,
Ra ita mbambe na lufu,
Ra zwi vhona musu ro no godima
Zwauri zwothe ndi zwau,
Ri khathutshela.*

[We forgot that life belongs to you,
We compete with death,
And realise after we disappear into oblivion
That all things are yours,
Have mercy on us.]

In its derision of God, humanity forgot/forgets that God is the author and finisher of all life. Here, the poet expresses his basic insight into the Christian faith that God is not only the creator but also that upon the cessation of earthly life all people will meet their creator. One may thus assert that Maḡadzhe views the termination of human life, which traditionally has been seen as the departure of the soul from the body (Mafela, 2008), as a transition from one life (temporary) to another (eternal). It must be stated at this juncture that the Vhavanḡa see death as both a transition between the life of this earth and life in the spiritual world and as a continuation of life begun on earth (Mafela, 2008; Stayt, 1931). Thus, to the Vhavanḡa death means joining the ancestors in a spiritual world where the living-dead continue to exert their (powerful) influence on their relatives on earth. In the Christian community, however, there are two types of death, physical death and spiritual death (ultimate death). When Maḡadzhe says, '*... musu ro no godima*', he is referring to physical death. Maḡadzhe does not believe in physical death only, and he is, in fact, most concerned with spiritual death through which humanity will realise that their reverence of God will yield great and good rewards, including eternal life, while derisions of God will result in eternal regret and destruction. Thus, to Maḡadzhe, how people live on earth has direct and practical implications in the afterlife. In the next stanza, Maḡadzhe goes on to advance the idea that catastrophes characterise life on earth because people have turned their backs on God:

*Maḍumbu a vho vhudzula a sa imi,
Ḍuvha ḷi vho tota tombo lwa tshoṭhe,
U penya ha ḽaledzi a hu tsha vhonala,
Mimuya yashu i vho shengela sa shango
Ri khathutshela.*

[Storms bluster ceaselessly,
The sun scorches at its maximum capacity,
The shine of the stars is no longer seen,
Our souls are suffering as a people
Have mercy on us.]

The poet insists that humanity's vilification of God has negative consequences. Such consequences involve the universe eventually working against humanity. Along with this submission, the poet states that the displeasure of the creator comes with misfortunes such as storms, scorching heat from the sun and the disappearance of stars; all of which result in humanity's agonies. It is thus not strange in the Vhavenda community that God is consulted for definition and explanations of the complexities of both earthly and heavenly life. Christian believers in particular hold the view that there are possibilities of creating and sustaining strong bonds with God only when this God does not compete with other gods for humanity's attention.

Also in the intercessory mode and mood of communication with God, Ratshitanga (1987:44) pleads for Nwali's intervention on behalf of the subjugated and oppressed in the poem "Nwali Thetshelesa" (Nwali, Listen).

*Nwali thetshelesa
Riṅe vha lilaho
Miṭodzi i sa tsha bva,
Vha no nga vhorṅe.*

[Nwali listen
To us who cry
Tears that no longer come,
Those who are like us.]

The poem is a prayer that is clearly directed at Nwali. It must be mentioned here again that Ratshitanga perceives Nwali, the God of the Vhavenda, as Jehovah (God of the Hebrews). By so doing, Ratshitanga blurs the boundaries and distinctions between prayer in the Judeo-Christian worldview and ritual in the African context.

Ŋwali is implored to hearken the cry of the people who are simply identified as “us” in the poem. The poet clearly depicts Ŋwali as a God who listens to “us” and those who might be in a similar predicament as “us”. In the first stanza, the poet mentions that the people for whom he prays have cried for so long that tears no longer come out. It is of critical contextual significance that in the poem Ŋwali is depicted as a God who listens to the cries of his people. In this way, Ŋwali is introduced as a God who is not indifferent to the suffering and prayers of his people; he is affected by what affects them. Furthermore, Ŋwali not only listens to a select few but listens and responds to anyone who sincerely cries out to him for help. This depicts Ŋwali as an impartial and just God. In this sense, Ŋwali is portrayed not as the God of the Vhavenda only but also as the God of all people (Khorombi, 1996). The poet goes on to say:

*Ro tangwa nga maswina,
Vha tamba nga riŋe.
Mikosi ya maṭhupho,
vha sea yeneyo.*

[We are surrounded by enemies,
Who ill-treat us.
Our cries of sorrow,
Are comedy to them.]

The second stanza sheds light on why the prayer is addressed to Ŋwali. The poet presents the predicament in which the oppressed who cry out to God find themselves. The oppressed cry out to God because they are surrounded by enemies. Their enemies treat them with cruelty, and when they express their agonies because of this brutality, their oppressors (enemies) laugh at their misery. God is thus called to intervene and help the oppressed. In the next stanza, the poet says:

*Masimu vho govhela,
Na mvula i sa ni.
Madanga o fhalala,
Ro sala ri si na.*

[They took our fields,
Rain no longer comes.
Our kraals are empty,
We are left with nothing.]

Still presenting his plea, the poet implores God to notice that the fields of the oppressed have been taken by their oppressors. The poet deems this issue important to raise to God because the Vhavenda were, and to a certain extent still are, an agricultural community (Khorommbi, 1996). The Vhavenda depended largely on what the fields yielded for their livelihood. Taking away their fields equals taking away their means of sustaining their livelihoods. Also, linked to this is the poet's reminder to God that the Vhavenda's flocks have disappeared. This line is important to the poet and should be equally important to God because quite a large number of Black farmers lost their livestock due to the lack of grazing lands because their land was taken from them (Khorommbi, 1996). The government of the day contributed to the problem by taking control of the Vhavenda's land. Later on, it is shown that displacement and dislocation from their native land (home) is a subject of interest for the Vhavenda poets. Further aggravating the problem was that on top of this there is no rain. On this, the poet essentially draws on the Vhavenda's ancient understanding of Nwali as the rainmaker (see Section 2.7, Chapter 2). Ratshitanga also says:

*Vhadzimu vho tshenuwa,
Zwifho a ri tshee na.
Ho sala u tovhela,
Kha vho ri thubaho.*

[The gods are astonished,
Our sacred places are gone.
All that is left is for us to follow,
Those who captured us.]

The recurrent problem in Ratshitanga's poetry is that he espouses both the African traditional worldview and the Judeo-Christian worldview. In the above stanza, Ratshitanga's ambivalent stance is evinced in his perception of spiritual reality and authority (Khorommbi, 1996). In Ratshitanga's view, the hierarchy of spiritual authority has God (Nwali) at the top and the *Vhadzimu* (ancestors) at the bottom. His perception of African traditional religion lends support to Khorommbi's (1996:100) assertion that,

The two realities are not in conflict with each other. The ancestors (*Vhadzimu*) have been living on earth worshipping Nwali. When they die, they go to be with Nwali. In the whole exercise of worship, they are not excluded.

Hence, in the poem, the poet bemoans the Vhavenda's loss of their traditional and ancient ways of worship. The captors referred to in the poem are the missionaries who came to Venda and imposed their religion on the people. Ratshitanga is unhappy that the Vhavenda are not only suffering at the hands of their captors but also because their captors contributed to the loss of their ethnic heritage. It is a problem to the poet that the Vhavenda are now the 'followers' of their 'captors'. The impression given by the poet is that the new religion does not find resonance with the Vhavenda's cosmogonic and cosmological views. In the fifth stanza, the poet announces the effects of the Vhavenda's capture.

*Vhutshilo vho shandula,
Lufuno lwo no fa.
Ri teka-teka rothe,
Mbilu dzi ofhaho.*

[Life has changed,
Love has died.
We are all wandering,
With fearful hearts.]

Not only has traditional life changed but love has also died in Venda, the poet avers. Ratshitanga thus sees missionary Christianity as both devoid of love and disruptive of the African way of life. Although in their motives and ideological convictions the missionaries may have believed that their religion brought love and salvation, to the poet, it did more harm than good. Ratshitanga blames missionary Christianity for the disruption and destruction of African communal life. According to Ratshitanga, a community that once lived in harmony and love, now lives fearfully and somewhat ambivalently because of the new religion.

*Ipfa khumbelo dzashu,
Ri fhe zwo tuwaho.
Ri vhuzelele hafhu,
Murahu havhudi.*

[Listen to our plea,
Restore to us what was taken,
Let us return (again),
To the beautiful past.]

In his conclusion, the poet issues a communal request to Nwali to hearken their prayer. The request is that Nwali restores what was lost. The allusive quality of '*Ri fhe zwo tuwaho*' (Restore to us what was taken) encapsulates the lost land, flocks, freedom and the traditional ways of African life. It seems Ratshitanga propagates the idea that the ancient ways that have been dismantled were better than the new ways. He asks for the opportunity to be returned to the beautiful past; although he does not clearly describe what he means by this request. One can only insinuate that Ratshitanga refers to the olden days when the Vhaventša lived in harmony and love as one family under one God (Nwali) before the missionary invasion. In this poem, Ratshitanga depicts God (Nwali) and gods (Vhadzimu) as living in harmony; an aspect he contests in another poem that is discussed later.

4.3. Ancestor Veneration in Tshiventa Culture and Poetry

It is difficult, if not impossible, to speak of Tshiventa traditional religion without touching on the subject of ancestors (Munyai, 2016). Munyai (Ibid) proffers that in traditional religion the ancestors are believed to be nowhere and yet everywhere, and that it is difficult to speak of them comprehensively. All the same, an ancestor is generally believed and perceived to be (a) a person who died a good death after having faithfully practised and transmitted to their descendants the laws left to them by their ancestors; (b) a person who contributed to the continuation of the genealogical line by leaving many descendants; and (c) a person who was a peacemaker and a link that fostered communion between the living and the dead through sacrifice and prayer (Munyai, Ibid: 31–32). Moreover, a firstborn is an excellent candidate to become an ancestor because they are able to maintain the chain of the generation in a long genealogy, thus making the right of the firstborn an inalienable right (Munyai, Ibid). In Tshiventa culture, the ancestors are thus those people who died at a mature age or as parents. Or, the ancestors are the people who form part of the genealogy of the family or the family's predecessors. One might add that the unmarried or infants that died cannot be accorded the status of ancestry after death as they had no offspring to whom to minister.

Mbiti (1969) regards the ancestors as the departed people of up to five generations prior. These departed people are said to be in a different category from the ordinary spirits. Mbiti (Ibid) further categorises the departed people into two periods, namely

the *sasa* period and the *zamani* period. According to Mbiti (Ibid), the ancestors are still in the *sasa* period, in other words, they are expressed as still existing in the present time, the recent past and the near future. Recently departed people whose time overlapped with the people still on earth are called the *sasa*, or the living-dead (Mbiti, Ibid). The living-dead are classified thus because they are believed to not be wholly dead since they live on in the memories of those who have survived them. By implication, the living-dead are in a state of personal immortality and their process of dying is not yet complete. The living-dead are chiefly believed to be the closest link that humans have with the spirit world.

Moreover, humans and the living-dead are bound together by their common *sasa*; that of the living-dead is, however, fast disappearing to the *zamani*. When the last person knowing an ancestor dies, that ancestor leaves the *sasa* for the *zamani*, that is, the dead. Generally, the *zamani* are not forgotten but revered (Munyai, 2016). The living-dead are still people and have not yet become 'things'; they return to their human families from time to time and share meals with them, although symbolically (Mbiti, 1969; Munyai, Ibid). It is with this understanding that in traditional African societies deceased relatives are consulted for definitions and explanations of the intricacies of life. The consultation is sustained by the belief that these departed relatives still have strong connections with the living and that they still maintain ties through the sacrifices and offerings given to them (Mokgoatšana, 1996).

Among Northern Sotho speakers, for example, it is said that ancestors "live in the spiritual world of the livingdead" and "liaise with their descendants on earth, and carry their concerns to the Almighty" (Mokgoatšana, 1996:117). Communion with the departed relatives is anchored by the African traditional view of prayer, which Mokgoatšana (Ibid) says is centred on the expression of the community's plight through intermediaries who direct these concerns to the Almighty. Thus, in the African traditional context, an act of worship is directed to God and not the ancestor; the ancestors are used here as a link between the living and the supreme God whose power cannot be faced in peoples' ordinariness (Mokgoatšana, Ibid: 129). Therefore, the ancestors are identified as people's liaison and are believed to channel the information to their most senior, that is, God, meaning that all ceremonies, rituals and functions of note are communicated by people to these very ancestors.

Mokgoatšana's (1996) postulations on the characteristics of African traditional religion resonate with the Tshivenda traditional religion which, according to Mashau (2004), is comprehensive because the Vhavenda view life in totality (cf. Van Rooy, 1978:3). This comprehensive view is essentially based on the Vhavenda's perception of the cosmos as a hierarchy of power where each of the entities involved (humankind, ancestors and Nwali) has its own place in the totality, yet still influence one another (Munyai, 2016). In the Vhavenda's traditional worldview, the lesser powers in the hierarchy, including humankind, do not have direct access to God. It is from this understanding that the Vhavenda's ideas of

'limited cosmic good', priority of human relations, and influence of the 'spirits and witchcraft' in the hierarchy play a significant role. Salvation, blessedness and peace depend on whether man is integrated in this totality, and then in his right place The Vhavenda people believe that no misfortune just happens by itself without a cause Consequently, they believe that certain misfortunes are caused by witchcraft (Munyai, 2016:18).

The Vhavenda's belief in ancestors implies that they also believe in life after death. This is accentuated by the fact that in their traditional religion the Vhavenda try by all means to maintain their bonds with the living-dead (Mashau, 2004:69). According to Myburgh (1981), many people with non-specialised cultures believe that the spirit of man survives after death and has greater powers than the living. Another common belief is that the spirits of the dead can influence the living and their circumstances for good or evil, and because of this, these spirits are feared and/or venerated.

In African traditional religion, it is believed that only the spirits of one's own ancestors have power over one (Matshidze, 2013). This section, therefore, looks at the veneration of and communion with the ancestors in Tshivenda culture in light of the role and significance of three intermediaries, namely the medium of *tshilombo*, traditional healers, and the *makhadzi*. The word 'veneration' as used in the previous sentence implies that respect is accorded to the departed relatives by those still living on earth. Intermediaries are considered here because in Tshivenda culture an individual does not have the right to approach the family ancestors without the knowledge and assistance of members of the family (Munyai, 2016). According to Munyai (Ibid: 42 – 43),

The ancestors could be approached when there is a need in the family, or a crisis, or when it has been firmly established that a married woman in the family is barren. In most cases, the head of the family or aunt (makhadzi), who has been trained to take charge of such matters, is endowed to take sacrificial responsibility for approaching the ancestors. Although there are different ceremonial sacrificial offerings, the procedure remains the same.

One of the sacrificial ceremonies that Munyai alludes to in the above excerpt is called *u luma* (to bite), which in most cases is conducted before the first fruits and green vegetables are eaten. In Tshivenda culture, a ceremonial sacrifice should be offered to the ancestors who usher in the celebration of the first fruits. It is on this occasion where the priest or priestess takes charge of the necessary procedure. Needless to say, the ceremony is treated in a dignified manner (Munyai, 2016:43). On this occasion, the priestess addresses the living-dead as if she were speaking to living human beings. Stayt (1931:255) records that the priestess would on this occasion say, for example, “I offer to all of you, and I deprive none among you. What remains on the ground belongs to me and the young ones”. It must be stated in all fairness that the name Nwali is never mentioned in the family circle during these offerings (Munyai, 2016:43). In essence, the ancestors are not on the same level as Nwali because the ancestors were people who lived, and after death they were promoted, as assumed by the living, to a position of ancestry.

4.3.1. The Medium of Tshilombo in Tshivenda Culture and Poetry

The aspect to which we now turn is when the living-dead are believed to reveal themselves through a dead spirit. Apparently, this dead spirit can manifest itself as a person through whom messages or instructions are imparted to the specific family or clan (Munyai, 2016). To elucidate on this, it is imperative to implicate the dance called *malombo* in Tshivenda culture. This dance is believed to be one of the rituals through which the spirit(s) of the living-dead find(s) expression. We rely heavily on Ngwana’s (1958:28) poem called “Malombo” as a point of reference to situate this discussion within the confines of this study’s thematic interests.

*Dzi a takuwa ngoma dza malombo,
Vhomatsige a vha tsha amba na muthu;
Hu pfala tshela na ngoma fhedzi;
Hu pfala nyimbo dza Matongoni.*

[The malombo drums are rising,
Master drummers no longer talk to anyone;
Only the handle rattles and the drum are heard;
Matongoni songs are heard]

This stanza brings into sharp focus a connection between drums and belief in Tshivenda. This connection is most notable in the traditional ritual dance called *malombo*, an aspect that the poet affirms in the first line of the poem. As a traditional ritual dance, *malombo* is performed seasonally in Tshivenda culture, unless there are some obligations from the ancestors that it must be performed at a particular time for a certain reason (Nengovhela, 2010:17). This ritual dance is performed when there is a person who has an ancestral call that they must start operating in.

The person cannot start operating without the connection to and endorsement from the ancestors, and therefore, for the person to be connected, the *malombo* ritual dance must be performed first (Nengovhela, 2010). Another name for this ritual dance is *u tika ngoma* (to hold/keep the drum in balance). The most important part of this ritual is *u wisa midzimu* (to settle the spirit of the gods). When the ritual is performed, the dancers wear special clothes, and one of the cloths worn is *ñwenda mutshena* (white Tshivenda traditional cloth), which is used to protect family members who are around from the bad luck that can be passed to them when the ritual is being performed. It is believed that the spirits that are in the dancer(s) can be passed to the people close by if they are not protected (Nengovhela, 2010). Thus, the first line of the poem is embedded with this cultural meaning by its mere mention of *ngoma* and *malombo*.

Vhatshini vho fara tsanga na thonga;
Vho ambara miñadzi ya Tshilemba.
Vha a dzunguluwa vha shela milenzhe;
Vhabvumeli vha vho tou honedzela.

[Dancers hold the weapon and staff;
Donned in Tshilemba hats.
They gyrate and participate;
Back up singers consequently produce deep tones.]

In the performance of *malombo* and ancestor veneration songs, *matsige* (the master drummer) beats the *ngoma* (drum) (Nemapate, 2009). The sound of the master drum (*ngoma khulwane*), the membranophones and the hand-rattle are bound together by

the rhythm of the *malombo* songs when performed, as stated by the poet in the second and third lines of the first stanza. The performers of *malombo* songs depend on the rhythm of the aforementioned three components. These are accompanied by the melody of the caller and the harmony of the respondents (Nemapathe, 2009). The songs that are sung during the *malombo* ritual dance are classified as *Matongoni* songs, as acknowledged by the poet in the first stanza.

The *malombo* songs are strictly sung for the veneration and communion with the ancestors. In most cases, according to Nengovhela (2010), a spirit of the ancestors is believed to take possession of an individual and such a spirit communicates through this possessed individual. In traditional Tshivenda culture, “a person who is possessed by such a spirit is always feared, despite being regarded as conciliatory in his or her action; and becomes honoured by the family, for he or she has acquired power from the ancestors” (Munyai, 2016:9). Thus, in the *malombo* ritual dance, a possessed person is a human oracle through whom the ancestral spirits communicate with the living members of the family. Munyai (2016:10) submits that the *malombo* dance takes place over several days and nights; the activity is associated with healing and other supernatural activities. Although music plays a significant role in the *malombo* dance, it does not precipitate the state of possession but encourages the possessed to dance faster. In the next stanza, the poet still emphasises the power and essence of the *malombo* songs.

Hu pfala lwone luimbo luhulwane;

Hu khou imbwa lwone lune lwa ri:

Ndo vha sia vho lala;

Mulamboni wa Tavha.

[Only the great song is heard;

While they sing the one that says:

I left them sleeping;

At the Tavha River.]

The main theme of the *malombo* song, according to the poet, is ‘I left them sleeping’. ‘Them’ referred to here are the living-dead either in the *sasa* or in the *zamani* period. These living-dead are said to be sleeping, which implies that they are resting. However, even in their state of rest they still deploy messengers to interact with those they left behind on earth. Notable in the above stanza is that the spirit believed

to have possessed a human being during the *malombo* is capable of speaking. In such an instance, it is believed that the *tshilombo* spirit (plural *zwilombo*) entered the host.

This *tshilombo* spirit is believed to be either that of the offended ancestor, sometimes extremely remote, or a troublesome homeless spirit with no genealogical connection with the person whom it entered (Munyai, 2016). On the latter, it is believed that such homeless spirits wander about searching for a host within whom they can find refuge. Therefore, in some cases, such homeless spirits could even be the *tshilombo* of foreigners (Munyai, 2016). Possession by a *tshilombo* is often indicated by the afflicted person suffering from a prolonged or serious illness. Once this had been diagnosed by a *nanga* (traditional healer), a *malombo* ritual specialist, called *maine wa tshela* or *ngaka ya malopo* in Northern Sotho (Sodi, 1998), is called in. The poet's use of the word *tshela* (hand-rattles) in the third line of the first stanza is intended to bring the role and significance of this ritual specialist in the *malombo* dance to light. This ritual specialist is believed to go into a trance-like state during which they are believed to be in contact with the ancestors (Sodi, 1998).

According to one of Munyai's (2016) respondents, the treatment of the possessed person is divided into two phases. During the first phase, the *maine wa tshela* visit the afflicted person in her home. The pronoun 'her' is used here because it is generally women who are possessed, although on rare occasions men can also suffer this fate (Munyai, 2016). Then a drummer who knows the *malombo* beat is summoned and word is sent out to the extended family, especially the woman's relations, and the wider community, stating that the afflicted person needs their help. When the drumming begins, those people in the community who had previously been possessed arrive to take an active role in the proceedings. Their comrade is put into a trance by the *maine wa tshela* and made to dance, accompanied by the *maine wa tshela* and those previously possessed from the district in relays, until she collapses (Munyai, *Ibid*: 57).

During the *malombo* dance, attempts are made to get the *tshilombo* spirit to identify itself and to state its needs. If it refuses to do this, after a short pause, during which the medium is rubbed with magical substances, the medium is made to dance to the point of collapse again. This process is repeated, sometimes over a period of a number of days, until the *tshilombo* finally cooperates. As attested to by the poet in

the next stanza, when the *tshilombo* finally cooperates, it speaks in Tshikalanga, Tshivenda and a mixture of the two or in a language intelligible only to the initiated:

Vhatshini vha amba nga Lukalanga;
Vha amba lwa vhadzimu vhavho;
Ndi lwone lwa vhomakhulukuku;
Vha rerela midzimu yavho.

[The dancers speak the Lukalanga language;
They speak their ancestors' language;
It is the language of the ancient;
They worship their gods.]

Thus, the spirits of the living-dead possessing the medium during the *malombo* dance are said to be bilingual (Munyai, *Ibid*). They speak the language of humans, with whom they lived until 'recently', and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically. In this stanza, the poet mentions that the dancers speak Lukalanga, which is identified by the poet as the language of the gods. Lukalanga or Tshikalanga is also spoken in western Zimbabwe by the *Vhakalanga*. Stayt and Dederen (cited in Kirkaldy, 2002) argue that the *malombo* cult is of Karanga (Zimbabwean) origin. According to the poet, Lukalanga is the language of the living-dead and is used by the *malombo* dancers to commune with and venerate their ancestors. The dancers' verbal expression in the Lukalanga language is reflective of the belief that the living-dead are still part of their human families and that people still have personal memories of them.

If the *tshilombo* spirit proves to be a malicious, homeless spirit, it is exorcised, trapped in a stick and thrown into a tree in the forest (Munyai, *Ibid*: 57-58). It is believed that the *tshilombo* will remain there unless some unfortunate individual touches the stick, releasing the spirit and becoming possessed in the process. According to Munyai (*Ibid*), it must be noted that it is difficult to propitiate the needs of foreign spirits as the *Vhavana* cannot trace their lineage. In the case of the ancestral spirit, however, the aim is not to exorcise the *tshilombo* but to persuade it to temporarily occupy the body of the afflicted person and dance in a manner that is not injurious to their health (Munyai, *Ibid*). In the process of stating its demand, the *tshilombo* can identify items such as clothes, ornaments, ancestral spears or axes (male ritual objects), or various types of cloth. Munyai indicates that sometimes

these items cannot be supplied immediately but a promise is made and they are supplied later. In the poem, the poet alluded to some of these items, such as *tsanga* (axe) and *muñadzi* (hat). The spirit can also demand the sacrifice of a goat.

In the second phase of the treatment, the medium joins a society of the *malombo* dancers. This group consists of previous patients. In addition to assisting the newly possessed, the group dances at intervals (annually at least) at the homestead of the eldest *maine wa tshela* in the community or the royal *khoro* (court). While a woman is possessed by the *tshilombo*, her husband and relatives has to treat her with great consideration and respect, saluting her as if she is a *khosi* (paramount king). Once possessed, a woman is never the same again because from then on the spirit will possess her from time to time when it has requests that it wants fulfilled or when it requires propitiatory gifts (Munyai, 2016). Hearing the *malombo* beat is enough to call the spirit to re-enter her and take part in the dancing.

Overall, Ngwana's poem confirms that the Vhavenda not only commune with their ancestral spirits but also do everything in their power to pacify them in when they are offended or troubled. The *malombo* dance, which is linked to their ancestral home Matongoni, and the beat of the drum are some of the performative and dramaturgical techniques through which they persuade their gods to speak to them. Although Nwali is not mentioned in the *malombo* dance, the linkage of the dance to Matongoni implies that the Vhavenda of old communed with both their ancestors and Nwali as Matongoni is designated as Nwali's sacred place. It seems Nwali (either of *Matonjeni* or *weDenga*, or both) is not offended by this engagement with the intermediaries. This raises yet another debate, apart from the postulations that there is a distinction between *Mwali weMatonjeni* and *Mwali weDenga*, that there seems to be no clash between the veneration of the ancestors and the worship of Nwali in the traditional religion of the Vhavenda. It raises problems because if the Nwali the Vhavenda believe in is the same as Jehovah espoused by Christians, the clash emanates from the fact that Christians do not endorse communion with the dead; in fact, such communion is viewed in a very negative light. The extreme lengths to which this view stretches are notable in Beuster's testimony (cited in Kirkaldy 2002:342–343) about his experience of the *malombo* dance in Venda. The testimony, dated 18 September 1874, is worth quoting in almost its full length, and reads thus:

For several days now, by day and by night, I heard the racket of drums, flutes and bells and the yodelling coming from a village. I heard that an idol-worshipping feast was being celebrated there. Today I made my way to the village. I found many people gathered there. They formed a circle around several dancing women.

Four of these women were specifically decorated with ostrich plumes and coloured clothes. They were the instigators of the feast. Their forefathers, who were now gods, had come to them, had spoken to them and had taught them all sorts of wonderful things, like to heal sicknesses, to cast spells etc. I was told they find the cause of the illness through smell and in the same way, they find the correct remedy for the illness. There was a frightful din in the yard. From a distance, the drums had sounded deceptively like the rattling of a mill, nearby, one also heard the sounds made by the other instruments. One did not only beat on skin of the drum, but also on the wood of which the drum is made.

The drummers raced across their drums with a frightful fury, at the same time pulling their faces into the most abhorrent grimaces, their sweat poured down and mingled with the swirling dust. In this way, these people experienced a truly devilish spectacle. The actual idols (the four dancing women) tried to maintain a certain amount of dignity, but the dancing of others, especially that of the old woman, was too terrible to observe. I could only speak with the people by shouting. After I had spoken with individuals for a while, I noticed that they did not treat me with hostility, as I had expected at the beginning. I used a moment of silence to walk into the circle and speak to the crowd, I said something like: 'I have come to experience your customs. But what do I see? I see people who are lost, who have left the correct path'.

I pointed at the idolised people and said to them that they were impostors and that the people were deceived by them. The idolised-people had withdrawn a bit, a woman was lying down, and she had danced herself sick. I spoke especially to them, but they did not feel like listening.

Beuster's testimony is reflective of the early missionaries' perceptions of African traditional religion, which was viewed in an extremely negative light. According to Mokgoatšana (1996:98), missionaries disputed the existence of religion among Africans, and where they acknowledged its existence, the religion was considered animism. Mokgoatšana further states that the missionaries failed to realise that Africans, like other communities, continue to search for a metaphysical explanation of the cosmos. Their religious experiences are reflected in their myths of origin, proverbs and their conception of the world. They believe in the existence of God, ancestors, divinities and spirits. God manifests himself in all reality, he is ever present among the living, in living objects and even among the living-dead.

Munyai (2016) adds that the early missionaries were active during a period in which foreign spiritual cults were practised, and they were convinced that these cults formed part of the religious beliefs of the Vhavenda. It is therefore possible that the missionaries could have concluded that the indigenous cultures were identical to each other and inherently in conflict with the principles of the Gospel they came to preach. All in all, the mediumship of *tshilombo* is one of the ways through which adherents of Tshivenda traditional religion commune with their ancestral spirits. Apart from communion with the *tshilombo* spirit as a delegate of the ancestors, devotees of Tshivenda traditional religion also rely heavily on traditional healers as intermediaries between them and their ancestors. The next subsection looks at this reliance.

4.3.2. Traditional Healers as Intermediaries between Human Beings and the Ancestors

The Vhavenda regard a traditional healer, or medicine man/woman, as a religious person whose main purpose is to find out what the needs of the spiritual ancestors are and what is expected of the living in service to their departed forebears (Munyai, 2016). The traditional healers' findings and conclusions reveal the beliefs of the Vhavenda's traditional culture. Traditional healers can also find out what angered the ancestors because the ancestors as "spiritual entities are believed to be omnipresent and to guide a *ngaka* [traditional healer] in his practice" (Sodi, 1998: v, author's insertion). In fact, some of them are even regarded as diagnosticians who can prescribe medicines to cure diseases (Munyai, 2016). Other names used to refer to them are specialists, sacred personages, special men/women, sacred men/women, or sacred specialists by virtue of their specialised office, knowledge and skill in religious matters (Mbiti, 1969).

Mbiti (1969) says that in traditional African societies the traditional healers are the greatest gift and the most useful source of help. Every village in Africa has a traditional healer within reach and they are accessible to everybody at almost all times. The traditional healer thus features predominantly at many points of individual and community life. Peek (1991) asserts that divination has occupied a central position in the attitude of traditional African people towards disease. It is regarded as the cap of creation where everything revolves and to which creation must answer.

In Tshivenda culture, traditional healers' areas of specialisation vary, although their descriptions and definitions tend to overlap (Munyai, 2016). Sodi (1998:v) confirms that the term *ngaka* or *sedupe* in Northern Sotho, *igqira* in isiXhosa, *abalozzi* in isiZulu or *ñanga* in Tshivenda are equivalent words used to refer to specialised categories of traditional or indigenous healers in South Africa. In Tshivenda culture, for instance, there is a *ñanga* (healer), *mungome* (seer), *maine* (doctor), *tshigomamutanda* (herbalist), *dzolokwe/dzembeleketete* (greatest healer and diviner), *mutunguli* (diviner), and *mungome* (prophet). Van Warmelo (1932) acknowledges that divination played a great role in the life of the Vhavenda because no single matter was supposed to be undertaken without the consultation of *vhadzimu* (ancestors) through this process. This was the only way to find out the reasons for the outbreak of diseases or other misfortunes and the solutions. Matshili's (1972) poem "Tshigomamutanda" (Herbal Specialist) affirms this notion.

Vha hashu; maṭungu o lapfa nandi!
Ri songo litshedza muthu u a ri sia Vho-Tshivanammbi,
Kha ri sokou tendeleka ri tshi ṭoḡa vhahulwane;
Vho-Magambila ndi ñanga vhukuma, kha ri ye.

[Brethren; the sorrows have prolonged!
Tshivanammbi, may we not let the person die,
Let us wander in search of the seniors;
Magambila is the true healer, let us go.]

Among the Vhavenda traditional practitioners, there are some who specialise in children's diseases, women's fertility problems, enemas and emetics, aphrodisiacs, sprains and fractures, fits, incurable ulcers related to cancer, or sexually transmitted diseases. There are also general practitioners who claim to treat all diseases without specialisation (Stayt, 1931:31). In the above stanza, Magambila is reputedly known for his curative powers; hence, the poet urges his brethren to go and consult him to discover the cause of the person's prolonged illness. In the next stanza, the poet says:

Mujakhulu u a fhinduwa Vho-Maine,
Ro ḡa u vhonisa marambo nga zwidini,
Tshiṭanu tsha luphaso asitshi Vho-Maine,
Kha ri pfe tshi vhulayaho lutshetshe hafha muḡini.

[The early bird catches the fattest worm, Healer,
We have come for divination to find out the cause,
Here is a 50-cent coin for propitiatory tokens,
Let us hear the cause of an infant's death in our home.]

The family members who were urged to go and consult the traditional healer are now in the presence of the healer. The theme has shifted from an ill person mentioned in stanza 1 to a dead infant in stanza 2. This reveals that in Tshivenda culture both illness and death, including that of an infant, are a cause for concern. The surviving members of the family believe the traditional healer can get the answers from the ancestors on their behalf. Moagi (2009) concurs that in the South African context, the traditional healer is believed to possess the gifts of receiving spiritual guidance from the ancestral world.

Van Rensburg, Fourie and Pretorius (1992) add that traditional healers concentrate on the diagnosis of mysteries. They also analyse the cause of special events and interpret the messages of the ancestral spirits. They use divination objects, such as *ditaola* (divination bones) (Sodi, 1998: v), or explain the unknown with special powers of prophecy. Their function is divination, but they often also provide medications for specific cases diagnosed by them. However, before the divination process begins, the person who consults the traditional healer is expected to pay a certain amount known as *luputululathevhele* or *phuthulla moraba*, which suggests payment for the opening of the *thangu* pouch during the first consultation (Milubi, 1997:56; Sodi, 1998:v). It is for this reason that the traditional healer is given *tshitanu tsha luphaso* (50 cents) in the above poem. Various objects may be used for divination purposes, but the most common is known as *thangu* (divining bones). In the process of divination, the traditional healer will praise their *thangu*. Each time the bones are thrown down praise accompany the throw. Praise is addressed to the *thangu* so that they reveal and tell more about the consulter and their problem. A typical example is notable in the third stanza where the diviner says:

*Dzanga thangu ndi mafhaladza miḡi ya vhathu,
"Wavhaa!" "Wavhaa!" Phashalalaa!" mmbudze salukanye,
Dzo wa murorwane na mahe a khadzi dza lima,
Dzi tshilume tsha mukundulela wa thwalima.*

[My divining bones disband people's homes,
(Praises ascribed to the divining bones being thrown), tell discerners,

The fall of the bones has untangled the mystery and identified the culprit,
There is a bad omen and danger.]

According to Mutwa (2003), the divining bones are believed to discern the presence of the spirits around the sick person, such as resentful ancestral spirits, offended nature spirits, or malevolent spirits that have been sent by a sorcerer against the person. The bones hint at how the affliction of an ill person or one under curse came about. The divining bone named *thwalima* suggests a very bad omen and danger, whereas the divining bone named *tshilume* represents a young man (Davhana, 2020; Milubi, 1997). After detecting the problem, the traditional healer may prophecy, divine or cure of sickness (Seligman, 1967). Thus, in Tshivenda culture the traditional healer is employed to establish the cause of disease and other misfortunes that befall people by using special methods of divination (Malan, 1980).

Mutwa (2003) reveals that where there is illness or madness, the *ñanga* or *maine* knows that some power of the universe is disrupted and must be balanced or restored to harmony. The evil spirits must be removed or returned to where they came from; offended natural spirits must be propitiated or pacified; or something as mundane as a diet may have to be changed, a blockage in part of the body softened or loosened, or good breathing restored. Schapera (1971) avers that most doctors, in addition to their activities, practise divination. This features prominently in Tswana life where people use it to discover the nature and causes of sickness, the reasons for a person's death, the whereabouts of missing stock, the prospects of a journey, the meaning of unexpected objects seen about the compound, and in all other situations where they are baffled by some occurrence or wish to ascertain what the future holds. In the old days, similarly, the chief consulted diviners officially before holding any big tribal ceremony, in time of war and drought, or when selecting the site of a new village. (Schapera, 1971). Traditional healers are thus assigned a significant role in the traditional religion and culture of the Vhavenda because they are believed to be in constant communion with the ancestors. Therefore, they are strategically positioned as messengers through whom the ancestors deliver their messages to family members. Another intermediary who is believed to sustain constant communion with and is able to decipher the messages from the ancestors in Tshivenda culture is the *makhadzi* (aunt).

4.3.3. Makhadzi as an Intermediary between Human Beings and the Ancestors in Tshivenda Culture and Poetry

In Tshivenda culture, one of the intermediaries who facilitate communion between the living and the dead is the *makhadzi* (aunt). It is believed that the *makhadzi* derives and possesses powers from the ancestors (Matshidze, 2013). As already indicated in the previous sections, although the ancestors are believed to have positive functions, they can also exercise destructive powers. Therefore, ancestors are like human beings and need to be recognised by making sacrifices. The Vhavana believe that if the ancestors feel negated or neglected, they could be dangerous. Ancestors are said to reveal their annoyance in a number of ways, such as killing, causing grief or inflicting trouble (Matshidze, 2013). The Vhavana believe accidents may in fact result from the discontent of the ancestors. Furthermore, ancestors may expose the family or family members to illnesses. Alternatively, they may become very passive when they are supposed to actively protect a family member or they may totally withdraw their protective function. It is therefore important to gain the favours of the ancestors. Therefore, the *makhadzi's* role is to appease the ancestors. If the *makhadzi* does not care about the family member or the family in general, the ancestors will not care either and that would be a disaster (Matshidze, 2013). In the poem "Mafhuwe a Vho-Makhadzi" (Pounding songs of the *makhadzi*), Ngwana (1958:19) affirms that his life would indeed be terrible if he had no *makhadzi*.

Makhadzi wanga ndi a khoḁa,

Nda shaya makhadzi ndi a lila.

[I praise my aunt,

When my aunt is absent I weep.]

The *makhadzi* is regarded as the representative of the ancestors. For this reason, the *makhadzi* is treated with utmost respect in Tshivenda culture. When she advises and reprimands, she has to be listened to; if not, the ancestors may bring misfortune to the family. There are a variety of rituals the *makhadzi* can use to provoke the voice of the ancestors (Matshidze, 2013); however, *u phasa* (to pour libations) is the most common method. It must be stated that not all forms of libation are poured. Offerings are sometimes made at the instructions of the traditional healer. Certain

libations, such as *u phasa*, are sometimes sprayed from the celebrant's mouth onto the ancestors' shrine. This carries much weight and strength, and is not done carelessly.

In the poem "Tshalovha tsha Lwamondo" (Tshalovha of Lwamondo), Matshili (1972:13) is concerned about the absence or silence of the *makhadzi*. He asks:

*Hee Vho-Makhadzi,
Ri do tondwa nga nnyi no ri shavha?*

[Hey you, Aunty,
Who will do us good when you abandoned us?]

The *makhadzi's* presence is valued and longed for by the poet because she is the one ordained to approach and appease the ancestors. In instances where there are malevolent spirits believed to traumatise people, the *makhadzi* is the one who is called upon to drive them away by appeasing the ancestors. She can also drive them away by initiating a process where the one afflicted or sick is taken to the traditional healer to cure the illness. Therefore, if one does not respect the *makhadzi* and things happen to go bad for them, it is possible to hear the Vhavenda people saying 'maybe their *makhadzi* used warm water during libation' (Matshidze, 2013). Hot water is said to be bad for libation because it makes a noise when it boils. Thus, using warm water may mean that after the libation has been poured everything will not be well and the sick person will not be healed.

The nature of the liquid used thus plays a significant role in libation. Water is for cooling, healing and creating or reconciling relationships. Alcohol is fiery and is usually used to rouse, cement, ignite, protect and perform strong purification (Matshidze, 2013). This is an important matter, because when the *makhadzi* performs libation, she is awakening the ancestors, which is only the first part of the process. After awakening the ancestors, she discusses the matter with them or perform another ritual. Libation is not, for instance, complete without thanking the ancestors or requesting something like support, stability, clarity, spiritual cleansing or protection. Once the *makhadzi* has poured libation, she talks to the ancestors as if she is talking to a human being. She converses and builds a relationship. Overtime, she hears messages in distinct ways. When she pours libation, she is sometimes accompanied by a person who needs ancestral intervention. All in all, the *makhadzi*

makes communion and communication with the ancestors possible in Tshivenda culture. Hence, the poets Ngwana and Matshili recognise her importance in this regard.

4.4. The Clash between Tshivenda Traditional Religion and Judeo-Christianity

The discussion on the Vhavana's concept of God and gods should have provided hints that there are clashes between the Tshivenda traditional religion and the Christian faith. Most of the selected poets profess their faith in either of the two religions, with the exception of Netshivhuyu (1990), who acknowledges both God and gods in his poetry. In an effort to highlight the distinction and possibly to resolve the ambiguities that may emanate from references to God and gods, Ratshitanga (1972:6–7) penned the poem "Mudzimu na Vhadzimu" (God and gods) and put it thus:

*Mudzimu ndi musiki na mukuvhatedzi
Wa tsiko yothe ya tādulu na shangoni
Ngeno vhadzimu vhe vhakukumedzi
Kha vhuswina uri shango li dzule mivhangoni.*

[God is the creator and buffer
Of all creation in heaven and on earth
While gods are instigators
Of the enmity so that world continues to live in disharmony.]

In the above excerpt, Ratshitanga seeks to not only distinguish *Mudzimu* (read Nwali, God) from *vhadzimu* (ancestors) but he also wants to show that there is a clash between the adherents of God and those of gods. Ratshitanga's vehement dismissal and even disparagement of *vhadzimu/mudzimu* (ancestors) in the poem 'Mudzimu na Vhadzimu' is mainly influenced by his espousal of the Christian faith. In the poem, he contrasts the demeanour of God (Nwali) and that of the gods. God is identified as the creator and a compassionate and loving father who desires the best for all his creation. His demonstration of love is notable in His delegation of all of His earthly creations, from the earth to human beings.

The gods, on the other hand, are presented as antagonists and false versions of Nwali, undeserving of veneration. According to the poet, Nwali intends to cater for the wellbeing of His people while gods seek the destruction of the people,

particularly when people refuse to be their adherents. The poet further views the gods as instigators of disharmony on earth, whereas Nwali is projected as a being who empowers humankind to create conditions of harmony and peace on earth. In the next stanza of the poem, the contrast between Nwali and gods is further elucidated, and Nwali is classified as the creator who is full of love while gods are allegedly responsible for all the misfortune that befalls those who choose a different path of faith. It goes without saying that Ratshitanga advocates the 'rightness' of the Christian faith by disparaging the Tshivenda traditional religion. In the final stanza, gods are classified as *marena a si na vuhosi* (lords without jurisdictions of rulership), implying that they are undeserving of any seat of sovereignty among the living or anywhere for that matter. The poet's conclusion is accompanied by a word of counsel to the reader.

*Zwi vhuṭali u thanyela eneo mavhanda,
Wa ralo lwendo lwau lwa vha lwa tshedza,
Vhunga vhakhakhisi avha na Khotsi a tshi vha sanda,
Nga mishumo yavho ya swiswi i raloho u xedza.*

[It is wisdom to be alert of those beasts,
By so doing, your journey will be of light,
Since these detractors are also despised by the Father,
Because their works of darkness tend to mislead.]

Another clash is that in the Tshivenda traditional religion, ancestors are viewed as intermediaries between Nwali and the people, but in Christianity, Jesus Christ, the begotten Son of God, is the only legitimate mediator between God and people. Mbulaheni's (1992:25) poem "Yesu u ngafhi?" (Where is Jesus?) affirms this view by acknowledging Jesus Christ as the only legitimate mediator between God and people:

*Yesu u ngafhi?
A buḑe na uno muvhundu,
Maṭula ano a vhone-vho,
Shangoni ja Murena Khotsi.*

[Where is Jesus?
May he pass even through this area,
So that he may also see the despicable things,
In the land of God, the Father.]

Yesu u ngafhi?
Vhupfiwa hawe a ṭanze,
Vilinga ʘi fhele,
Shango ʘi lale.

[Where is Jesus?
May he express his true feelings,
So that chaos may cease,
And the land rests.]

Ruma muya.
Ruma ḍenzhe.
Ruma ḍuvha.
Hau vhuhulu vhu vhonwe.

[Send the Spirit.
Send light.
Send the sun.
So that your greatness be seen.]

The life, words, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundation of Christianity (Mafela, 2008). In this sense, the life of Christians has its source, agency and goal in the person of Jesus Christ. In the above poem, the poet longs for Christ's intervention on earth. The poet believes that only Christ is capable of confronting and ending chaos on earth. Mbulaheni's poem takes the form of public proclamation that Jesus is the Saviour of humankind. Jesus Christ, as purported by the poet, not only saves humankind from sin, but is also able to restore peace in the land. Reliant on Christians' view of God as Trinitarian, the poem implicates God the father (*Murena Khotsi*), God the son (*Yesu*) and God the Holy Spirit (*muya*). In the Christian community, these persons are not viewed as independent from one another; they are three-in-one and one-in-three and they are the same substance but unique in disclosure. It is worth reiterating, therefore, that there is yet no harmony between the Tshivenda traditional religion and the Christian faith, and seemingly, there are no hints that the two worldviews will ever be harmonised. It is perhaps because of this continued clash that some Vhavenda embrace both the Tshivenda traditional religion and the Christian faith instead of choosing one faith (Munyai, 2016). Although Munyai (Ibid) writes on the subject, this area is still fertile for research, particularly an exploration on the poets' adoption of dual religions, with Ntshivhuyu (1990) cited here as a typical example.

4.5 Section Deductions

Christian poets like Sigwavhulimu, Ratshiṭanga, Milubi, Maḍadzhe and Phaswana identify the God of the Christians as the only one who is supreme, exclusive and ultimate, and the Vhavenḍa traditionalists and poets, such as Matshili and Ngwana, believe in both Nwali/Mudzimu (God) and *vhadzimu* and have Matongoni as a dominant leitmotif in their poetry. Herein lies the divergence of the two worldviews. Adherents of Tshivendḍa traditional religion view the living-dead, *tshilombo*, traditional healers and the *makhadzi* as intermediaries between the living and God, whereas Christians view Jesus Christ as the sole and legitimate gateway to God (cf. John 14:6). Thus, it is safe to assert that there is a clash between Tshivendḍa traditional religion and Christianity, the two ideological strands within which the selected poets fall. Generally speaking, religion, irrespective of whether traditional or modern, is incorporated into the lives of the people. There is no way to speak of the people's lives and leave out religion. Their religion permeates all life. Failing to recognise that religion is an integral part of people's lives does a disservice to people (Mokgoatšana, 1996). The next category discusses the selected poets' conception of a human being, including their hypotheses on the origin of people.

4.6. ANTHROPOCENTRICITY IN TSHIVENḌA CULTURE AND POETRY

This section explores the selected poets' postulations on human beings' origin, identity, purpose, potential and destiny. Two perspectives on the subject are considered, namely the Euro-Christian worldview and the African traditional worldview. The section begins with the poets' espousal and instantiation of the Judeo-Christian faith in their articulation of human origin because most of the selected poets appear to embrace this faith, and by extension, Euro-modernist perspectives. It must be borne in mind that the Judeo-Christian ontological framework was coterminous with the advent of colonial intrusion into African societies and all it entails, including its educational system and other aspects. On the other hand, the African concept of a human being can be described as follows:

In relation to other things, the majority of African peoples place the creation of man towards or at the end of God's original creation. Man also comes into the picture as husband and wife, male and female. It is generally acknowledged that God is the originator of

man, even if the exact methods of creating man may differ according to the myths of different peoples (Mbiti, 1969:91).

The concept of human beings originating from God, as Mbiti (1969) purports in the excerpt above, is predominantly cherished by those Vhavenda poets who espouse the Judeo-Christian faith. The Vhavenda poets, such as Sigwavhulimu, Ratshitanga, Milubi, Maḍadzhe, and Ladzani, pervasively link human origin, identity, purpose, potential and destiny to the God of the Christians.

4.6.1. Notions of Human Origin from the Judeo-Christian Perspective

Mbiti (1969:93) asserts that the picture of human beings' ontological origin places them in a different position from other earthly created things: Human beings come from 'above', from 'another' region of the universe, and from a position 'nearer' to God than other things. It is probably with this ideology in mind that Sigwavhulimu, a Muvenda poet, ensures that his poetry becomes "concerned with creation and appeals to supernatural beings, religious matters, death and pain" (Mafela, 2008:106). The God that Mbiti (Ibid) speaks of is to Sigwavhulimu the God of the Christians. Sigwavhulimu's awareness of the God of the Christians is easily understandable when one considers that he was a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mafela, 2008). Like all other Christians, Sigwavhulimu perceives God as the centre of creation. He, therefore, does not believe in the gods or any other theory that is contrary to his faith in the God of Christians. His acceptance of the supremacy of the God of Christians is aptly captured in the title poem of his anthology *Tsiko-Tshiphiri* (Secret Creation), where he says:

*Ro bebwa nga Iphi,
Ri ralalela Iphini.*

[We were created by the Word,
We live for the Word.]

(Sigwavhulimu, 1971:27)

In these two lines, Sigwavhulimu (Ibid) summarises Christians' belief of how creation, including human beings, came to exist. Christians essentially believe that the Word (also personified by the incarnation of Jesus Christ, according to John 1:14; Colossians 1:15) was and is responsible for the creation of all beings and

things. The term 'Ipfi' (Word) starts with a capital letter to denote reference to God (Mafela, 2008). Similarly, Netshivhuyu (1990:28) shows reverence to the power of the Word in the poem "Ipfi" (Word), in which he says:

U tshanduko;
U mulilo;
U banga la muya;
U maanda a Mudzimu!

[You are change;
You are fire;
You are the sword of the spirit;
You are the power of God!]

Sigwavhulimu (Ibid) and Netshivhuyu (1990) espouse, or at least agree with, the Christian doctrine in their promotion of the belief that the creative power of the Word of God, both in the spoken (Rhema) and personified (Jesus Christ) form, is responsible for the origin of all beings and things. In the poem titled "Haleluya" (Hallelujah), Maumela (1988:4) says:

A hu na a re wawe,
Na nne a thi wanga,
Na inwi a ni wanu,
Na vhone a vha wavho,
Rothe a ri vhashu,
A ri vhashu rothe,
Ri na Muthu washu,
A re Khotsi ashu,
A vhusaho zwothe,
Kha ri mu rende-ha,
Ri anze-vho zwivhuya.
Haleluya!
Amen!

[No one belongs to themselves,
Even I do not belong to myself,
Even you [youths] do not belong to yourselves,
Including you [elders] do not belong to yourselves,
All of us do not belong to ourselves,
We have our own Person to whom we belong,
Who is our Father,

Who reigns over all things,
Let us praise Him therefore,
So that good things multiply.
Hallelujah!
Amen!]

Ontologically speaking, in the above poem God is viewed as the origin and sustenance of all things (cf. Mbiti, 1969). In the poem God is regarded as simultaneously outside and beyond His creation, yet personally involved in His creation so that creation is not outside of Him or beyond His reach. In this way, God is, to the poet, simultaneously transcendent and immanent. In acknowledging God as responsible for the origin of human beings, Ratshitanga recognises the glory and dominion with which a human being was endowed by the same God. Ratshitanga specifically propagates the idea that a male ranks higher than a female human being. This is evident in the poem, “Tshiala tsha Munna” (The Crown of a Man) (Ratshitanga, 1987:17).

*Ndi ɔe mini ho ita Musiki,
A tshi vhea nguwane n̄ha ha thoho,
Zwa ralo ha vha u rwela tshitari,
A fhedza a inga nga ngoho?*

[What shall I then say when it is the Creator who ordained it,
Placing the crown on top of the head,
And by so doing, officialised it,
And further added the truth?]

In Ratshitanga’s understanding it is God who gave a man (male) dominion and crowned him with authority on earth. In the subsequent stanzas, it becomes clear that Ratshitanga uses the word *munna* (man) to refer to the male and not a generic sense that includes both males and females. Implicit in this is the belief in the primacy of the male over the female. Put more tersely, Ratshitanga’s position offers exponents of postcolonialism and feminism the conceptual tool box to address the multiple sites of oppression and to reject universalisms around gendered experiences of both males and females (Parashar, 2016:371). Hence, Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi (2015:44) purport that the quantum of postcolonial feminism’s grouse is, at the literal level, the idea that males primarily appropriate discourse and write females as footnotes in male history, thus deifying the male while subjugating the

female. One of the identifiable Vhavenḡa female poets who responds to this mode of gender representation is Kanakana Yvonne Ladzani (Sebola, 2021a).

Linked to this is the belief that “agency is denied female characters in male discourse where they are treated as appendages and chattels in the treasure troves of patriarchy” (Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi, 2015:44). A thorough discussion on gendered representations in Tshivendḡa poetry deserves an independent study. It is only referred to here to shore up the idea that in Christian circles the male is deified while the female is juniorised. This is important to consider here because it sheds light on how both the conceptions men and women are espoused by some of the poets, which, of course, becomes a fertile area for further research on gender politics in Tshivendḡa poetry. Ratshiḡanga further endorses the idea that a male is superior to the female in the next stanza.

*Ndi nnyi a dzhielaho munna
Vhuhulu hawe he a ambadzwa,
Vhulisa kana vuhosi zwa u phulusa,
Misambi ine yoḡthe a orosa?*

[Who takes away from man
The glory with which he is clothed,
Sheperding or dominion which deliver,
All flocks which he oversees?]

According to Ratshiḡanga, it is by divine design that the male occupies a higher rank. The male, Ratshiḡanga avers, is clothed with so much glory and dominion that all of earthly creation is under his subjugation. In the next stanza, man’s intelligence is acknowledged as being responsible for human civilisation and development:

*Mu vhoneḡi ḡamusi o phula magondo,
Milamboni a vhea miratho.
Zwoḡthe ha vha u itela muthu,
ḡwana wawe na musadzi.*

[See him, today he has created roads,
Man placed bridges across rivers.
All this was done for a human being,
His child and wife.]

Man’s creative prowess emanates from God, and therefore, as God created so does man create infrastructural and architectural designs. The poet says that man does all

this for his children and wife. Again, it remains a subject of further debate that a man is depicted as the source and agent of earthly creation and invention while the woman is typified as the object of this artistry. In Ratshitanga's poem, a man is assigned agency while the woman is relegated to passivity. It would have been interesting to see the poet ascribing equal dignity, integrity and intelligence to both the male and the female. One might argue on the basis of Genesis 1 that the male and the female not only emanated from the same God but were also addressed by the same God as beings who have equal footing and equal divine dignity in the sight of their creator. It is tempting to press the matter further, but this topic cannot be given the space it deserves in this chapter. In the next stanza, a man is aligned with God in the function of transferring creative wisdom to his child:

*Asuuḷaa u fhaṭa zwifhaṭo zwa pfunzo,
Hune ṅwana wawe a ḍo pfunḷulula mapfundo,
E ene na Musiki vha vha vho pfunḷa.
Vhuṭali vhu ṅea ṅwana wawe gundo.*

[There he is, he built institutions of learning,
Where his child will untangle the knots,
Which he and the Creator knotted.
Wisdom gives his child victory.]

It is the man who built the institutions of learning, which implies that epistemic and pedagogic inventions are the sole prerogative of the man. Apart from affording his child the latitude to discover and apply knowledge, God and man are depicted as the wells from which the child accesses and acquires the wisdom of life and living. In the next stanza, the poet says:

*Vhonani ṅamusi o gonya ṭaḍulu,
Sa goni a tshi zwima vhudzulo,
Vhunga vhana vhawe vho no andesa,
Na mme avho o thoma muvhango.*

[See, today, man has climbed to heaven,
Like an eagle, hunting a place of residence,
Since his children have exceedingly multiplied,
And their mother has begun conflict.]

God did not only endow the man with the power to establish architectural and infrastructural designs but also with the ability to procreate after his own kind. As a

result of this ability, the man has so populated the earth that there is no longer space for people to inhabit it. It is for this reason that man now climbs up to heaven in search of residence. By this the poet means that man has built skyscrapers because there is no space to build horizontally because of over-population. The woman (the mother) is said to be the reason the man keeps building; thus, she is depicted as dissatisfied with the 'home' within which her children live, and therefore, she needs more space. The idea that a man is by divine order ordained to be superior to all creation, including a woman, finds clear expression in the last stanza, where the poet says:

*Lavhelesani ni vhone a tshi gomedza,
Sa Musiki a tshi vhuya shangoni,
E Murena a daho sa munna.
Mme a vhana u ro sokou mu vhangisa.*

[Behold and see when he completes,
Like the Creator returning to the world,
As Lord coming in the form of man.
The mother of the children's rivalry for equality with him is futile.]

That a man is first in the hierarchy of creation is evinced by God coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ as a male, according to the poet. God (Jesus Christ) returns to the earth as both a man and the Lord. The poem ends with the poet's belief that women's battle for equality with men is nothing but a vain exercise because, in the poet's mind, males will always be supreme. With all its concerning perpetuations of gender inequality and female repression, Ratshitanga's poem is still insightful in terms of how Christians view the notion of human origin. Put succinctly, Christians believe God (in the person of Jesus Christ) is responsible for all creation, human beings included. In the next section, human origin is discussed from the Africanist perspective as championed by some of the selected poets.

4.6.2. Notions of Human Origin from the Africanist Perspective in Tshivenda Poetry

It must be stated from the onset that within the Tshivenda traditional worldview a human being is viewed in terms of their community (Munyai, 2016). Here, the area of interest is how the traditional Vhavenda conceptualise and articulate the notion of human origin from their cultural perspective. In the Africanist perspective, the

ancestors are recognised as key role players in both the origin and continuity of human life. This is evident in Netshivhuyu's (1990:25) poem "Vhane vhanga" (My Masters/Fathers).

*Vhone vhanga;
Vhubvo hanga;
Mudzi wanga;
Nqila yanga;
Vhane vhanga!*

[They who are mine;
My origin;
My root;
My way;
My masters!]

Ancestor veneration is at the centre of the Tshivenda tradition, and all aspects of this veneration are organised to explain the origin and nature of human life. The tending of life itself is sustained through divination and mediumship systems that are believed to offer answers to common human problems. Netshivhuyu's (1990) poem thus offers an illuminative proposition that adherents of the Tshivenda traditional religion view their ancestors as not only occupying a premier position but also as agentively involved in the creation of humankind. Netshivhuyu (1990) as the poet-protagonist does not implicate God or the Supreme Being in the articulation of his origin and identity, and only the ancestors are appreciated. This implies that to the poet the ancestors are the originators of human life. This view, however, is seriously contested by Ratshifanga.

In his anthology *Ndi Nne Nnyi? (Who Am I?)*, Ratshifanga resolutely summons the Vhenda people to heed their *angsty* selves, prodding them out of the 'they' and 'them' to the 'I', 'me', 'us' and 'we', and also depicts the uncanny feeling that seems to bedevil a people whose avowed goal seems to revolve around the abandonment of their sense of selfhood, being, belonging, essence of presence and culture, the very hallmarks of inauthentic existence. In the poem "Ndi Inwi Nnyi, Ndi Nne Nnyi?" (Who Are You, Who Am I?), for example, Ratshifanga attempts to give an account on people's conceptions of a human being.

*Vhanwe vha ri muthu ndi thuwwa,
Na tshimedzwa tsha vha fhasi,*

Wa lavhelesa wa ri n̄thañwe
Vhunga zwoṯhe phedzo hu ḡasi.

[Some say a person is a messenger,
And an outgrowth of the ancestors,
You look and conclude that maybe [it is so]
Since the culmination of all things is below]

The first line, *vhañwe vha ri muthu ndi thuñwa* (some say a person is a messenger), hints at the ambivalence and ambiguity that often characterise attempts to define and describe personhood. Though there may be varied opinions on what a human being is, the poet singles out the idea that some people view a human being as a messenger. The poet does not disclose, at least not yet, who deployed a human being as a messenger, what the message is and who the audience of the message is. Inherent in this notion is the idea that there is ‘someone’, possibly of higher rank, whose prerogatives, whatever they may be, are mandated to and fulfilled by a messenger called a human being.

Compounding the ambivalences and ambiguities that attend the definition of a human being is the second line of the poem that classifies a human being as *tshimedzwa tsha vhaḡhasi* (an outgrowth of the ancestors). In Tshivenda culture and discourse, *vhaḡhasi* (literally translating into ‘those who are below’) refers to the ancestors. At this juncture, the poet tangentially alludes to the Vhavenda’s belief in the spirit world, probably because he knows that the spirit world remains an integral part of the Vhavenda’s religious beliefs (Munyai, 2016). These *vhaḡhasi* (ancestors) are regarded as those celestial beings that remain in transition between the living and the dead.

It is not surprising that Ratshitanga alludes to opinions that link humans’ origin to the ancestors. For the Vhavenda the linkage of the origin of personhood to ancestors finds expression in their belief in the world of the dead, who, as spirits, are believed to sustain constant contact with the living on earth. Munyai (2016) adds that there are certain locations all over Venda that are designated as the habitations of the spirits, such as Lake Fundudzi. A separate section in this chapter is devoted to a broad discussion of Lake Fundudzi as a substantial leitmotif among the selected Vhavenda poets. For the purposes of venerating the ancestors, a chief had to have a forest (*tshitaka*) or a mountain in which the spirits of his ancestors were believed to

abide. Most of these places have been set apart as burial places of the chiefs among the Vhavenda (Munyai, 2016). Thus, the Vhavenda's life is more oriented to the past because it connects them with their roots (the ancestors) and the origin of their traditions, as notable in Netshivhuyu's poem cited above. Ratshitanga's allusion to the ancestors as the possible originators of human life and personhood is indicative of those assumptions and the pervasive interrogations that continue to characterise a people's quest for authenticity and meaning.

Thus far, a human being is, in Ratshitanga's mind, viewed as either a messenger or an extension of the ancestors. Ratshitanga is only willing to accept the idea that a human being emanates from *vhafhasi* on the premise that all life appears to culminate its cessation with a burial. The designation of the dead as *vhafhasi* (those who are below) stems from the awareness that dead people are below the ground by virtue of their bodies being buried in the ground. Thus, in Tshivenda traditional religion human beings are viewed as outgrowths of their long-departed ancestors. The poet implies that the cessation of biological life results in a reunion of the ancestors; hence, the 'planting' of the dead, and the subsequent outgrowth of new life, promulgating the idea that in African traditional religion life is cyclical. However, the poet's use of the word *thawwe* (maybe) in the above stanza is indicative of his doubts about the merits of this traditional worldview. To further vanguard his doubt, the poet says:

*Uja wa muhumbulo mulapfu
A ralo a vhudzisa na u eledza:
Khuluṇoni ya Nwali ndi tshalo-shu,
Dasi swiswini hu sa dihwihwo tshedza?*

[The one with an expansive mind
Will thus ask and intimate:
Nwali's throne is our grave,
Down in the darkness that knows no light?]

In this excerpt, Nwali and not *vhafhasi* is acknowledged as the ultimate source, agent and goal of all life. To the poet, acknowledging Nwali as the absolute initiator of life requires an expansiveness of mind—the mind that conceives realities beyond the earthly dimensions of human life. The poet advances the idea that this perceptual access to domains beyond the material zone(s) compels one to conclude

that all life began at Nwali's throne and will inevitably cease there. In this way, Ratshitanga regards Nwali as the living and eternal ancestor from whom all life derives. In the subsequent stanza, Ratshitanga is still resolute in his dismissal of the living-dead as the absolute and ultimate source of human life.

*Ndi vho-makhulukuku vhashu-shu
Vho sikaho zwothe muthu na shango?
Muvhudziswa e ri nadzo "tsu",
A hanganea sa o fanelaho mulifho wa thongo.*

[Is it our ancestors really
Who created both a human being and the world?
The one asked fails to answer,
Dumbstruck as one sanctioned to repay an inexorable debt]

Apart from their faith in Nwali, the Vhavanḁa also believe in ancestral spirits. The poet strives to nullify the idea that the ancestor cult should remain the central belief of the Vhavanḁa, as if proposing that the relationship with their living-dead should not have so much more meaning than their relationship with Nwali. It is worth reiterating that the Vhavanḁa, like any African society, believes in a supreme being (Nwali), but seemingly their belief largely emanates from family and tribal gods. A belief clearly demonstrated by the manner in which they offer sacrifices to their departed ancestors. It is these ancestors that the poet vehemently opposes as the source(s) of human life. The problem advanced by the poet is that when the adherents of Tshivenda traditional religion are asked to account convincingly for their stance on the ancestors being the originators of human life, they become dumbfounded, as shown in the next stanza:

*Zwo tshipa ya uḁa ḁhalukanyo,
Zwino nḁe mathina ndi ngafhi?
Ndi na nḁivho-vho na kana nzanyo
Ngavhe ḁi si dzanda ḁa one mazwifhi?*

[It rendered that one's understanding impotent,
So, where shall I go?
Do I have any knowledge or acquisition
But a mere load of lies?]

It suffices to conclude that Ratshitanga sets out to not only disregard belief in the ancestors as the originators of human life but also to encourage the disparagement

of such a belief. His preference is that the origin of human life be ascribed only to Nwali. According to Ratshitanga, the ancestors should be relegated to a position of inferiority and dismissed as false versions of 'reality', whatever that may mean, particularly because he believes the ancestors are devoid of the power to create and sustain human life. Overall, because the selected poets embrace two different worldviews, the Christian worldview and the African traditional worldview, they remain at loggerheads when it comes to providing an absolute account for human origin. In the end, the poets link their sense of selfhood and identity either to the God of the Christians or to their ancestors. Hence, in their efforts to provide sociographic and historiographic descriptions of themselves, these two worldviews continue to pervade the poets' thematic foci. In the next section, the poets' quests for authenticity and meaning in light of their varied senses of origin are brought to light.

4.6.3 Agitations for Self-Identification and Self-(Re)presentation in Tshivenda Poetry

This section aims to clearly illustrate how 'autobiographical' aspects in selected Tshivenda poetry function as indices into the poets' conceptualisation and articulation of their selfhood, identity and culture. The section further elucidates the poets' sense of individuation and subjectification, that is, their acknowledgement of their capacity for self-determined agency. It is hoped that developing self-identification and self-representation aspects, what Mogoboya (2011:5) regards as "epoch-making aspects" that are captured as integral to the people's identity and being, will attain discursive merit in this chapter.

It is in the encapsulation of such epoch-making aspects that the 'self' of (or in) the writer finds expression in the wide-ranging events of life and consequently 'reveals' themselves. This revelation of the self/selves entails divulging who the writers are "in terms of cultural, religious, social, and political convictions, a totality of their being" (Mogoboya, 2011:6). Mokgoatšana (1996:36) adds that "autobiography may be used as a vehicle to centralise the life of the author, and that the personal experience of the writer may be employed to (re)construct a life within temporal and spatial terrains which have radically altered". This is necessary in postcolonial societies because autobiography becomes a useful strategy to centre the lives of those who are often

denied space and are compelled to use autobiography to gain access to the centre from which reality is defined.

Autobiographic modes in selected Tshivenda poetry are discussed bearing in mind Raditlhalo's (2003:22) observation that analysing "the theoretical postulations on identity is a challenge, encompassing the autobiographical subject and the intricacies by which identities have come to be seen as constructions in the latter part of the twentieth century". In these intricacies by which identities are constructed and articulated one is also likely to note a 'quest for authenticity' (Umezurike, 2015). By authenticity Umezurike (2015:v) means "a mode of existence" which involves "an existential state of awareness and control". Of particular interest in this chapter is how the selected poets present themselves as existents who seek to reveal their individuality and uniqueness while "entangled in the web of the they [or them]" (Umezurike, 2015:v). Autobiography, among other modes of self-(re)presentation, thus becomes one of the processes that allows poets in particular to generate and publicise their notion(s) of self-definition. By so doing, they project self-definition as an essential task of postcolonial discourse (Mokgoatšana, 1996).

It must be highlighted, however, that in some of the selected poems it is clear that the poets' existential struggles and their need to foreground their individuation is accompanied by a quest to emerge out of the cages where the diminutions of both cultural/ethnic and political identity are a common parlance. Therefore, the poets' uphill efforts geared towards delinking identity or identification from coloniality is a worthy thematic interest in this chapter. As the discussion expands, it demonstrates that most of the selected poets' preoccupations are lynched to the desire "to emerge out of the shadows of publicness to the epicentre of self-awareness" (Umezurike, 2015:v). It also shows that the selected poets' self-definitions, self-(re)presentations and identity (re)constructions largely rely on "memory, emotion and imaging elements which are fundamental to the study of autobiography as opposed to other forms of writing" (Mokgoatšana, 1996:36).

The disclosure of the quest for identity and authenticity among the selected Vhavenda poets is often virtually linked to a call of conscience. This call is evinced in Maḡadzhe's poem '*I vha iwe muḡe*' (You be yourself) (1985b:20). In the poem, Maḡadzhe lampoons people's tendencies to wish they were someone or something else. Also connected to this tendency is the pretentiousness that most people adopt

at the expense of their authentic selves in an effort to get other to like them. In the first stanza, the poet avers:

*Luaviavi u nga si vhe,
I vha iwe muṅe.*

[You will never be a chameleon,
You be yourself.]

Chameleons are known for their ability to assume a range of colours. They use their ability to change colour to conform to the colour(s) of their surroundings, and this make it difficult to find them and remove them from their environment. Thus, chameleons have no phenotypical 'fixity'. For this reason, chameleon is a source of metaphoric extensions in most cultures. In Tshivenda culture, for instance, referring to someone as a chameleon means that such a person is untrustworthy, pretentious, deceitful and unstable in their convictions. In the lines quoted above, the poet advises people to refrain from living like chameleons. He prods his audience towards embracing their uniqueness by accepting and being at ease with what they are not. In the process of seeking to be many selves in multiple contexts, it seems, most people end up losing a clear sense of who they are. Rather than trying to be chameleons, the poet deems it best to appreciate one's unique design and identity. Although Maḍadzhe does not explore the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of 'authentic' identity or personhood, if any, his poem can be taken as a premise upon which to launch a discussion on the quest for 'authentic' selfhood among the selected poets. Ratshitanga's (1973:16) poem "Ivha zwine wa vha" (Be what/who you are) resonates with Maḍadzhe's poem in that it also encourages accepting and appreciating one's uniqueness.

*Muṅwe muḍivhi wa mafhungo,
O nndaya nga aya nda tenda,
Nge nda wana e a mbuya phungo,
Mbilu yanga yo a kuvhanganya ya renda
Zwe a ri: "zwine wa vha zwone u songo shanduka,
Vhunga mpho ḥaḍulu dzo tumbuka".*

[One well-informed expert,
Advised me and I concurred,
Since I deemed the counsel good,
My heart gathered it and praised

When they said: “do not change who you are,
Since it is a gift originating from heaven”.]

*Zwine wa vha zwone ndi khwine u livhuwa,
Ngauri a u na maanḁa a u shandula
Zwe nga Makole zwa simuwa,
Vhunga wo shaya nungo dza u zwi landula.*

[It is best to be grateful for who you are,
Because you do not have the power to change
What God established,
Since you are devoid of the power to reject it.]

*We tshifhaṭuwo tsha mbifho a avhelwa,
Nga a lidze phala ya dakalo,
Vhunga lupfumo lwa mbilu o vhetshelwa,
A tshi ḁo ḁa a fura mulalo.*

[One apportioned an ugly face,
Should blow the horn in joy,
Since the wealth of the heart is reserved for them,
Culminating in the fullness of peace.]

*Zwe wa ṅewa ndi zwone,
U songo tama zwe muṅwe a ṭanganedza,
U sa ḁo gagaḁela u sa kone,
Wa sala fhedzi zwoṭhe zwo redza.*

[What you were given is appropriate,
Do not envy what the other received,
Lest you carry what you cannot,
And remain with nothing when all else fails.]

Similar to Maḁadzhe’s composed gait, Ratshiṭanga also leans on oracular wisdom as a technique to highlight the essence of staying true to oneself. The ability to stay true to oneself is predicated on the willingness to embrace one’s uniqueness, irrespective of how one might feel about one’s outlook. The reader is encouraged to delight in their design simply because it is God who deemed it so. To the poets, unconditional self-acceptance is the foundation upon which the dialectics of identity construction and articulation can be best predicated. In the poem titled “Maanḁa” (Power), Ratshiṭanga (1987:25) recognises the power that inheres in self-identification.

*Maanḡa a muthu ndi u ḡalusa,
Na u sa lozwa vhuḡe hau.
Wa ralo zwe wa fhulufhela wa khwaḡhisa,
U sa londi u solwa kha zwau.*

[The power of a person lies in [self-] description,
And not losing your being/identity.
And remaining firm in what you believe,
Never paying attention to criticisms of your heritage.]

The first line in this stanza condenses a human being's power into an ability to define and describe themselves. This implies that if one is unable to authoritatively identify themselves, they are powerless. Thus, power dynamics are implicated in self-identification. Closely connected to self-identification is one's valuation of one ethnic heritage, even in the face of disparagements from others. From the onset, the poet prods his readers towards taking pride in their own identity and all other aspects that are linked to their identity, such as culture and heritage. In the next stanzas, the poet uses imagery to further augment the idea of taking pride in the authenticity and uniqueness of one's selfhood.

*Vhunḡe uhu ndi hu vhonehalo kha ḡowa,
Ine hoḡhe i sa ite zwine muthu a tama.
Kha zwi melaho mavuni vhuḡwe vhu na ngowa,
I melaho ho gugumelwaho misi yoḡhe.*

[This sense of identity is evinced by a snake,
Which never does anything according to the will of a human being.
Of all that grows from the soil, others assume the similitude of a mushroom,
Which always breaks through hardened places.]

According to the poet, the snake never alters its identity in order to be accepted or understood by people; it remains true to its identity. The same goes for plants such as mushrooms, which never compromise the uniqueness of their identity even when they are suppressed by hardened surfaces. With this imagery, the poet seeks to emphasise the idea that identity should never be compromised or abandoned, no matter how severe the conditions within which one finds oneself. This is important, particularly bearing in mind that the poem was written in the South African context during the apartheid system when people's worth was determined by their complexion, among other racial characteristics. In apartheid South Africa, the white

establishment saw Black negatively as non-white and denied it a culture. But for the indigenous African, the term 'Black' signified pride in African culture and history and committed the indigenous African to a struggle to cast off the non-African yoke (Barnett, 1983:7). According to the poet, the process of casting off the non-African yoke entails demonstrating agency in formulating a narrative discourse on identity construction and articulation. To the poet, narrations of one's true identity is an important tool and method that should be seriously used to combat dehumanising and colonial narratives about people's selfhood, identity and culture.

The power to narrate or to block other narratives from forming and emerging was very important to the colonising culture and its imperialistic ambitions (Said, 1993). Therefore, the same power to narrate should be shown by the formerly colonised to assert the uniqueness and authenticity of their own identity. Grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment should thus aid the mobilisation of people in the ex-colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection. According to the poet, it is only when the formerly colonised possesses the power to define and describe themselves in their own space and right that they will finally know the power of authentic selfhood. To further bolster his view, the poet implores the reader to consider the example of domestic animals in the following stanza.

*Lavhelesa mbudzi na nngu mafuloni.
Naho tshitumba tsha vha tshithihi hayani,
U lila hadzo hu nga u andisana,
Zwine vhuvhili ja do fhela zwi songo shanduka.*

[Look at goats and sheep in the grazing lands.
Even when the kraal is only one at home,
Their bleating sounds like they are multiplying each other,
Although that will never change their unique identities.]

The idea in this stanza is that although the goat and the sheep may both bleat, they retain the essence of their uniqueness. The goat and the sheep may inhabit one kraal, but they will not lose their identity as a result of this co-habitation. In fact, in this co-habitation one can still identify the unique bleating of each of these animals. Thus, co-habitation does not necessarily imply conformation; one can stand out in a multilingual and multicultural context. These are the key ideas of the above stanza. In the last stanza, the poet ascribes the cause of human beings' inauthenticity in

terms of identity and identification to the issue of genetic modification, among other inventions.

*Muthu u shaya maanḁa aya nga u silinga,
Nge a fara itshi na tshila a ṭanganyisa.
Ṭhanganyiso iyi a ḁikhoḁa ngayo o takala,
Ngeno ho xela vḁunḁe vḁune ha vha one maanḁa.*

[A human being lacks this power because of being naughty,
By taking this and that and mixing them.
A person then joyfully brags about this mixture,
While the authenticity of selfhood, which is the true power, is lost.]

The poet finds fault with human's desire to tamper with God's original design. This tampering and scientific mixture of genes dilutes, if not obliterates, the uniqueness of a person. As a result, the poet laments the loss of authentic selfhood.

Netshivhuyu's (1990:6) poem "Tshililo tsha vḁuvha" (The cry of being) connects with the previous poets' need to articulate uniqueness in the ideological superstructure of identity politics.

*Vḁupfa hanga kha vḁu moḁe,
Vḁu fovhele thumbuni ya vḁuhwi,
Iṭo ṭanga ṭi vḁone vḁutswu,
Thangela-vḁupofu ha vḁuvha.*

[May my feeling liquefy,
And be swallowed into the belly of silence,
May my eye see blackness,
The foreshadowing of the blindness of being.]

*Mbilu i sime lwa lugungulo,
Maṭo a phophe malofha,
Thindidzo tshanduko hu biso,
Mvumela-tshililo tsha vḁuvha.*

[May my heart start a song of unrest,
My eyes drip blood,
The solidification of change being ailment,
The complementarity of the cry of being.]

*Mbilu yanga iwe nḁe,
Fḁufha-ha u buḁe matavha,*

Seli ngei ndi ri phavha!
Ndi ṭunḡe ndodo dza thindidzo.

[My heart, you, authentic 'me',
Fly then and cross mountains,
So that, there on the other side I land!
And gather provisions of solidity.]

Netshivhuyu's poem advocates for a utopian narrative of both self-identification and self-determination. Otherwise recondite aspects such as the dissolution of feeling and consignment into 'silence' or 'oblivion' are intended to highlight the notion that the definition and description of authentic selfhood cannot be found in an earthly realm. The quest for true identity and authenticity is interspersed with the need to go beyond the earthly realm and align with a reality whose authority supersedes that of the earth or of human constructs.

The poet believes that by accessing a dimension beyond the earthly dimensions of existence, he will gain a true and clear understanding of his authentic self. It is not specified in the poem whether the poet yearns for an encounter with God or with gods as his system of reference for true identity.

In the last four stanzas of the poem "Nḡe ndi Nnyi, Inwi ni Nnyi?" Ratshiṭanga yearns for the privilege to access and acquire true and wholesome knowledge about the origin of humankind. The stanzas further capture the poet's quest for authenticity and ability to define himself within a circumstantial whole of human life. The question '*Mathina nḡe-ha hone ndi nḡe nnyi kha swiswi ḡino ḡine ra vhangā vhuḡe?*' (But I, who am I in this darkness where we vie for authentic identity?) surmises the poet's quest for true identity. Such interrogative questions are essential, particularly in a context where there are multiple opinions and subsequently multiple identities. The poet also seeks or prefers an identity that will condense all these identities into one. Hence, he answers his questions in the subsequent stanzas, beginning with the line '*Nga ndi fhindule hu vhe u fhindulela*' (Let me answer myself and by so doing answer for everybody). The poet seeks to answer two questions, 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' when he says:

Vhubvaḡuvha na Vhukovhela na yoḡhe mivhala,
Ine yoḡhe ya ralo u tambulela
U ḡivha vhungoho musi i tshi tshila.

[East and West and all colours (races),
All of whom continue to struggle
To know the truth while alive.]

*Nḡe ndi nga inwi, ndi nga uḷa,
Nda nga uyu na vhaḷa vhe vha fhira.
Shangoni tho ngo ḡa u dzula;
Ho vha u shuma kha we roḡhe a hira.*

[I am like you, I am like that one,
Like this one and those who have passed.
I did not come to stay in this world;
It was merely to fulfil the mandate He hired all of us for.]

*Vhungoho-ngoho he na vhaḡwe vha ḡivha
Ndi ha uri haho ane a ḡivha
Zwiphiri zwa ḷino dzivha,
Hune ra tshila nga vengo na u vshivha.*

[The truth of the matter that even others knew
Is that there is no one who knows
The secrets of this lake,
Where we live in hate and greed.]

(Ratshitanga, 1973:1)

Ratshitanga does not clearly answer the questions 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?'. He relies on allusions rather than on definite premises upon which identity construction and articulation can be lynched. Nevertheless, these allusions are not baseless, at least in the poet's mind. The poet's allusions may be taken (a) as a technique intended to illustrate that identity is too complex to be assigned an absolute definition; or (b) that human identity cannot be fully understood or clearly defined unless there are substantial answers to philosophical questions such as 'Where do we come from?' (origin), 'Who are we?' (identity), 'Why are we here?' (purpose) and 'Where are we going?' (destiny). Although the poet does not provide answers to these questions, his ideological premises in the poem are (a) that we all originate from God and to God we shall all return, and (b) that since we all come from God will return to God, the totality of our being, identity and purpose is found in the totality of God's being and identity. The problem, which the poet does not solve, however, is 'Who/what is God?'. This is one of the reasons that a section is devoted

to the discussion of the selected poets' conception of both God and humankind. This discussion laid the foundation for the discussion of theocentricity and anthropocentricity in Tshivenda culture and poetry and for an exploration of the notions of being and belonging. This last aspect is the focus of the next section's discussion.

4.6.4. Being and Belonging in Tshivenda Poetry

This subsection considers the selected poets' exhibition of both a sense of belonging and alienation in their poetry. It is also asserted that identity is interconnected with place (home) and memory, the hallmarks of belonging and identification. Some poems in this section should be read with forced removals and the homeland system in apartheid South Africa in mind. These historical experiences are considered because they are major contributory factors and formative influences on the poets' longing for belonging. The discussion also highlights that when people are removed from their home (land), a sense of melancholic alienation tends to find expression in their lives. This melancholic alienation may be depicted by raising questions such as the ones Rasila (2006:44) raises in the poem "Ndi nne nnyi?" (Who am I?).

Ndi nne nnyi kha ja muno?

Ndi nne nnyi kha zwa muno?

[Who am I in this world?

Who am I in the things of this world?]

Rasila does not provide answers to these questions, he simply laments the loss of his identity and sense of cultural understanding. He connects the loss of his identity and culture with the loss of his religion in the next stanza:

Vhurereli hanga ndo laṭa,

Nda doba ha mutsinda—mufheledzi,

Ha mpfunza vengo kha zwa hanga,

Na zwino ndi zwi sili,

Na zwifho nda nala.

[I threw away my religion,

And picked the foreigners' religion as the ultimate one,

It taught me to hate my ethnic heritage,

To this day, my ethnic beliefs are pagan,

Even the sacred sites I turned away from.]

Rasila's lamentation is not only tinged with a sense of regret for abandoning his traditional religion but also reflects how cultural imperialism contributes to cultural malnutrition and schizophrenia among the imperialised. Rasila leaves it to the reader to grasp the implicit message of how the Vhavanḁa abandoned their traditional religion for Western values and religion, eventually resulting in cultural confusion, if not hollowness. Rasila affirms that the Vhavanḁa, like any other African people south of the Sahara, led a religious life before the missionaries came. The allusive quality of the lines above shows that traditional religion imbued the Vhavanḁa's faith in such a way that their daily lives were controlled by religious practices and customs. Rasila, however, does not specify whether the Tshivavanḁa traditional religion, which he abandoned in favour of the Western religion, also encapsulated the Vhavanḁa's belief in a supreme being. His reference to *zwa hanga* (my ethnic heritage) is representative of the Africans' knowledge of God, which in most cases is expressed in proverbs, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies (Mbiti, 1969). Rasila feels culturally disoriented and alienated; as a result, he feels disconnected from his ethnic identity. Thus, a sense of alienation may stem from the abandonment or annihilation of a person's traditional culture.

It must be noted that upon arrival and subsequent settlement at Dzaḁa, the Vhavanḁa established and sustained their traditional culture and belief systems. However, the arrival of European settlers in Venḁa notably disturbed the life and living of the Vhavanḁa (Khorommbi, 1996). Consequently, the Vhavanḁa not only lost most of their land but their cultural identity was also seriously impacted. Hence, Ratshiḁanga's (1987:16) poem "Mpheni Venḁa ḁanga" (Give my Venḁa) entails a longing for the restoration of the Venḁa (home) he knew before the invasion:

*Mpheni Venḁa ḁanga ni mphe dakalo;
Mpheni Fundudzi na milambo yoḁhe ya lunako.
Ni nḁee Mangwele na Lwamondo,
Luvhola ndi i vhone kha ḁa tshipembe.*

[Give me my Venḁa and you shall have given me joy;
Give me Fundudzi and all the beautiful rivers.
Give Mangwele and Lwamondo,
And let me Mount Luvhola in the south.]

A conceptual analysis of the term 'renaissance' indicates that since such events or processes are characterised by a passion for the revival of lost, marginalised or forgotten culture, literature and science, the term 'renaissance' may thus be understood as a 'return' (More, 2002). The reference in Ratshitanga's poem is firstly a kind of return to a previous state of being or a repeat of something desirable. Hence, African 'renaissance' in particular is conceptually associated and defined in terms of words that begin with the prefix re-, as expressed in rebirth, rediscover, redefine, redress, regenerate, reawaken, reinvent, represent or return. Thus, at the first level, the poet longs for the retraditionalisation of Venda in particular and Africa in general. In this sense, the poet envisions African renaissance as a search for African authenticity.

In the second level, Ratshitanga progresses from idealised notions of some form of essentialist mystification construing African essence as not only genetically determined but also as geographically-bound. Hence, his main cry is for the restoration of the Vhavenda's land. The cry for land brings into sharp focus the effects of social maladies such as displacement and dislocation in the discursive arena of identity politics. The poet's cry for land reflects the fact that when people are moved from their home, they tend to be overwhelmed by a melancholic sense of alienation. This is because people identify with a place and feel at one with that place. As a result, they are always occupied with the idea of return to the place, which is why in the next stanza, the poet still demands his land from the European settlers:

*Mpheni Madzivhañwombe ho dzulaho vhaeni,
Phepho i tshi rwa miṭambi i wane pfulo.
Ni ralo ni nkonanye na avho vhaeni,
Vhunga na u rangani ro konana.*

[Give me Madzivhañwombe where visitors settled,
The cold persisting, so that the flocks will find pasture.
By so doing, reconcile me with those visitors,
The same way we reconciled in the beginning.]

Dislocation, therefore, results in the shell-like hollowness that geographically dislocated people feel (Mogoboya, 2011). This melancholic sense of alienation results in the poet feeling rootless and soulless because it is people's home (land)

that makes them tick. The poet emphasises the idea that Venda is settled by 'visitors' (European settlers). Furthermore, the settlers did not only take the land for mere residential purposes, but they also took the Vhavana's grazing lands and subsequently crippled the Vhavana's economic development. Thus, dislocation and displacement fragment and undermine people's life and livelihood, which further compounds that sense of alienation. Displacement and dislocation erode a people's sense of identity and belonging. For the poet, the problem can be resolved by engaging with the settlers about the prospects of land redistribution. He alludes to the fact that initially the Vhavana and European settlers had a cordial relationship and lived in harmony. On the strength of that former cordiality, reconciliation between whites and the Vhavana and the restoration of land should be re-imagined. Obviously, land redistribution will not be as easy as the poet makes it to look; he merely seeks to prod the readers towards a reflection on the prospects of regaining their land.

In another poem titled "Hanga ndi ngafhi" (Where do I belong[?]), Mashuwa (1972:9) exhibits both the sense of alienation and need for belonging:

Hanga ndi ngafhi ndi shangoni ja vha tshilaho?

Tshanga ndi mini i si vuvhu?

U kundwa vhannani a hu na lukuna,

Hai, u amba ndi u pfa nungo.

[Where do I belong in the land of the living?

What is mine except privation?

There is nothing good in lack,

No, if I were to state it in detail, it would be a waste of time.]

Ndi dzulafhi hu si na muvhango,

Ndi nnyi ane a ntonda kha vha jino,

Muvhuya ndi nnyi a si na tshikhetho?

Yowee, ro khakha nga u sa fana ngeno ri songo nanga.

[Where can I live without conflict,

Who can be generous to me among the people of this world,

Who is the noble person, the one without discrimination?

Oh, our failure was not looking the same even though we did not choose it.]

Longing for belonging and the subsequent sense of alienation are simultaneously caused and compounded by both poverty and people's indifference to the poet's

plight. In the last stanza, the poet implicates racism as another cause of estrangement. Where racial categorisation and discrimination persist, people treat each other with hostility. Here, the poet refers to the separatist ideology of the apartheid system in South Africa. In the poem, Mashuwa seeks to prod the reader towards exploring the lingering effects of racial polarisation in apartheid South Africa. In this way, Mashuwa submits that alienation can also take its impetus from “a racially turbulent society” (Chapman, 1982:11). It is against the background of the perceived discrepancies between commonly accepted notions of human dignity and the peculiar indignities that were daily heaped on Black people by the apartheid mentality that the next section reflects on the Vhavenḁa poets’ interfacing of identity, memory, home and renaissance.

4.6.5. Identity, Memory, Home and Notions of Renaissance in Tshivendḁa poetry

The concept of renaissance brings into sharp focus the post-apartheid notion of ‘return’ (More, 2002). According to More (2002), there are two conceptions about ‘the return’. The first is an Afro-pessimistic conception that construes ‘the return’ as a regression to something similar to the Hobbesian ‘state of nature’ (innocence), and thus retrogressive and oppressive. The second conception is the opposite and interprets ‘the return’ as necessary, and thus, progressive, liberatory politics. More (2002) argues that the former view smacks of distorted (apartheid’s) representations, symptomatic of most Western images of Africa and the African; a view driven by ideological and political motives that want to halt and obstruct transformatory praxis.

This section presents some of the selected poets’ (re)imaginings of their ancestral home (Matongoni) and their longing to return to this home. The poems are read in light of the liberatory interpretation in an attempt to show that the poets’ idea of return is not conservative, nativist or essentialist, but that it is directed at reconstructing and rehabilitating the African. It is further indicated that the poets reimagine returns to their ancestral home while forging an identity and authenticity they think is appropriate to the exigencies of ‘modern’ existence (cf. More, 2002). To this end, Ratshiḁanga’s (1987:43) poem “Vendḁa Thetshelesa” (Vendḁa, Listen) abets the discussion of the notion of return among the Vhavenḁa poets in this study. In the poem, Ratshiḁanga says:

*Rothe ro bva Vhukalanga,
Ra swika Dzaṭa ra fhaṭa,
Govhani ḷa mulambo Nzhelele,
Mirafho ya ṭandulukana ri tshi khwaṭha.*

[We all hailed from Vhukalanga,
And arrived at Dzaṭa and built,
At the valley of the Nzhelele River,
Generations successively came and solidified us.]

Ratshiṭanga provides an account on the migration of the Vhavenḍa from Vhukalanga (Zimbabwe) to Dzaṭa (South Africa). Vhukalanga is to Ratshiṭanga, the original home of the Vhavenḍa, and therefore, serves as representation of the Vhavenḍa's history and identity. As if in consensus with Ratshiṭanga, Matshili's (1972:26) poem "Matongoni" is both insightful and helpful in the poet's reimagination of the Vhavenḍa's ancestral home (Vhukalanga/Matongoni).

*Matongoni hayani hashu,
Hayani hashu havhuḍi;
Ro dzula hone ri tshi ḍiphina,
Ri tshi ḷa ra posa na tsiwana.*

[Matongoni our home,
Our beautiful home,
We lived there in enjoyment,
Eating so much that we also fed the poor.]

Originally, the Vhasenzi, the ancestors of the royal Singo clan of the Vhavenḍa, lived in a city called Matongoni (The Graves) (Schutte, 1978). The poet identifies Matongoni as both a beautiful home and a place once characterised by such prosperity and abundance that even the poor were fed by the native inhabitants. Matongoni is also depicted as a place worth recreating or revisiting. Returns to Matongoni appear to be a Herculean task, particularly because so much has changed since the Vhavenḍa's migration that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to recreate the ancient and ancestral home of the Vhavenḍa. Secondly, returns to Matongoni cannot happen because it is traditionally held that Nwali instructed the Vhavenḍa to leave the place and move to the south (South Africa), as the next stanza confirms:

*Tshi dinaho Mwali makhulu ndi mufhumudzi,
Ro thakhwa hani Matongoni hayani hashu;
Ndi tshini tshe ra vha ri tshi lila?
Tshifhefho dzithumbu dzi tshi dzula dzi mirutshe.*

[What bothers Mwali, the grandfather is the lack of a comforter,
How spoiled we were at Matongoni our home;
What did we lack?
In autumn, our bellies were full beyond capacity.]

It is not strange that the poet progresses to mention Mwali with Matongoni. It is believed that it was Mwali that conversed with the Vhasenzi (Vhavenda) at Mount Matongoni (Khorommbi, 1996). In essence, the Matonjeni or Matongoni shrine complex is said to have been the centre of the Mwari cult (Daneel, 1970; cf. Schutte, 1978). Schutte (1978) records that Matongoni itself had six distinct offices. There was a high priest, a keeper of the shrine, a *hosanna* or dedicated male, a *jukwa* dancer, a second priest and interpreter of the Voice of Mwari and a medium (Schutte, 1978). Also connected to the cult was the tremendous drum that was classified as the drum of Nwali, the voice of the great god, King of Heaven (*Mambo wa Denga*), but also of the ancestor God of the Vhasenzi (Vhavenda) and Vhakalanga (Schutte, 1978). Unlike Mashau (2004), Schutte (1978) does not see a distinction between *Mwali weDenga* and *Mwali weMatonjeni*. This lack of distinction implies that to the Vhavenda Mwali/Nwali was/is both an ancestor (also referred to *Makhulu* [Grandparent]) and the God of Heaven. The first line of the stanza above also mentions Mwali's need for comfort but does not disclose why. The subsequent lines all reiterate the prosperity and abundance once enjoyed and now longed for by the poet.

*Mvula i sa ni vhakalaha vha isa nduvho,
Nduvho ya ṭanganedzwa nga dakalo jihulwane,
Ngomalungundu ye ngindi-ngunduu ya unga lothe,
Mifhululu ya ṭaha thungo dzothe.*

[When it did not rain, the elders sent their propitiations,
And the propitiations were accepted with great joy,
Ngomalungundu would spontaneously rumble: *ngindi-ngunduu*,
Ululations would spread to all directions.]

This stanza reinforces the association(s) of Mwali with rain-making, an aspect that was triggered by prescribed propitiations. *Vhakalaha* or senior members were designated to deliver these propitiations to Mwali. This buttresses the idea that Mwali was not approached or appeased by just any member of society (Mashau, 2004; Munyai, 2016). Understanding the propitiation of Mwali and the ancestors in Tshivenda culture also requires one to understand the “African philosophical conceptions of religion” (Mokgoatšana, 1996:115). A glimpse at Africans’ cosmogonic view and the way in which their society is ordered shows how the principle of relying on intermediaries to approach and address the king, the ancestors and God, the supreme being, is adhered to (Mokgoatšana, 1996). According to the poet, Mwali is approached and propitiated by *vhakalaha* (old men) as intermediaries. This affirms the idea that Mwali is “a personal being beyond and above ancestral hierarchies and could only be approached through the mediation of the senior lineage ancestors (*mhondoro* or *vharudzi*) or special messengers” (Schutte, 1978:110).

The poet makes it a point to mention *vhakalaha* (old men; plural) instead of *mukalaha* (singular) because African religion is not an individual affair; it is a corporate religion that includes the whole community. Thus, the ancestor (Mwali) or the ancestors are approached by the group (*vhakalaha*) to satisfy group interests and needs. Even if an individual would have attempted to open a line of communication with the ancestor or ancestors, that individual would use the plural to indicate that the interests are not only theirs but also the group’s that they represent (Mokgoatšana, 1996). When this principle is adhered to, Mwali responds favourably to all people in his realm of rulership, resulting in the people’s tremendous joy.

In these moments of joy, the Vhasenzi’s tremendous drum *Ngomalungundu* would also spread its echoing sound (to be discussed broadly in the next section). The same *Ngomalungundu* sounded in the Vhava’s radiant moments of joy also struck such fear into the souls of their enemies that they either fled in terror or fell to the ground in a swoon as in death, as stated in Section 2.7.2. At times, the power of the drum was so great that it appeared to play itself, and this was because the invisible Mwari/Mwali himself was playing it (Kirkaldy, 2005). It is held in oral tradition that during their movement southwards, the Singo were protected by this drum with magical powers (Munyai, 2016). Thus, as envisaged in Section 2.7.2,

myth and drums as aspects of belief form the thematic foci of some Vhavenda poets, particularly those who follow the Tshivenda traditional religion. In the next stanza, the poet goes on to reflect on what used to happen at Matongoni when Mwali was pleased with the sacrifices of his people:

*Ya thoma u bvuma nga Tshipembe,
Kukole paṭa vhukati ha ṭhoho,
Milobilo ya unga thungo dzoṭhe,
Ra takala u handululwa nga makhulu washu.*

[Thunder would begin in the south,
A small cloud would gather in the middle of the head [sky],
Downpours would gush from all directions,
We would be glad for having been relieved by our grandfather.]

This stanza is intended to appreciate Mwali's rain-making abilities. According to Schutte (1978:110), the name *muali* (Mwari/Mwali) means 'sower', and the god/God is mainly associated with the fertility of crops and women. Schutte (1978) further states that Mwari is the giver of rain. His praise name is *Dzivaguru* (Great Pool) (Schutte, 1978). The idea of a great pool is important in Tshivenda traditional religion because water is essentially associated with life among the Vhavenda (see Section 4.6).

*Matongoni marubini ashu,
Haya ha miomva na miṭaḍa minzhi,
Mitsheho ya tshaka dzoṭhe,
Maḍi a shuluwa hoṭhe-hoṭhe.*

[Matongoni our ruins,
A place of bananas and numerous fruits,
Fruits of different kinds,
Water pouring everywhere.]

As a result of Mwali's provision of rain at Matongoni, people enjoyed the bounties of the earth such as bananas and other fruit. The poet's reminiscing on these times of bountiful harvest at Matongoni aims to contrast the Vhavenda's life under the sovereignty of Mwali and the life they lived without Mwali, the latter being a life of lack and despondency. At Matongoni, the Vhavenda's life was characterised by

*Dzinyimbo na miulu zwi tshi nanela,
Matangwa na tshikona zwi tshi likitana,*

*Tshigombela na lugube zwi tshi fhalana,
Lo lala Matongoni hayani hashu havhuḁi.*

[Songs and celebratory performances heightening,
Plays and the reed-pipe dance in full blast,
Tshigombela and hollow bamboo instrument in harmony,
With Matongoni our beautiful home at ease.]

This stanza still emphasises the joyful life of the past. This joyfulness was expressed through songs and other forms of celebration. The poet further connects the Tshivenda traditional dances such as *Tshikona* and *Tshigombela* to Matongoni. By implication, Mwali of Matongoni and Heaven did not have a problem with the Vhavana's cultural expression and identification through song and dance. Missionary endeavours eroded or contributed to the neglect of these African cultural patterns and traditions on the premise that they were animist, heathen and pagan religions that reflected barbarism and backwardness (Mokgoatšana, 1996). But for the poet, Matongoni is home.

*Matongoni, hayani hashu havhuḁi,
A ri nga ḁo u hangwa na khathihi,
Ri u humbula masiari na vhusiku,
Ri tshi elelwa zwivhuya zwau zwavhuḁi.*

[Matongoni, our beautiful home,
We will never ever forget you,
We think about you day and night,
Remembering all the good you possess.]

The interface of identity, memory and place is manifested in this stanza. The poet speaks to Matongoni and makes a societal oath that Matongoni will never be forgotten. The poet does not explain how Matongoni will remain in the memories of the Vhavana, he simply states that the place will always be on the minds of those connected to it. The poet has nothing bad to say about Matongoni and only focuses on the good once enjoyed in the place. In the last stanza, Matongoni is identified as the place of the Vhavana's creation or origin.

*Matongoni, matongoni tsikoni yashu,
Wo ri kanzwa zwihulu vhukuma,
Zwigala zwau wo sala nazwo wo zwi kuvhatedza;
Ra humbula Matongoni ri a ḁidzima zwijlwa.*

[Matongoni, Matongoni where we were created,
You bestowed so much good to us,
Your glories remained with you shielded;
When we remember Matongoni, we fast from food.]

Both Ratshitanga and Matshili mention the Vhavenda's migration from Vhukalanga, Matongoni, to their present habitation in South Africa in attempt to reflect on the 'glorious' past once enjoyed by the Vhavenda. It can only be assumed that this glorious past was enjoyed before the advent of missionary influence and colonialism in Africa. Matshili's (1972:29) poem "Mupfuluwo wa Vhasenzi" (The migration of the Vhasenzi) dramatises how Nwali would probably deliver his oracles to the Vhavenda.

Hee inwi vhaḍuhulu vhang!
Ni itani phanḍa ha maḥo anga?
Milayo yanga no i isa ngafhi naa?
Zwiito zwanu zwi a nengisa vhannani.

[Hey you my grandchildren!
What are you doing before my eyes?
Where did you put my laws?
Your deeds are disgusting.]

The poem's central theme is Nwali's displeasure with the Vhasenzi or Masingo abandoning his laws. The poet speaking as if he is Nwali implicitly propagates the idea that Nwali is a deity who not only speaks *to* a person but one who also speaks *through* a person. If Nwali does speak through a person, it means then that he (Nwali) inhabits a human being. Nwali's inhabitation of a human being consequently advances the idea that he can take control of both the mental and vocal faculties of a human to express his will and intentions. In this way, a human becomes a medium through which Nwali conveys his word and will. In the poem, however, the poet makes no reference to himself as a habitation or medium through which Nwali speaks and focusses merely on the fractured relationship between the Vhavenda and their deity. The Masingo's abandonment of Nwali's laws not only resulted in Nwali's departure from them but also in their disharmony and bloody wars as a people, as the next stanza shows.

Mufhirifhiri ndi wani vhukati haḥu?
Ni vhangisana mini tshihuluhulu?

*No nndina nga maanḁa vhasenzi vhanga,
Mishumo yaḁu i a ntsilinga zwihulu.*

[What are the bloody wars for among you?
What is so big that you are fighting one another for?
You infuriated me so much my vhasenzi,
Your deeds are greatly repulsive to me.]

The poet does not clarify the cause of the conflict among the Vhasenzi. What is clear is that Nwali is both infuriated and nauseated by the fights among his people. In anger, Nwali commands the Vhavanḁa to leave both their home and Nwali's sacred place, Matongoni, to go to a place merely referred as the 'south' in the poem.

*Vhasenzi! No n[n]dina pfuluwani,
No ntshonisa vhuhulwane a vhu lwelwi,
Muḁi wanga no u fhiselani vhannani?
Vhasenzi nandi! Pfuluwani maḁoni anga.*

[Vhasenzi! You angered me, move away,
You embarrassed me, seniority is not a matter of protest,
Why did you burn my home?
Oh Vhasenzi! Move away from my sight.]

Part of Nwali's fury with the Vhasenzi is that in their bloody wars they also burnt his sacred site/home. It is possible that the poet's narration of this fractured relationship is also a tactic employed to account for the reasons behind the Vhavanḁa's migration. If that is true, the poet adds to the Masingo's migratory and political history the tradition that the Masingo moved from Matongoni primarily because they offended their God and not necessarily because of being overpowered and expelled by other tribes. If it is true that the poet provides a historical account of the Masingo's origin, it does nothing but endorses the claim that there are conflicting traditions on the Masingo's origin. In the next stanza, Nwali instructs the Masingo:

*Iyani thungo ya Tshipembe noḁhe,
Ni dzule shangoni ḁavhuḁi ḁa mulalo,
Fhano aiwa, ndi a pfuluwa nḁe Mwali nga ndoḁhe,
Ndo sinyuwa muḁi wanga wo lovha na zwalo.*

[All of you, move to the South,
And settle in the good land of peace,

Here, no, I, Mwali am leaving in my own accord,
I am furious, my residence has disappeared with its sacred sites.]

Although Nwali is grieved by the Masingo's abandonment of his laws, their bloody wars and subsequent destruction of his sacred site, he still instructs them to go to 'a good land of peace' that is in the south. Here, Nwali is depicted as a God who although infuriated by his people, still provides what is good for them. This gives the impression that his benevolence towards his people supersedes his fury against them. In the next stanza, Nwali calls upon his son Tshilume to lead the Masingo to the south.

*U ngafhi Tshilume nwananga?
Nwana wa vuhwavho na vhudele;
Kha swike ndi mu fhe milayo yanga,
Ni thetshesele ene vhaquhulu vhanga.*

[Where is Tshilume, my child?
A child of humility and neatness;
He must come so that I give him my laws,
And you listen to him, my grandchildren.]

Not much is disclosed about Tshilume in the Vhavenda's oral traditions, except that he is the son of the God King Mwali (see Section 2.7). The poet concurs with Schutte (1978) that communication between the religious functionaries and Nwali varied through time: First there was a high priest, and then Tshilume who is depicted as the successor to Nwali as king. It is possible that the poet speaks not only on behalf of Nwali but also on behalf of the priesthood who lost their position to Tshilume.

It is also possible that Tshilume was merely a chief who functioned as a mediator between Nwali and the people. Since aristocracy constitutes the core of the Vhavenda's life and worldview, an independent section is devoted to this aspect in Section 5.8. For now, it suffices to show that Nwali revealed himself directly to chiefs (Hwami, Ravhura and of course, the oldest, Tshilume). It is unclear whether Tshilume is simply the oldest chief in the Vhavenda's dynasty or is the begotten son of Nwali. As explained in Sections 2.7 and 4.2.3, *Hwami* and *Tshilume* are also the names of the two male divining bones in the basic set consisting of four dice. *Hwami* represents the old man and *tshilume* represents the young man (Schutte, 1978). Tshilume, upon being summoned by Nwali, immediately assumes the role of a

mediator between Nwali and the disobedient Vhavenda. Nwali's replacement of the priests with Tshilume affirms the idea that Nwali would no longer interact directly with his people. Tshilume is identified as an obedient (law-abiding) son who is both humble and neat. The Vhavenda are instructed to obey him. In the above stanza, the earlier statement about Nwali being perceived and addressed as a grandparent (*makhulu*) is hinted at with the use of the words *vhaduhulu vhang*a (my grandchildren). In the next stanza, Nwali shifts his focus from the Vhavenda and addresses Tshilume:

*Tshilume thetshesesa nne muṅe wau,
Pfuluwa na vhasenzi havha vhau,
U vha range phanḁa nga mulalo,
Ngoma ya madambi i ḁo fhenya vhoṁthe nga ṅdalo.*

[Tshilume, listen to me, your father,
Migrate with these vhasenzi of yours,
Lead them in peace,
The magical drum will conquer all in their totalities.]

Tshilume is implored to listen to Nwali, his father and lord. The mandate given to Tshilume is that he must migrate with the Masingo and lead them to a designated place in the south. Tshilume is instructed to lead the people in peace. To further endorse Tshilume's leadership, '*ngoma ya madambi*' (the magical drum) must be in his possession. The drum referred to above is *Ngomalungundu*, whose role and function in Tshivenda mythology is discussed in Section 2.7.2 and is revisited in Section 4.4.2. In the above stanza, protective qualities are ascribed to the sacred and magical drum given to Tshilume. Thus, the magical drum in Tshilume's possession symbolised Nwali's presence and continual protection of the Masingo against their foes. Nwali's next instruction is:

*Milayo yanga ni i vhulunge nga nungo vhukuma,
Na khakha areḁi ni ḁo vha no khakhela nne Mwali waṅu,
Bulayo na tshinyalo zwi ḁo vha zwihulu,
Zwo itwa nga nne Mwali makhulu waṅu.*

[Preserve all my precepts with all your might,
If you falter, well, you would have offended I, your Mwali,
Death and destruction will greatly increase,
Emanating from me Mwali, your grandparent.]

Tshilume is implored to do everything in his power to preserve Nwali's precepts. It seems the only way to secure Nwali's presence, pleasure and protection is by living in total obedience to his laws. An infringement of his laws ultimately results in his offence, which yields further destruction and death. This implies that Nwali is also a God who has the power to cause destruction and death. Citing this complete poem was done to foreground the idea that Raluvhimba is depicted by the poets as a deity who can speak *to*, *in* or *through* a person. This is important because it shows how people commune with God or god. Thus far, it can be said that Nwali is perceived by some of the Vhavenda poets as God the creator, who not only speaks but also exercises his sovereignty to the benefit or detriment of creation.

4.7 Section Deductions

Continuing from the two main streams that feed the selected Vhavenda poets' articulation of selfhood, identity and culture, namely notions of theocentricity and anthropocentricity, the second category of this chapter reflected on how the poets derive their understanding of human origin from either the Judeo-Christian or the traditional perspective. The appeal of the poets' writing lies mainly in its expression of the need to be agentively assigned the prerogatives to articulate their own sense of self-identification and cultural representation. The poets' agitations for self-identification and representation are a poignant and realistic portrayal of the Vhavenda's collective need to move from the margins to the centre of postcolonial discourse on identity and culture. For the poets, this need is etched in the desire to capture the stark and naturalistic depictions of their cultural consciousness and struggle for liberation. Thus, the poem becomes the shortest route to the truth of the circumstances in which the poets lived, and possibly still live, in South Africa. The poets' linkage of identity, memory, home and renaissance serves to bolster the idea that art for the Muvenda has always been a communal activity and never a private contemplation. Therefore, the Vhavenda poets' artistic experimentation always has close affinities with the salient features of their history, home, belief and cultural uniqueness, giving Tshivenda poetry archetypic resonances with postcolonial poetry productions in other African cultures. Viewing Tshivenda poetry as a sociological response to the necessity of identity formations and reformations in the postcolonial

context, the next section focuses on the mytho-aesthetic aspects of Tshivenda culture.

4.8 MYTH, MYSTERY AND RELIGION IN TSHIVENḌA POETRY

It is a strongly held belief among some Africans that life started from a pool; hence, they trace their origin from water (Mokgoatšana, 1996:103). In his analysis of some aspects of Puleng's poetry, Mokgoatšana (1996) mentions that the Northern Sotho-speaking people connect water imagery with childbirth, among other communicative purposes, to trace their life from water. According to Mokgoatšana (Ibid:106), "this idea [of connecting water to origins of human life] is not strange because the Basotho of the New South Africa and Lesotho also believe the first Mopeli came from a pool situated in Ntswanatsatsi, a mythic area in the east". Mokgoatšana (Ibid: 108) is quick to inform the reader that,

This tracing of life from water should not be taken literally. This is a metaphorical expression that connotes the whole pelvic area, the womb and the pubic hair The pool referred to extends to the plasm in the placenta which bursts open before a child is born. The symbolism of water cannot be divorced from the women's procreative function.

The Vhavenda's belief system and culture is also built on a vibrant mythical understanding where water is an important theme. Certainly, there are many sacred sites within their region where the Vhavenda conjure up their ancestral spirits (Munyai, 2016). The Vhavenda

believe 'zwiḍuḍwane' or water spirits live at the bottom of waterfalls, and that these beings are only half visible, have only one eye, one leg, and one arm. One half of a man can be seen in this world and the other half in the spirit world. The Vhavenda would take offerings of food to them, because 'zwiḍuḍwane' cannot grow things underwater (Munyai, 2016:17).

Apart from linking their belief systems to waterfalls, the Vhavenda also connect their belief system to lakes. This mythological understanding is reflected in their perception of Lake Fundudzi, which is one of the most sacred sites of the Vhavenda (Munyai, 2016). In Section 2.7.3 it was anticipated that the selected poets would use water imagery, particularly drawn from the semiotic significances of Lake Fundudzi in Tshivenda culture. The next section focuses on Lake Fundudzi because some of the selected poets centralises it as a leitmotif in their poetry.

4.8.1 Lake Fundudzi as a Source and Literary Representation of Tshivenda Mythology

According to Munyai (2016), Lake Fundudzi was formed by a huge landslide in the Soutpansberg mountain range. As the previous subsection purported, much of the Vhavana's folkloric language and mythological outlook thematises Lake Fundudzi. Among the selected poets, Ngwana's (1958:17) poem "Dzivha Fundudzi" (Lake Fundudzi) lynchpins its themes on water imagery and relies on Lake Fundudzi as the fulcrum of Tshivenda mythology:

*Dzivha Fundudzi li vhone duvhani
Lo no vhona maduvha manzhi-manzhi
Ndo kuvha u tamba kha dzivha heli;
Dzivha li re na vhadzimu vha hashu.
Ndo kuvha u lidza ngoma Fundudzi,
Ndo kuvha u dzula mjavhani yalo;
Ndi toga u dzula na vhokhotsi anga;
Ri tshi imba dzavhuji dza Matongoni.*

[See Lake Fundudzi in the sun
It has seen many countless days
I miss bathing in this lake;
The lake inhabited by our ancestors.
I miss playing the drum at Fundudzi,
I miss sitting on its sands;
I want to stay with my fathers;
Singing beautiful songs from Matongoni.]

Recognised as the only natural lake in South Africa, Fundudzi is unsurprisingly central to the old mythologies of the Vhavana (Nettleton, 2006). Unsurprisingly, suspicion surrounds the lake, which is fed by the Mutale River but does not appear to have an outlet (Munyai, 2016); hence, the poet's reference to Mutale in the second stanza. The Vhavana regard Lake Fundudzi as a metaphorical womb, that is, the origin of life (Nettleton, 2006). Linked to this metaphor, as Nettleton further avers, is the *ngoma* (drum) which is an image of Lake Fundudzi or the womb, within which swims the crocodile (the king), represented in the drum by *mmbé* (two pebbles). *Mmbé* are taken from the stomach of a live crocodile in the water by a powerful healer or diviner and the king swallows them on his investiture, and they

remain in his intestines until his death (Nettleton, 1985, 2006). When the pebbles rattle in the drum, they are likened to the crying of the baby (Nettleton, 2006).

The poet's word choice in the poem should not be taken lightly for the words are deliberately and purposefully chosen to reinforce the myth of genesis that surrounds Lake Fundudzi among the Vhavenda. The verb stem *ɬuvha* (miss; yearn) in the second stanza (below) is used to front the idea that the persona is restless on earth and can only be at ease upon reunion with his *vhokhotsi* (fathers; ancestors), who apparently inhabit the lake. The recurrent use of the verb stem *ɬamba* (bathe) in the poem ascribes renewal and cleansing qualities to the lake. It is only by accessing the lake that the poet can truly be cleansed and renewed. In this sense, the lake is not only associated with renewal, but also with regeneration or even recreation. Here, the genesis myth associated with water, more specifically with Lake Fundudzi, gains a foothold. The use of the noun *ngweṅa* (crocodile) bolsters the belief of the Vhavenda's royal ancestors' interactions with crocodiles to legitimise their rulership. The poet alludes to his royal status and privilege as factors that will prohibit the crocodiles from devouring him. It is also possible that the poet intends to advance the notion that only those who legitimately trace their ancestry to the Vhavenda's ancestors can swim with crocodiles in Lake Fundudzi.

*Ndo ɬuvha u ɬamba Fundudzi,
Ndo ɬuvha u nwa maḡi Muḡale;
Masekhwa matshena a tshi khou tala;
Ngweṅa dzaḷo dzi sa nnyiti tshithu.*

[I miss bathing at Fundudzi,
I miss drinking water at Muḡale;
While white ducks float;
Its crocodiles doing me no harm.]

In the poem, Lake Fundudzi is centralised thematically because it is important in both oral and written histories and in the continuing customs of the different groups who constitute the Vhavenda. That in Tshivenda mythology Lake Fundudzi is recognised as the origin of the world and the sacred space of ancestors (Nettleton, 2006) is notable in how the poet not only implicates this notion but also in how he longs to join his 'fathers', whom he believes inhabit the Lake. In yet another poem titled "Fundudzi", Ngwana (1958:68) writes:

*Mpheni phapha ndi rambe lothe;
Fundudzi ndi dzivha la kukalaha Netshiavha;
Mwali mudzimu wa Vhavenḁa o ita dambi,
Ngefhaḁaa! ho alama dambi-;
Aiwa, lo alama vhukati ha dzithavha;
Matombo o ḁi tikaho ndi vhuthengethenge*

[Give me wings so that I invite the whole world;
Fundudzi is the lake of the old man Netshiavha;
Mwali the god of the Vhavenḁa performed the magical,
There! spreads the magical-;
Ah, it spreads amid the mountains;
The rocks that support it are artistic designs]

The poem opens with the poet's plea for wings to fly across the world inviting people to come and witness the magical properties of Lake Fundudzi. The poet ascribes Fundudzi to both Netshiavha and Mwali, the god of the Vhavenḁa, and acknowledges the latter as responsible for the mytho-aesthetic aspects of the lake. Ascribing Fundudzi to Mwali is not strange because the lake is surrounded by a number of natural features that are identified as belonging to Raluvhimba (Mwali), including some boulders (*matombo*) which are believed to be his drums and the mountains (*dzithavha*) (Nettleton, 2006). The mention of *kukalaha* (small, old man) is also gravid with meaning and contextualised mythological understanding. Nettleton (2006) records that the Singo were unable to take physical possession of the lake, which meant that the Netshiavha lineage of the Vhangona remained the guardians of Lake Fundudzi even after the Singo invasion. As a result, the poet identifies the Netshiavha lineage with the lake. Also, annual offerings to the spirits of the lake are said to have been made by the head of the Netshiavha lineages on behalf of the major Singo chiefs, the Ramabulana and Tshivhase (Nettleton, 2006:70). The poet goes on to say:

*Afho mudavhini u tshimbila ndi vhumbombombo;
Wa sa thanya u a wa, wa si vhuye;
Maisane, nga khaladzi ndo ḁoḁa u wa;
Vhe ndi gadaba la muḁambapfunda;
Lo ḁamba Munzhedzi a kuna
A sala a tshi nga dzuvha ḁi maḁini.*

[One must walk on its plains with tremendous caution;
If one is not careful, they fall and never return;
I swear by my sister, Maisane, I almost fell;
They say it is populated by the fabaceae;
Munzhedzi bathed there and became clean
And was left looking like a rose in the water.]

Nettleton (2006) reveals that the Singo were believed likely to die from contact with the lake's waters, while ordinary people (in the sense of not being royalty) could be attacked by the mischievous, grotesque spirits, the *zwidudwane* (described in Section 2.7.1), who inhabited the lake's parameter. These *zwidudwane* are said to be fond of venison, and consequently dig game pits. Because of these pits, it is difficult to walk around or near the lake; hence, the poet says one must be careful when walking here lest they fall into the pits. According to the poet, if one falls into these pits, they will disappear forever. While on the myth of disappearance, it is worth mentioning that Lake Fundudzi is also connected with the disappearance of the first Singo king of Venda, Ṱhohoyandou.

It is believed that Ṱhohoyandou disappeared into Lake Fundudzi to live there with his court, replicating the courts of his descendants still on the land (Nettleton, 2006). It is also believed that Ṱhohoyandou was a newcomer to the lake, a leader of the invading Singo who had arrived from the north and taken control of the Soutpansberg area only sometime around 1700 (Nettleton, 2006). As tangentially touched on in the first chapter, the Singo were the last of a number of invasions of Shona-speakers and they, together with the Vhaṱavhatsindi and Vhangona, make up the different strata in the Vhavenda society. Legend has it that the Vhavenda's cultural hero Ṱhohoyandou's disappearance into Lake Fundudzi and spirit occupation of the waters established the Singo hegemony within the lake sacred to the earlier inhabitants, the Vhangona.

In the second stanza, the poet indicates that he nearly fell into the pits, implying that he too could have disappeared. The poet goes on to comment on the trees that surround the lake, called *muṱambapfundo*. *Muṱambapfundo* (Fabaceae) is a plant species used for medicinal purposes (their root and stem bark are used as ingredients to prepare polyherbal decoction taken against malaria) and to make drums (Bapela, Meyer and Kaiser, 2014). By mentioning *muṱambapfundo*, the poet shores up the cultural understanding and the essence of drums surrounding the

Fundudzi legend. At this juncture, one feels compelled to reiterate the essence of drums in Tshivenda traditional religion, although thus far, this study has provided sufficient information on the role of drums in Tshivenda culture. A brief, independent section on drums is only provided here to emphasise the poets' understanding of Tshivenda mythology.

4.8.2 Drums and Belief in Tshivenda Culture and Poetry

Drums are mentioned in the poem cited in Section 4.4.1 because they are integral to the Tshivenda traditional religion as well as the endorsement of a royal leader. In fact, in Tshivenda culture it is unthinkable to be a king without drums (Nettleton, 1985, 1989; Stayt, 1931; Van Warmelo, 1932). It is a prerequisite that all Vhavana kings of Singo descent have replicas of the drums and that no one else can own them. Possession of such drums empowered kings not only through their magical properties but also by symbolically embodying Lake Fundudzi through various details of form, materials, and relief (Nettleton, 2006:73). Apparently, those who ventured close to the lake can hear Thohoyandou's *Tshikona* bands' music, the drumming on his *ngoma* coming from the lake and his young women performing the *Domba*; although no one appears to be there (Nettleton, 2006; cf. Munyai, 2016:17). *Domba* "is an initiation school for young men and young women" (Mulaudzi, 2001:9).

4.8.3 Spirits, Powers, Ancestralism and Lake Fundudzi in Tshivenda Poetry

In the last two lines of the poem cited in Section 4.4.1, the poet appreciates the cleansing qualities of the lake. He mentions that Munzhedzi bathed in the lake and was made clean, as if to purport that the lake has sanctifying powers. The poet does not say exactly who Munzhedzi is and how Munzhedzi is linked to the lake. While one might be tempted to view Munzhedzi as an ordinary person and conclude that just any person has access to Fundudzi's waters, the third stanza of the poem "Fundudzi" (Ngwana, 1958:68) argues the contrary:

*Vhe maḡi a Fundudzi ha ṭambi mutsinda;
A ṭambiwa nga vhakololo vha Tshiavha;
Uvhani Fundudzi a hu dzhenwi
Ndi haya ha zwiḡuḡwane;
Tze-tzee! muludzi wuuuu!
He! ni a zwi pfa naa?*

[They say strangers are forbidden from bathing in Fundudzi's waters;
 Only the Tshiavha royal members are permitted to bathe there;
 Because entrance into Fundudzi is prohibited
 It is the home of *zwidudwane*;
 Cautious steps! the whistle blows wuuuu!
 Hey! do you hear?]

Here, the poet depicts Lake Fundudzi as both a literary leitmotif and cultural myth as the image of Lake Fundudzi recurs through Vhavenḁa's thinking about social issues and relationships—reserved for some, guarded from others, and prohibited to the most powerful. These restrictions surrounding Lake Fundudzi in the traditions and customs of the Vhavenḁa are deeply and deliberately rooted and shrouded in mystery, exacerbated by the fact that the lake has for the longest time been hung about with old mythologies. These mythologies are cited to prohibit tourists and other strangers from gaining access into the lake. Unless one is a priest of the Ntshiavha clan, accessing the lake and even seeing the stone-throwing *zwidudwane* means certain death. These *zwidudwane*, as described in Section 2.7.1, are said to be half-human and half-spirit. The one half that is in the spirit world is invisible to humans. Thus, among the Vhavenḁa, Lake Fundudzi is purported to be so full of ogres that only a few human beings will dare to wander through the Lake. Hence, the poet emphatically informs his readers that entrance to the spirits-inhabited Fundudzi is only privileged to the Ntshiavha clan. Ntshivhuyu's (1990:9) poem "Dongodzivhe" does not explicitly mention Lake Fundudzi but does emphasise the power of water imagery in Tshivendḁa culture.

*Shaḁani ḁa thavha Tshinetise,
 Ningoni ya tshikwara Dongodzivhe,
 Ho tewa vhualo ha maḁi,
 Hone zwifhoni zwa Maseḁoni.*

[On the shoulder of the Tshinetise mountain,
 On the nose of the Dongodzivhe hill,
 A watery bed is laid,
 The core of the Maseḁoni's burial place.]

*Tshiḁanḁamelo ri vhona mboni,
 Ya tshiswaḁhe tsha one mavhanda,
 A tshi ri findu-fundu! Kodo-kodo!*

*A inga mphaso dzivhani;
E mbwanda, dzadzadza!*

[At Tshiṅṅamelo, we see wonders,
Of the touch-chase game of beasts,
Doing the backflip! Projecting only their buttocks!
Piling libatory gifts in the lake;
And then submerge, disappearing out of sight!]

*Zwa vuwa-vho ri vhona ḡembe,
Ḳa tshinzie ngomu tivhani,
Nngwa dzi tshi honedzela;
Dzi tshi Ḳula tsinyamaṅanga.*

[When troubled, we see the miracle,
Of utter disarray in the lake,
Dogs grunting deeply;
Forewarning about ensuing destructions.]

The allusive qualities of the locatives *zwifhoni* (burial site) and *tivhani* (in the lake), the noun *ḡembe* (miracle), the adverbs *mbwanda*, and *dzadzadza* (submerge, disappearance) and phrases such as *vhualo ha maḡi* (a watery bed), *tshiswaṅthe tsha mavhanda* (touch-chase game of the beasts)' and *mphaso dzivhani* (libatory gifts in the lake) point to Lake Fundudzi or at least to the significance of water in the Vhavenda's mythology. Both Ngwana's and Ḳetshivhuyu's poems encapsulate mountains in Venda as places linked to their communion with and veneration of ancestors. Fundudzi is also surrounded by the Soutpansberg Mountains, and the Thononda Hill also overlooks the lake, which serve as sources of the mytho-aesthetic aspects of the Tshivenda traditional religion. Ḳetshivhuyu's poem, cited above, ends with a gloomy picture, hinting at what happens when the spirits are troubled in the lake. Apart from the awe-inspiring occurrences witnessed in the lake such as beasts backflipping and playing a 'touch-and-chase' game, when offended or troubled, these beasts bring misfortunes upon the human world. The same tone is evinced in Ngwana's (1958:68) last three stanzas of the poem "Fundudzi". In Ngwana's poem, it is said that,

*Vhe ḡamusu zwo vhifha hu duba vhutsi;
Hu fukulwa lufuko thavha i a ḡuhuna;
Vhe zwiḡuḡwane zwo tanga dzivha Ḳoṅthe;
Uvhani Vho-Ḳetshiavha na ndebvu avha a tsha vheula;*

*Vha vho lala vho ima vha tshi rerela midzimu yavho;
Ngei thavhani tshikona tshi tou vhimbila.*

[They say things are bad today, smoke blows;
The covering is removed, the mountain grumbles;
They say zwiḽuḽwane surround the whole lake;
Even Mr. N̄etshavha no longer cuts his beard;
He sleeps standing while venerating his gods;
At the mountain *Tshikona* continues to be piped.]

As has been repeatedly indicated, Lake Fundudzi is said to be connected to ancestor spirits N̄etshavha of the Tshavha clan and is supposed to be inhabited by the spirits of other Vhaḽavhatsindi people (Mashau, 2004; cf. Stayt, 1931; West, 1976). This kind of belief has a great impact on the lives of the Vhavenda people. Because of the presence of spirits, Lake Fundudzi is greatly feared. It is greatly feared because of the influence that the dead ancestors are believed to have on the living, such as their ability to bring misfortunes on the living (Mashau, 2004). In the above stanza, the poet reveals the terror and panic experienced by people when the ancestor spirits are troubled or offended. As a result, N̄etshavha, as the guardian of the lake, has to see to it that he finds out what the cause of the ancestors' fury is and placate them.

According to the poet, N̄etshavha will spend sleepless nights, if need be, interceding for the people with his ear attuned to the frequency of the spirits' voices in order to meet their demands. N̄etshavha does not even cut his beard, perhaps to emphasise the point that appropriating the ancestor cult is much more important than his own needs and also to symbolise that the ancestors are infuriated. Or, he has been so occupied with attempting to mollify the ancestors that there has not been time to care for himself. This implies that pleasing the ancestors is far more important than the pleasure of basic conveniences of human life.

In seeking to placate the ancestors, the traditional dance *Tshikona* is also performed, seemingly to no avail. The reason the priest N̄etshavha goes all out to mollify the furious ancestors, as already stated, is that, the dead ancestors are said to bring benefits and misfortunes to their descendants (Mashau, 2004). Accidents, illness and miscarriages are said to be caused by angry spirits of one's family or the dead ancestors. N̄etshavha spends sleepless nights (and days) trying to combat the occurrence of these misfortunes by allaying the wrath of the ancestors. The poet

also affirms that the ancestor cult among the Vhavenda is referred to as *midzimu* (gods) in the plural (see Mashau, 2004). In the singular, it is *Mudzimu* (god). The poet's reference to *midzimu* indicates that the ancestor cult remains central to the Vhavenda's belief so that their relationship with their dead ancestors has much more meaning than their relationship with Raluvhimba (Nwali). The poet also says:

Ho țangana maswuhana ndi kunzhelele-kunzhe;
Nga ngei Tshiheni vho ima nga zwiingamo;
Vha tshi vhona zwi itwaho Fundudzi;
Maisane! nga Tshavhumbwe ri a lovha iwe vhathu;
Kha hu rambwe tshikona u kunguwedza midzimu;
Ndi Vho-Makhavhu vho ima fhasi ha muņenze
Vha tshi khou feta ndebvu dzavho.

[Young men have all come together, unified in rhythms of dance;
 At Tshiheni, they stand at the thresholds;
 Seeing what is being done at Fundudzi;
 Oh! I swear by Tshavhumbwe, we perish!
 Invite the *Tshikona* crew to pacify the gods;
 Makhavhu says while standing under a tree
 While fiddling with his beard.]

Vha hashu, hu shavhisa Mwali nandi;
Mudzimu waņu o dzivha Fundudzi;
Riņe ri takala ri Tshiheni tsha ha Nyaphungatshena;
Tomboni ȷa mbila, hune re ri ri tshi vuwa;
Ra ȷi vhona nga tshivhoni tsha dzivha.
Ane a țoȷa u vhona nga a ye hu tshi kha ȷi vha zwino;
Nndaa!

[Brethren, the frightful one is Mwali really;
 Your God has procured Fundudzi;
 We are happy when we are at Tshiheni of Nyaphungatshena;
 The rock of the xylophone [or rock rabbit], where when we wake up;
 We see ourselves in the lake's mirror.
 Whosoever wants to see must go while it is now;
 Nndaa!]

The poet still emphasises the need to pacify the ancestors. In the event where misfortunes are incurred by the living, the Vhavenda people will say that *midzimu i a hana* (the ancestor spirits are not in agreement or are refusing; Mashau, 2004:71).

The poem does not mention what provoked the wrath of the ancestors. The central theme of the last stanzas is the need to propitiate the troubled or offended ancestors. Unlike in the *malombo* dance, Mwali/Ñwali is connected to the ancestor cult inhabiting Lake Fundudzi. He is acknowledged as one jealously guarding the lake and prohibiting unauthorised entrance into the lake. In fact, Lake Fundudzi is believed by the Vhavenda to be the swimming pool of Ñwali/Raluvhimba (the creator), who left his giant footprints in the mountains around it at the moment of creation while the earth was still soft (Nettleton, 2006). Furthermore, it is believed that the python writhes on the perimeter of the lake, signifying the powers of the healers, of members of other lineages, and of members of the Vhavenda communities politically disempowered by Singo dominance. Also, in Tshivenda culture, the lake and a pregnant woman's womb are both containers, and the belts worn by pregnant women, which 'tie' the baby in its place, are likened to a python (Nettleton, 2006:74). The poem ends with the poet's declaration that the people who live in the vicinity of Lake Fundudzi, such as in Tshiheni, are happy there, despite its frightful properties. Tshiheni is an area west of Lake Fundudzi. Furthermore, the poet links the Vhavenda's corporate identity to Lake Fundudzi by conjuring up an image of Fundudzi as a mirror. Put laconically, the Vhavenda look into the lake and see a reflection of themselves, which in and of itself metaphorically means Lake Fundudzi is implicated in identity constructions and articulations of the Vhavenda.

The foregoing discussion reveals that there are distinctions between the Tshivenda traditional worldview and the Euro-modernist worldview. These worldviews differ in their perception of 'ultimacy', a human being, ethical codes, conceptions about life, belief in the spirit world, among other aspects. Some of the distinctions between the Tshivenda traditional (Africanist) worldview and the Euro-modernist worldview are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 0.1: Differences between the Tshivenda traditional (Africanist) worldview and the Euro-modernist worldview

Africanist (Vhavenda) Worldview	Euro-Modernist (Judeo-Christian) Worldview
<i>It is comprehensive:</i> The Vhavenda view life in totality, which is based on their view of the cosmos. The cosmos is seen as a hierarchy of powers that each has its own place in the totality	<i>Metaphysics:</i> Judaism (encapsulated particularly in the Old Testament) acknowledges YHWH (Yahweh/Jehovah) as the ultimate source of everyone and everything. In the New

Africanist (Vhavenda) Worldview	Euro-Modernist (Judeo-Christian) Worldview
and influences each other mutually.	Testament, Jesus Christ (the Word personified) is acknowledged as the creator.
<i>Belief in the Spirit World:</i> In lieu of the above characteristic, totality is seen as a hierarchy of powers, with <i>God (Nwali)</i> as an inherent part of it and occupying the top position. The living-dead are believed to be in constant contact with the living.	<i>Cosmology:</i> The universe is seen as God's creation. God is said to have created the cosmos from nothing by the Word (Jesus Christ).
<i>Ancestor cult:</i> The Vhavenda believe in ancestral spirits known as <i>midzimu</i> in the plural and <i>mudzimu</i> in the singular. Ancestors are regarded as intermediaries between Nwali and humans on earth.	<i>Intermediary:</i> Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the only gateway to God (Jehovah). Christianity, especially Pentecostal Christianity, insists on the outright rejection of ancestor veneration. The intercessory role was, according to Judeo-Christian tradition, ascribed to prophets, a select few chosen by YHWH (Yahweh/Jehovah) to communicate the divine will to the people. In time, this duty became attached to Jesus, as confirmed by the declaration 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6).
<i>Rituals:</i> These are performed to commune with and propitiate the ancestors.	<i>Prayer and supplications:</i> These are used as forms of praise and worship.
<i>Makhadzi, tshilombo medium and traditional healers:</i> They are integral in initiating and sustaining communion with the ancestors.	<i>Jesus Christ:</i> Over millennia the Christian movement has, by and large, remained true to the tenet that Jesus Christ is the only true intercessor between God (Jehovah) and humans.
<i>Belief in Witchcraft:</i> The Vhavenda believe that no misfortune just happens by itself without a cause. As a result, diviners, healers and other 'traditional' practitioners/doctors are consulted to determine the cause of misfortune.	<i>Witchcraft:</i> The Bible acknowledges that there is witchcraft (Exodus 22:18; Numbers 23:23; 1 Samuel 15:23). However, witches are said to be below the rank and authority of those who believe in God (Yahweh) through Jesus Christ (Luke 10:19).
<i>Anthropology:</i> Human beings are somewhere below the spirits and above other creatures such as animals and plants.	<i>Anthropology:</i> Human beings are regarded as the image and likeness of God (<i>Imago Dei</i>).
A <i>human being</i> is considered 'a full human	Since human beings are created in the image

Africanist (Vhavenda) Worldview	Euro-Modernist (Judeo-Christian) Worldview
being' after having undergone the transitional rites, such as birth rites, initiation ceremonies, marriage and raising children, and the kinship system rites (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2).	and likeness of God, it follows that they possess the personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity of God.
It has a sense of <i>communality</i> . A human being is viewed in terms of the whole of their community. For this reason, priority is given to communalism or interpersonal relations.	<i>Ethics/moral philosophy</i> : Objective moral order is rooted in the character of God as love and justice and human beings as responsible agents. The character of God is the standard of human morality revealed to human beings in moral absolutes in the Bible (10 Commandments, Sermon on the Mount, and St. Paul's epistles). Jesus Christ is perceived as the only perfect embodiment of the moral life.
It entails <i>sacralism</i> . The Vhavenda do not distinguish between that which is sacred and secular. In their totalitarian view of life they see everything as embodied in the hierarchical powers. They do, however, hold the notion of 'taboo' in their understanding of the hierarchical powers.	<i>Epistemology</i> : Human beings can know the world around them and God Himself because God has built into them the capacity to do so and because He takes an active role in communicating with them. Human intelligence is grounded in divine intelligence.
Covers the notion of <i>timelessness</i> . Life is not structured according to time frames. The Vhavenda's life is more concerned with the present and more oriented to the past because the past is familiar and connects them with their roots (their ancestors) and the origin of their traditions.	<i>Death and afterlife</i> : Eternity with or without God. The options for the afterlife include (a) personal extinction; (b) resurrection; (c) Heaven or hell (the Christian view).

(<https://www3.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/Worldview%20and%20a%20Christian%20Worldview.pdf>; Mashau, 2004)

4.9. Situating Tshivenda Poetry Within Afrocentric, Hermeneutical and Postcolonial Paradigms

The surrealistic depictions of the need for self-determined agency in the arena of identity politics in the postcolonial and post-apartheid landscape of South Africa warrants an intellectual orientation on how Tshivenda poetry can be best understood

with the frameworks of paradigmatic perspectives adopted in this study, namely Afrocentricity, the hermeneutical approach and postcolonial theory. These frameworks are briefly discussed in light of the major thematic preoccupations of the selected poets, namely, selfhood, identity and culture. These thematic preoccupations are arguably sufficient to prepare a literary critic to effectively examine Tshivenda poetry because they allow the critic to listen to both the individual and collective voices of the Vhavenda in their poetry. Listening to people's voices, in this case literary voices, is important considering that one of the objectives of Afrocentricity is to present a critique that propounds a cultural theory of society by the very act of criticism, any criticism of society, which is definitionally, a criticism of the ruling ideology of that society (Asante, 1998). Thus, culture shapes the interpretation of literature.

It must be stated that an Afrocentric literary critic must offer an Afrocentric discussion of literature against an ethnocentric promotion of a group universality, something that Eurocentrists espouse (cf. Asante, 1998). The central problem with a literary critic who thinks in this vein is that they may consciously or unconsciously assume that everyone else should simply acquiesce to their expansive provincialism. With such critics it is easy not only to make their arguments with an array of tropes, figures, and oxymorons but to also assert them as if there were no other reality or other perspective (Asante, 1998). In this study, Afrocentricity was therefore used because it takes its impetus from the need to confront presumptions of inequality, Eurocentric doctrines that encourage the exclusion of historical and cultural perspectives of Africa, and any pedagogies and epistemologies that are framed to dislocate and disorientate African people.

This chapter also tries to show that African people, the Vhavenda, although once victims of antihuman behaviour in the past (colonialism/apartheid), are not devoid of values, culture, philosophy and religion. The subsequent chapter shows that even values such as harmony, love, justice, equality, patience, diligence and good-naturedness are not foreign to the Vhavenda people. Thus, reading Tshivenda poetry from an Afrocentric perspective reveals that the Vhavenda's existential relationship to their own and to the culture that they have borrowed/absorbed defines what and who they are at any given moment.

Some of the poets echoed the belief that by regaining their own platforms, standing in their own cultural spaces, and believing that their way of viewing the universe is just as valid as any they will attain the kind of transformation that they need to participate fully in a multicultural society such as South Africa. However, without this kind of centredness, the Vhavenḡa will bring almost nothing to the multicultural table but a darker version of Eurocentricity (cf. Asante, 1998). There is therefore nothing strange or irrelevant about adopting the Afrocentric idea in the analysis of indigenous literature. Asante (1998) argues that all distorted or otherwise negative understandings of Afrocentricity are rooted in the society's manner of viewing Africans. According to Asante (1998), this is not to say that all who reject the Afrocentric idea are racists but rather that their failure to appreciate its context and objectives suggests their seduction by the structural elements of a hierarchical society that fails to recognise African agency. It should also be clear to the reader that while numerous issues remain unresolved in the discourse of Afrocentricity, Afrocentrists are not opposed to any conception of the human being that is rewarding and liberating. Hence, this study also considered the relevance and necessity of the hermeneutical approach and postcolonial theory in the analysis of Tshivendḡa poetry.

The hermeneutic approach as a different way of conceiving the self, became helpful in the analysis of the selected poetry because it departs from the proposition that human beings possess some kind of self-comprehension and self-understanding (Escudero, 2014). This implies that the self is viewed as a narrative construction. The selected poets' agitations for self-identification and self-representations, among other ambitions, demonstrate that to have a self, or even better, to be a self, is something in which one is existentially involved. The self, so to speak, is "the product of conceiving and organizing one's life in a certain way" (Escudero, 2014:8). As such, when confronted with the question 'Who are you?', one can tell a certain story that defines who they are and present themselves to others for recognition and approval. Implicit in this is the idea that people build a narrative self, which involves a complex social interaction; they construct an identity that starts in early childhood and continues for the rest of their lives. Who they are depends on the story they and others tell about them. In the hermeneutic approach, one cannot be a self on one's own, but can only be a self with others as part of a community. And so, one might be

both the narrator and protagonist when they tell a story about themselves, but they would not be the only author. In the end, who the person is depends on the stories told about them, both by themselves and by others.

Postcolonial discourse in general aims to engage in dialectical redefinitions of the relations between the so-called 'imperial/colonial' state and the indigenous/colonised subjects. This relationship is marked by a pursuit to re(w)rite the place of the colonised in the land of their birth (Mokgoatšana, 1999:13). For this reason, Mokgoatšana (Ibid:14) asserts that South Africa needs clearly defined programmes that are geared at correcting the mistakes of the past and subsequently according Africans a proper place in the history and development of the country. In appropriating such programmes, however, token affirmative action is merely cosmetic because it does not address the serious issue of identity crisis and inferiorisation that has been institutionalised (Mokgoatšana, 1999). Mokgoatšana further avers that such an inferiorisation is deeply rooted in the minds of the oppressed, which essentially means that the postcolonial subjects are faced with such Herculean tasks as redefining their place in the new postcolony.

In the uphill efforts of redefinition and decolonisation, it is vital, therefore, "to design academic programmes which aim at altering the psychological impact of colonisation/apartheid. These programmes should deliberately assert an African experience" (Mokgoatšana, Ibid: 14). Mokgoatšana also says that "without positive moves to challenge the pseudo-scientificism which relegated African people as *personae non gratae*, South Africans will fall into the trappings of 'unknowable indoctrination' by their colonial masters" (original italics). Thus, in the theatre of decolonisation, the daunting task of postcolonial writing and other forms of discourse is to unmask and to demystify the myth of European/imperial superiority, and to reverse the inferiorisation of the colonial subject (Mokgoatšana, Ibid:16).

4.10. Section Deductions

The poets' longing to freely traverse Lake Fundudzi show how deeply rooted the Lake Fundudzi myth is in the poets' minds. The longing could also be reflective of the fact there is some sense of disillusionment with the Lake Fundudzi mythology among the Vhavanḁa, implying that the myth is no longer perceived as substantial (see Nettleton, 2006). This is probably because much in Vevḁa territory has

changed, particularly since the democratic elections of 1994. Disillusionment with the old mythology that shores up chiefly privilege, according to Nettleton (2006:70), has crept into people's dealings with political and cultural dimensions of rural life in this former ethnic stronghold.

Nettleton (2006) further asserts that the smattering of missions and hospitals and a few modern buildings were minor indices of change. This, for Nettleton, was part of the systematic underdevelopment and ingrained poverty engendered by apartheid, a system that entrenched the traditional rights and customs of a small aristocratic class by buying out the traditionalist leaders and conferring on them special powers claimed to be cultural and historical. With this privileging of chiefly power came the obliteration of the other Vhavenda clans' oral histories and traditions (Nettleton, 2006). Hence, the pre-Singo commoners, specifically the Vhangona and Vhaxavhatsindi, "were effectively silenced and to some extent effaced from the ethnographic record" (Nettleton, 2006:71). In the present-day context, Lake Fundudzi has become the centre of controversy in the new power struggles that are related to the question of land distribution (Nettleton, 2006). The issue is characterised by the re-emergence of older traditions and divisions that set out to challenge Singo hegemony and "urbanisation which disrupts older forms of authority" (Nettleton, 2006:71). Nevertheless, for poets like Ngwana, Lake Fundudzi is the origin of life and its ethic mythology and heritage must be considered in the metaphysical explanations of human life. In this way, Ngwana's poem becomes an index into the Vhavenda's traditional and metaphysical explanation of human origin, and that explanation holds that the ancestors are the source of human life. Ngwana's position is, however, rejected by other Vhavenda poets Ratshitanga and Sigwavhulimu and by other Vhavenda poets who operate against the backdrop of a Judeo-Christian perspective that embraces the whole notion of Western cultural values, including those fostered by the monotheistic outlook of Christianity.

4.11. CONCLUSION

This chapter commenced with a discussion on the essence of theocentricity and anthropocentricity from both the traditional and modern perspectives of the Vhavenda poets. It was deduced that in terms of religious convictions, the Vhavenda poets virtually gravitate towards either the traditional Tshivenda religion or

Christianity. Varied modes of communion with God and gods in Tshivenda culture were explored in this chapter. It was also noted that the selected poets link their sense of selfhood, identity and culture to either Raluvhimba/Nwali, the ancestors or the God of the Christians.

Furthermore, the selected poets' agitations for self-identification, representation and renaissance were reflected upon in this chapter. Mytho-aesthetic aspects of the Vhavana's life and their traditional worldview were discussed in light of the centrality of water imagery, with Lake Fundudzi as dominant leitmotif, as well as the essence of spirits and drums in Tshivenda culture. The chapter ended with a brief appropriation of Tshivenda poetry within the paradigmatic frameworks of Afrocentricity, the hermeneutical approach and postcolonial theory.

The next chapter focuses on the Vhavana's socio-cultural traditions and ideologies, with specific reference to the nature of Tshivenda marriage, initiation ceremonies, traditional dances and selenology.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIO-CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND IDEOLOGIES IN TSHIVENDA POETRY

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the selected Vhavenda poets' thematisation of the Vhavenda's socio-cultural traditions and their attendant ideologies. It particularly focuses on the poets' thematisation of Tshivenda traditional marriage and its preparatory ceremonies or rituals; followed by Vhavenda poets' appraisals of Tshivenda traditional dances, their perceptions of traditional leaders and constructions of men's and women's images; and the poets' appreciation of Tshivenda anthroponymy and onomastic creativity, their encapsulation of Tshivenda cosmology, selenology and ethnoastronomy, the meanings of months and seasons in the Vhavenda's calendar system as well as their allusions to Tshivenda star lore. The preceding chapters equipped the study with a sufficient sociological background to illuminate the ideology behind the issues raised in the selected texts.

5.2. MARRIAGE AND CULTURE

Mokgoatšana (1996:43–44) says “marriage and culture are as inseparable as two sides of the same coin. In the light of this, marriage cannot be thought away from the culture in which it is being contracted”. Mokgoatšana adds that, although there is no universal definition of marriage, marriage involves a love relationship of two or more people, and that relationship is welded and legalised by certain rituals or ceremonial acts that are so highly held by a cultural group that violation thereof arouses feelings of contempt and scepticism. The idea that marriage is just between one individual and another (Kwenda, Munden and Stomer, 1997) is cherished by Maumela (1979:12) in the poem titled “Mbingano” (Marriage) where he describes marriage.

Mbingano ndi pfundo mbumbano,

La vhavhili vho funanaho.

Lufuno na lwone ndi manditi,

A mupo u pinzana.

Ndi malingo kavhili

A tshiphiri mbiluni.

Vho funanaho vha kha

Dakalo ji si na mbambe,

Lo govhelaho mbilu dzavho.
Vhuvhili havho vho rali,
Vho dirandela kudima
Kwa madzanga vhuthihini.
Ndi dembe na kavhili,
Li dudumelaho fulufhelo
U sokotedza bvungwi lufuno –
Ndi makole a si gathi fhedzi,
Ndi vhutshilo vhu bulaho fhedzi,
A u dzula nothe,
Ni tshi vhavhalelana,
Na u kondelelana
Hothe naho zwi tshi vhavha:
Maṅunguni na miḡifhoni,
Nḡodzini na one mapwapwalala,
Zwivhuyani na zwo vhihahoh;
Zwa engedza nyalo ntswa
U ingekanya tsitsi dza lufuno,
Lu balea miḡifhomutoli
Ya lufuno u ḡinekedza,
Ngauri tshee tsha vha tshi tshipiḡa.
Tsho khunyelela u vha tshivhili,

[Marriage is the knot of the oneness,
 Of two people who loved one another.
 Love is essentially the magic tricks,
 Of nature in their conglomeration.
 It is an experience characterising the dyad,
 Of the secret in the heart.
 Those who love experience,
 The kind of joy that has no rival,
 That has captured their hearts.
 Being two as they are,
 They have plotted their own course,
 Of pleasantry in oneness.
 It is also a double miracle,
 Which reaches higher to hope
 To squeeze love into secrecy –
 It is only but for a few years,
 It is only life that declares the years,
 Of living together,

Caring for one another,
 Being tolerant of one another.
 In everything, even the bitter:
 In sorrow and in pleasure,
 In mournful tears and joyful laughter,
 In good and in bad;
 Creating a new space
 To add new dimensions of love,
 Breaking forth in honey-sweet pleasures
 Of self-giving love,
 Because what was only a part,
 Has now found completion in the union of two.]

As the English translation of the poem reveals, Maumela's emphasises that a marriage relationship is about and for two people who are in love with one another. Their love for one another manifests itself in a variety of attributes, such as patience with one another, forgiving one another, tolerance and unity. The married couple bears the brunt of cultivating their marriage and try by all means possible to defend their union against dissolution. Maumela makes no reference to the role of family and the community in the regulation and sustenance of marriage because only the husband and wife are participants. Sigwavhulimu's (1975:11) poem titled "Munna na musadzi" (Man and woman/Husband and wife) also delineates marriage as a union of only two people.

Munna na musadzi vho vhumba mudzio
Nga dzofha ja mulayo
Wa vhunna na vhusadzi.

[A man and woman formed a vessel
 Through the legal blood
 Of maleness and femaleness.]

Vho vhumba mudzio.
Zwine wa do fara a vha zwi di;
Ndi mbumbo yo kunguwedzwaho
Nga dzangalelo ja nama.

[They formed a vessel.
 What it will hold they do not know;
 It is the formation fuelled
 By the desire of the flesh.]

*Munna na musadzi kha vha lile,
Vha lilele u bebwa ha mbumbo yavho
Ine ya fa nga u bebwa.*

[A man and a woman should cry,
Crying for the birth of their formation
Which dies by being born.]

While it is true that marriage is usually for and about two people, one cannot ignore the fact that in traditional communities, marriage is viewed as an integral part of society. In fact, marriage in such societies is embedded in that very society's cultural norms, values and traditions or customs (Mbiti, 1975). Reber (1985) concurs that marriage is an institution that is undergirded by a set of social norms, meaning that the institution of marriage is sanctioned according to local customs. Sociologically speaking, in a traditional (African) society in particular, marriage is a socially approved mating arrangement, usually involving sexual activity and economic cooperation between a man and a woman or women (cf. Popenoe, Cunningham and Boulton, 1997). Overall, to marry is to have a family (Casler, 1974). Mbiti (1975) avers that since marriage is at the core of human life, it is expected that there should be many marriage customs throughout Africa. The Vhavenda have their own marriage customs, and it is the spirit of this study to discuss how the Vhavenda poets reflect on this institution.

5.3. MARRIAGE IN TSHIVENDA CULTURE

The Vhavenda, like other African tribes, have their own system of marriage. On the nature of Tshivenda marriage, Stayt (1931:143) says that the Vhavenda have a polygynous system of marriage. Masakona (2000) asserts that in Tshivenda traditional culture, every Muvenda man desires to possess as many wives as possible. This is because having many wives means wealth because when those wives bear children, those children are perceived as symbols of wealth (Nekhongoni, 2013a). For this and other reasons, marriage to more than one wife is essentially a trademark of Africa (Mbiti, 1969).

In Tshivenda culture, the necessity of having more than one wife is further legitimised by sayings such as *musadzi muthihi ndi khaladzi* (having one wife is like staying with your own sister), *munna ndi ndou a i ji muri muthihi* (a man is an

elephant, he does not feed on one tree) and *kholomo ya nḡila a i fhedzi hatsi* (the cow that is constantly mobile does not finish the grass). In the first saying, it is purported that the man's sexual pleasures are limited because he cannot have sexual relations with his sister. The second and third sayings are adages that are generally used to perpetuate and subsequently justify the hegemonic ideologies of masculinity and men's promiscuity. In Tshivenda culture, when a wife is sick, visiting her family or away for some reason, the husband is supposedly left stranded (Mashau, 2006:32), and therefore, needs another woman to have sexual intercourse with.

Moreover, in Tshivenda culture there are taboos related to a man and woman who are married. If, for instance, a woman is 6-months pregnant, *u a bviswa nḡuni* (she is removed from the room), meaning she is prohibited from having sexual intercourse with her husband (Nekhongoni, 2013a). After childbirth, her husband is forbidden from entering the room where the newborn baby is, and he (the husband) does not eat the porridge cooked by the *mudzadze* (the woman who recently gave birth) because it is believed that the man might suffer from *thetheḡwa* (palsy). Therefore, if there are many wives, they will help resolve the problem of taboos. If the wife is a *mudzadze*, another wife will be able to help with domestic chores. Many wives thus increase the husband's labour force (Masakona, 2000). However, the Vhavenda's preference of the polygynous system of marriage does not mean there are no monogamous systems of marriage. Monogamous marriages are proliferated by the economic conditions of modern life and other modern views that undermine polygamous marriages, among other factors (Mbiti, 1989). The Tshivenda marriage, irrespective of whether monogamous or polygamous, is fundamentally regulated by preparatory ceremonies or rituals. Preparation for marriage is a long process, and the key moments are marked with rituals, such as initiation schools.

5.3.1. Preparation for Marriage in Tshivenda Culture

When a child has been physically born, it must also be born ritually or religiously in order to make it a social member of the community (Mbiti, 1969). At a later age, it goes through a series of initiation rites. These initiation rites are like the birth of the young people into the state of maturity and responsibility. Initiation rites dramatise and effect the incorporation of the young into the full life of their nation. Only after

initiation, where this is observed, is a person religiously and socially born into full manhood or womanhood with all its secrets, responsibilities and expectations.

One of the purposes of initiation rites is to introduce young people to matters of sex, marriage, procreation and family life. One could say then that initiation is a ritual sanctification and preparation for marriage, and only when it is over may young people get married. Since the whole community participates in the initiation rites, it is the entire corporate body of society that prepares the young people for marriage and family life. The traditional system is therefore designed more to indoctrinate young people into the acceptance of the given social system than to 'educate' them in the true sense of the word or to reveal and develop their individual qualities and abilities (Blacking, 1969).

In addition, and particularly in societies where there are no initiation rites, parents and other relatives gradually educate their children in marital affairs. Girls are taught how to prepare food, how to behave towards men, how to care for children, and how to look after the husband and other domestic affairs. The boys are taught what most concerns men, like looking after cattle, behaving properly towards one's in-laws, how to acquire wealth, which one would give to the parents of a girl as part of the engagement and marriage contract, and how to be responsible as the 'head' of the family. Sex knowledge is often difficult to impart from parent to child; but girls are better off in this respect than boys since they spend more time with their mothers and older women relatives than boys may spend with their fathers. Much of the sex information is gathered from fellow young people, and it is often a mixture of truth, myth, ignorance, guesswork and jokes. Formal schools and universities in modern Africa are often the centres of even greater ignorance on these matters, so that young people go through them knowing perhaps how to dissect a frog but nothing about either their own reproductive system or mechanisms or how to establish family life (Mbiti, 1969). In this respect, surely traditional methods of preparing young people for marriage and procreation are superior to what schools and universities are doing for our young people (Mbiti, 1969:132). For the purposes of providing some glimpses into how the Tshivenda traditional system prepares young people for marriage, the next section describes both the female and male initiation schools in Tshivenda culture.

5.3.2. Female Initiation Schools in Tshivenda Culture

In Tshivenda culture, it is unacceptable for one to talk about sex-related issues with one's own child. This is often purported through the adage *mudengu ha didenguli*, which means that a doctor cannot treat themselves. Therefore, even if a parent is an exceptional counsellor, it is believed that they cannot advise their child successfully. Initiation schools are meant to cater for this. Initiation schools facilitate the passage from youth to adulthood, and initiates are oriented on how the society expects them to behave.

There are several schools that a Muvenda girl attends to be initiated and the teachings differ from one school to the other. However, the Vhavenda have the following initiation schools: *Musevhetho*, *Vhusha*, *Tshikanda* and *Domba*. *Musevhetho* or *Sungwi* is the first initiation for girls who have not yet matured, namely *phalaphathwa* (a girl whose breasts have not yet developed) and *thungamamu* (a girl whose breasts have just started developing), and is equivalent to *Murundu* (Stayt, 1931). The initiation is meant for young girls ages 7–13 (Mafenya, 1988). *Musevhetho* and *Murundu* are equivalent in the sense that the initiates in both the schools have not yet matured. *Musevhetho* was adopted by the Vhavenda from their Northern Sotho neighbours, and only commoners attend *Musevhetho* because it is not a tribal rite. Like in the *Murundu*, the influence of Northern Sotho can be seen in the songs and *milayo* (laws) of this school. To participate in the school, the initiates have to pay a prescribed fee to the headmen. Some male figures are allowed to form the membership of the school body. Boys who have attended *Murundu* may be granted admission to the school.

Some boys play the part of the *vhahwira* (intermediaries). They go out dancing and asking gifts for *nonyane* (bird), hence the Vhavenda's adage: *Luhumbelo lu no nga lwa muhwira* (the begging that is similar to that of *muhwira*). *Vhahwira*'s dancing sometimes attracts those girls who have not yet gone to *Musevhetho* to want admission to the school. Boys are either be called *marivhane* or *ramaadana*. *Marivhane* are those boys who have been to *Murundu* but have not yet performed the duty of being *midabe* (mentors), whereas *ramaadana* are those boys who have performed the duty of *midabe*. *Midabe* serve as instructors to the initiates who are called *vhali*. They instruct *vhali* to carry the drums, that is, *u hwala ngoma*.

Makhulu (also called *Nonyane*) is a man. *Nonyane* occupies a significant position in the school and is sometimes referred to as the spirit of the school. He appears to the participants of the school during dark evenings when there is no moonlight because people should not be able to see him clearly. He is also disguised in the way he dresses. *Nonyane* is believed to possess some supernatural powers. When he appears, he speaks with a terrible voice. With the power he possesses, he can extinguish a bonfire. Hence, most girls are afraid of *Nonyane*; they try by all means to stay away from him.

Vhusha is an initiation school that is attended by mature girls. As soon as a girl experiences her first menstruation, it is said that *o dzhena vhañweni* (she has joined the others), or that *o sema vhañgulu* (she has cursed the old ladies). The matter of her maturity is reported to the relevant people who will then inform the relevant person in the headman's kraal. They wait until there is a reasonable number of reported mature girls that warrant the starting of *Vhusha*. Only commoners attend *Vhusha*. *Vhusha* is strictly for the womenfolk. If a man trespasses, he can be subjected to a hefty fine and may be expected to give up a goat as a fine. Since *Vhusha* is a rite that involves local residents, it is held at the local headman's court. The people of that particular village will be actively involved in the proceedings of the school. The proceedings last for six days and the initiates have to remain at the kraal for the duration of the school, residing in the public hut called *tshivhambo*.

On the first day, the person who is accompanying the girl to be initiated leave her at a distance and inform people that she is bringing a candidate, then a song will be pitched for welcoming her, and she will be stripped naked, which is called *u shangulwa*. Some girls who graduated recently are kept in charge of the initiates. The duty performed by these girls is termed *u laṭa muṭavha* (to throw away sand). They are the ones who guide the initiates in what needs to be done and how it should be done. A lot of activities are done during the night and in the early hours of the morning. During these times, women around the village come and teach the initiates what it means to be mature and what is expected of them. These lessons are usually delivered in the form of songs and laws (*milayo*). *Milayo* are an essential feature of all Venda initiation schools (Blacking, 1969:69). *Milayo* means literally 'laws' or 'instruction', but in the context of initiation, *milayo* may be better translated as 'esoteric knowledge' or 'wisdom', because it refers primarily to a series of

formulae in which certain familiar objects are given special names, rules of conduct and etiquette are reiterated and the meaning of rites and symbolic objects is explained. Each initiate is expected to memorise the laws, which will enable her to gain access to the next school in the future.

Every day, early in the morning, the initiates are led to the river. On their first day in the river, the girls are subjected to *tshitavhe* (where they are examined to see if they have engaged in sexual intercourse). There they are taught the significance of being grown up and that they must conform to the tribal laws. They also receive a certain amount of dancing instructions, although most of this takes place at night (Stayt, 1931). They are encouraged to stretch their labia minora and are also taught techniques for having sexual intercourse in a way that they may not lose their virginity. On their way to the kraal, the initiates are subjected to numerous humiliations. On the sixth day, the initiates are escorted to their homes where their parents will receive them with joy. The initiates are at this stage bound by some laws until other girls are admitted to the school, when they will become their instructors. After this, the girls are said to have fulfilled the requirements of *u laṭa muṭavha* (to throw away the sand).

Tshikanda is another initiation school to which women should go before they attend *Domba*, which is the final initiation before marriage. Only matured and nobler girls who are fit for marriage qualify for admission. All the songs that are sung in this school are the same as those sung in *Vhusha* (Mafenya, 1988). Both commoners and noble girls attend the school, and the nobles will catch up with the songs that the commoners learned at *Vhusha*. Just like *Vhusha*, *Tshikanda* is attended by womenfolk only.

The only female initiation school that was appraised by one of the selected poets is *Domba*, a premarital initiation dance (Mafenya, 1988), and therefore it receives serious attention in this study. The only poet who appraises this rite is Matshili's (1967:29–30) in a poem titled "Domba". In the poem, he says:

*Yo hakwa deu ya vhaṭhannga na vhasidzana,
Zwanḡa ndi tshaini yo vhoḡha mbongola.
Mabengele o shoshela zwanḡani.
Ndi vhuketsheketshe Nyamasindi.*

[The queue has been formed by young men and young women,
Arms are the chain that has tied the donkey.
Bangles are piled up on the hands.
It's all rattles, Nyamasindi.]

Domba is a traditional rite that girls attend after the *Vhusha* rite. *Domba* can be attended by males as well (Milubi, 2000b). According to Mulaudzi (2001:9),

Domba is an initiation school for young men and young women. It does not take place regularly. This type of school takes place when there are a number of grown up girls ready to participate, as well as a good harvest and plenty of food. This school prepares the grown up boys and girls for life after marriage. When the school is in session, they are taught to understand the most important aspects of life after marriage.

The noun *Domba* appears to have been formed from the verb stem *-dombela*, meaning *to become more mature* (Mulaudzi, 2001:9). This is illustrated by what happens during all the phases of *Domba*, namely *Tshikanda*, *Ludodo* and *Domba* proper. *Domba* is preceded by the practices of *Tshikanda* and *Ludodo*. *Tshikanda* is the secret initiation rite for females. It is known as *Tshikanda* because initiates wear pieces of raw hide. It takes place a day before *Domba*. During the *Tshikanda*, *vhadabe* (those who were initiated during the previous *Domba*) teach the initiates the morals or formulae of what is traditionally right, customary, ethical and obligatory (Mulaudzi, 2001:10). With the knowledge of all these formulae and terminology, the initiates are regarded as the foundation of the future generation; that is why they are known as *vhatei*.

The noun *vhatei* is derived from the verb stem *-tea* meaning *to lay the foundation*. Like other institutions, *Domba* has its own variety characterised by lexical items and unique expressions that are suitable for this variety. One should pay close attention to the words used in the Tshivenda traditional rites because one word may be pregnant with various nuances that can yield an intensive and broad discussion of the rite. For instance, in the first line of the stanza above, the poet uses words such as *hakwa deu* (formed a queue), *vhaṭhanna* (young men) and *vhasidzana* (young women). The *Domba* dance movement is called *u haka deu*; the dancers stand closely together in file and each holds the arms of the novice in front.

Youths at the *Domba* are called *madunana* (lit. young males), and girls are called *mbebo* (lit. progeny, issue) (Blacking, 1969; Nemapate, 2009). In the second line of

the above stanza, the poet says *zwanda ndi tshaini* (arms are chains) to illustrate how the dancers stand in file. The third line refers to the traditional attire that is worn when the *Domba* dance is in session. Part of the attire are the *mabengele* (bangles), which are worn on the hands. It must be mentioned here that there are various types of bangles in Tshivenda and each type of bangle communicates something Tshivenda culture (cf. Sebola, Chauke and Motlhaka, 2020⁵). The dancers also wear jangles around their feet, which make a rhythmic, rattling sound during the dance, hence the poet's use of the word *vhuketsheketshe* (rattles). *Nyamasindi*, as mentioned in the poem, can be the supervisor of the *Domba* dance. This is understandable, particularly considering that the names of the masters of the *Domba* institution begin with the prefix *Nya-* meaning 'the mother of'. This idea is confirmed in the second stanza where the poet says:

*Nyamungozwa u favha mukosi,
Vhasidzana vha tivha khulo, vhaṭhannga vha honedza,
Vhabvana vha huvha mihuvho,
Ngoma i fhaladza makwara, i vhidza bonndo dza vhathu.*

[Nyamungozwa gives a shout,
The girls brake into an ecstatic style of vocal hocketting, the young men grunt,
Young women [of childbearing age] raise the alarm,
The drum levels mountainous places, summoning people's money donations.]

The man in charge of the *Domba* is known as *Nyamungozwa* or *Nemungozwa* and is a song leader (Milubi, 2000b; Mulaudzi, 2001; Stayt, 1931). He is assisted by a woman known as *Nyamatei*, who supervises the girls. The noun *nyamungozwa* is formed by adding the prefix *nya-* (the mother of) to the noun *mungozwa* (the woman

⁵ The central theme of this study is that Tshivenda traditional attires assume a socio-cultural and communicative significance and are more than mere products of a textile sweatshop. Their true significance becomes apparent in Tshivenda culture when a particular attire, either by virtue of its design, colour or embroidery, conveys a non-verbal yet meaningful message to the observer. Tshivenda traditional attires are worn during ritual performances and initiation ceremonies, and are also used to depict power relations, gender and even one's marital status.

who has just given birth). Mulaudzi (2001:10) says the noun *mungozwa* appears to have been borrowed from Shona and means a woman who nurses a baby up to one month old. Although the name *Nyamungozwa* is feminine in its semantic content, it explains the role played by the man in charge. The man is regarded as the mother of all the initiates and they should all listen to him. *Nyamatei*, on the other hand, is a title assigned to a woman who supervises girls and is formed by incorporating the prefix *nya-* (the mother of) to the plural prefix *ma-* and the verb stem *-tea* (*lay the foundation*). *Nyamatei* provides the basics of life to the initiates. Both *Nyamungozwa* and *Nyamatei* see to it that the *Domba* is properly run and that the initiates carry out all the instructions of this institution until they graduate.

In the second line, the poet mentions *u tivha khulo*. During the *Domba* dance, this is a unique multi-part vocal style used that is contrasted with the subdued call-and-response style that preceded it. It uses hocketing and interlocking techniques reminiscent of *Tshikona* (see Section 5.6.2) when each girl performs only a limited number of notes to a phrase, which combined with the phrases of other girls to create a dense harmonic sequence. Singing in quasi-orgiastic cries of joys, the result is an ecstatic musical style, symbolising sexual climax (cf. Blacking, 1969). This is why in the next line, the *vhaṭhannga* grunt while the *vhabvana* shout.

In the same stanza, the significance of the drum is mentioned, which further affirms the assertion made in the previous chapter that drums are unique instruments to the Vhavenda, and as a result they play a significant role in Tshivenda cosmology and mythology. The uniqueness of the drum is its shape and size (Nemakonde, 2006). The Vhavenda use drums in different initiation schools and also during ceremonial occasions. Hence, the word *ngoma* (drum) pervades the *Domba* variety in examples such as:

Ngoma ya ṭharu ‘the demonstrative lesson of the python’; *Ngoma ya sali* ‘the demonstrative lesson of embers’; *Ngoma ya mavhavhe* ‘the demonstrative lesson of pain’; *Ngoma ya muṭoṭombudzi* ‘the demonstrative lesson of the grasshopper’; *Ngoma ya phalana* ‘the demonstrative lesson impala’; *Ngoma ya singwele* ‘the demonstrative lesson of falling’; *Ngoma ya mbudzi na nngwe* ‘the demonstrative lesson of the goat and the leopard’; *Ngoma ya muvhero* ‘the demonstrative lesson of young married man’; *Ngoma ya Thovhela na Tshishonga* ‘the demonstrative lesson of Thovhela and Tshishonga’ and *Ngoma ya nyalilo* ‘the demonstrative lesson of crying’ (Mulaudzi, 2001:13, italics added).

As a musical instrument, *ngoma* is “a large, pot-shaped drum with hemispherical resonator carved out of solid wood, and is always played with a stick” (Blacking, 1967:19). The Vhavanḁa believe that the sounds of the drums are the voices of the ancestors (Nemakonde, 2006). They are therefore used for communication, celebration and entertainment. *Domba* becomes a complete institution when the demonstrative lessons (also known as *maḁano*) cited above are presented to the initiates. The demonstrative lessons are believed to be symbolic of practical life (Mulaudzi, 2001:13). For instance, *ngoma ya ḁharu* (the demonstrative lesson of the python) is centred on a woman, and the python refers to a woman. *Vhatei* (only males) are warned not to have sexual intercourse with a woman if she has experienced abortion or miscarriage. It is said that if they do, they will die. The woman is equated with a python swallowing an animal or a human being. The swallowed animal or person dies inside the belly of a python (Mulaudzi, 2001:13). *Ngoma ya sali* (the demonstrative lesson of embers) teaches the initiates about the hardships of life by making them hold hot embers. The noun *sali* is formed from noun *sale* meaning ‘embers’.

In *ngoma ya mavhavhe* (the demonstrative lesson of pain), the initiates are ordered to engage in strenuous physical exercise, and if they fail to do it properly, they are beaten severely. The purpose of the lesson is to prepare the initiates to face hardship after graduating from the *Domba*. The pain associated with the lesson is evinced by the noun *mavhavhe*, which is derived from the verb stem *-vhavha* (painful). The *ngoma ya muḁoḁombudzi* (the demonstrative lesson of the grasshopper) teaches females that men are superior to women. *Muḁoḁombudzi* is a female grasshopper who is bigger than the male grasshopper and represents females in the *Domba* variety (Mulaudzi, 2001:13). The idea that men are superior to women is demonstrated when a female, who is disguised as a grasshopper with rushes and grass, thrashes male initiates but in the end is defeated. The *ngoma ya phalana* (the demonstrative lesson of impala) teaches the initiates that in whatever they do, the chief, who is equated to *phala* (impala), should get a share. During the demonstrative lesson of *ngoma ya singwele* (the demonstrative lesson of falling), the female initiates are taught to be faithful to their husbands otherwise trouble may befall them.

In the *ngoma ya mbudzi and nngwe* (the demonstrative lesson of goat and leopard), the male initiates who play the role of drunken men are taught that while they are drinking beer, the goat they are supposed to take care of is killed by a leopard. In this way, the male initiates are warned to be always alert and to protect their properties (Mulaudzi, *Ibid*: 13). *Ngoma ya muvhero* (the demonstrative lesson of young married man) teaches young men to defend themselves if they happen to be in trouble. The noun *muvhero* is derived from *muvhera* meaning 'young married person'. *Ngoma ya Thovhela na Tshishonga* (the demonstrative lesson of Thovhela and Tshishonga) teaches young men to be strong and protect their wives. During the lesson, male initiates play the role of *Thovhela* and *Tshishonga*. These two characters, are married men and when a fight breaks out, *Tshishonga* is defeated and his wives are taken by *Thovhela* (Mulaudzi, *Ibid*: 13).

Ngoma ya nyalilo (the demonstrative lesson of crying) teaches male initiates to show their manliness over their female partners during sexual intercourse. The deverbative noun *nyalilo* is derived from the verb stem *-lila* (cry). This lesson entails sexual abuse. In their reflection on sexual harassment, myth and culture, Cloete and Maḡadzhe (2004) debunk various myths, including the lie that women enjoy rape, as mainly rooted in the *Domba* initiation school where initiates are given time to practice sex during the *ngoma ya nyamalilo*. Mafenya (2002:102) in Cloete and Maḡadzhe (2004:23) sheds light on what happens this ceremony as follows:

On *ngoma nyamalilo* the novice and all the people assemble in the *khoro*. In the presence of all, a young girl is chosen and she is ordered to lie down on a mat spread in the middle of the *khoro* [royal courtyard] where a boy, often the chief's son is already lying. The girl usually screams and resists, hence *nyamalilo* which comes from *u lila* (crying). Even though she resists, she is forced on the mat where the two are covered with a blanket. They then have sexual intercourse. After this the blanket is removed and the young man is applauded for his manliness (cf. Milubi, 2000b:61, original italics; author's insertion).

According to Cloete and Maḡadzhe (2004), this extract reveals the following two main points: (a) Clear proof that women do not enjoy sex when it is forced upon them; and (b) rapists tend to use culture and tradition as a scapegoat to camouflage their repulsive deeds and warped thinking. Milubi (2000b) adds to the discussion by noting that the symbols of male presence pervade the whole *Domba* rite. Milubi (2000b) says that during the *ngoma ya sali*, the *vhatei* (initiates) are stopped from

dancing and ordered to lie down and hide their faces. The *nyamatei*, who is regarded as the mother of the initiates, brings a *sali*, which is a calabash-shaped solid object made from a mixture of ashes, earth and cow dung and studded with mealie seeds. The seeds are of different colours. The preferred seeds are the white ones because they represent young men in the full vigour of life (Stayt, 1968). White seeds are in this instance symbolic of the male procreative spirit (Milubi, 2000b).

When the *Domba* is in session, the *vhadabe* (those who previously participated in the *Domba*) and *vhatei* (initiates) form a queue known as *deu* and perform the Python Dance. Milubi (2000b) concurs that *Domba* is associated with a python. That is because when the initiates dance, they form a line, holding one another's arms. As they dance, they imitate the movement of a python. This is the central feature of this institution (Mulaudzi, 2001:12). Blacking (1969), however, says he held discussions with several masters of the *Domba* institution, and they were all adamant that *Domba* does not, as many writers have suggested (see Milubi, 2000b; Mulaudzi, 2001), portray the movements of a python and should not be called the Python Dance. Pythons do not move in circles, and if they coil up, they reduce the size of the circle, which the dancers do not do (Blacking, 1969). However, one must also mention the circumference of the dance circle is called the body and tracks of a python, but this does not mean that the chain of the dancers represents a python; the leading dancer is not the head of a python.

The references of the python are in the *milayo* (laws) and not in the dance. Both the python and the chain of dancers are phallic symbols and life, and the progress of each performance of the dance symbolises stimulation, copulation and ejaculation (Blacking, 1969; Milubi, 2000b). Milubi's (2000b:61) informant, who also happened to be *the maine wa Domba* (the specialist of *Domba*) acknowledged that the python symbolises life to the Vhavenda people. The informant further revealed that the Vhavenda naturally do not kill a python. A python represents the penis of a man in the *Domba* songs. This organ is said to give life when a man and woman have sex. A python is also regarded as a snake that prevents a fountain from drying up. Therefore, in the presence of the snake, there will be water, but if it dies, the fountain also dries up (cf. Milubi, 2000b). When going back to the poet's praise of *Domba*, one learns that,

*Nyamungozwa haḥwani hu kiwa mapfura,
Mufari wa deu, u farese u si fare deu madebe.
Muvhumbi wa thavha ha koni,
Ngavhe a vhumbe Nzhelele muḥangaumani.*

[One can fetch oil from Nyamungozwa's oral cavity,
The 'holder' of deu, hold it tight and do not hold the deu petulantly.
The maker of the mountain failed,
They should have formed Nzhelele at a white-berry bush.]

It is considered most difficult to dance in front, because of the pressure of the people behind; and so new recruits are put there so that they will quickly learn to dance (Blacking, 1969). The dance is simple in itself, but requires careful co-ordination with the drum rhythms: The girls' song follows the beat of the alto drums, but their feet must follow the tenor drum. On the command from the master, they move forward and around the drums and the fire in an anticlockwise direction until they are told to stop moving. They then bend over towards the centre of the circle and 'pump' their arms forwards and backwards until the song stops. Finally, they kneel down and do what is known as *u losha* (to greet) in the traditional Tshivenda fashion.

The poet goes on to say:

*La-ha-nyamiri hu duba buse,
Deu i songolowa sa tshidimela,
Mirumba i tshi ḥambela tshanda,
Vhavhoni buse ḥi tshi fhelela milomoni, ho ḥangana pidzhane.*

[At nyamiri, the dust rises,
Deu makes the serpentine movement like a train,
Drums rumbling excessively,
The dust filling the mouths of the spectators, it is hectic.]

*Mifunga na thuthu dzo fhoma khundu,
Ndi belevhele ya vho-siḥamporo,
Tshotshwane yo tshotshela milenzheni.
Zwifuko a hu na ndi ḥama ya muvhili.*

[Beads and the belt surround the waist,
It is the artistry of the salempores,
Bangles with small metal clasps/knobs surrounding the legs.
There are no clothes, it's only the flesh body left bare.]

*Vhasidzana dziṭhafa ndi vhengevhenge,
Musidzana a songo ṭamba u mona na muri a lila,
U shavha u sewa nga maonga na zwipofu;
Mavhudzi ndi tshihule tsha hatsi.*

[The young women's calves exhibit bulkiness,
If the young woman has not bathed, she turns around a tree and cry,
She fears mockery from the clueless and immature;
The hairs have grown like grass.]

As already stated, *Domba* is a general preparation for marriage where boys and girls, who are usually separated, are brought together and by means of symbols and metaphors are taught the true significance of marriage and childbirth. They are also warned of the pitfalls and dangers they are likely to encounter during the course of their lives (Stayt, 1931:112). The Vhavenda female initiation schools are therefore established to help solve behavioural problems, especially among the youth.

Although the content of *Domba* songs is often sexual, it must not be thought that the minds of their creators operate at the same level as the minds of many tourists when they come to photograph and gaze at the girls (Blacking, 1969). Sex is seen not simply as a gratification of animal passions, nor even as a means for biological reproduction, but is also regarded as a way of uniting man with the cosmic forces that animate both a human's body and the world in which a human finds themselves (Blacking, 1969:215–216). Therefore, the *Domba* dance is not meant to be sexy; it is intended to symbolise both the mystical act of sexual communion, conception, the growth of the foetus, and childbirth. We now turn to male initiation schools, as appraised by the selected poet(s).

5.3.3 Male Initiation Schools in Tshivenda Culture

Vhavenda young men attend initiation schools called *Vhutuka*, *Thondo* or *Tshiṭambo*. *Vhutuka* is hosted once in a year. The young gather at the chief's kraal and sleep at a designated place called *thondwani*. The *Thondo* initiation school exist in Venda and is part of the basic education of the Muvenda child. Each Venda boy needed to complete his initiation schooling in order to attain manhood. Nemapate (2009) indicates that *Thondo* is where mature boys are checked to see or find out whether they have got sperms that can make children. These mature boys' maturity is called *u sema vhalaha* (to scold old men) (Nemapate, Ibid: 220). Another idiom for these

boys who are matured is *u luma luṭanga* (to bite the reed). None of the poets mentions *Vhutuka*, *Thondo* or *Tshiṭambo*, and only *Murundu* is appraised by Matshili (1967) and are therefore discussed broadly.

The traditional rite that initiates a young man into full manhood and marital life is called *Murundu/muḷa/hogo/ngoma* (Makhado, 2009; Milubi, 2000b). *Murundu* is deemed the most important initiation rite among the Vhavenda. *Murundu* is done in winter in June or July. It is attended only by males. Through *Murundu* a young man is admitted to the membership of being a 'real man'. This 'real manhood' is attained mainly by shedding blood during circumcision (Milubi, 2000b). There are other methods that are used to prepare the young men for 'real manhood', such as "beating (when the laws of the lodge are contravened), eating unsavoury food, prohibition from drinking water, uncomfortable sleeping conditions, school traditionally held in winter, cold sessions, bathing in icy rivers" (Funani, 1990:25). All of this are intended to prepare the young men for hardship in life.

Apart from preparation for manhood and the hardships of life, *Murundu* also has certain benefits for the young men, for example, it gives them a smaller chance of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, it teaches them remedial interventions against problems related to high divorce rates, it addresses problems related to people's lack of respect and anti-social behaviour, and it inculcates values such as patience and integrity (Makhado, 2009). To participate in *Murundu* there is a prescribed fee that the initiate must pay. When *Murundu* is supposed to happen, the chief begins by looking for a *nanga* (traditional healer) who consults the ancestors to gain their approval. Those who previously participated in the *Murundu* gather and build a place where the initiates will dwell. Oftentimes, such a place is far from the residential areas and near a river where they will fetch water for cooking. When the initiates arrive the following day, they find the place well prepared for them. There are taboos that are enforced during *Murundu*. On linguistic taboos in Tshivenda, Maḡadzhe (2007:4) proffers the following:

In present-day discourse, taboo is thus synonymous to words such as ban, disallowance, inhibition, interdiction, and prohibition. In a nutshell, linguistic taboos are nothing but forbidden words and expressions; rather, words and expressions that must not be used or spoken; and these in most instances are used to describe sex, body parts and their functions as well as those that are used to insult people.

Murundu has some taboos to prohibit women's presence in the ceremony. For instance, although it is a place where blood is shed during circumcision, the blood of a menstruating girl is not tolerated (Milubi, 2000b). In fact, any girl who is menstruating is not allowed to cook *tshivhanelo* (initiates' food). Milubi (Ibid) avers that menstrual blood in this context is associated with contamination and infirmity. Girls who are permitted to cook for the initiates carry cone-shaped porridge to a spot called *dzikhareni*, where the uninitiated young men gather before they are fetched for circumcision. Girls and women are not allowed to pass this spot (Milubi, Ibid). The same prohibition enforced against menstruating girls and women applies to breastfeeding women. Such women are not allowed to cook for the initiates because milk in this case is not, as is often the case, ascribed life-giving qualities. Milk here is viewed as a disease causative agent. Both menstrual blood and breast milk are seen in relation to the oozing away of male life (Milubi, 2000b).

Other than the prohibitions mentioned above, it is also important to remark that a highly codified variety is used at the *Murundu*. If one is not familiar with the variety by virtue of having attended the rite or having had the rare privilege of observing or interviewing the knowledgeable, it will be difficult to decipher the words, phrases and sentences used at the *Murundu*. The encryption of the variety is notable in how a common word such as *mulilo* (fire) acquires a new meaning *ndou* (elephant) at the rite (Makhado, 2009). Similar examples are *maḍi* (water) which is *magedo* (cutters), *vhuswa* (porridge) which is *muḥali* (warrior/important one) and *mbaḍo* (axe) which is *gobodo* (Makhado, 2009; Stayt, 1968). In most cases, however, it is difficult to provide meaningful translations of some of the words and phrases used at the ceremony, as will be seen in the Matshili's quotation of the *hogo* song. Part of the problem is that a fusion of three languages (Tshivenda, Xitsonga and Northern Sotho) usually characterises the linguistic outputs of both the *Murundu* discourse and the songs sung by the initiates (Milubi, 2000b; Makhado, 2009). Matshili's (1967:65–66) poem "Murundu" gives us an opportunity to discuss this male initiation ceremony among the Vhavelenda:

*Wo ṭaha murundu wa maḍali,
Mashuvhuru o dzhenwa nga ṇowa-gudu,
Yo ṭaha ngoma ya vhanna muila-vhasadzi,
I ladzaho shango mulalo wa ḍala hoṭhe,
Ngoma-nduna ya Vhalemba vha Mbelengwa.*

[Maḡala's circumcision lodge has been established,
The uncircumcised are overwhelmed by terror,
The ngoma of men who are tabooed from being with women has been
established,
It brings rest and peace spreads across the whole land,
The ngoma for males accredited to the Vhalemba of Mbelengwa.]

It is well known in Tshivenda culture that *Murundu* is not installed by just anybody; there are experts called *maḡala/maḡali/Ramalia/Ravhalia* and *maine* who are tasked with the responsibility of establishing and supervising the ceremony. It is for this reason that the opening line of the poem implicates the *maḡali*. This choice of experts for the instalment of the ceremony means *Murundu* cannot be viewed as an entrepreneurial venture because it can only be established and supervised by a limited number of experts. This in some way limits dangers such as deaths and diseases that may be caused by those without knowledge of this rite. Thereafter, the *maine* (traditional healer) begins the task of welcoming the uncircumcised one by one while a *ngosha* (song) is sung:

Ho! Ho! Huvho hoho huvho.
Ha Maḡala yo wee! Hoho i yo wee
Ngosha i naka mudabe
Huvho! Hoho huvho!

[Chorus: Ho! Ho! Huvho! hoho huvho.
At maḡala yo wee! Hoho i yo wee
What makes the song best is the presence of the mudabe
Huvho! Hoho huvho!]

After the song, the initiates are made to sit down in the vicinity of the *vhadabe/midabe*, who are mentioned in the third line of the stanza above. *Midabe* are the ones who fulfil the responsibility of teaching the *mashuvhuru* (the uninitiated) *milayo* (laws). They also fetch firewood for the uninitiated and prepare the place where the initiates eat (Makhado, 2009). Separation of male initiates from their mothers and all other females during the ritual is intended to dramatise the transition from a world of women and children to one that is ideally male. At *Murunduni*, the *mashuvhuru* are taught to keep secrets, to greet, to respect elders, to be faithful, to live in harmony with others and other indoctrinations. Those who contravene the rules and regulations of *Murundu* are regarded as guilty and will in most cases be

required to pay a fine. They may be required to pay with a goat if the crime is serious or with a chicken if the crime is minor (Makhado, 2009).

On the day the initiation is completed, all the people gather at the chief's court/kraal to inform the chief that *Murundu* is completed. From here, the people disperse and gather in small groups for a week. The girls who participated in the *Musevetho* go and spend the night with these groups. They teach each other good *milayo* when they meet. After a week, they wake up early and head to the river to bath. From here, they go to the chief's kraal where they greet the chief for the last time. When an elderly person greets them, they respond while clapping their hands and looking down. The parents brew beer and *mabundu* in celebration of the children's return from the school. It is a big day of celebration and the whole land is at ease. Even the *zwigomathukhwi* (those who were recently circumcised) enjoy dancing to a *ngosha*.

The poet also mentions in the above stanza that *mashuvhuru o dzhenwa nga nowa-gudu* (the uncircumcised are struck with terror) upon learning the circumcision lodge is set up for them. As a result, they hide themselves for fear of being abducted and forcefully taken to the circumcision lodge. Stayt (1968:127) confirms that

Any uncircumcised man, venturing near a circumcision school was likely to be caught and detained by force until he had conformed with all the regulations of the lodge. Many traveling [Vhavenda] must have suffered this fate. The danger and inconvenience became so great that many [Vhavenda] found that the simplest way of solving the difficulty was voluntarily to enter the school before attempting to make a long journey. To the circumcised traveller the lodge was a great convenience.

Nemakonde (1999) supports Stayt's observation by stating that the Vhavenda migrant labourers were forcefully circumcised when they went to urban areas in search of work (Nemakonde, 1999). Against these forceful circumcisions, the Vhavenda established their own ngoma 'initiation school' in their own land, Venda. When King Makhado voluntarily became circumcised, the rest of the Vhavenda were motivated to sustain this practice. In times of old, *Murundu* would last for a year because at the time initiates had no other commitments like going to school. In modern times, *Murundu* only lasts for a month because the initiates are school children. *Murundu* is accompanied by songs of jubilation in the next stanza:

Wa ima hu pfala khuwa thungo dzothe,
Hu tshi imbiwa luimbo lukhoda vhanna,

*Vhanna vha tshi u fhufha vha thakha makole,
Migwabere i tshi lelemela sa luṭanga lwa maḍini
Ngoma-mbuya ya Vhashavhi vha Mbelengwa.*

[If you pause you hear shouts from all directions,
While they sing the song of praise to men,
Men leaping so high that they reach the clouds,
Sticks floating like a reed in the water
The good ngoma of the Vhashavhi from Mbelengwa.]

According to Van Warmelo (1960:125), the Vhavanḍa adopted circumcision for males from their neighbours the Vatsonga and Basotho. However, other ethnographic researchers acknowledge the Vhalemba/Vhashavhi/Vhasena/Vhamwenye/Vhalungu as the ones who introduced and established *Murundu* in Venḍa (Makhado, 2009; Stayt, 1968). Makhado (2009) states that the Vhalemba are the ones who also influenced other ethnic groups such as the Vatsonga, Bapedi and Basotho to install *Murundu*. For this reason, there are parallels between what takes place in the initiation ceremonies of the Vhavanḍa and those of the Vatsonga, Bapedi and Basotho. This is notable in the songs that the Vhavanḍa initiates sing at the *Murundu* as most songs are in the Sesotho language (Makhado, *Ibid*). When the circumcision lodge is established, the uncircumcised are called upon to join.

*Wo ṭaha murundu asuyo mashuvhuru,
Gidimani ni yo dzhena ni vhe vhanna,
Ni songo shavha vhaṅwe sa vhasadzi,
Iyani ni vhone zwi no itwa ni vhe na mulayo,
Kha ngoma ya vhalungu-na-nguvho.*

[To the uncircumcised, the murundu has been established,
Hurry and join so that you will become men,
Do not fear to join others like you were women,
Go and witness what is done so that you know the law,
At the ngoma of the vhalungu-with-a blanket.]

At the *Murundu*, boys' foreskin is surgically removed using a knife (Makhado, *Ibid*). As already indicated, the variety used at *Murundu* fuses words from Tshivendḍa, Xitsonga and Northern Sotho. This is notable in the song below, as cited by the poet:

*Hee – Ma-vhasali – sivhasa-ra-nyalimana
Vhasali vha ha Tsatsawane malimana-*

'Hoogoo, hoogoo, hu wele-e-lewe
Małogo ma e-lewe-hoogo'
Lu a nanela luimbo lwa muļa.

[Chorus: Hee – Ma-vhasali – sivhasa-ra-nyalimana
Vhasali of Tsatsawane malimana-
'Hoogoo, hoogoo, hu wele-e-lewe
Małogo ma e-lewe-hoogo'
The muļa song rises to a crescendo.]

The *Murundu* songs varies on the basis of where and when they are sung. There are songs that must be sung when the already circumcised initiates are sitting by the fireside in the evening, songs that are sung when the uncircumcised initiates are being circumcised, songs that are sung when the *vhadabe* fetch food from the women, and songs sung by the circumcised in memory of home (cf. Rabothata, 1991). Notable in the song above is the mixture of Tshivenda prefixes *Ma-*, the honorific prefix *Ra-*, and *nya-*, Northern Sotho words such as *vhasali* and *sivhasa* and the Xitsonga word *Tsatsawane*. The meanings of the words are so deeply encrypted that even the researcher's engagements with Vhavana, Northern Sotho and Xitsonga researchers and cultural advisers to decrypt the songs yielded no fruit. Compounding the problem is that the supervisors of the ceremony rarely decode the song(s) for the initiates. What is known by the initiates, however, is that the above excerpt is the main song of the male initiation ceremony (cf. Makhado, 2009). Apparently, the *Murundu* song frightens the uncircumcised as described in the following stanza.

Lu pfala lu tshi shusha manngođa tsho dzumbana,
Zwigoma zwinzhi zwo tibwa ho sala murundu fhedzi,
Tsemano na nndwa zwo fhela shango ļo lala;
Thungo dzothe hu pfala luimbo luthihi.
Lwa ngoma-khudzwa ya vhalungu.

[It sounds like it frightens the uncircumcised in their hiding places,
Most of the small ngoma are silenced except that of the murundu,
Insulting one another has ceased and the land is at peace;
Only one song is heard from all directions.
Of the great ngoma of the vhalungu.]

In the first line of this stanza, the poet states that the *Murundu* song frightens the hiding *manngođa*. *Manngođa* is another name for *mashuvhuru* (the uncircumcised).

The uncircumcised are not only assigned derogatory names in Tshivenda culture, but they are also despised and alienated by the whole society. The poet implies that the *mannongda* are cowards who hide whenever *Murundu* is installed. With this, the poet also suggests that the brave ones are those who attend the initiation ceremony. It is also noteworthy that all this information is communicated by means of a song. According to Musehane (1986:11), "Songs in Venda are another way in which communication can be transmitted from the communicator to the recipient to effect some ideas". Songs form the basis of African traditional education. Thus, the poet highlights that the circumcised extemporise songs to communicate their disdain for the uncircumcised. It is hoped that by addressing the uncircumcised through songs, the uncircumcised will be motivated to join the initiation ceremonies so that they may learn societal respect.

*Vho i fara zwavhuḍi ngoma yavho Vhalemba,
Vho i tika u bva kha vho-makhulukuku,
Vha i hudza vha i gagamisa nga misi,
Vha si mafarelwa mawela-ngoma-nṯha.
I faren i zwavhuḍi vhalungu-na-nguvho.*

[The Vhalemba have taken good care of their ngoma,
They have sustained it from the days of their forefathers,
They have honoured and elevated it at all times,
And were never irresponsible with the ngoma.
Take good care of it, vhalungu-with-blanket.]

In the above stanza, the Vhalemba are appreciated for ensuring that the *Murundu* does not fade away. This reinforces the belief that the Vhalemba are the ones who introduced *Murundu* to the Vhavenda and other neighbouring ethnic groups. According to the poet, the Vhalemba/Vhalungu received the practice of circumcision from their forebears. Here, the poet affirms that folkloric knowledge and cultural transmission is sustained by intra- and intergenerational transfers. This means that if one generation abandons their long-standing cultural norms and practices, these practices may disappear forever. The Vhalemba are said to have prevented this by ensuring they hold dearly the folkloric customs of their forebears. It is as if the poet implores the readers to take a leaf from the Vhalemba in as far as cultural preservation is concerned.

*Vha yaho vha vhuya na madzina maswa,
Rasivhetshela, Rasilingwani, Razwimisani, Rasanavho,
Othe madzina a murundu a thoma nga RA.
A songo ralowo ndi mapambuwi.
Ndi ngoma-mbuya ya vhalungu.*

[Those who attend return with new names,
Rasivhetshela, Rasilingwani, Razwimisani, Rasalanavho,
All the names given at the murundu have the prefix RA.
Those which do not have the prefix are alien.
It is the good ngoma of the vhalungu.]

The reiteration of the word *vhalungu* in the poem does not only affirm the belief that the *Vhalemba* are the descendants of the Jewish nation but also sustains the notion that they are the people who introduced the initiation rite to the Vhavenda (cf. Milubi, 1997:53). When *Ravhalia* has concluded his duty, the *midabe*, *milidi* and elderly men come together and say:

*Mafhe!
Mafhe mafhefho!
Mafhe!
Mafhe mafhefho!*

Immediately after these expressions, the leading voice declare *dziḁa!*, and then everyone responds in unison by saying *dziḁa!* The singing of '*Mafhe! Mafhefho!*' followed by the acclamation of *dziḁa!* can be seen as reaffirmation of 'male' presence on behalf of the *mashuvhuru* who are now accepted into real manhood (Milubi, 2000b). Traditionally, the initiation school is burnt down after about three months. The initiates are then taken to the river for bathing. As soon as the initiates emerge from the river, they are given new names. The new names suggest a transition from boyhood to manhood, and the initiates are now called by their new names (Milubi, 1997; 2000b). The new names are characterised by the prefix *Ra-*, such as *Rafumbedzani*, *Ratshilumela*, or *Rathiyaya*, or in the case of the poem quoted above, *Rasivhetshela*, *Rasilingwani*, *Razwimisani*, and *Rasalanavho*. Even the name of the surgeon in the rite is named *Ravhalia*. An initiate named *Rathiyaya* or *Ratshilumela* might praise himself thus:

*Ndi nḁe Rathiyaya muḁani
Ndo tou iswa.*

[I am one who never meant to go to the initiation school
Yet I was taken there.]

Ratshilumela tshi bva tshi muṭani
Tshi tshi ri vha nṅa ni mṗhalale,

[Ratshilumela emerges from the homestead
In search of outside help.]

(Milubi, 1997:52)

The Tshivenda prefix *Ra-* originally means ‘father of’, forming nouns denoting function or position such as *Ramukhadi* (herd master), *Ramuḁi* (owner of the homestead), *Ratshili* (selfish one, particularly to his wife or wives) (Nemukongwe, 1995). The prefix is also used when new chiefs and headmen are given new names on the day of installation following historical events or some good wishes to happen during their reign; names such as *Raṅwedzi* (one to whom people should listen). There are other names given on such occasions that do not begin with the prefix *Ra-*, such as *Ntshumiseni* (make use of me ‘chief/headman’) and *Nthetsheseni* (obey me; cf. Nemukongwe, 1995). After undergoing the initiation rites, both the young men and the young women are deemed ready for marriage. They have the right to choose a marriage partner, although in a traditional setup, parents normally choose a marriage partner for them, as the next section shows.

5.3.4. Choosing a Marriage Partner

In Tshivenda culture, there are essentially the following three ways to choose a marriage partner: (a) Marriage arranged by parents; (b) looking for a partner yourself if you have bridal property; and (c) an independent choice without the involvement of parents (Stephens, 1963; cf. Nekhongoni, 2013b). Parental involvement is emphasised in selecting a marriage partner because when a man and woman marry, their two kin groups become allied, and the status of these groups to a large degree determines the status of the children born of the marriage (Goodman and Marx, 1971). According to the old Tshivenda custom, a man ought to marry his cross-cousins (the daughters of his maternal uncle) and his little cross-cousins (the daughter of his male cross-cousins) (Van Warmelo and Phophi, 1948). In the present-day context, young people choose marriage partners for themselves, and when parents want to regulate their marriage, young people often refuse. This is

evident in a poem titled “Khomba” by Matshili (1972:27–28), where a modern Muvenda girl pleads for the deregulation of marriage in a patriarchal and traditional community. In the poem, the *khomba* says:

*Nda țamba nda țola,
U tshimbila ndi u khophea,
Vha mbonaho vhe ndi khomba yo dziaho,
Ndi hone vhathuni vhukuma.*

[If I bath and apply fragrances
I walk like I am breaking
Those who see say I am a mature girl,
I am truly among the people.]

Khomba is a girl who has just started menstruating. The term *khomba* means ‘dangerous’, implying that sexual intercourse may now result in pregnancy (Stayt, 1931:106). It is for this reason that parents send someone to the petty headman (*vhakoma*) to report that there is a girl who has just started menstruating. The headman escalates the matter to the chief. Parents and other royal members will set a date for the initiation ceremony called *Vhusha*. Having undergone *Vhusha*, the girl will then participate in the final premarital initiation school called *Domba*. Thereafter, she is deemed ready for marriage. To demonstrate that she is ready for courtship or marriage, the girl might brag about her beauty and sex appeal, thus:

*Ndi tshi tshimbila thi funi thunzi i tshi kavha,
Třhafu dzi a penya dzi vhai-vhai,
Vhathannga vha fhisea vha tshi mmbona ndi tshi kanda,
Ndi humbelwa fola na nga vha sa dahi.*

[When I walk, I do not even want a fly to land,
My calves are shiny like a blinking light,
Young men burn with passion when they see me walking,
I am proposed even by the disqualified.]

This stanza is a self-praise poem where the *khomba* appreciates the beauty of her body. Apparently, she is so beautiful that almost every boy she comes across yearns to date or marry her. Reference to her calves is meant to emphasise the point that she is strong physically and that her legs are attractive. An inference to her readiness for sexual intercourse and procreation in marriage. The line, *Ndi humbelwa fola na nga vha sa da hi* (I am proposed even by the disqualified) has

sexual connotations. By this, the girl means that even those who are no longer sexually virile long to sleep with her because of her beauty. It also means that she is proposed even by people who should not be proposing. The idea that she views herself and is viewed by others as ready for both sexual intercourse and marriage is captured in the stanza below:

*Ndi nnyi a sa nkongoniho ndi ndilani?
Ndi nnyi ane a si fune ndi musadzi wawe?
Ndo naka na ningo ya u fumula maduda,
Maḡamu ndi zwitendende khanani yanga.*

[Who does not bother me when I am on the road?
Who does not want me to be his wife?
I am all beautiful, including even my nose that blows out mucus,
My breasts are stand upright on my chest.]

The *khomba* creates an impression that she is the centre of attention and attraction wherever she goes. Every man she meets desires to make her his wife. She regards herself as extraordinarily beautiful. The allusion to her upright breasts means that she is still a virgin. As indicated in the previous section, the initiation ceremony of females, *Vhusha*, marks the passage from childhood to adolescence. Every Muvenda girl is expected to participate in *Vhusha* before she is married, and they must engage in sexual intercourse before dancing *Vhusha*. *Vhusha* is meant to inform girls that they are ready for marriage and sex. Thus, the girl's allusion to her breasts is meant to express her pride in her 'sexual purity', something which is deemed honourable in Tshivenda culture (Nekhongoni, 2013b). Apart from the *khomba* praising her own beauty, other people also affirm that the girl is beautiful:

*Ndi nnyi ane a sa ri khomba iyi ndi tshinyeke?
Ndi gondoni ndi vhidzelela zwiḡoni zwi kule,
Zwa ḡa zwa vhungedza phanda hanga,
Zwi tshivhanda vho ni beba vha tshi funa ngoho ha Mutangwa.*

[Who does not admit that this girl is a beauty?
When I am on the road, I summon birds from afar,
And they all come and gather before me,
Telling me that 'creature, the Mutangwas conceived you in love'.]

The girl is so beautiful that even nature cannot help but acknowledge her beauty. She says that the birds come and pay homage to her in lieu of her beauty. She even

personifies the birds by saying that the birds appreciate her parents for birthing such a beautiful girl. All of this attention, however, does not mean that the girl is cheap or gullible, she is firm enough to decline men's advances. This is evident in the next stanza where she says:

*Ndi vhangana vha ḡaho u ambisa?
Vhapfumi na vhashai vho wedzana vha tshi ambisa,
Vho kanuka ndi tshi "pfu" sa goya ḡa ḡaka,
Wanga u hone wa mbiluni we ra anelana ra khwaḡhisa.*

[How many came to propose me?
The rich and the poor all came to ask for my hand,
They were shocked when I declined like a stray cat,
My beloved with whom I have a strong covenant is there.]

The word *ambisa* (propose) in the first line is important. In the poem, *u ambisa khomba* (to propose the girl) is not being done by the parents on behalf of their sons, the sons are doing it themselves. Had it been the parents doing it, the boy's family would be the one initiating the marriage process because the Vhavenḡa say *khuhu ya phambo a i vumbi mutsho* (a girl/woman never proposes a boy/man). When the parents, especially the father (who might also have been advised by his sister 'makhadzi'), notice that their daughter is mature, they look for a partner. They only do this if there has not been anyone already identified as a suitor for the girl. To notice that the boy child is ready for marriage is not complicated at all: If the boy plays *tshihwana* or *mbila* (musical instrument) non-stop, it indicates that he needs a wife and is tired of staying alone. When the father realises that his son is ready for marriage, he gathers the *makhotsimunene* (younger brothers), the *makhotsimuhulu* (senior brothers) and the *makhadzi* (aunt) to inform them that the boy is grown (cf. Nkehongoni, 2013a). He will inform them about which family to choose a bride from. He will refer to the cross-cousins. If there are many cousins, the inquiry will be 'from which house or *tshiḡanga* (kitchen)?' If upon serious reflection and deliberations it is realised that there are misgivings about a prospective family, they will opt for a *ḡeḡdila* (mediator) to initiate the marriage proposal and process. The *ḡeḡdila* will arrive at the family and specify who sent them for the proposal. In response, the proposed family will probably say '*ri ḡo vhudza vhahulwane*' (we will tell the elders).

The proposed in-laws also consider what kind of family the groom comes from, even if they are cousins. If they are not keen, they will say '*riṅe ro no ḷa thundu dza vhathu*' (we have already consumed other people's bridal property), meaning someone else has proposed the girl or they just do not want their daughter to be married in that family. The intermediary will go back and forth at least three times before giving up, concluding that they do not want to hand over their daughter in marriage. Even when there are no misgivings, the prospective in-laws do not just concede to the proposal on the first day, they tell the delegates that they will first inform the elders and that the delegates should come back on a certain day. Upon their return, the *nḅendḅila* will simply say 'the elders agreed, you may enter'. The girl, on the other hand, will play *lugube* non-stop. In the above stanza, however, young men take it upon themselves to propose the girl. There is no indication that the parents or relatives are involved in the proposal of the girl. The *khomba* in the poem warns her parents not to take or consume other suitors' bridal property:

Hee inwi vhabebi vhangā na vha hashu!
Ni songo ḷa thundu dza vharwa vhanna,
Ne ni na ḅwana ni tshi amba nḅe:
Nḅe wanga u hone ane nda mu funa nga mbilu yanga yoṭhe.

[Hey, my parents and relatives!
 Do not consume the bridal property from other people's sons,
 Thinking you have a daughter, referring to me:
 I already have someone I love with all of my heart.]

Among the Vhavendḅa, marriage is solemnised and contracted by the transferral of bridal property called *mamalo/lumalo* from the kraal of the groom to that of the bride. Stayt (1931) divides the *lumalo* in Tshivendḅa culture into two categories, namely (a) a portion goes to the girl's father, and (b) a cow and calf go to the girl's mother. *Lumalo* ranges from eight (8) to fifteen (15) cows and other gifts such as bangles (Nḅekhongoni, 2013a). Marriage is not considered a private affair of the couple, as purported by the persona throughout the poem, but an extension of communal relations that bind the two families together. The transference of bridal property from the groom's family to the bride's family symbolises a knot of the two affinal relations, and the dissolution of marriage is considered out of the question because the relationship is meant to join the two families forever.

In traditional Venda, marriage cannot be concluded without consent of the two families and relatives involved. It is customary to have a mediator (*nendila*) involved who mediates the process of transferring bridal wealth. To avoid such a covenantal relationship, the girl pleads with her parents not to choose a marriage partner for her. She already has someone she loves. The girl wants to choose her own spouse and do not want her parents to choose for her as in traditional communities. It is important for the girl to tell her parents not to receive any bridal property from families other than the one she desires because “the girl’s marriage in some traditional societies is arranged even before her birth. This clearly indicates that they are without power in the marriages in which they are contracted and expected to remain docile” (Mokgoatšana, 1996:64–65). The *khomba*, however, rejects an arranged marriage because she already has someone she loves:

*Mufunwa wanga ndi mu humbula masiari na vhusiku,
Ndo mu funa nga Swondaha tsini ha muhuyu,
A sa mmala ndi nga diposa tivhani zwa ya na vhusulu,
Nhe khomba ya tshinada tsha vhasadzi.*

[I think about my lover day and night,
I loved him on Sunday near a fig tree,
If he does not marry me, I drown myself in the lake and all will be end there,
I, the only strong one among women.]

*Nda edela ndi lora ndi khou mu vhona,
Nda fhatuwa ndi mu humbula tshifhinga tshothe;
Nda mu vhona ndi nga ndo vhona musuku u penyaho;
Ndi hali mafo mbilu yanga i rothisa mutoli wa notshi.*

[While asleep, I dream of seeing him,
When I wake up, I think about him all the time;
When I see him, it’s like I have the shining gold;
I am so in love that my heart drops honey.]

*Ndi do mu lindela u swika a tshi mmbinga,
Thi nga iti vhuḍabaḍaba vhu disa tshinyalo;
U do nngwana ndi si na tshilavhi muvhilini wanga,
U do mpha marengwa mbilu yawe yo rula.*

[I will wait for him until he marries me,
I will not succumb to wayward behaviour; it brings destruction;

He will find me without any bit of defilement in my body,
He will pay a hefty bride price with his heart at ease.]

The persona's plea to her parents that they let her choose whom to marry represents a longing for freedom from the socio-cultural chain that tends to snare women's liberties and relegates their position to passive objects with no say in what happens to them. The poem marks the modern Muvenda woman's resistance and longing for individual expression, particularly in matters of choosing one's life partner. Hers is a salient appeal for society to deregulate marriage. Noteworthy is the fact that both men and women are persons who have all kinds of feelings, including love, affection, hate and contempt. Society declares it an outright privilege for men to express their passionate feelings about women, yet the contrary is treated with scepticism (Mokgoatšana, 1996:46). The poet creates a picture of an ideal love relationship between a young man and a young woman that is characterised by love, mutual understanding, cooperation, care, compassion and patience. If the *khomba* succeeds in convincing her parents to let her marry the one she loves, the two will go through the betrothal process as per Tshivenda customs.

5.3.5. Betrothal in Tshivenda Culture

It is worth reiterating that in Tshivenda culture marriage is arranged by parents (Nekhongoni, 2013a). The father of the groom has the responsibility to see to it that his son marries. The girl is given a husband by her parents; thus, the father has to see to it that his daughter has a good husband. According to custom, the Vhavenda already know from which family they will marry (Nekhongoni, 2013a). As indicated, in Tshivenda culture, one marries within the family, particularly cross-cousins from the maternal uncle. Siblings do not marry each other, including the paternal uncles' children, because they all trace their descent from a single father (Stayt, 1968). It is a taboo in Tshivenda culture to share the marital bed with siblings. This includes the maternal aunts who trace their descent from a single mother. The Vhavenda avoid marriage (intermarriage) with strangers because they fear that they might marry from families known as *vhahulu* (witches/wizards) or from families that suffer from hereditary diseases or disabilities. That is why during the marriage process, the Vhavenda investigate their prospective in-laws to determine what kind of person the groom or bride is (Nekhongoni, 2013).

5.3.6. The Wedding Ceremony in Tshivenda Culture

When a girl gets married in Tshivenda culture, she takes along a vessel to her in-laws. Within that vessel is *tshitemba*. *Tshitemba* is symbolic of the girl's virginity or lack thereof. When she arrives at her in-laws', she hands it over to an elderly member of the family. If the *tshitemba* is not pierced, they automatically conclude that their bride is still a virgin and does not have a child (Nekhongoni, 2013a). Thereafter, they let go of the bridesmaids and take the bride to a secret place to check if it is true that she is a virgin. If she is a virgin, they ululate joyfully and pridefully give out gifts. If she is not a virgin, they do not ululate; instead, they spit on her, insult her and do not give her gifts (Nekhongoni, 2013a). Matshili's (1972:24–25) poem "Vhaselwa" (Bridesmaids) provides insights into the Tshivenda wedding ceremony.

*Vhaselwa vhukuma vhe ngomu mudini,
Ro dzhena ra dzula re tshetee mudini wa vhathu,
Ra nga ro felwa ri songo felwa na khathihi,
Ri fanela u vuḁa ngauri ri mudini wa vhaḁwe vhathu.
Ra dzula ndi tsho itwaho,
Hu pfi ri khou pfunda ri ḁduni,
Biko ḁi tshi tou be kha riḁe,
Mufhemuswa a ri u wani nga pfanelo.*

[The pure bridesmaids were in the homestead,
When we entered at the people's homestead, we remained silent,
We were like we had lost a loved one whereas none had died at all,
We must be humble because we are at other people's homestead.
We sat for a very long time,
It was said that we are suffocating while in the room,
Sweat was too much on us,
Fresh air was not as accessible to us.]

In Tshivenda custom, when the bridesmaids arrive at the home into which the bride is marrying, they are taken into a room and are detained for three to seven days. They are taken out in the evening and together with the bride are smeared with a mixture of ground red ochre and cow fat. The bridesmaids wrap their waists with *miḁwenda* (Tshivenda traditional cloths), and the bride wraps her waist and covers her head. The bride spends a week covered by a blanket and she continues to work

while covered. After a week, she is paid money to take off the blanket. As the stanza below indicates, in the evening, bridesmaids fetch water from a river. On the day they are released from detention, they celebrate.

*Duvha ǀa u tswa maǀi ri a pembela,
Ri ya mulamboni nga lufhimavhaeni ro takala,
Ra ka maǀi ashu ra vhuya ro hwala,
Nga matshelo ra phakhelwa miṭa nga u fhambana.*

[On the day of stealing water we celebrate,
We go to the river in the evening,
We fetch our water and come back carrying it,
On the following day, we are assigned our different homes.]

The bridesmaids ensure that everybody in the family and the neighbours have warm or hot water to bathe with. When they bring the water, they are greeted and are shown appreciation with money, bangles and other valuable artefacts. As the next stanzas indicate, the bridesmaids work very hard on behalf of the bride.

*Ri shuma nga mafufufulu miṭani yo fhambanaho,
Muṅe wa vuhadzi na muṅwe vha sala henefho,
A tshi sumbedzwa kushumele kwa muḍini na milayo,
A sumbedzwa na kufarele kwa thundu dza henefho.*

[We labour energetically at different families,
The bride and someone else remain there,
While being taught about marriage customs and laws,
She is also shown how to preserve properties of the family.]

*Ri vuwa ri tshi ṭambedza vhathu vhoṭhe,
Ro dudedza maǀi nga matshelonitsheloni,
Vha ṭamba ra loshelela ro vunḍa dziṭhoho,
Ra fhiwa marengwa a u ḍo renga vhurotho.*

[We wake and ensure that everyone has water to bathe,
We heat the water so early in the morning,
They bathe and we greet with our heads bowed,
We are then given the money to buy bread.]

*Musi ri miṭani ri guda zwa muḍini,
Ri fhiwa mavhele ra ṭohola ra sinḍa,
Ra bika ra ṭuwa naho muṭani wa muṅe wa vuhadzi,
Ri ṭhavhelwa na mbudzi ya u nona ra ḍikanda khanani.*

[When in such families, we are taught how to run a family,
We are given mealies to pound into mealie-meal,
Which we cook and take along to the bride's family,
They kill a fat goat for us and we feast.]

*Ri ḡo i roḡa ri tshi sevha tshisese,
Ḍuvha iḡo ndilo a i sali na lukoko;
Ri ḡo ḡa ra ḡiphina ngayo ri tshi khou sea,
Ra ḡikanda khanani nga mapfura a ḡukadzaho gulokulo.*

[We would eat to our fill,
On that day, the play is wiped clean;
We would eat to our enjoyment as we laugh,
We treat ourselves to a great meal that oils the throats.]

Bridesmaids are given grain in a basket or sack and pound it into fine mealie-meal. The girls scatter to their various homes from the bride's in-laws. On the day that they pound, a goat is killed for them. After pounding for the second time, they bid farewell and depart to their homes. When they leave, they are accompanied by the groom who sleeps at his in-laws where the bridesmaids also sleep.

As the stanzas above affirms, apart from the transference of bridal property, the Vhavenda also perform a ritual ceremony that legitimises the marriage and symbolises that a girl has left her biological family and joined a new (marital) one. In such a ceremony, a sacrificial goat is killed to introduce the girl to the ancestors. According to Mokgoatšana (1996:45), "the goat sacrifice is a symbolic communication between the bride's parents and the *badimo* [ancestors] who are expected to protect the bride and bless her with children". Mokgoatšana (1996) adds that marriage is accompanied by these rituals to appease the ancestors so that misfortune does not befall the bride and the groom during their marriage. After this sacrifice, the two are declared officially married. A time will come for the bridesmaids to inform the brides' in-laws that they are leaving, as the next stanza highlights.

*Musi ri tshi ri ri matshelo ri a ḡuwa,
Ri ḡo sinḡa vhukhopfu ra vha siela,
Khuni ri sia ro vha reḡela dzi madzanda,
Wa wana dzikhokho khumbini dza zwiḡanga.*

[When we say tomorrow we are leaving.
We will pound mealie-meal and leave it with them,

We will leave them with loads of firewood,
You will see them in impressive piles near the kitchen.]

*Ra swika ri kuvhangana muḍini wa o vhingwaho,
Ra vha anetshela nga ha lwendo lwashu,
Ra langana u ya vhengeleni u renga zwithu zwashu;
Ri ḑo langana ḑuvha ra ya u renga zwi ri takadzaho.*

[When we arrive, we gather at the bride's home,
And report on how our journey was,
We then agree to go to the shop to buy our things;
We agree on a day on which we will go and buy whatever we want.]

The dramatis personae also reveals that during the wedding ceremony the bride is left with her in-laws to be taught on how she should conduct herself in the family. In this instance, the bride is expected to simply keep quiet and imbibe all the teachings she is given about marriage. The persona says:

*Muḅe wa vhuhadzi u sala e duu sa tshisiwana,
A tshi humbula mishumo na zwoḑhe zwa muḍini,
Vhuhadzi a si u bika matope vhu ḑoḑa muthu a si na mbilwana,
Ane a takadzana na vhoḑhe vha mu dalelaho.*

[The bride is left behind in silence like an orphan,
As she thinks about all the domestic chores,
Marriage is not a game, it requires a patient person,
Who entertains everyone who visits her.]

According to Tshivenda custom, when a girl is married, she is supposed to stay with her mother-in-law and assist her with domestic chores, including cooking for her. Her mother-in-law will guide her on how things are done in the family (Nekhongoni, 2013a). When the bride gives birth, she is given her own hut, although she continues cooking with her mother-in-law until her husband's younger brother marries. This implies that a bride is not permitted to have her own house elsewhere and has to live with her in-laws. The bride is expected to respect and obey her in-laws at all times, especially her father-in-law, whom she is not even supposed to call by name (Nekhongoni, Ibid). In the last stanzas, the persona shares some of the lessons and laws that a bride is taught.

*A vhu ḑoḑi musadzi wa u sinyukana,
Vhu pfana na musadzi wa tshifhungu,*

*Ane a kakarika na dzikhali na dzindongwana,
Ane a sinḡa mavhele nga nungo dzoṭhe.*

[Marriage is not for a person who is easily angered,
It is for a person who is a hardworker,
Who struggles with the pots and dishes,
Who pounds mealies with all her strength.]

*Mashaka a munna wau u songo a nyala,
U vha fare nga nḡila yavhuḡi ya tshidele,
U songo ḡiḡowedza u dzula wo sinyuwa,
Zwi vhavhaho na zwi dinaho u konḡelele.*

[Do not resent your husband's relatives,
Treat them the best way possible,
Do not make it a habit to always be angry,
Endure everything that pains and frustrates you.]

*U ḡifare nga misi kha vhutshilo hau,
U songo tshila vhutshilo vhune ha nengisa;
Dzula wo ḡitakalela u songo kongonwa na nga vha hau;
Vivho, zwitshete, vhudakwa na tsemano zwi a shonisa.*

[Exhibit good morals at all times in your life,
Do not lead a disgusting life,
Always be happy and never be bothered, even by your relatives;
Envy, strife, drunkenness and profanity are shameful.]

*Musadzi vhukuma ndi lupfumo lwa munna wawe,
Musadzi a sa ḡivhalei ndi maḡisambilu kha munna wawe,
Munna wawe u dzula a tshi gungula sa tshisiwana,
Zwine a vha nazwo na zwine a fara ndi mahandana.*

[A good wife is the wealth of her husband,
A wayward wife is her husband's sorrow,
Her husband keeps grumbling like an orphan,
All that he has and all that he gathers is vanity.]

It is evident in the preceding stanzas that the bride is indoctrinated into silence, submissiveness and passivity. In this silence she is not allowed to articulate her desires or utter any meaningful word. This image explains well women's position in society. They are expected to accept their secondary position without questioning. They do not have a say in the politics of their own social groupings, not even in

matters that directly affect them, like marriage (cf. Mokgoatšana, 1996). Their role is to tacitly submit to their husbands. If they succeed to do that, they will ‘enjoy’ their marriages because they are expected to endure even the hardships that a normal human being would not tolerate in the name of being of ‘good wives’. As for why it is that silence and immobility, which are signs and manifestations of inertia, are criteria for the beauty of women is a matter deserving an independent study. The next subsection focuses on perceptions of separation and divorce in Tshivenda culture.

5.3.7. Separation and Divorce in Tshivenda Culture

The traditional (Tshivenda) marriage rarely ended in divorce (Phaswana, 2000). There had to be ‘valid’ reasons for a man to return his wife to her parents’ house. According to Mulovhedzi, Masoga and Mudau (2017:91), “a man cannot return his wife to her parents and receive compensation unless she had several abortions, had committed incest, had become a habitual adulteress or a thief, or had been designated a witch”. Phaswana (2000:124–133) adds that the grounds for divorce are witchcraft, excessive wife-beating and maltreatment (as if there is an acceptable degree), neglect of wife by husband and the problem of interfaith. Phaswana (2000) opines that adultery, habitual lying, gossiping and insolence, desertion without cause and barrenness are not offences that are grounds for divorce. In the instance that divorce occurs in Tshivenda culture, it is often associated with a bad or dirty life (Mulovhedzi et al, 2017). As a result, divorcees are likely to be stigmatised and alienated, including the *mbuyavhuhadzi* (female divorcee who returns to her parents as a child in the house). The poem “Mbuya-Vhuhadzi” (Female divorcee) by Matshili (1967:68) attests to this.

Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi u bva'fhi?

Tsho u vhaihaho ndi tshithu-de?

Wo diwa ngani u vhuhadzi hau?

Tsho u totaho ndi tshi'ni munnani wau?

[Hey, female divorcee, where do you come from?

What is it exactly that brought you back?

What hit you when you were at your marital home?

What pinched you when you were with your husband?]

Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi a u shoni na u fhanu?

Munna wau u sala a tshi bikelwa nga nnyi?

*Wo bva ngani ngei vhuhadzi hau?
Wo pandelwa nga nnyi a sa funi u bikelwa?*

[Hey, female divorcee, are you not ashamed of being here?
Who do you think will remain cooking for your husband?
What made you leave your marriage?
Who expelled you that does not like being cooked for?]

*He mbuya-vhuhadzi mubvafha-u-sinda
Vhabebi vhau vho ja thundu vharwa-vhanna,
Vha do lifha ngani vho shenga yothe?
Kholomo vho dzekisa yau.*

[Hey, female divorcee, you who is lazy to pound
Your parents consumed their in-laws' bridal property,
How will they repay it when they have consumed all of it?
They have used even your cow to marry elsewhere.]

*Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi mulamba-u-vhudzwa?
Vho mazwale vho u sundelani?
Wo fara milayo ya hayani wa litsha ya vhuhadzi.
Thetshelesa vhalai vha vhuhadzi u dzule nga dakalo.*

[Hey, female divorcee, are you one of those who do not heed counsel?
Why did your in-laws push you out?
You obeyed the laws of your home and disregarded those of your in-laws.
Listen to the marital counsellors so that you may remain happily married.]

*Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi i ya vhuhadzi hau;
U songo shavha vhahadzinga vhau,
Naho vha u hadzinga nga gango ji fhisaho,
Kondelela ndi zwa vhuhadzi hau.*

[Hey, female divorcee, go back to your marital home;
Do not run away from your co-wives,
Even when they make you go through severe challenges,
Endure, that's what happens in your marriage.]

*Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi zwa vhuhadzi a zwi shavhiwi,
Shumai u shishe mabiko a rothe,
Vha vhuhadzi vha u khode mishumoni,
Ndi hone vha tshi do renda vhe' thundu yashu yo vhuelwa.*

[Hey, divorcee, you never flee from marital challenges,
Work so hard until sweat becomes droplets,

Until your in-laws praise you when it comes to hardwork,
That is when they will praise and say our bridal property has paid off.]

5.4. PROCREATION IN TSHIVENḐA CULTURE

Marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects that often overlap so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another (Mbiti, 1969:130). For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: The departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalised. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Those who do not participate in it are a curse to the community; they are a rebel and a law-breaker; and they are not only viewed as abnormal but also as 'under-human' (Mbiti, 1969:130). Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society, and therefore, society rejects them in return.

It must also be noted that marriage and procreation in African communities are a unit: Without procreation marriage is incomplete (Mbiti, 1969:130). Procreation is a religious obligation through which the individual contributes the seeds of life towards humankind's struggle against the loss of original immortality. Biologically both husband and wife are reproduced in their children, perpetuating the chain of humanity. Mbiti (1969) says that in some societies it is believed that the living-dead are reincarnated in part so that aspects of their personalities or physical characteristics are 're-born' in their descendants. A person who has no descendants therefore in effect quenches the fire of life and becomes forever dead since their line of physical continuation is blocked if they do not get married and bear children. This is a sacred understanding and obligation that must neither be abused nor despised (Mbiti, 1969). Ntshivhuyu's (1990:26–27) poem "Khombe" (Bachelor) provides insight into how an unmarried man is viewed in TshivenḐa culture.

*Tshililo tshau iwe,
Tshau tshililo tsha vhulombe,
Tshi shaya muphalali tsikoni,
Vhunga wo pfuka muano.*

[Your cry,
Your cry of aloneness,
Has no rescue in creation,
Since you violated the covenant.]

*Mukosi wau iwe khombe,
Mukosi kha vhundothe hau,
U fhindulwa nga ufho mulayo;
Kha ya fumi iyo ndabani?*

[Your cry, bachelor,
The cry of your singleness,
Is answered by which law;
In all the 10 commandments on the stone?]

*Dzina lau ji shaya mudzi,
Thikho vhukuma kha tsiko,
Musi walwo wa ongomala,
Ha vha u unga na muya.*

[Your name lacks a root,
The true pillar of creation,
When death comes you wilt,
And echo with the wind.]

*Nyito yau i kunda khaidzo,
Kha thoho yau ya mutile,
Wa ri wo fushwa ndilo wa bvuvhula,
Khungumadzi ya matula iwe!*

[Your deed is beyond rebuke,
On your hardened head,
You say you are satisfied and kick away the dish,
What a misfortune!]

Khombe is a bachelor and childless man (Ramanyimi, 2008:86). When a bachelor dies, the Tshivenda ritual performance *u dzekisa mufu* has to be done. Traditionally, any man who dies without having married and fathered children is regarded as selfish. When such a person dies, a piece of wood is inserted between his buttocks. This becomes symbolic of the responsibilities that he has shunned. The ritual is conducted according to the instructions of the *maine*. This varies according to the man behind the whole scene (*maine*). In some instances, when a man dies a bachelor, the *maine* takes a branch of *muvhale* tree and cut it into two pieces and

the medicine person performs the medicinal practice. The branch is then taken to the intersection of the path where people commonly pass every now and then. The other piece of the branch is put at the gate where the deceased used to live.

During the funeral, the medicine man will take the branch that was at the gate and put in the coffin next to the deceased. By so doing, the deceased will be married. The branch of the *muvhale* tree will therefore be a symbol of his wife (Nengovhela, 2010:48–49). Another ritual may still be performed for the one who has died a bachelor. In this instance, a wooden hoe stick is placed in a round gourd. The medicine person opens a hole on the gourd and this is where the hoe stick is inserted. The medicine person performs medicinal practices, and thereafter, the stick and the gourd are taken to the intersection of the path where people pass every now and then. Whoever passes will realise that the person who had died was a bachelor. The stick becomes symbolic of male hood; while the gourd with a hole becomes symbolic of female hood (Milubi, 2007:3).

This symbolic ritual performance may also serve as an appeasement of the spirit of the one who died without having married. In this way, they are not marrying but removing curses that can be transmitted to the coming generation. It also serves as a symbolic warning to those who are still alive that one must marry (Nengovhela, 2010). According to Stayt (1931:242), if the spirit of the dead bachelor is not pacified, “he may become a source of endless trouble to the lineage. So he is given an old used hoe to handle “Gulelwa” with a cotton tied near the hole to symbolize a wife, the string being her waist band and the hole for female genitals”. During the burial process, one of the relatives might be heard saying “*hamusi ro ni wanela musadzi, u heneho ni songo tsha ri dina nga tshithu*” (Ramanyimi, 2008:88), meaning ‘today we have found a wife for you, she is there with you, do not trouble us any longer’.

The Vhavenda dislike seeing a person unmarried, especially if there is still a need to bear children in the family (Nekhongoni, 2013a). The second way in which marriage and procreation as a unity attempt to recapture immortality is in the matter of ‘remembering’ the living-dead. Mbiti (1969) highlights the importance of ‘personal immortality’ in which the living-dead are kept by members of their human families. So long as there are persons in the family who remember someone who has physically died this person is not really dead: They are still alive in the minds of their relatives and neighbours who knew them while they were in human form. Their name still

means something *personal*, and they can ‘appear’ to members of their family who knew them and recognise them by *name*. These also give them food and drink, the tokens of fellowship and remembrance. This, as Mbiti (1969) shows, is extremely important in African societies. It is in one’s family that the living-dead are kept in personal memory the longest after their physical death. Mbiti (1969) mentions that he once heard elderly people say to their grandchildren who seem to wait too long before getting married, ‘if you don’t get married and have children, who will pour out libation to you when you die?’ This is a serious philosophical concern among traditional African peoples. Unfortunate, therefore, is the man or woman who has nobody to ‘remember’ them after physical death.

To lack someone close who keeps one in personal immortality is the worst misfortune and punishment that any person could suffer. To die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from human society, to become disconnected, to become an outcast and to lose all links with mankind. Everybody, therefore, must get married and bear children; this is the greatest hope and expectation of the individual for themselves and of the community for the individual. However, it is possible that one (either a man or a woman) may get married and be unable to bear children. Even then, there are certain reactions that the Vhavanḁa will project towards such a person and they will strive to find remedies to sterility, as the next section highlights.

5.5. PERCEPTIONS OF STERILITY IN TSHIVENḁA CULTURE

Nekhongoni (2013b) examines the impact of sterility on the Tshivendanḁ language and social life, and how this condition influences social relations among the Vhavanḁa. It is believed in Tshivendanḁ culture that the perpetuation of one’s lineage relies prominently, if not solely, on childbirth (in marriage). The burden of procreation is, therefore, placed on both the male and female, although it seems women tend to shoulder this burden more than men. This is said in light of Stayt’s (1968:30) remark that “every Muvendanḁ woman desires to bear children, and if she does not become pregnant shortly after marriage her mother-in-law requires her son to take his wife to consult a medicine man”. By implication, the blame for a childlessness in marriage is automatically apportioned to the woman.

Mafenya (2002:132) adds that “Traditionally, it is also believed that a woman’s natural function is to bear children. As a result, women who do not have children, either because they are unable, or because they choose not to, are classified as abnormal, unnatural or deprived” (cf. Ryan, 1998). Therefore, to be a wife without bearing children is regarded not only as a matter of regret but also as a reproach that can even lead to divorce (Douglas, 1990). That childlessness is associated with regret and reproach is reinforced in the poem “Muumba” (Barren woman) by Netshivhuyu (1990:22).

*Vhuṭungu hau kha mbebo,
Vhuṭungu ha u dziṅwa mikando,
Vhu nga vhuṭungu ha bofu;
Ḳi tshi lilela luvhone.*

[Your sorrow pertaining to childbirth,
Your sorrow for being denied breastmilk,
Likens that of a blind a person;
Who cries for the light.]

*Maṭodzi au muumba,
Maṭodzi au kha nyandiso,
Ndi maṭodzi a tshimuma;
Tshi tshi lilela u bula.*

[Your tears, barren woman,
Your tears on matters of multiplication,
Are the tears of a dumb person;
Who cries for the ability to speak.]

*Lugungulo lwau muumba,
Lugungulo lwau kha mupo,
Ndi luimbo lwa muhoṭa;
A tshi rabeledza tsiko.*

[Your murmuring, barren woman,
Your murmuring to nature,
Is a song of a sickly person;
Who begs the creation.]

*Hau afho ndi hau muumba,
Zwau izwo zwi vhe zwau,*

*Hanna kha iwe a vhe thama,
Hu vhe u tangedza tsiko.*

[It is your allocated portion, barren woman,
What is yours should remain yours,
Hannah should be your close friend,
That will be your reception of creation.]

A woman who cannot bear children, or one whose children die in infancy is called *muumba* (Van Warmelo, 1989). Among the Vhavenda, childbirth is emphasised at initiation schools. In fact, the initiates are taught that marriage is not a game, it is the precursor of childbirth, and as such should be properly understood so that the offspring will be strong and healthy (Nekhongoni, 2013b). In this way, sex in marriage is presented as a means to an end; the end is having offspring. Moreover, marriage is seen as a means to an end; the end is making children (Ramurunzi, 2002).

Masakona (2000) adds that the traditional Tshivenda marriage focuses on procreation and multiplication and not on love. If a barren wife is not expelled (divorced), her husband may marry another wife (or wives) so that they may bear children for him. Sometimes, the in-laws may send the wife's younger sister or cousin as a substitute so that she can bear children on behalf of the wife (Nekhongoni, 2013b). If the husband does not resort to polygamy, he may opt for infidelity in an effort to prove that he can bear children (Mashau, 2006).

Traditionally, there are several factors that can be responsible for a woman's barrenness in Tshivenda culture, namely (a) witchcraft; (b) *lukuse* (disease or miscarriage); (c) marrying at an old age; (d) retraction of the uterus or endometriosis; (e) blockage of the fallopian tubes; and (f) loss of or being born without ovaries (cf. Nekhongoni, 2013b). If a woman is barren, it may be suspected that witchcraft is the cause of her barrenness. This is believed to be done by *u rolela mavu* (gathering the soil) from where she was seated or stealing her *sheddo* (underwear) and using it to enforce and sustain her barrenness in marriage. It is also believed that her ex-boyfriends may have, out of spite and jealousy that she is with another man, consulted a witch or wizard to cause her barrenness in marriage. Sometimes, it is believed that her ancestors are responsible for the barrenness (Nekhongoni, 2013b). In such a case, the ancestors must be propitiated under supervision and intercession

by means of *u phasa* (pouring libations) so that they may grant her children. After the propitiatory ritual, the woman is also given herbs so that she may conceive (*ḡnowa yawe i fare*). *Lukuse*, on the other hand, is an illness that can be contracted by a woman or a man and prevents childbirth (Van Warmelo and Phophi, 1967). Tan and Jacobs (1991) aver that marrying at an old age is another cause of barrenness. The Vhaventḡa also ascribe infertility to what they call *u humela murahu ha ḡnowa*, that is, the retraction of the uterus that is immobilised by a pelvic inflammatory disease or endometriosis (Nekhongoni, 2013b). There is also *u valea ha ḡnowa*, which means the fallopian tubes become blocked, resulting in an adhesion that distorts the shape of the tubes and their relationship with the ovaries (cf. Tan and Jacobs, 1991).

None of the selected poets wrote a poem about an infertile man (*ngoḡwa*). This might serve as a reinforcement that barrenness is generally ascribed to women rather than men in Tshiventḡa culture. However, this should not be taken to mean that there are no impotent men among the Vhaventḡa. In fact, in some of the female initiation songs the initiates are informed about the possibility of being married to an infertile man. Such a song might be rendered thus:

Matanda mapufhi—Nḡoḡwa lurandala
Matanda mapufhipufhi—Nḡoḡwa vhukuma
Mavhala malapfu ndi munna a konaho
Mavhala mapufhi ndi ngoḡwa lurandala
Mavhala mapufhipufhi ndi ngoḡwa vhukuma

[Low sperm count—temporarily infertile man
 No sperm production—permanently infertile man]
 A high sperm production denotes a potent man
 A low sperm production denotes a temporarily infertile man
 No sperm production denotes a permanently infertile man]

(cf. Nekhongoni, 2013b; Van Warmelo and Phophi, 1967)

These lines can also be translated into ‘a man who does not produce sperms during sex’, ‘a man who cannot secure an erection’ and ‘a man whose sperm is watery’ are impotent. Nekhongoni’s (2013b) informants also mentioned *ngoma luranzhala* instead of *ngoḡwa lurandala*, and stated that this is a man whose penis becomes erect but then becomes flaccid. In the lines quoted above, *ngoḡwa lurandala* is a man capable of engaging in coitus but is sterile, whereas *ngoḡwa* is an impotent

man incapable of coitus (Van Warmelo, 1989). Thus, a man may be unable to make a woman pregnant because of insufficient sperm/low sperm production or no sperm production (Nekhongoni, 2013b). Undescended testes can also cause a man's infertility (Tan and Jacobs, 1991). Sexually transmitted infections (i.e. gonorrhoea) may also be a contributory factor to a man's impotence. Whether it is a male or female, barrenness generally puts a stigma on that person in society.

If a man is impotent, for example, the Vhavenda will say '*o sia vhura dzundeni*' (he left his bow at the work party for the chief), meaning he cannot make a woman pregnant. An impotent man and a barren woman are both despised by the people (Masakona, 2000; Nekhongoni, 2013b). Overall, marriage is viewed as an institution for producing children. Even in an instance where a woman is pregnant, she still worries if she will carry the baby full term. The worry emanates from the stigmatisation, mockery and alienation that is likely to happen if she loses the baby. A pregnant woman's fears are expressed in Rasila's (2006:43–44) poem "Musadzi muimana" (Pregnant woman).

*U tsa u tshi gonya,
U tshi teka-teka,
Wo hwala pfundo ja dakalo,
Pfundo ja zwililo.*

[You go up and down,
Wandering,
Carrying the knot of joy,
The knot of sorrows.]

*Maɖuvha au a u gagaɖela,
Ha lavheleswi nga iwe,
Huno, nga vho u wedzaho mulambo,
Hune u sa ɖo humela.*

[Your days of carrying,
Are not counted by you,
But, by those who helped you cross the river,
To a point of no return.]

*Vho lindela vho komolela,
Sa mmbwa yo lindela marambo,
Maanga o lindela i tshi wa,
Zwa ɖi ralo i si we.*

[They are eagerly waiting,
Like a dog waiting for bones,
Vultures are waiting for it to fall,
And yet it does not.]

*U lindela havho ndi ha zwaho,
Vhunga arali wa moḁisa,
A vha nga koni u faredza vha tikedzela,
Vha ḁo linga fhedzi u u rothodza mbilu.*

[Their wait is just for the sake of it,
Because, if you have a miscarriage,
They will be unable to help you stop it,
They will only try to cool your heart.]

*Minwedzi yau ya ḁahe a si tshithu,
Zwe ya puta a u zwi ḁi,
A u zwi hanyisi musi zwo fa,
Tshau ndi u gagaḁela.*

[Your nine months is nothing,
What they possess you do not know,
You have no power to make the dead alive,
Yours is only to carry.]

*Afho vhuongeloni he wa shavhela,
A si vhukhudo ha pfundo ḁe wa pfunela.
Huno ndi haya ha fulufhelo,
ḁi re ḁuvhani na muliloni.*

[At the hospital where you fled for refuge,
Is not a hiding place for the knot you have tied.
But, it is a home of hope,
Which is between the sun and the fire.]

*Maḁamu au u zwimba a si u ḁo mamwa,
Mikando ye wa hwala ndi ya fhedzi,
Arali Nwali a so ngo ḁea,
Vhunga zwoḁhe zwi zwawe.*

[The swelling of your breasts does not mean they will be sucked,
The breastmilk they carry is for nothing,
If God has not given,
Since all belongs to Him.]

*Muimana u si tima-time,
Musi maḍuvha o paḍa,
Zwoḥe ndi zwa o ṅeaho,
Riṅe ri vha ṭanganedzi.*

[Pregnant woman, do not doubt,
When the due date passes,
All belongs to the One who gave,
We are only the receivers.]

The central idea of this poem is that a pregnant woman should always be prepared for good and bad news about her baby or babies. According to the poet, all a pregnant woman can do is to carry her offspring; there is not much else she can do to control the gestation period. She is also informed that not everyone is happy for her. In fact, there are others called *mahanga* (vultures) who would love to see her lose her baby/babies. As a result, she should be careful who she tells about her pregnancy. Seemingly, it is not only the pregnant woman who is eagerly waiting for the birth of her child, there are also others, such as family members, friends, relatives and colleagues, who cannot wait for the arrival of the baby. In their anticipation, they should not forget that God is the only one who can protect both the mother and baby. Hospitals can only do so much, and they do not have absolute control over life and death. Therefore, the mother must always bear in mind that God has the final say in her pregnancy. The poet concludes by comforting and encouraging the pregnant mother to keep the faith and hope that God will see her through the whole pregnancy. Her child will be born, however, threatening the challenges that come with pregnancy.

To get glimpse into reactions to childbirth, Ladzani's (1995:37) poem "Nwana o bebwaho" (The child that was born) is instructive.

*Mukosi wawe a tshi swika shangoni,
A si mukosi wa dakalo,
Ndi mukosi wa thambulo.*

[Its cry when it arrives on earth,
Is not the cry of joy,
It is the cry of suffering.]

The answer to the question why the child cries after birth is not simple (Mokgoatšana, 1996:103). However, the following reasons may help unravel the

mystery: (a) Perhaps the cry symbolises the child's freedom from being tied to the mother by the umbilical cord; (b) the child realises that it has been severed from its usual habitation (the womb), a place of no return; (c) connected to the second reason is the possibility that the child is freed from the routine of being fed directly from its mother and feels incapacitated to face the 'outside' world alone; and (d) perhaps it is the hostile nature of the physical world that causes the child's cries when it is born.

In tandem with the foregoing reasons, Mokgoatšana (1996) says that people strongly believe that they are tied to the world by their umbilical cords, which are shed when they are born. It is for this reason, Mokgoatšana (Ibid) further opines, that people claim origin on the basis of their birth rites. Being severed from the world from which they were born thus frustrates them. In the above stanza, the poet states that the child's cry after birth is not a cry of joy but of sorrow. With this, the poet implicates the first cry motif to condemn the atrocities of the world that await both the child and its mother. According to the poet, the unwelcoming nature of the world, dominated by conflicts, bloodshed and traumatic events, may be responsible for the child's cry. The innocent and helpless child is probably frustrated by the marked difference between the two worlds: The unseen world of the womb and the physical world of the living. One is perplexed by the fact that it is not the child who suffers the birth pangs but its mother, and yet the child cries at birth. On the contrary, the child actually magnifies the mother's joy and that of the family as a whole. The mother's joy is mentioned in the subsequent stanza:

*Mme na vhone a vha takali zwone,
Vha a hangwa zwe phambo ya itwa,
I tshi dzhielwa khukhwana dzothe fhuu!*

[The mother is overwhelmed with joy,
She forgets what was done to the hen,
When its chicks were all snatched from her!]

In John 16:21 Jesus Christ says: 'When a woman is about to give birth she has sorrow because her hour has come; but when she has given birth to the child, the pain is put out of her mind by the joy that a child has come into the world'. It is seemingly this kind of joy that overwhelms the mother at after the birth of her child. The poet, however, does not focus on the mother's joy, but on the misfortunes that

await the mother and her children. She likens the mother to a hen that loses her chicks to vultures. The mother seems unaware that as soon as her child is born they are susceptible to danger. This idea is reinforced in the fourth stanza where the poet says:

*Mme a vho itwa nga u sa divha,
Uri u pungaila havho vhuṭunguni,
Ndi u beba vhuṭungu vhu no vhaisa mbilu.*

[The mother does not know,
That the sorrows she endured,
Were to birth the pain that breaks the heart.]

The last stanza traces the roots of maternal love and perseverance to the pregnancy period and labour. Pregnancy is a testing period for the mother. It is here where the mother demonstrates her love and patience for the most trying times of her life. Extended labour may tempt her to commit suicide or abortion to get rid of the pain, but with love for the long-awaited baby, the mother endures until the great moment arrives when the child is born (Mokgoatšana, 1996:36).

5.6. APPRAISALS OF TSHIVENḌA TRADITIONAL DANCES

Some Vhavendḅa poets also praise Tshivenḅa traditional dances. Some of the well-known Tshivenḅa traditional dances are *Tshifasi*, *Tshigombela*, *Malende* and *Tshikona*. Only two dances are praised by one of the selected poets, R.R. Matshili, and therefore, only these dances (*Malende* and *Tshikona*) are discussed in this study. However, for the purposes of informing the reader, *Tshifasi* or *Tshinzerere* is a children's playful dance. It is meant to teach children to distinguish a male from a female while at an impressionable stage. This is evinced by the song *Thi ji funi jiduna ja u vhifha* (I do not want an ugly man). *Mahunḅwane* is another strategy the Vhavendḅa use to prepare children for marriage and family. Thus, apart from initiation schools, the *Tshifasi* dance also serves to prepare the youth for marriage (Nekhongoni, 2013a). *Tshigombela* is one of the dances done only by women and are danced by some Vhavendḅa to entertain themselves (Murwamphinda, 1993). The accompanying songs include praise poems. A drum (*ngoma*) and a small drum, *murumba*, are beaten during the performance. *Thuzu* (rattles) worn on the legs enlarge the sound made by the drum, giving the basic rhythm. The *murumba* beat is

fast and requires people to dance at a great speed. The dancers are given instructions with a whistle blown by the leader. We now turn to the *Malende* dance, which we discuss broadly, followed by the *Tshikona* dance.

5.6.1 Malende

The *Malende* dance is also performed when there is *thevhula*. *Thevhula* is the sacrificial rite in which a chief and his family pour a libation of beer on the graves of their ancestors once a year (Van Warmelo, 1937a). The *Malende* dance is also performed when a group of women and the old ones go to visit the son-in-law when there is a newborn baby. They organise what is known as *murula* (beer). They take along one man who will make the *Malende* dance both impressive and entertaining. Whenever *Malende* is performed, it symbolises that people are enjoying life at that particular moment. This man is called *tshiviambudzi* (a man who slaughters a goat) (Nemakonde, 2006:11). Both males and females, young and old, perform the *Malende* dance. There are no specific clothes meant for the *Malende* performance. All types of clothes, including traditional clothes, Western clothes and clothes made from animal skins are worn by *Malende* dancers. Vhavenḁa women and girls often wear different kinds of salempores (*miḁwenda*) when they perform *Malende*. Matshili's (1972:34–35) poem "Malende" provides a clue on how the *Malende* dance is viewed in Tshivenḁa culture.

*Ndi musi ho swa ho nyenga,
Venḁa ḁa ha Tshikamuroho ḁo si na midzi,
Nyimbo dzo ḁangana muralala,
Musimi i ḁambi i sa vhuyi fhanu tsini,
Hu hone ḁo si na midzi Venḁa ḁa ha Tshikamuroho.*

[At a time when people are joyful in Venḁa,
When the Tshikamuroho [Venḁa] land is at ease,
Numerous songs sung in gladness,
The lead singer being a rare, gifted individual,
At a time when people are joyful in Venḁa.]

The foregoing stanza shows that *Malende* as a Tshivenḁa traditional dance is performed for entertainment during leisure times (Rabothata, 1991). It is performed after drinking beer, working as a group, *murula* (beer and food stuff sent to in-laws) and *masosa* (beer halls) (Nemakonde, 2006). The dance is performed by one

member (soloist) who starts by leading the group in singing. The soloist moves around once or twice singing slowly. The soloist continues by clapping their hands so that the audience may join in, and the clapping accelerates, as if telling the performer to start dancing. When the clapping, drumming and singing are harmoniously in progress, the soloist starts dancing by jumping up and down. A *Malende* dancer can take two steps in the wink of an eye, while another can only take one step during that time (Nemakonde, 2006), as stated in the next stanza:

*Vhathangga vha tshi u fhufha, thunzi ya sea,
Vhafumakadzi vha tshi vhea mukosi bama ja bvumela,
Hu hone hu tshi khou fhufhiwa vhavhili vha sera,
Davhani vha tshi u tshina mbeu i si tsha mela,
Hu hone jo si na midzi ja ha Tshikamuroho.*

[Young men will be leaping so high that a fly laughs,
Women will be shouting so loud that the earth echoes,
At a time when people leap so high that two people crawl underneath,
People will be dancing so avidly at the chief's tilling field that no seed will ever
grow
At a time when people are joyful in Venda.]

Nemapate (1999) describes *Malende* as a dance performed after people have harvested their crops. They are having a rest after working very hard in their fields. At this time, they have all the necessary ingredients to brew beer as the crops are sufficient for that purpose. Hence,

*Nyimbo dzi tshi nuunela mbiluni,
Vhakale zwi tshi vha humbudza zwa mulovha,
A vha tsha kona vho leda dzikhunduni;
Vha dhangwa sa Vho-Dzhege vha a lovha,
Hu hone jo si na midzi ja ha Tshikamuroho.*

[Songs will be sweet melodies in the heart,
They will have the old reminiscing on yesterday,
They are no longer able to twist their waists;
And forget themselves like Jack and die,
At a time when people are joyful in Venda.]

Malende songs are well received by the heart because they are essentially songs of joy. However, in these radiant moments of joy, there is still room for *vhakale* (the elderly) to reminisce on bygone times. The bygone times are not mentioned except

that they the times when the elderly were still young and full of vigour – a privilege they no longer have. Seemingly, going down memory lane should be enough for the elderly; they should not attempt to dance lest they hurt themselves. This implies that the Malende dance requires youthful vigour to perform. That the *Malende* songs trigger youthful memories among the elderly should not be taken lightly because with their age, the elderly are, metaphorically speaking, mobile libraries that possess a vast deposit of indigenous knowledge. Although there are no clear-cut rules that indigenous knowledge should not be transmitted, the mere fact that the dance allows the participation of both genders and age groups allows for the transmission of this knowledge through song and conversation.

Malende is also a dance that facilitates marriage. To mature boys and girls, the *Malende* dance is a convention of courtship, dating and sexual bargaining (cf. Thomas, 1993). In this way, *Malende* facilitates finding marriage partners. As boys and girls spend most of the time dancing together, they get sufficient opportunities to make marriage proposals to each other in the future. At a later stage, a boy may ask for powdered tobacco (snuff) from the girl, and if she agrees, the boy will know that she has fallen in love with him. The dance thus plays a major role among the Vhavenda. Nuanced in *Vhasadzi vha zwinyeke vha tshi dzunguluwa* (Beautiful women spinning around) and *Vhaṭhannga vha tshi pwasha fhasi vha tshi ṭṭisana* (Young men breaking the ground open in competition) in the stanzas below is the enforcement of the idea that the dance, apart from depicting leisure times and entertainment, also facilitates courtship in Tshivenda culture:

Vhasadzi vha zwinyeke vha tshi dzunguluwa,
Vha tshi nga vha tshina malombo a ngoma,
Vhathu vha si tsha funa u ṭuwa;
Vho takala vha tshi ḡifhelwa nga mbilamutondo,
Hu hone ḡo si na midzi ḡa ha Tshikamuroho.

[Beautiful women will be spinning around,
 Like they are participating in the ancestral malombo dance,
 People will be unwilling to leave;
 They would be happy, enjoying the mbilamutondo music,
 At a time when people are joyful in Venda.]

*Vhaṭhanna vha tshi pwasha fhasi vha tshi ṭaṭisana,
Vha tshi u fhufha ha pwashea fhasi,
Wa wana buse ḷo akha lutsinga ḷi tshi phusukana,
Vha tshi u pwasha fhasi wa vhona uri mavu a balea,
Hu hone ḷo si na midzi ḷa ha Tshikamuroho.*

[Young men breaking the ground open in competition,
They will jump so high that the ground breaks open,
You will see the stirred dust rolled up like a vein,
While they break open the ground and you see the soil cracking,
At a time when people are joyful in Venḍa.]

The dance also serves another significant purpose in Tshivendḍa culture. Arguably, the Vhavenḍa are generally reluctant to disclose that a married woman is having an extra marital affair with another man. Therefore, *Malende* songs are thus used to inform the concerned husband that his wife is unfaithful to him. The following song is an example of this:

*Vha songo sokou dzula vhe hee!
Mbudzi dzi tshi khou ḷa mavhele
Musadzi wavho u dzulela u zwifha
Jim! Ni tou vha munna-ḍe?
Musadzi a tshi vhambadza muvhili.*

[Do not just sit and relax!
Goats are eating mealies
Your wife always tells lies
Jim! What kind of a man are you?
Your wife prostitutes her body.]

(Nemakonde, 2006:45)

This *Malende* song informs the husband, Jim, that his wife has a relationship with another man. Jim is alerted to this and eventually he will consult the elderly people to resolve this sensitive issue and to help prolong their marriage. Overall, *Malende* through its songs is used to reprimand people's immoral behaviour, to inform people about what is happening in their community, to warn people about unacceptable behaviours prevailing in society and of course, to encourage people to be joyful.

5.6.2. Tshikona

Tshikona as the Vhavenda's national dance, takes place under the auspices of traditional leaders and is associated with important social rituals or occasions (Nemakonde, 2006; Kruger, 2007). These important social rituals/occasions include the installation of a new ruler, the commemoration of a ruler's death (*dzumo*), and the sacrificial rites at the graves of a ruler's ancestors. *Tshikona* is under the auspices of traditional leaders because a Muvenda chief had/has dual powers; one is *political* and the other *ritual*. *Tshikona tsha thondo* was used as a mechanism by which a leader could exercise direct *political* control. The original participants of *tshikona* were young men attending *thondo*, an institution under the patronages of traditional leaders. *Tshikona* is a male dance (Van Warmelo, 1960; Matshidze, 2013). *Thondo* was an initiation school that formed part of the basic education of the Muvenda child, and was attended in order to attain manhood (Munyai, 2016). At this initiation school, mature boys were checked to see or find out whether they had sperms that could make children (Nemapate, 2009; Sebola, Chauke and Motlhaka, 2020). These young men were trained in warfare, and served as royal bodyguards and community police, and were dispatched by a traditional leader to collect fines and outstanding debts (Kruger, 2007). In this way, the ruler could exercise direct political control. Apart from the foregoing, *Tshikona* is performed for entertainment, celebration of the Vhavenda's heritage and other things. For analytical convenience, Matshili's (1972:20–21) poem "Tshikona" is quoted and analysed in full.

*Vhea mukosi Ramela,
A țangane maņanga a ha Nyatshikalanga;
Musununu u fhanzee lwo piringana,
Lwa ha masiakhali i tshi vhila.*

[Break out a shout, Ramela,
So that Nyatshikalanga's reedpipes may gather;
And the bamboo breaks as the song goes on,
Of one who leaves the boiling pot.]

When *Tshikona* is due to be performed, the *ngoma* is first sounded as a signal, and they gather in the *khoro* or public meeting place of the kraal (Kirby, 1968). The *malugwane/malogwane* calls out *mukosi* and then utters a curious hooting signal to the sound [*ee*], and immediately the *phala* player together with the players who

sound the octaves above and below his pipe commence playing, followed by the *thakhula* player. These sounds are delivered at the speed with which the *thungwa*, which controls the speed, indicates. These two beats having been given, the ensemble of flutes and drums begins. The scheme is said to be simple, though the result is apparently complex to the ear. It is performed by a group of men and a few boys of different ages. The difference in age suits the variety reed pipes used for the dance.

The lead singers blow reed pipes that produce soprano tunes. The rest of the blowers join in sounding baritone tunes. The dancers move in a circle, jumping up and down. The leader (*malogwane*) may change a tune, giving a signal to the dancers to change the style. The drumbeaters watch the style in question and also change the style of beating. The *Tshikona* performers also use the *phalaphala* (sable horn). A sable horn is used as a trumpet. It is made from the horn of an *impala* or old buck. It is a long crooked horn that is wide at the base and has a curved hole at its end. When air is blown through the curved hole, a sound is produced. This type of instrument is played by men during the outing ceremonies from the *Tshikona* dance. Sometimes, a sable horn is blown to call the dancers to come together and perform *Tshikona*. *Phalaphala* may also suggest that there is a big gathering at the chief's kraal or headman's place. After blowing the *phalaphala*, the blower have to send a message to the community to indicate what they are called for.

*Makhotho a fhufha vhavhili vha a sera,
Zwikalaha na zwikegulu zwi a diludza;
Vhasheli vha milenzhe vha tou shaphulisa,
Vanḁani we muthu u bvisa kholomo ya luḁanga.*

[If the expert dancer jumps, two people can crawl underneath him;
Old men and old women dive in joy;
Contributors add to the fun,
The open field is populated by multitudes of people.]

*Mifhululu ya vhafumakadzi yo ḁanganedzana,
Vhaḁangi vha tou ḁangavhedza dzhatsha lo ḁangana,
Zwifhungu zwo shisha mabiko zwi tshi kupula,
ḁotshi dzi tshi bva phakhoni dzo kwatula phula.*

[Women's ululations proliferate in harmony,
Audience members move slowly as the performance is at its peak,

The performers are drenched in sweat and keep wiping it off,
Bees come out of their hive stingless.]

Old women join the group by dancing and ululating outside the dancing group. *Tshikona* is performed on all important occasions such as the installation of a new ruler, the commemoration of a ruler's death (*dzumo*) and the sacrificial rites at the graves of the ruler's ancestors. In the *Tshikona* dance, the men move in a file anticlockwise around the women, who play bass, tenor and alto drums. This national dance is performed only with sets of heptatonic pipes. The dancers follow some of the steps that are representational and abstract. Some of them are difficult to master. Representational steps such as *u kumbuludza nduhu* (to gather peanuts), *u zwala mbeu* (to sow seeds) and *mapfene* (baboons) are clearly related to the first fruit ceremony at which the national dance is performed.

*Muselwa u gidima a sia khali i tshivhasoni,
Musi maṅanga a ha Nyatshikalanga a tshi hadzingana khoroni,
A zwi vhudzwi muṅwe thovhela ndi maḍembe na maḍalimbo,
Vhatukana vha litsha zwiṅoni zwo fashiwa nga vhulimbo.*

[A bride hurries and leaves the pot on the hearth,
When Nyatshikalanga's reedpipes are frying one another at the chief's kraal,
One has to witness the dance for oneself, second-hand narrations never suffice,
Boys leave birds caught in the birdlime.]

*Vha si na ṅanga vha lidza gunwe vha hashu,
Maṅanga a xaxarisa vanḁa loṅhe ḁa musanda,
Vhakegulu vha tou ḁipiḁa vhe ngomu leswu-leswu;
Maonga a tshi ḁikhopha a rwa fhasi nga phanḁa.*

[Those who do not have a pipe/flute, blow into their thumb,
The reedpipes/flutes make the chief's open field simmer,
Old women twist themselves during the dance;
Expert dancers twist and hit the ground with their foreheads.]

*A okhola makhotho luṅanga lu a fafata,
Ndi tshiane o tsha mukegulu wa Nyatshiḁahela;
Zwo vhone waho ndi maḍembe a sa ṅoḁi u ṅahelwa,
Ndi zwi ladza Venḁa ḁa Vho-Thovhela.*

[Expert dancers play the reed skilfully,
It is a tale of the old woman from Nyatshiḁahela;

What has been witnessed are miracles that should not be missed,
It is the peacemaker of Mr. Thovhela's Venda.]

*Buse u wana lo akha lutsinga lwa ya makoleni,
Vhamusanda vho thukha ntha ha khuluṅoni;
Magota na vhaṭanuni vho temba vha tshi nga zwiṅoni,
Vhakegulu na vhafumakadzi mifhululu i tshi fhaladza lukwara.*

[You find dust stretched like a stream in the sky,
The chief seated on his throne;
His headmen and his wives standing/sitting in a line/circle up like birds,
Grannies and women's ululations flattening hills.]

Tshikona is performed at the chief's kraal, graveyard, show grounds, stadia, schools and in cities or towns (Nemakonde, 2006). During rainy days, *Tshikona* is performed inside the *tshivhambo*, a large hut built like a kitchen (*tshiṭanga*) that serves to accommodate visitors (Van Warmelo and Phophi, 1967). A *tshivhambo* is only built in the village of a chief or headman of a district or in a chief's headquarters. Its structure differs from other huts in that it has two doors opposite each other. The main reason for performing the *Tshikona* at the chief's kraal is to entertain visitors who are visiting the chief.

The dancers may sometimes be sent to express sympathy at another chief's kraal, where the dancers are expected to remain for three to five days (Nemakonde, 2006). During this time, the dancers take no food with them, and they get food by begging or *milosho* may be ordered by the chief or headman of the place. *Milosho* means food eaten by *Tshikona* performers. To be precise, *milosho* is a dish of porridge contributed by the parents and is sent to the *Tshikona* dancers. In this way, *milosho* becomes a sign that shows cooperation between the chief and his subjects because the food is contributed free of charge. *Tshikona* is also performed at the chief's kraal during the installation of a new king or chief. The new chief is led to the public by the *Tshikona* dancers, and thereafter, the *Tshikona* is blown for a few minutes.

Tshikona was also performed at the chief's kraal to welcome warriors who had just returned from war. Immediately after the war, the chief, the royal house and members of the community gathered at the chief's kraal to praise and encourage the warriors who had fought bravely during the war. *Tshikona* is also performed at the graveyard where the ancestors lie buried. The whole family and relatives of the chief

assemble at the graveyard and pour *mpambo* (libation) over the stones that mark the graves and represent the ancestral spirits (Nemakonde, 2006). When this has been done, the *khotsimunene* (deputy chief) gives an instruction to the *malogwane* (the leader of *Tshikona*) and other men to start dancing *Tshikona*.

The ceremony is also a sacrifice to the spirits of the ancestors of the chief's lineage and some of the abstract steps may remind people of their illustrious ancestors (Nemakonde, 2006). The attire for the *Tshikona* is totally different from that of other traditional dances such as *Tshigombela* and *Malende*. The attire for the *Tshikona* dance are mentioned because traditional dances are ignored today and have become activities that are falling outside the auspices of a capital-driven modern society (Nemakonde, 2006). There are distinctions between the ancient and present-day attires for the *Tshikona* dance. In ancient times, *Tshikona* performers wore clothes made from animal skins and traditional garments for women (*miñwenda*). Young boys wore short leather pants made from the skins of animals (Nemakonde, 2006; Sebola et al, 2020). Nowadays people wear modern clothes, most of which are imported from Western countries. The clothes worn by the *malogwane*, the leader of the *Tshikona*, are completely different from those of the rest of the group. He used to wear leather garments made from wild cat skins and sometimes decorated himself with colourful beads around the neck. The observers and performers could easily identify him while he demonstrated the next step to them. The women and girls who play bass, tenor and alto drums wore traditional female garments called *miñwenda*.

Tshikona may also be performed at the show grounds where agricultural products, arts and crafts are displayed. It is performed to entertain the public. At some stage, the *Tshikona* dancers may compete with one another and the best performer receives a large sum of money or gifts at the end of the competition (Nemakonde, 2006). *Tshikona* may also be performed at stadia to entertain football players and their supporters or dignitaries and political leaders on public holidays such as Heritage Day, where audiences are reminded to honour the culture and tradition of their ancestors.

*Vhana vha zwipofu i pinzhe-pinzhe i fhira ndi u fhire,
Zwa maduda na malanga zwi tshi posa mpundu zwa ganama;*

*Zwi tshi nyanyulwa nga musununu u fhanzeaho sa pfure,
Une wa vhudzulwa nga vhaṭhannga vha ḍipfaho vho takala.*

[Children congested, pressing into one another,
Those with mucus and sleep crust kicking into the air and falling on their backs;
As they are excited by bamboo which breaks like the medicinal plant, pfure.
Which is blown by vigorous and jovial young men.]

*Ipfa! Ipfa! Ipfa! A si zwiṭuku ndi zwiḥulu,
Thungwa i fhandula matavha na makwara a Venḍa;
Murumba u tshi ṭambela tshandḍa wa shusha na khuhu,
Hu hone ḵo lala Venḍa maladze ḵi sa ladzi ḥwana na ḥdala.*

[Hear! Hear! Hear! It is not a trivial but great matter,
Thungwa breaks open great mountains and rocky hills of Venḍa;
Murumba has washed itself for the hand, frightening even the chicken,
At a time when Venḍa, which never lets a child sleep hungry, is at peace.]

Tshikona uses *dzingoma* (drums) as musical instruments. The Tshivendḍa *ngoma* instrument is made up of an animal skin that is tightly stretched over a round frame. Put differently, a *ngoma* is a large pot-shaped drum with a hemispherical resonator carved out of solid wood, and is played with a drumstick or beaten with bare hands. Among the Vhavendḍa there are various drums, and these drums are distinguished by their shapes and sizes. A drum is the most significant instrument for the Vhavendḍa (Nemakonde, 2006). In fact, Nemakonde (2006) avers that the Vhavendḍa believe that the sounds of drums are the voices of the ancestors. They are, therefore, used for communication, celebration and entertainment.

The Vhavendḍa have at least three types of drums, namely the *ngoma khulwane* (big drum), the *thungwa* (small drum), and the *murumba* (alto drum) (Nemakonde, 2006). The *ngoma khulwane* is a hemispherical instrument that usually has four handles. Different materials are used to make drums, and this, of course, differs from one tribe to another. The Vhavendḍa use a wooden tree trunk that the sculptor scoops out to create a drum that is decorated on the outside. The decoration symbolises a specific historical event of the Vhavendḍa people (Nemakonde, 2006). *Thungwa* is a pot-like drum, identical in shape to the *ngoma khulwane* but smaller (Blacking, 1965; Van Warmelo, 1989). The *thungwa* is made from a *mufula* (*Sclerocarya birrea*) tree trunk and its head is covered with a skin that is usually pegged to the wooden rim.

The *thungwa* player keeps a steady beat throughout the dance. The little hole at the base of each drum produces sound.

The *murumba* is a long, cylindrical membranophone instrument made from curved wood tapering to the end (N̄evhuṭalu, 1995). According to Van Warmelo (1960), when *Tshikona* is performed, the performers play the flutes while the *mirumba* drums are beaten by girls who stand upright and hold them between their legs. A small drum called *thungwa* is also used and is beaten with a *tshiombo* (knobbed drumstick). The girls beat the *mirumba* with their hands. The *murumba* is tall and resembles a milk pail in shape: Its head is at the wide end, and it is open at the other. Women hold it between their legs and beat it with their hands (Van Warmelo, 1989). The *murumba* is carved from a single piece of softwood, such as *mukunde* or *mufula*. The wood carver usually uses tools such as an axe and chisel to decorate the instrument. The head is usually covered with an ox hide that is pegged on while wet (N̄emakonde, 2006). The *murumba* has one large handle on the side, which helps the performer to place it between the legs when it is played. The tips of the fingers and the palms of the hands are used to produce two distinct sounds. The flat palm strikes the head of the *murumba* near the centre while the tips of the fingers strike the *murumba* near the rim. The instrument is usually played by women.

Nanga (reed pipes) are also used by the *Tshikona* performers. Each performer is responsible for a single note and the sounds of the reeds are played in harmony like trumpets. A complete set of reeds is called a *muṭavha*, which usually consists of a set of seven heptatonic pipes. Each pipe has its own function. The *nanga* are made of different materials. *N̄anga dza musununu* are obtainable from the Tshaulu village in the former Venḁa homeland. One member of a family is responsible for cutting reed pipes. *N̄anga dza luṭanga* (pipes made from river reeds) are found in many villages in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. They are cut into pieces between the nodes and closed naturally at one end. In the present-day context, some *n̄anga* are made from hosepipes, electric tubes, curtain rods, pram handles, and pieces of metal tubing (N̄emakonde, 2006). The flutes are cut in such a way that they produce different tones. The flutes are made of a certain reed that grows at Tshaulu. The flutes are cut to produce different tones, namely *phala* and *phalana*, *thakhula* and *thakhulana*, *tshiaravhi*, *nzhingi*, *veve*, *mpinzhe*, *dangwe* and *zika*. The

essence and function of each of the flutes/reedpipes is so important to the poet that he mentions the whole set in the following two stanzas.

*Phala na phalana zwi tshi pfala kule zwi tshi aravhisana,
Thakhula na mvusi zwi tshi n̄aṇela zwo ʔanganedzana;
Mutilo na pinzhe zwi tshi gomela zwo hambeledzana,
Mazika a tshi vhomba sa ndau i na ndawana.*

[Phala and phalana heard from a distance in a call-and-response melody,
Thakhula and mvusi rising to a crescendo in harmony;
Mutilo and pinzhe groaning in consensus,
Mazika roaring like a lion with a cub.]

*Thetshelesani uri tshi ri mini tshiaravhe!
Vulani n̄devhe ni p̄fe zwi bvaho kha dangwe,
Vha sa lidziho vha dengenya dziz̄hoho dzavho
Vha nga vha ngomu ngeno vha siho khavho.*

[Listen to what *tshiaravhe* says!
Open your ears and hear what comes out of *dangwe*,
Those who are not performing move their heads to the tune,
Looking like they are involved while they are not.]

Each *n̄anga* has a name according to its place in the scale and the name is given according to its function. The *phala* is the first heptatonic pipe to be cut and the key-note of every set. Thereafter, smaller pipes are cut to give the ascending scale and larger pipes to provide the descending scale. The *phala*, as the main tone, is the first to be blown, usually by someone who is an expert in the *Tshikona* dance. All the blowers stand round the *phala* so that they start blowing at once. The *phala* and *phalana* flutes are blown first. The blowers of the other flutes stand together around the *phala* blower, and when they commence playing, they all start at once, and begin to walk round and round blowing all the time.

The *thakhula* is the second heptatonic pipe to be cut and is slightly higher than the key-note *phala*. *Thakhula* means ‘lifter’, and this name refers to its position in the melody of the national dance. The main purpose of this pipe is to lift up all the heptatonic pipes in the dance. It is also called *mvusi*, meaning the one that helps to rise up. *Tshiaravhi* means ‘answerer’ and is usually blown immediately after the *thakhula*. *Nzhangi* is blown together with the *phalaphala* (sable horn). It sounds like the *phalaphala* and the blower blows it repeatedly without taking a rest throughout

the entire dance. The *nzhingi* needs a strong blower who can continue blowing at the same rate and level producing the same sound. This ultimately creates a well-balanced *Tshikona* dance. *Veve* is blown after the *nzhingi*, but twice and faster than the *nzhingi*. It is usually found in the middle of the circle and links the heptatonic pipes. The correct melody or rhythm of the *Tshikona* dance is created by the *veve*. The *mpinzhe* is the *dziṅanga* (reed pipes) that follows the *thakhula* and *phala*. It comes in between the volume and harmony of the music of the *Tshikona* dance. The *dangwe* also forms part of the heptatonic pipes of the *Tshikona* dance. It is of less importance than the aforementioned *Tshikona* instruments. The *mukhudo* is a bag or container used to carry the *dziṅanga*. It is made of plastic, leather or animal skin (Nemakonde, 2006).

Dzi a ṅaṅela a hu ḽiwi lu ḽifhaho;
Kha Venḽa ḽa maladze ḽi sa ladzi ṅwana na ṅdala
Hu hone mavhuthu oṽhe a Thovhela o takala,
Hu tshi fhufha vhanna na vhaṽhannga vha ḽipfaho.

[The reedpipes/flutes continue, with no one at ease;
 At peaceful Venḽa where a child never sleeps hungry
 While all the multitudes of Thovhela are rejoicing,
 While vigorous men and young men leap for joy.]

Musi tshi tshi awela vhatuka vha vhea zwivhombo,
Zwa u luvha Vho-Thovhela vho thukhaho kha khuluṅoni,
Vhasidzana vha dzinodo vho piḽa mitsinga vho vhea zwiombo,
Vha tshi khou xwuxwa kha dzhatsha ḽa malombe muṽusa ṽthoni.

[When the dance stops, young men go down,
 Paying homage to Mr. Thovhela who sits on the throne,
 Young women bend their necks, having put down drumsticks,
 Resting from the performance of the musical experts, who take away shame.]

Tshikona is regarded as the Vhavenḽa's national dance (Kirby, 1968; Nemakonde, 2006). Rabothata (1991) regards *Tshikona* as a sacred dance. Van Warmelo (1960) says *Tshikona* is a dance for men and the youth.

When the band has started, the *malogwane* gives a second signal and the flautists break away from the drums, sorting themselves into a circle with the drums in the middle. The player with the pipe of the lowest pitch is leading and the others are

following in the order of the scale; they are all moving round, counter-clockwise with definite and clear-cut dance steps (Nemakonde, 2006).

5.7. Section Deductions

The Tshivenda traditional dances are not only for entertainment, but they also encapsulate educational values because they are used to preserve and transmit extremely important information. Furthermore, the dances help the Vhavenda to maintain and protect their own culture. Attempts at recording and reflecting on these dances in a variety of contexts can play an important role in shaping the behavioural patterns of young people as well as inculcate the essential tenets of their culture and traditions. These traditional performances can also be helpful indices into the role, significance and meaning of some ritual performances, such as the installation of chieftainship, respect to the elders, to air grievances, etc. Having mentioned chieftainship, even by way of an example, it is necessary to also reflect on how the Vhavenda poets perceive their traditional leaders. This is because traditional leaders are the hub of the Vhavenda's life, worldview and wellbeing (see Mmbara, 2009).

5.8. PERCEPTIONS OF TRADITIONAL (ROYAL) LEADERS IN SELECTED TSHIVENDA POETRY

The Vhavenda have always been known for their respect towards their kings, headmen and other members of royal families (Mmbara, 2009; Sebola, 2021b). Consequently, royalty is bestowed with honour in Tshivenda culture because the Vhavenda regard chieftainship and kingship as important institutions (Mafela, 1997). Royal leaders range from the most junior level to the most senior level, namely *vhakoma* (petty headman), *musanda/khosi* (chiefs), *khosi khulu* (paramount chiefs) and *thovhele/thovhela* (king) (Nemudzivhadi, 1998; Nethengwe, 2005; Rakhadani, 2006; Raphalalani, 2015; Sengani, 2008). Sebola (2021b⁶) provides some insights on how Vhavenda traditional leaders are bestowed with honour in Tshivenda culture.

⁶ The article focuses on *U kumela* (paying homage to the royal leader) as a widely accepted practice in Tshivenda culture. The article reveals that *U kumela* not only serves as an aspect of praise to royal leadership but also functions as an addressive device. *Zwikumelo* (referential praises) often have no definite or rigid

In Tshivenda culture, chiefs are regarded as the leaders and founders of the tribes (Murwamphinda, 1993). Each chief rules one tribe and it occupies its own land. The land may be named after him or after one of his ancestors. The chief is honoured as the founder of the tribe. The chief also becomes a wealthy man, and often has a large herd of cattle and other livestock because of the gifts that he receives from people. His *dzunde* (ploughing field) is expansive and people help to plough it. The chief also occupies a large portion of land and on the best section, usually somewhere on a hill where he can see everything coming (Sebola, 2021b). He has many wives and many children. People from other tribes are free to join him; in this way he extends his territory. Amongst the Vhavenda, chieftainship is hereditary. The chief is automatically succeeded by the son of the wife whose *thundu* (dowry) was contributed by members of the tribe (Murwamphinda, 1993). Even when he is young, old men respect the chief. In times of war, chiefs could be relied upon or at least expected to fight for their territories. A chief's victory meant a lot to both himself and his subjects. For this reason, praise poems would be composed for them after their victories. Ngwana's (1958:70–71) poem "Makhado" is an example of such poems.

*Makhado nwana wa Ramabulana;
O bebwa dzithavhani dza Songozwi;
A aluwa a tshi divha vhuṭali ha Vhavenda;
Makhado mufunwa wa Ramabulana –
Munna mupufhi wa vuhali sa ndau.*

[Makhado, child of Ramabulana;
He was born on the Songozwi mountains;
And grew up knowing the wisdom of the Vhavenda;
Makhado, Ramabulana's beloved –
A short man but valiant as a lion.]

Makhado Ramabulana was a Muvenda warrior who fought the whites on the mountains near a town called Louis Trichardt (now named 'Makhado'). Makhado's worry was that the whites wanted to take his grandfathers' country (Murwamphinda,

pattern and are uncensored. As such, the praise singer may start the way they wish and utter whatever they like. Hence, praise singers often utter somewhat humorous, sarcastic, hyperbolic and senseless phrases and sentences when bestowing honour upon royalty.

1993). The whites had guns and horses, which made fighting much easier for them. Still, Makhado decided to engage in a fight against them. The Vhavenḁa often praise Makhado for his bravery in this manner: *Tshilwavhusiku tsha ha Ramabulana* (The night fighter of Ramabulana). The name Tshilwavhusiku, which is legendary among the Vhavenḁa, are used because some of Makhado's strategies included attacking the Boers at night (cf. Milubi, 1997:44).

*Makhado o dzhena Tshiruluni nga pfumo;
Thanga ya murole yo vha i tshi mu funa;
Davhana o shavha sa ntsamavhuvhu;
Milayo yawe yo vha i na vhuḁali ngomu;
Mivhango yoḁthe o i fhedza nga vhuḁali.*

[Makhado entered Tshiruluni through the spear;
The youth used to love him;
Davhana fled like a duiker antelope;
His laws encapsulated wisdom;
He ended all conflicts through wisdom.]

Tshiruluni is the royal residence where Limani (Makhado's mother) was based (for more details, visit http://luonde.co.za/king_makhado/). The poet mentions that Makhado was loved even by the youth. There was a prolonged conflict between Makhado and Davhana (who sided with the whites against Makhado). Davhana and his supporters could not withstand the onslaught brought by Makhado and his army on the battlefield. As a result, Davhana hurriedly fled (like an antelope) when he realised he could not defeat Makhado. According to the poet, Makhado was not only a brave warrior but was also full of wisdom. This idea is reinforced in the next stanza.

*Makhado munna we a vha a sa ḁivhi nyofho;
Luhura lwa muḁi wawe lwo vha lu lwa matombo;
Vhanna vha vhatsila vho u fhaḁa zwavhuḁi;
Kha vhathu vhawe ho vha hu na mulalo;
Mulayo wawe wo takalelwa nga vhoḁthe.*

[Makhado, a man who never knew fear;
The wall surrounding his home was made of rocks;
Artistic men had built it beautifully;
Among his people there was peace;
His laws were appreciated by all.]

The legendary warrior-king Makhado is viewed in Vhavanḁa's political history and legends as the hero of the struggle against colonisation and racial oppression. It is for this reason that his exploits in battle and in defence of the Vhavanḁa's land and their dignity and wellbeing remains etched in the history of resistance to colonialism. According to the poet, Makhado ensured that there was peace among his subjects. Not only was his home beautifully built, the whole land in which the Vhavanḁa lived during his reign was beautiful, as the next stanza attests.

*Shango ḁa Makhado ḁo vha ḁo nakesa;
U bva Mulenzhi u swika nga Vhembe;
O vhusa nga vhuhali a sa tshuwi tshithu;
Thungo ya Devhula o vha o dzivhela;
Vha re Tshipembe vha tshi mu ofha.*

[Makhado's land was so beautiful;
From Mulenzhi to Vhembe;
He ruled valiantly without any fear;
Towards the north, he had conquered;
Those in the South were afraid of him.]

*Dzitshaka dzi re masakhani a ḁa Venḁa;
Dzo vha dzi tshi mu shavha, dzi tshi mu luvha;
A hu na we a ḁa nga vhuhali kha Makhado,
Vhoḁhe vho ḁa khae nga u ḁitukufhadza;
Vha tshi ḁivha ndau ya vhuhali Makhado.*

[Tribes at the fringes of Venḁa;
Used to be scared of him, they paid homage to him;
There was none who could approach Makhado bravely;
All came to him in humility;
Knowing the valiant lion, Makhado.]

*Vha re masakhani a Venḁa vho mu renda;
Vho mu itela zwirendo nga lwa havho;
Vho mu luvha nga zwoḁhe zwi takadzaho.
Kha Vhavanḁa o vha a tshi tou ofhiwa;
Zwoḁhe zwe a amba zwi tshi tevhelwa.*

[Those at the fringes of Venḁa praised him;
They composed praise poems in their mother tongues;
And bestowed honour upon him in all sorts of delightful ways.

Among the Vhaventḁa, he was feared;
All he said was obeyed.]

*Makhado o lwa u swika hu tshi vha na mulalo;
O funza vhana vhawe u lwela mulalo;
Vhathu vho thomaho o lwa navho nga vuhali;
Mphephu ḁwana wawe o mu funza u lwela Vevḁa;
O u dzama, zwiililo zwa vha zwihulu Vevḁa.*

[Makhado fought until there was peace;
He taught his children to fight for peace;
He fought intrepidly against people who provoked him;
He taught his son, Mphephu, to fight for Vevḁa;
When he died, mournful cries were great in Vevḁa.]

The recurrent theme in the poem is Makhado's bravery and fame, which spread even to distant lands in the north and the south. Chief Makhado is thus widely known for his successful battles. He fought the whites and defeated them, and he subjugated many tribes (Milubi, 1997). His domain stretched from the Limpopo to some portions of Lebowa, such as Moletji and Matlala. The poem quoted above portrays Makhado as a fighter of great standing. Therefore, warrior-kings or chiefs are often the focus of praise in Tshiventḁa culture. However, royal leaders in general, irrespective of whether they are warriors, are bestowed with honour, often through *zwikumelo* (referential praises). Sigame's poem "U luvha Musanda" (To pay homage to the chief) (in Ngwana, 1958:42) is instructive on this matter:

*Thovhela ndi mma ndi a ḁa ndi a ḁa;
ḁwana a bebwa a vhuya a tshimbila;
Ndi ya nga ndoḁthe musanda thi luvhelwi,
A hu na gole ḁi no luvhela ḁiḁwe.*

[The paramount chief/king always promises to visit;
A child is born and even walks without that visit having happened;
I go by myself to the royal headquarters, no one pays homage on my behalf,
There is no one who pays homage on behalf of another.]

*Gadabi ḁa muḁambapfunda;
ḁi no kunda na ḁanga dza Vhaḁavhatsindi;
Fundudzi ḁi tibe mingome;
Vhalisa pfunani zwisenga.*

[Possessor of the fabaceae
Who confounds the Vhaṭavhatsindi healers;
Fundudzi must cover the seers;
Shepherds sit and cross your feet.]

Tshihweduhwedu tsha mahosi vhadali,
Vha shaphula musanda vharena;
Maphusule musanda a ji dzheni;
Ndi wau thovela (sic), nga i ponde i sie marambo.

[The cooperation of royal visitors,
The lords walk hastily at the royal headquarters;
The scatterer is forbidden entrance at the royal headquarters;
I am yours, oh King, may your mercy be upon me.]

Khedebu ya mahosi muṅe wanga,
Khakha u mela N̄emashango;
Dzhatsha muthombeni muṅe wanga;
Mbila-u-lume, phosho u wela vhathu.

[My lord is the one who silences chiefs/kings,
The one who arrives unexpectedly, Landlord;
My master, the foundation [of the country];
The male rabbit/the great droner, the noise that falls on people.]

The preceding poem is an example of how referential praises (*zwikumelo*; *U kumela*) are rendered in Tshivenda culture. Sengani (2008:88) describes *U kumela* thus:

U kumela literally means ‘to groan for’ *mahosi* ‘rulers’ from the verb stem *-kum-a* ‘groan’. Within Vhavenda society, rulers from the most junior level (*Musanda*), to one level above (*Khosi*), and the most senior level (*Thovhela*), which is at the same level as a king, are praised in the fashion of *U kumelwa* ‘to be groaned for’ when they are drinking, addressing people, arriving at some place or standing up to leave. However, if all of them are present, it is the most senior ruler who is ‘groaned for’ by his subjects including all his immediate juniors. When subjects enter the royal residence or come into the presence of a royal leader, they announce their arrival with *zwikumelo* praises. The same happens when they are taking leave from his presence (original italics).

In the poem quoted above, the praise singer may to a large extent appear to be uttering senseless phrases to the royal leader, such as *Tshiulu tsha maḡini* (Mound of soil in the water), *Tsetsema* (The one who shuffles), and *Mbilalume* (Male rockrabbit); however, both the royal leader and the subject know that there is ‘sense

in the nonsense' (Sebola, 2021b). Through *U luvha* or *U kumela*, subjects can express their appreciation and respect for their ruler. This, however, does not mean that the subjects cannot indicate their dissatisfaction with their ruler or even protest against his rule with strategic remarks (Sengani, 2008). Although *U kumela* encapsulates the element of praise, it differs from other forms of praise because "the expressions are referential praises that are addressive and appellative in nature, and are accompanied by informative remarks that the subjects add for the attention of His majesty" (Sengani, 2008:89). *U kumela* has no clear-cut structure like ordinary poetry or even praise poetry. In fact, each person has the freedom to compose their own praise and if another repeats what they created, there is no censure (Milubi, 1997; Sengani, 2008). Another example of a poem illustrative of *U kumela* in Tshivenda culture is "Vhamusanda N̄eswiswi" (Chief N̄eswiswi) by Matshili (1967:69).

*Hee vha hashu ja kovhela ni laṭe mbaḡo,
Vhusiku ndi dada ji a ja tsha vhukudzi,
N̄eswiswi vhusiku ndi khosi,
Vha vhea mukosi vhana vha khurumele.*

[Hey my brethren, when the sun sets, throw away the axe,
Night is an ogre that devours ravenously,
N̄eswiswi is a chief at night,
If he shouts, children should cover their heads with blankets.]

*Vha fhufha nga u kona vha ja nga u kona,
Maḡo avho ndi luvhone lwa ḡenzhe,
Mbevha na u khuda kha N̄eswiswi ndi zwiṭuku,
Swiswi na u swifhala ji fha maandḡa N̄eswiswi.*

[He jumps when he feels like it and eats when he feels like it,
His eyes are the lamp of a torch,
Rats cannot hide from N̄eswiswi, however hard they may try,
The darkness in its blackness gives N̄eswiswi his power.]

*Lu' mini lutiitii ludia-maivha thengu ya ṭhukhula besu?
Lu nyadza hani vhamusanda N̄eswiswi
Lu tshi vha lindisa mulindi masiari?
Vho-Thovhele vha kumedza vha wa nṭha ha vhusiku.
Ahaa! ahee! vhamusanda N̄eswiswi,
Vha tshusa vhathu vho eḡela vhukati ha vhusiku,*

*Vhe "huu-huu, swoo, swoo",
Mukoma e, "kuluu" ndi muloi.*

[What is the small bird, beater of other bird species until they lose feathers,
saying?

How dare it disrespects Chief N̄eswiswi
By making him guard the hole during the day?
The King slumbers and falls from a tree at night.
Chorus: Ahaa! ahee! Chief N̄eswiswi,
He scares people while they are asleep at night,
He goes like "huu-huu, swoo, swoo",
The petty headman says, "oh" it's a witch.]

It was difficult for the researcher to establish who the Chief N̄eswiswi referred to in the poem is. The poet does not even bother to provide clues about his literary subject. However, it is possible that reference here is made to Chief N̄eswiswi of the Vhambedzi (see <https://luonde.co.za/mutale-na-musina/vhambedzi>), one of the Vhavenda clans. The Vhambedzi are found mainly at Hamutele, Hamakuya, Hamabila, Tshilavulu, Tswingoni (Mianzwi), Masetoni, Halambani, Tshikweṭa, and Haluvhimbi. The poet is mainly interested in describing the personality of Chief N̄eswiswi. In the poem, Chief N̄eswiswi is presented as a fearsome individual who only makes his public appearances at night. The poet warns the readers that they should try their best to avoid encountering Chief N̄eswiswi face-to-face. If Chief N̄eswiswi ever did any exploits in Vhavenda's history, it is unfortunate that a record of such exploits could not be found by the researcher. That, however, should not be taken as a serious setback in this study because the focus is mainly on how the Vhavenda bestow honour upon their royal leaders.

The central purpose of the quoted poem above is to say that it is not easy to see the chief/king's face, and when one does see him, such an encounter should be treated with utmost deference. The idea reinforced throughout the poem is that the chief/king should be feared and honoured. It was mentioned earlier that in the rendition of *zwikumelo* praises the praise singer has the latitude to raise concerns about anything that might require the ruler's attention. Furthermore, the praise singer is at liberty to strategically criticise the leadership style of the ruler through *zwikumelo* in an effort to effect change. Ngwana's (1958:94–96) poem "Vhamusanda Vho-

Makahane” (Chief Makahane) reveals how a praise singer might employ sarcasm as an addressive strategy before the ruler.

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha vhambisa vhakalaha mukumba nga maṇo;
Vha farisa vhakalaha ṇowa nga mutshila;
Vha itisa vhakalaha tshidula tsha musingaḡi;
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He forces old men stretch the rawhide using their teeth;
He forces old men grab the snake’s tail;
He forces old men to perform children’s songs;
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha limisa vhakegulu dzunde;
Vha haḡisa vhakalaha khwivho;
Vha kaṇisa vhakegulu dzunde;
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He forces old women to plough his expansive field;
He forces old men to clear the wild plants;
He forces old women to harvest his expansive field;
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha maṭo a no nga a goya;
Vha tshina malende sa tshimange;
Vha kumelwa na musi vha tshi poidza,
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He has eyes like those of a feral cat;
He dances *Malende* like a cat;
He is praised even when he blinks,
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha re na milandu vha imiswa
Ḍuvhani nga mulenzhe muthihi
A wa ndi u vhuluhwa nga pfumo;
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
Those who committed crimes are made to stand
In the sun on one leg
If anyone of them falls, they are killed by a spear;
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha shidzhisa vhanna sa mbudzi;
Vhone vha tshi khou thamukana sa tshimange;
Vhaṭanuni vha tshi khou lidza mifhululu,
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He causes men to be slaughtered like goats;
While he prances like a cat;
His wives will be ululating,
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha nwisa vhathu halwa vhu songo ṭuḍwa;
Vha fhedza nga u vha akhela khadi;
A netaho u a vhulahwa nga pfumo.
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He forces people to drink beer with its dirt unfiltered;
On top of it, he requires them to play the skipping rope game;
Whoever gets tired is killed by a spear.
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
A vha lavheleswi kha tshifhaṭuwo;
Wa vha lavhelesa ndi kholomo mbili;
Iṅwe ndi ya iṭo iṅwe iṅwe ndi ya iṭo iṅwe;
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He is never looked at in the face;
If you look at his face;
You pay a fine of two cows;
One is for his one eye while the other is for his other eye;
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha lidzisa vhanna tshikona vhusiku hoṭhe;
Hune lubaḍa lwavho lwa sumba hone;
Vhatshini vha ya henengei na musi hu na ḍaka;
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He forces men to perform the *Tshikona* dance the whole night;
Wherever his sceptre points at;
The performers head there, even if there is a bush;
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Luimbo lwavho a lu bvumelei;
Vhalidzi vha mbila mutondo a vha lu koni;
Vhone vha sokou thamukana sa tshimange;
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
His song is impossible to back;
The performers of *mbila mutondo* music do not know it either;
He, on the other hand, prances like a cat;
It is Chief Makahane.]

Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane vha tshiṭuhu;
Vha tshina malombo vhe khosi;
Vhomatsige vhavho ndi vhakalaha;
Vha tshina vho fara shambo la muthu.
Ndi Vhamusanda Vho-Makahane.

[Chief Makahane is cruel;
He dances *malombo* even when he is a chief;
His supervisors are the old men;
He dances while holding the bone of a human being.
It is Chief Makahane.]

U kumela is used by the subjects to express their feelings to/about the chief as exemplified in the above poem. The chief often takes note of the subjects' feelings and responds accordingly. If Chief Makahane is a reasonable man, which is highly unlikely judging by the poet's description of him, he would be willing to change how he treats his subjects. From the first stanza to the last, the poet light-heartedly, but strategically confronts the chief for his unbecoming behaviour towards his subjects.

Chief Makahane is not only portrayed as cruel and abusive, but also as a man who takes pleasure in treating elderly people like children. Through renditions such as the one above, subjects are able to raise issues before the king and help him adopt the kind of behaviour that would yield genuine praise and honour from them. Thus, during the praise poems of *U kumela*, a chief is sometimes cursed, criticised and even mocked. But this, according to Milubi (1997), is not to be taken seriously by the chief. There are yet many other ways of praising chiefs and kings in Tshivenda culture. For instance, chiefs are praised by their own names and physical characteristics, as shown in the following poem:

Ahee Mafhumulele Mugivhi
Hune a fhumula zwa ɔi tshinyala
A amba zwa ɔi tshinyala
Ahee Mafhumulele Mugivhi

[Oh, Silent Mugivhi

When he keeps quiet, things go wrong
Even if he speaks, things still go wrong

Oh, Silent Mugivhi]

(Murwamphinda, 1993:22)

The praise poem intends to highlight the point that the Chief Mafhumulele Mugivhi is not a talkative person. This leaves one uncertain on whether his quietness is because he is at ease or if he is contemplating a cruel act. Those around him are never at ease because of their inability to read his demeanour. Other Vhavenda chiefs are praised after their countries. Chief Sikhwivhilu of Ngovhela may be praised after his country, thus:

Sikhwivhilu ndi sinyesinye,
Ndi sinyesinye miedzini ya Ngovhela

[Sikhwivhilu blinks,
He blinks in the water course of Ngovhela.]

The chief may also be praised for any and every action he performs, such as speaking, drinking and eating (Milubi, 1997; Murwamphinda, 1993; Sebola, 2021b; Sengani, 2008). There are many more Tshivenda poems where heroes, political leaders, spouses/lovers, friends, natural phenomena (such as countries, mountains,

rivers, trees and plants), domestic animals (such as cattle, goats and dogs), wild animals, birds, insects, European inventions, deities, divining bones, traditional dances, and so on, are praised in Tshivenda culture (cf. Murwamphinda, 1993). A thorough discussion of all these aspects and more in Tshivenda poetry will require an independent study. However, a brief discussion on how men and women are perceived by the selected poets is important to the subject on selfhood, identity and culture.

5.9 Section Deductions

While it is true that the Vhavana royal leaders, from the most junior level to the most senior level, are bestowed with honour in Tshivenda culture (see Sengani, 2008; Sebola, 2021b), Mmbara (2009) and Raphalalani (2015) argue that things have changed remarkably. Mmbara avers that although the Vhavana as a cultural group has been known for the respect they display towards their kings, headmen and other members of royal families, of late the honouring of royal leaders has conspicuously declined. Part of the problem is that the traditional leadership system has become politicised, corrupt and irrelevant to the subjects (Fokwang, 2003; Nettleton, 2006). The poems cited above are indicative of a bygone practice that seems to hold no significance to modern-day Muvenda. It remains to be seen whether bestowing honour to royalty will once again be revived and occupy the centre of the Vhavana life and worldview as it did in the past, or if it will eventually suffer its ultimate and complete demise. After looking at how traditional leaders are perceived and addressed in Tshivenda culture, it is helpful to the scope of this study to consider how the selected poets construct and present images of men and women in their poetry.

5.10. CONSTRUCTIONS OF MEN'S AND WOMEN'S IMAGES IN TSHIVENDA POETRY

Most images of men and women in Tshivenda culture and poetry aim to create or perpetuate idealised notions of what a man or a woman should be. These idealised notions often find expression in Vhavana's traditional rites. However, it seems most of the idealised notions are geared to socialise women into submission, silence and passivity (Sebola, 2021a). During the data collection process of this study, at least

14 poems (see Table 5.1) were found, predominantly by male poets, that were written for the following two reasons: (a) To reprimand women who did not succumb to the stereotypic and idealised images of womanhood, or (b) to appreciate those women who accepted such gendered representations with unquestioned acceptance.

Table 0.1 Poems that focus on women’s adherence to the Vhavanḁa’s idealised notions of a woman

Title of the poem	Author
“ <i>Musidzana wa mashudu</i> ” (Fortunate girl)	Mbulaheni (1992:10)
<i>Musadzi</i> (Woman)	Ḃengwekhulu (in Mafela, 1995:44)
<i>Musadzi</i> (Woman)	Mudau (in Mafela, 1995:74)
<i>Musadzi</i> (Woman)	Milubi (1990:26)
<i>Musadzi</i> (Woman)	Ratshitanga (1972:2)
<i>Musadzi ndi nnyi?</i> (Who is a woman?)	Ndhlovu (2001:55)
<i>Iwe musidzana</i> (You, girl)	Milubi (1990:5)
<i>Musadzi wa shango</i> (Woman of the world/prostitute)	Ladzani (2004:5)
<i>Mbuyavhuhadzi</i> (Divorced woman)	Matshili (1967:68)
<i>Muumba</i> (Barren woman)	Ḃetshivhuyu (1990:22)
<i>Maria musidzana</i> (Marry, the girl)	Sigwavhulimu (1975:7)
<i>Damu ja vhufhura</i> (Deceptive breast)	Milubi (1990:37)
<i>Khomba</i> (Teenage girl)	Matshili (1972:27)
<i>Musidzana wa tshimvingimvingi</i> (‘Well-built’ girl)	Ndhlovu (in Sigwavhulimu et al, 2001:59)

One would expect that the Vhavanḁa would be equally as devoted to prescribing what a man should be and should not be. However, only two poems were found that tried to articulate what manhood should be (see Section 5.8.1). This shows an imbalance in Tshivendanḁa culture when it comes to the cultural/traditional socialisation of the girlchild and the boychild and of men and women. Socialisation here is defined as a process by which a biological person becomes a social being (Okharedia, 2003:6). This is problematic particularly when one considers that in most of the traditional rites girls’ and women’s dignity is not only insulted but they also have their

standing in society denigrated (Milubi, 2000b). Milubi (2000b) says that it is principally the negative portrayal and repression of women that evokes the response of feminists, who feel compelled to re-examine the stereotypical images of women in African contexts. Sebola (2021a⁷)

5.10.1 Images of Men in Tshivenda Poetry

Ndhlovu's poem "Iwe munna wee!" (Oh, you man!) (in Sigwavhulimu et al, 2001:66) is our point of departure to look at images of men in Tshivenda poetry.

*A u shoni ngani musu u tshi swika mapitoni,
Hune wa vha likumedzwa ja zwihevhehevhe
Wa solwa na nga zwikongomoti zwa shango
Kha mishumo yau i bvulaho na zwiambaro.*

[Are you not ashamed when you are in public,
Where you become the subject of hushed gossip
You are criticised even by insects of the world
Concerning your works which leave one naked.]

*Vhutshilo hau na ha zwikhotho ndi vhuñwe
Hune wa leleḁa murahu ha tsadzi dzi songo fungulaho
Vhukhandwa wa ṭhurumudzha maḁeri
U tshi itela pfembedzo ya fola ḁi sa athu kangiwa.*

[Your conduct is so peculiarly unbecoming
Where you roam behind immature females

⁷ This paper reflects on Kanakana Yvonne Ladzani's use of poetry to vanguard women's images and voices. The paper further considers how, apart from articulating the significance of her role as a poet, Ladzani also comments authoritatively on how women are perceived in society. The paper used the qualitative approach and purposively selected five poems from Ladzani's three poetry anthologies. Undergirded by African feminism, the analysis appreciates Ladzani's literary vision of women empowerment. The analysis of the selected poems argues that Ladzani prefers positive female portraiture over negative ones. It is also argued that Ladzani aims to prod women to move from the margins to the centre of gender discourse through her poetry. In its conclusion, the paper appreciates Ladzani's poetry as an essential mode of agency through which the Vhavana women may make their voices heard in the contemporary space.

You tear apart infants' diapers
And molest these immature and innocent beings.]

*Shango nga ji u pfe mare na hune wa ya
Mafo au a sa vhoni vhwatwalala ha zwiqamu
Vhuvhili hao a nongokanywe nga vha mulayo
Khamusi ndi hone u tshi do pfudelwa nga vhupfe na vhuudzi.*

[May the world spit in disgust wherever you go
Your eyes which cannot recognise undeveloped breasts
Both of them should be gorged out by the law
Maybe that is when you will be fed up with your shameful and tabooed deeds.]

*Zwiito zwau u bula zwi nengisa sa maanza
Hune iwe wa ragaladza na zwitukana malaloni au
Zwitshili zwa malwadze wa gobela sa luvhele
Tshivhi tshau ndi mulavhu, ndi gweketshifu tshi do u wana.*

[To make mention of your deeds is as nauseating as vomit
Where you even share your bed with small boys
You plant disease-causing viruses like millets
Your sin is a trap, a deadly trap which will catch you.]

This poem reflects the notion that literature can be used as a functional tool of social reconstruction (Mafela, 2003). The poem reproaches a grown man who molests children. In the first stanza, the poet asks this man if he is not ashamed of his abhorrent deeds. Apparently, the public sees what the man does and is disgusted by it. However, there is no indication of the public ever doing anything to stop the man from his nefarious actions; they only whisper about it. While the poet's focus is not necessarily on the public's reaction to this man's deeds, it is worth mentioning that through their silence the public contributes to the man's behaviour. The fact that the public speaks about the molestation of children in hushed tones and that the perpetrator lives free could be indicative of (a) Cowardice (emanating from fearing the bully/molester); (b) child molestation has become so common and normalised that molesters roam the streets freely; (c) the criminal justice system does not apprehend perpetrators or it does not guarantee the safety of the victims; (d) and cultural and linguistic taboos are enforced against those who try to speak up. These are only speculations because the poet does not provide reasons for why the man continues to live unscathed. The poet, however, as a representative voice of the

public speaks of the man in a condemnatory tone, implying that sexual abuse is viewed as wrong in the society in which he lives.

The poet is only willing to go as far as wishing that the man will one day pay for his sins. Society is disgusted by the man's deeds but seems reluctant to do anything that will stop the behaviour. The man is repeatedly cursed by the poet but nothing more. This poem reveals that there are men who live antagonistically to the cherished social mores by not valuing other people's rights to safety and dignity. Seemingly, there are men in society whose main goal is to not only hurt children and the youth but also to take advantage of them sexually. It might be added that such men have no regard for the youth's future. The image created here in the poem does not reflect positively on men. The poet's intention is to expose the realities of human situations, problems and relationships. In this way, poetry becomes a vehicle that reveals typical characters, good and bad, which compels people to change their unacceptable ways of living.

The poet's aim was not to provide a prototype of what a man is, although a total contrast of the man described above would be helpful to show how the Vhavenḡa perceive and define manhood. One can only appreciate that the above poem reveals some of the Vhavenḡa's response to social maladies such as child molestation; although it is still necessary to go beyond mere reproach to actively stand against such behaviour. Maḡadzhe's (1985b:19) "Munna" (man) calls men into action and a position of responsibility.

*Tshifhaḡuwo tshau kha tshi tshe,
Mulomo wau kha u vulee,
Luambo lwau kha lu denyefhale,
Mihumbulo yau kha i dzike,
Vhunna hau vhu tamise.*

[May your face brighten,
May your mouth open,
Your utterance be emboldened,
May your thoughts be calm
May your manhood become enviable.]

In the poem, a man is advised not only to make his presence felt wherever he might be but also to ensure that when he speaks his words count. The poem challenges

timid men to become authoritative voices in their spaces and ensure that they think through whatever it is that they are going to say. It is perhaps such men who might be able to confront molesters and wayward men who make life awful for others. To the poet it is a man whose face is bright and whose mouth boldly speaks out well-thought-out words that are worth listening to. Seemingly, a man with a calm spirit is a man whose thoughts and words carry authority. Perhaps society needs such vocal and clear men in families and a variety of societal contexts. Perhaps clear-minded men will possess the will and drive to generate ideas that will aid nation-building processes and help communities to uphold humanistic values. In short, Maḡadzhe's poem foregrounds the idea that there is a dire need for courageous, responsible and honourable men who build rather than destroy communities.

5.10.2 Images of Women in Tshivenda Poetry

In the poem titled "Musadzi" (Woman), Ratshitanga (1972:2) says:

*Musadzi a si nge a vha o shayaho ndebvu,
Kana nge a mamisa,
Wa sa ḡivha zwenezwo devha zwau thebvu,
U sa fhedze mbavhalelo yawe nga u tambisa.*

[A woman is not a woman because she does not have a beard,
Or because she breastfeeds,
If you do not know that, then just use your time to crush the hard-walled marula
seed,
And not waste their mercy by taking it for granted.]

According to the poet, a woman is not a woman because she does not have a beard or breastfeeds. Instead of providing a clear description of what a woman is, the poet focuses on what he thinks a woman is not. The reader is still left unclear on what a woman is. By implication, breastfeeding has no bearing on the definition of womanhood. Breastfeeding is here trivialised although it is an important provision of nutrition to a child. In fact, the very man who despises it was probably breastfed by his mother. It could be that the poet intended to say that breastfeeding is not a distinctive feature of womanhood because 'all' women have breasts, and therefore, there is nothing special about it. If this is what he means, the expectation then is that he will describe what makes a woman a woman. However, when one turns to the next stanzas, he only says the following:

*A si nge a vha wa lukanda lutete,
Kana nge a vuḑesa,
Wa vha na mashithe a uri a ye u u bikela vhutete,
U dzumba ndi vhutshivha, nga ndi ralo-ha u buledza.*

[It's not because she has a soft skin,
Or because she is too humble,
That you even hesitate to let her cook soft porridge for you,
To hide is to be greedy, let me say it explicitly.]

*A songo vha ene nge a tswukesa,
Kana nge vhabebi vhawe vha lugesa,
Wa fhurwa nge wawe ṛwenda a ḑi u fukedza,
Ngeno wa hangwa uri mbingano i ḑiswa nga lufuno u dugesa.*

[She is not a woman because she has a light complexion,
Or because her parents are kind,
And become deceived because of the ṛwenda cloth she wears,
While you forget that marriage is by love set ablaze.]

The poet seems to view women's biological design as insignificant when it comes to defining womanhood or femininity. Her soft skin, demeanour, etiquette, light complexion and clothes are denigrated to imply that the definition of 'real' womanhood excludes of these aspects. Still, the reader waits for the distinctive feature(s) of 'real' womanhood. While the reader expects a somewhat substantial and convincing description/definition of womanhood, the poet says:

*Luvhomba lwa musadzi-sadzi ndi u ḑiita musadzi,
A ralo a ḑivha zwe a dzulela afho muḑini,
Ngeno a sa hangwi uri kha iwe fhedzi u musadzi.
A tenda zwenezwo vhuiwa hoṭhe a hu na tshidini.*

[The cream of a true woman is one who treats herself as a woman,
And know the purpose of her being in the home,
While not forgetting that to you and only to you, you are a woman.
And concede to everything without objection.]

Most of the poem focused on what a woman is not. This created the expectation that when the definition of a woman finally comes, it would certainly be mind-blowing. The poet simply regards a true woman as one who 'treats herself as a woman', whatever that means. She is not viewed beyond the confines of domesticity. A good woman, according to the poet, is one who is submissive, compliant and silent. Since

the poet restricts good womanhood to the domestic space, it follows that a good woman is one who lives in total submission to her husband. The poem represents the tradition of male writers who deem it necessary to provide flawed and monolithic prescriptions for women. It is particularly problematic that the poet does see anything wrong with this kind of stereotypic and idealised notion of womanhood. It is this kind of mindset that evokes the response of feminists, as discussed earlier. An in-depth discussion on the representations of women in literature certainly deserves an independent study. Ladzani's (2004:11) poem *Naa musadzi ndi mini?* (Really, what is a woman?) contributes to the discussion of what a woman is.

*Musadzi a si daleḍale ja mathukhwi,
Line ine na funa na tshokoḍedza,
Ndi musuku u fhiraho daimane nga kule,
Ndi mpho i tewaho u tetekedzwa,
Nge Musiki a vhona i thengokhulu.*

[A woman is not a garbage site,
Where whatever you wish to discard is discarded,
She is the gold that far surpasses the diamond,
She is a gift worthy of tender care
Because the Creator ascribed to her great worth.]

The opening line shows that the poet intends to confront the maltreatment of women in society. The poet's use of words such as *daleḍale* (dumping site) and *mathukhwi* (trash) shows that women are treated with indignity and denigration. For the poet, the maltreatment of women begins with the perception that women are dumping sites, and therefore, worthless. In the subsequent lines, she proceeds to describe 'what' or 'who' a woman is. In the description, positive imagery is attributed to women. For instance, a woman is typified as *musuku* (gold) and is said to be more precious than a diamond. The symbols 'gold' and 'diamond' are a contrast of the dumping site and trash because value is often assigned to gold and diamonds. Through these images, the poet, perhaps because she is a womanist, re-appropriates women's images from negative to positive constructions. In the subsequent stanza, the poet says:

*Musadzi a si bunga line malaḍwa na sia,
Ngau ndi ene murango na mukhunyeledzi,*

*Vhutshilo muḡisi ndi ene,
We a ralo u angaḡela ya ḡahe.*

[A woman is not a toilet, where you leave excrement,
Because she is the beginning and the end,
She brings life,
She carried it within her for nine months.]

The poet says a woman is not a toilet, as notable through her use of the word *bunga* (toilet). Here, the poet reveals how women are perceived and treated with utter disrespect. The image of the toilet reveals the denigration and desecration of women's dignity in society. Needless to say, the toilet's central function is to collect excrement. This image depicts women as not only dehumanised, but also as reduced to detestable beings whose existence entails nothing but the 'collection' of excrement from others. While on the discussion about constructed images of women in Tshivenda poetry it is also imperative to consider the depiction of the mother figure in this poetry. The next subsection discusses this topic.

5.10.3 The Mother Figure in Selected Tshivenda Poetry

This subsection shows as far as possible how the poetry reflects the close affinity between the poets and their mothers. It further shows that the mother's strong influence is visible in how the poets reflect on the love their mothers gave or still give them. The selected Vhavenda poets' depictions of the mother figure does not come as a surprise considering that they were generally brought up by their mothers. An analysis of their poetry that ignores this aspect will be incomplete. None of the selected poets penned a poem about their father, but they dedicated their poems to their mothers. The poems dedicated to the mother figure have praise as their central theme. The mother is praised for the love, courage, perseverance and support she has shown in the upbringing of her children. Laudatory tones are delineated in Maḡadzhe's (1985b:7–8) poem titled "Mme" (Mother).

*Mishumo yau ndi mihulu,
Zwiito zwau zwi a mangadza,
Lufuno lwau a lu keguli,
U konḡelela hau hu fhira ha muthu.*

[Your works are great,
Your deeds are astonishing,

Your love never grows old,
Your perseverance is beyond human capacity.]

This stanza identifies motherhood with hard work, love, kindness and fortitude. The poet is awed by how his mother never loses her vigour and courage to face the horrendous events of life. The same ideas are reinforced in the subsequent stanza, where the poet goes on to say:

*U oma nga phepho vhana vhe nguvhoni,
U noka nga ndala vhana vho fura,
U shelwa nga buse vhana vho khuda,
Vhuthu hau vhu fhira vhuthu,
Hone u muthu wa nama.*

[You freeze in the cold while your children have blankets to cover them,
You faint due to hunger while your children are full,
Dust blows onto you while your children are protected,
Your benevolence supersedes the limits of benevolence,
Although you are a human of flesh.]

In this stanza, motherhood is presented to the reader as a repository of love, care, compassion and sacrifice. The mother is projected as the epitome of selflessness. The poem does not merely praise but also unambiguously expresses the poet's love for the mother who is willing to put her life and wellbeing on the line for the sake of her children. The love he expresses for the mother throughout the poem evolves from the maternal love he seemingly received and observed from early childhood. The poet deliberately employs overstatements to highlight the selfless love and sacrificial attitude of the mother. Her children are protected against all odds, even when it requires the mother to lose her own life and health, until the children are old enough to fend for themselves. Even with the overstatements such as "*u kondelela hau hu fhira ha muthu*" (your perseverance is beyond human capacity) and "*vhuthu hau vhu fhira vhuthu*" (your benevolence supersedes the limits of benevolence), the poet still finds himself unable to sufficiently express his gratitude to his mother. Nevertheless, the poet goes on to say:

*Vhana vha lwala u a vha ilafha,
Vhana vha sinyuwa u a vha sengenedza,
Vhana vha bva ndilani u a vha vhuisa,*

*Vhumme hau vhu fhira vhumme,
Hone u muthu wa ṅama.*

[If the children become sick, you heal them,
If the children are saddened, you tickle them,
If the children go astray, you prod them back,
Your motherhood surpasses motherhood,
Although you are a human of flesh.]

In this stanza, motherhood is still delineated as a unique position in society, an extraordinary institution that provides the security, protection and preservation of human life. In Maḡadzhe's poem, the image of motherhood is decidedly treated in a way that makes the reader believe that the institution itself is infallible. The mother is even said to possess curative powers so that when her children are sick, she knows exactly what to do to restore their health. The mother can make her children laugh when they are sad. She knows how to prod her children back onto the right path when they stray from it. The poet is amazed by the mother's ambidexterity in exhibiting well-rounded knowledge and at creating conducive environments for her children. In the next stanza, the poet says:

*Ṫhoho yau yo no tou kwangwala,
Mutsinga wau wo no tou oma sa tsimbi,
Milenzhe yau yo no tou vha tombo,
Zwiito zwau zwi fhira nyito,
Hone u muthu wa ṅama.*

[Your head has already become hardened,
Your neck has become solidified like iron,
Your legs have become the rock,
Your deeds surpass acts,
Although you are a human of flesh.]

According to the poet, the mother's perseverance, that is, her ability to withstand trying times for the sake of her children, has made her a force to be reckoned with. The poet elaborates on the hardships the mother had to suffer to bring up her children. If the poet is appreciating his own mother in the poem, it must be noted that his mother's must have faced a Herculean task. It has to be considered that the father is not mentioned or inferred in the poem, and it must have been difficult for his mother to single-handedly supplement a meagre family income. Again, if it has to be

considered that the family may have depended on the meagre income of the mother who raised her family alone, the scorching days of apartheid should not be isolated from the context of the poem. All of these struggles and more seem to have contributed to the solidification of the mother's character and cemented her sense of resilience, at least in the poet's mind. In the last stanza, the poet comments on the fact that despite all her efforts and sacrifices, the mother does not always receive the honour and gratitude she deserves.

*Ṫhoho yau tshena, madodo a a sanda,
Lukanda lwau lwa hwetekana, madodo a a nyadza,
Maṭo au a swifhala, matsilu a u kudza kule,
Maṭhupho au a fhira u ṭhuphea,
Hone u muthu wa ṇama.*

[Your grey-haired head, is detested by fools,
Your wrinkled skin is despised by fools,
When your eyes darken, fools push you to the margins,
Your sorrows exceed distress,
Although you are a human of flesh.]

In her old age the mother is sidelined and despised, possibly by the very children she brought up. In her old age she is marginalised and alienated. The poet lambasts people who mistreat the elderly in general and mothers in particular. He equates people's maltreatment of old mothers with utter foolishness. Overall, it is vital to consider that Maṭadzhe does not merely reciprocate maternal love in the poem quoted above, but he uses his poetry to honour a mother who guided her children through the most horrendous of times and places in life and succeeded in morally shaping them to face life's challenges with courage.

Ladzani's (1995:16) poem "Mme anga" (My mother) reflects on the mother figure thus:

*Musi ndi bofu ḷa maṭo a vhonaho,
Vho mparisa lubaḍa ṇḷila vha ntsumba,
Musi ndo fara i si yone ṇḷila ndi tshi phuphudzika,
Sa kholomo na dzhogo foroni vho ntsumbedza,
Musi mulenzhe wa u kanda u tshi kanda i si yone ṇḷila,
Ndi vhone vho faraho tshimebi tsha u tshaela hanga vhutshilo.*

[When I was blind though with eyes that see,
You helped me to lay hold of the staff and directed my path,
When I took the wrong path and groping,
Like oxen carrying the yoke, you showed me where to plough,
When my feet wandered to the wrong path,
It was you who held the whip that rightly channelled my life]

The poem begins with the poet's acknowledgement that although she had eyes, she could not see her way clearly without her mother's guidance. The word *maṭo* (eyes) symbolises wisdom and insight without which the poet could not have succeeded in life. In line 2, the poet's mother is hailed as an ever-present and patient guide, which is corroborated by the use of the word *lubaḡa* (staff). In Tshivenda culture, *lubaḡa* represents leadership and guidance. The mother's shepherdess heart is noted even when "*ndo fara i si yone nḡila ndi tshi phuphudzika*" (when I went astray, groping in the dark), the mother still did not give up on her child. The poet confesses that she was not always compliant to her mother's instructions, but the mother nevertheless kept diligently prodding her back onto the right path. This prodding, at times, required the use of *tshimebi* (whip), a symbol of discipline, to nudge her back onto the right way. The mother's resilient love is still appreciated in the next stanza:

*Musi vhathu vha ḡino shango vho nndangana,
Vha tshi vho nengwa sa ḡwana wa phaḡi,
Ndi tshi vho landulwa sa Yesu Golgotha,
Vha mpfare sa dzhulu ḡi tshi luma mufhembo,
Vhunga nḡe ndi mbeu ye vha zwala,
Mathina nga nḡe mitshelo vha vho fula.*

[When the people of this world conspired against me,
Disgusted by me like I was child with scabies/smallpox,
Being denied like Jesus at Golgotha,
You held onto me like a termite stuck to the reed,
Since I was the seed that you sowed,
Knowing that through me, you would harvest fruit.]

The poet appreciates that her mother's presence and love were consistent and unwavering even when people turned away from her (the poet). She equates people's abandonment with the avoidance often experienced by a leprous person. By this she means her mother had every right to treat her like an outcast, a diseased being and abandon her like everybody else, but she did not. The imagery enlarges to

a comparison with the disdain suffered by Jesus during his crucifixion at Golgotha, and yet the mother's love remained unfazed. The mother held onto her child the same way the *dzhulu* (the soldier termite) holds onto the stem of grass when the stem is inserted into the anthill (where termites live). For the mother, loving her child unconditionally was simply because *ndi mbeu ye vha zwala* (I am the seed you sowed). The image of seed denotes the faith, hopes and expectations that the mother had for her child.

*Musi khonani kule na n̄e dzo no sendela,
Dzi tshi vho ntshavha vhunga dzuvha ʃo moḡaho,
Tshandḡa tshavho kha n̄e ndi tshiala tshihulu,
Vha mmbuise naho vhuḡungu vhu vuhulu,
Vhunga nga n̄e vho pfa vhuḡungu vhu sa anetshelwi.*

[When friends distanced themselves from me,
Fleeing from me like I was a wilted, wasted flower,
Your hand upon me remained a huge crown,
Bringing me back even when sorrow abounded,
Since because of me, you endured the pain beyond description.]

This stanza continues the thought that the mother stayed even when she had every opportunity to leave like the poet's friends did. When the poet was avoided by her friends like *dzuvha ʃo moḡaho* (a wilted rose), the mother still treated her with ultimate dignity and respect. She kept praising her child, which to the child were like *tshiala tshiulu* (an enormous crown). The mother's love looked past the child's flaws and covered a multitude of failures. Although the mother endured unimaginable grief in the process, she continued prodding her child in the right direction. The child now acknowledges the constancy and consistency of the mother's love. In the poem, a picture of motherhood is foregrounded, where a woman succeeds in raising a child alone. In this way, Ladzani portrays mothers as consistent and constant in their love for their children. Hence, women (mothers) are portrayed in a positive light in the poem.

5.11. Section Deductions

It was noted in the poems quoted in the previous sections that women are largely portrayed in a more negative light than men. A comparison between Ratshĩanga's and Ladzani's poems on womanhood reveals that Ratshĩanga perpetuates

misconceptions about womanhood while Ladzani strives to reconstruct women's images from negative to positive ones. The misconceptions about women, on the part of Ratshitanga and other male poets represent a lack of commitment from most Vhavenda male writers to tell the truth, particularly in family politics where women bears the brunt. It is unfortunate that these writers seem unable to obfuscate the dominant ideology that renders women as the second class citizens of the world. Some of these writers' assertions by way indoctrination and justifications of patriarchy go as far as naturalising women's victimisation and torture by suggesting that only those who can persevere make it at the in-laws. Mokgoatšana (1996) claims that this phallogentric approach to literature has run its course after dominating the field for centuries, and it should give way to new approaches that recognise women as equal with men. The poets' tone changes, however, when they talk about their mothers. Laudatory epithets are produced as tributes to the mothers' unconditional and enduring love. One can only hope that henceforth Tshivenda poetry will seriously begin to reflect on putting women, and not just their mothers, at the same levels as men. The issue of image construction and reconstruction is not really that far from naming. Hence, the next section is devoted to the aspects of Tshivenda anthroponymy and onomastics.

5.12 SOME ASPECTS OF ANTHROPONYMY AND ONOMASTIC CREATIVITY IN TSHIVENDA POETRY

This section looks at the importance of some names in selected Tshivenda poetry. It is the researcher's intention, therefore, not just to collect names in selected Tshivenda poetry but especially to try and show the role these names play in the societal, cultural and sociological matrix of the Vhavenda. It is convenient to begin with aspects of Tshivenda anthroponymy and onomastic creativity that are brought to the fore in this study because

Names in Africa have meaning People are therefore advised not to take names for granted as they have the capacity to influence relationships among people. Names can be used to build or destroy relationships. It is against this backdrop that one observes that naming can be used to express and resolve interpersonal conflict. This is a strategy that Vhavenda use to reflect their concerns as naming does not physically spill blood, but its impact is nevertheless as profound as a spear piercing soft flesh. In some instances, women who feel ill-treated by their men

may resort to naming a child with a name that denotes their experience and unhappiness (Maḡadzhe, 2018:173).

Furthermore, Africans use personal names, first names, nicknames and trade names to differentiate one another and use clan names to distinguish families from one another. The use of clan names by Africans should be understood from their worldview that sees the individual as a member of the community (Mandende and Mashige, 2018:196). It is also important to bring Tshivendḡa names to the fore because

the socio-economic and political environment of the day did not allow Africans to practice their traditions and cultural value systems because they were under colonialism and later on in South Africa, under the apartheid regime which deliberately denied (Africans) to place their traditions and cultural values as they were regarded as barbaric practices and values of uncivilised people. (Mandende and Mashige, 2018:197).

Names, better than any other language form, reflect various social and other attitudes and relationships, social barriers, and the way in which social groups behave towards languages and other aspects of society (Neethling, 2000). Among the Vhavendḡa, there are many possibilities of linguistic creativity through name-giving. In fact, for the Vhavendḡa, the very act of naming has both communal and personal importance. Since “the study of names cannot be isolated from the study of the societies in which those human beings live, nor from the study of their minds, their mental and emotional processes and their behavioural patterns” (Neethling, 2000:209), a discussion of some Tshivendḡa names sheds light on the psychology and philosophy embedded in those names. Naming practices in Tshivendḡa, like in other African languages, has always been done with purpose (Nemukongwe, 1995). Proper names are socio-onomastic, meaning they are related to the social properties of their referents. The ensuing subsections focus on Tshivendḡa proper names, including names for geographical situations, the landscape (rivers and mountains), historical, actions and colours.

5.13.1 Naming a Child in Tshivendḡa Culture

In African societies, the naming of a child assumes very particular cultural significance, and the key features of social structure are brought to the fore by the practice of name-giving. Nemukongwe (1995) asserts that naming a child is a family and social activity. Hence, relatives, grandparents, parents of the newly-born child

and the family traditional doctor are all involved in the naming process. N̄emukongwe goes on to say that this can be done formally or informally. People name a child in this manner to remind one another of the happenings of the past or the good wishes of the future so that they might give the child a better name. There is a strong belief that a bad name may have negative consequences on the behaviour of the child (N̄emukongwe, 1995). This idea is in accord with the Tshivenda proverb *dzina jivhi ji ya vhurumoni* or *Na u tamba wa dola, senenga a ji tuwi* (give a dog a bad name and it will hang itself). Tshivenda names such as Nndwakhulu (Big fight) is believed to have some influence later in life when the child may become an aggressive and violent person who like fighting and becomes a family problem (N̄emukongwe, 1995).

Names like Nndwammbi (Horrid fight), Nndwamaṭo/Nndwayamaṭo (Witnessed fight) are used to denote the idea that when the child who bears the name was born there were internecine hostilities. However, the child may be named thus to simply highlight the point that such a child was born in a time of war, not necessarily in the domestic context. By naming a child thus, it is intended to classify the child as a witness of the domestic or political unrest. Bad names are, therefore, sometimes given to children with the aim of hurting the offender when there is friction or a dispute in the family.

Examples where the in-laws interfere in the affairs of the married couple will always give rise to names such as Ndidzulafhi (where should I stay), Fhumulani (be quiet), and Nnditsheni (leave me alone), and at that time, one will always find that the parents to the father of the newly-born child are trying to tell their son's in-laws not to interfere in their affairs. In certain families, one finds that the wife is too young to cope with the family's demands and frequently makes mistakes. The family where the wife comes from should tell the in-laws to forgive and teach her everything she does not know. Should she have a child, they might be named Nkhangweleni (forgive me), Mpfunzeni (teach me), and here the family tries to put itself in the position of their child. Names such as Tshifhiwa (gift), Ndivhuho (gratitude), Takalani (be happy) and Khoḡani (give praises), among others, are preferred. Naming in Tshivenda often divides into various categories, such as common names for boys and girls, naming of boys, naming of girls and biblical names (N̄emukongwe, 1995).

Oftentimes, Tshivenda (unisex) names are accompanied by a praise epithet. For example, the name, Adziambei, which is usually given to anyone with an unspeakable character, is accompanied by the praise epithet *ndi dza muṭani, ndi khakhisa u rwa, ndi mbevha ya ludongoni* (a dilemma where fixing a problem will cause yet another a problem, and leaving it unaddressed will still be a problem). The name, Arinao (Lit. We do not have the strength) is accompanied by the epithet *A ri nao maanda a u lwa na vhaṅe vha mashango ro rano ri vhalanda, khwatha ya lila yo lila, ri isa ṅala dza vhathu ha vhane vhadzo ro takala* (we do not have the strength to fight our traditional leaders, if they call us to work, we go and serve them happily) (Nemukongwe, 1995). The following are more examples:

- Itani: *Ndi zwaṅu ndi ita zwanga wa ha tshilamba u vhudzwa u vhona nga maṭo* (the name is generally given to one who does not listen to other people's advice)
- Mafanedza: *Ndi maṭo a nzie a fanedza ṭhoho, mutumbu u tshi nga suḍo* (One who is regarded as merely ornamental)
- Maita: *A nga vha e maitakhole, arali e maitazwiṭoma ene ha fani na madzulafhedzi* (may be translated as 'half a loaf is better than no bread')
- Masindi: *Nyakunombelo kune kwa pfi ku tshi vhavha ni reme, ku sa ḍo tshinyadza miṅwe* (Always given to a person after some misfortunes that might lead to their death)
- Mavhungu: *Ndi ṅama ya khalula yo bikwaho na muṅo. ṅama ya u bebela fhasi zwivhungu zwi tshi ḷa, vhaṅwe vha khou takula* (the name is given to a child after one of the family members has died)
- Tshililo: *Ndi nyaluḍangani nduni, lupfumo lu tshi ḍa nga u vhona luṅwe* (similar to 'Mavhungu' and is a sign of lamentation) (cf. Nemukongwe, 1995)

Quite clearly then, personal names reflect the sociology and psychology of the era in which they are or were used (Neethling, 2000). Such naming tendencies are hinted at in the poem "Nyamurerelo" by Ratshitanga (1987:35):

*Ḷo naka hani dzina ḷe vha fha
Hu u humbula maswikele aṅu,
Nge na bvelela musi wa guvhangano
ḷa vha rerelaho Musiki vho takala.*

[How beautiful is the name they gave you
As a way of remembering your arrival,
As you appeared at a time of gathering
of those who worship the Creator in joy.]

Thus, the Vhavanḁa use name-giving as a way of memorialising their experiences. This means that Tshivendanḁ names are not only psychologically laden but also have sociological and cultural importance (Neethling, 2000:208). Tshivendanḁ names therefore bear on every aspect of the Vhavanḁa's activities. One might add that personal names fundamentally reflect better than any other language form various social and other attitudes and relationships, social barriers, and the way social groups behave towards languages and other aspects of society. This is evinced in the stanza of a poem titled "Thinavhuyo" (I have no direction) by Ratshinḁanga (1987:32).

*Thinavhuyo a zwo ngo siana na Thinawanga,
A re Muvendanḁ vhukuma u a ḁalusa,
Nge e madzina a vho ḁaledzwaho,
Avho vhe vha swika vhabebi vho hanganea.*

[Thinavhuyo is not different from Thinawanga,
One who is a true Muvendanḁ is able to discern,
Because these are the names of the abandoned,
Those who arrived when the parents were stranded.]

If a child is born in a family where the father is old, that particular child is either named after the father as a tribute to him that he is still strong (Nemukongwe, 1995). If the firstborn child is a boy, he is generally given the name of one of the grandfathers in the family. Names such as Lindelani (Wait), Maswole (Soldiers) and Muḁaifa (Heir) are given to boys born after two or more girls. The same procedure followed in the naming of boys is followed in the naming of girls. If the firstborn child in the family is a girl, she is likely to be given the name of one of the grandmothers in the family or she might be named Makhadzi (Aunt, in the sense of her father's sister). Names such as Tshiwela (One who falls into) and Makomba (A girl) are given to girls born after two or more boys in the family. Furthermore, the prefix *Nya-* (mother of) forms the names of women and some titles; for example, *Nyamatei* (Female supervisor of Domba initiates), *Nyamuthenga* (Senior girl or prefect in the *Domba*) are affixed to the name of a woman's firstborn child. Names beginning with

the prefix *Nya-* seem to be encouraging good behaviour and reprimanding bad behaviour (Nemukongwe, 1995). The following are examples:

- Nyadzanga: *Ndi amba na nḁila vhusiku nda kumedza gona fhedzi fundamutaḁwa ndi fa nayo* (implies that a woman does not reveal her family private affairs)
- Nyamashaisa: *O shaisa mme lukuna vha sala vho tshena sa danda* (one who puts her parents in predicaments)
- Nyamubika: *Nga u pfa yawe nḁala a sa londi munna ngeno o malwa* (one who cares for her personal affairs only)
- Nyamukoki: *O ḁishela birima ḁi khou xaxara, a tshi swa u vhudza nnyi a sa vhudzi makhadzi wawe?* (one who creates problems for herself)
- Nyaphophi: *Tshi sa funi u vhona murahu ha dzembe, tshi mafhuri tsho a wanafhi? Vhavenda ndi Vhonyathophi yo fhola nḁha fhasi i tshi fhisa* (the Vhavenda people could pretend to be friendly whereas they dislike one's behaviour) (cf. Nemukongwe, 1995).

According to Maḁadzhe (2018:173), names such as the ones provided and others like Thitondwi (I am not treated well), Thinashaka (I do not have relatives) and Lowani (Continue bewitching us), to name but a few, are used as conflict management and resolution strategies. For instance,

the name *Thitondwi* is polysemous as it may denote two meanings. Regarding the first meaning, the woman would be sending a message to her husband and in-laws that they do not treat her well and give her the respect that she deserves. The woman in this instance complains that the treatment that she receives from her husband or in-laws is unsatisfactory whereas her rival is treated like 'an egg'. The intended listeners would know that the name is about them and would henceforth change their unbecoming behaviour towards. If they do not change at all, the name would still remind them that their behaviour is unacceptable. Nobody likes to be told every day that he or she is 'a sinner'. In the end, those who treat the woman badly would do their best to prove to the complainant that they are not as bad as she thinks. Through this strategy, good relations are fostered and maintained for a very long time.

Maḁadzhe (2018:174) further proffers that the same name, Thitondwi, might be used in a sarcastic manner when the woman tells those who had wronged her that in spite of trying her best to treat them with the decorum and respect they deserve, they do

not appreciate her efforts. The message is that people should not take any good treatment accorded them for granted. This idea of taking good treatment for granted is explored in the poem “Mutondi” (Benign person) by Ratshifanga (1987:24).

*Vho zwi vhonaho vho t̄alusa,
T̄haluso ya nea t̄halutshedzo,
Sa mirero yothe yo itelwaho u alusa,
Ine ya vha yone t̄halutshedzo.*

[Those who witnessed it described it,
Description provided an explanation,
Like all the proverbs developed to raise,
Which is the actual explanation.]

*Vho ri mutondi u vha muvhulahi,
Kha avho vha tondwaho lu si lwa mbadelo,
A itwa mutshinyi nga vhutondi uho,
Ngeno ene a tshi vha fela sa tshithavhelo.*

[They said a benign person becomes a murderer,
To those who were freely accorded good treatment,
They are turned into a criminal of that benevolence,
While they dies for them like a sacrifice.]

*A tondaho u dzula muṭodzi u shamani,
A ambwa maṭamba othe a no kalakata.
Vha salaho vha dzivhuluwa o no vha jivhidani,*

[One is who is kind always lives with tears on their cheeks,
Sour insults accompany all that is said about them.
Those who remain behind realise it when a benign person is already in the
grave]

The message of the poem quoted above is that people should be thankful for the good things that have been provided as this encourages the provider to keep doing good to others (cf. Maḍadzhe, 2018:174). However, in this poem the one who does good is mistreated and ill-spoken of by the very people who benefit from their good deeds. Those who benefitted and still mistreated the benevolent person only realise their wrong when the person they mistreated is already dead. The poem has the following three messages: (a) Benevolent people are rarely appreciated but are instead are badmouthed by the very people to whom they do good; (b) however demoralising it may be, a benevolent person should never cease doing good, even

to those who do not deserve it; and (c) the significance of benevolent people will only be realised and valued when they are no longer alive.

Similarly, the names Thinavhuyo and Thinawanga in the stanza quoted above are assigned to children to express the parent's frustration at being neglected and uncared for by their close relatives. The poet states that a true Muvenda would decipher the implicit meanings of the names because such a person would be familiar with the sociology, psychology and philosophy behind these Tshivenda. Thus, naming a child Thinavhuyo, Thinawanga or Thinashaka is intended to shore up the idea that a parent lives like they do not have any relatives because of the maltreatment meted out to them by close relatives. Consequently, such a person lives like a beggar or a loner (Maqadzhe, 2018). On hearing such names called out loudly and repeatedly, the intended target would know that the message is meant for them, and to disprove it, they will be compelled to be as supportive as possible to the parent. The poem, "Thinaneli" (I do not grumble) by Ratshitanga (1987:25) falls in the same category of interpretation where a sarcastic tone is employed to address interpersonal conflicts.

*Ndi do nanelela mini shangoni,
Vhunga zwine nda itelwa
Na khotsi anga vho di itelwa,
Nda vho nga a sa dzulihho shangoni?*

[What will I grumble about in the world,
When all that is done to me
Was also done to my father
Becoming like one who does not live in the world?]

In this poem the name Thinaneli, as the title of the poem, is used to protest against the injustices and maltreatment suffered by the poet. The poet uses the name to express his unhappiness about the state of affairs. The name is used to inform the perpetrators of injustice against the poet that their deeds have been prolonged and should stop. While it is unclear what deeds the poet refers to, it is apparent that his father suffered the same fate. Since the poem was produced during the apartheid era in South Africa, it is probable that the poet is indirectly addressing the oppressors that are mistreating him. Seemingly his father suffered in silence, the same way the poet is suffering, but the poet is tired of keeping quiet. The melancholic sense of

alienation runs so deep in him that he feels he does not belong in the world. Antithetical Tshivenda names such as Thinaneli are thus used to confront injustice, both at a domestic and political level. The same sense of alienation and frustration is expressed in yet another the poem titled “Musiiwa” (One left all alone) by Ratshitanga (1987:35).

*Tsho siiwaho kanzhi a tshi na muṅe,
Nge muṅe watsho a ṭuwa tsha sala murahu.
Tsho ṭalifhaho tshi salela u ṭoḡa vhudzumbaṭhoho,*

[That which has been left behind often has no owner,
Since its owner left and it remained behind.
If it is wise, it will seek a refuge to hide its head.]

The name Musiiwa is assigned to an orphaned child in Tshivenda culture. The name is given when upon birth both parents died or divorced, leaving the child alone to be raised by others. Musiiwa may also refer to one who has lost all relatives and has been left alone in the family line. When called out, it reminds both its bearer and those targeted to be sympathetic and sensitive towards the name-bearer. If anything, they should try to help the person whenever and however they can. However, it must be mentioned that there are instances in Tshivenda culture where children who are born after those who have died are given special names, such as Phumudzo (Comfort). Children are also given names to commemorate important events that took place during their mothers’ pregnancy or around the time of their birth, or conditions that prevailed during that period before their birth, such as famine, Nḡalammbi (Nemukongwe, 1995).

5.13.2 Names of Places in Tshivenda Poetry

The names of geographical areas also have meaning. Such names include Mukondeni (a place of many euphorbian plants); Sokoutenda (just yield/agree/sacrifice), which is a protest name that came about when people were compelled to stay at the place they did not like after they had been forcefully removed from their place of residence; Thengwe (the place of the Vhaṭavhatsindi clan), so named because it is a mountain that was said to be full of leopards, that is, *thavha ya dzinngwe*; and Dzumbaṭhoho (hide your head), which was named after people were given smaller yards than they needed and they thought the space was

just enough to hide one's head. The poem "Makwarela" by Ratshitanga (1987:37) praises the place called Makwarela.

*Makwarela vhe ndi vemba ja n̄wenda,
Li kherulwaho ja ambadza lushaka.
La malela vhothe vhahulu na vhaṭoma,
Zwothe hu u alusana malofha.*

[They say Makwarela is the *n̄wenda* fabric,
Which is torn to cover a nation.
And marries for both the great and the small,
All of which helps the growth of blood relations.]

It is notable in this poem that the name Makwarela is accompanied by its praise epithet "Vemba ja n̄wenda li kherulwaho ja ambadza lushaka/na kherukana vhadzinga ni a ṭangana" (one who shares with others, even when they do not have enough) (cf. Nemukongwe, 1995).

5.13.3 River Names in Venda

Muungadi (*muungo wa madi*) is a name that came after people heard the sound or echo made by flowing water. *Sambandou* (*hu ṭamba ndou*) is the name of the river that is believed to have been a bathing place of elephants. *Mbweḍi* (stony river) is characterised by heavy stones that were used to make hoes, spears and other fighting weapons. *Dzindi* is a name that came from the male loincloth, and the cloth was a determining factor when people wanted to cross the river during the floods: If the water reached the height of this big loincloth (*dzindi*), people would normally decide to retreat (Nemukongwe, 1995:39). An example of rivers being praised in Tshivenda poetry is Ngwana's (1958:26) "Luvuvhu".

*Vhe ni songo pfa u pfi Luvuvhu;
Luvuvhu u ela u tshi tsa na thavha dza Venda;
Mulambo u sa xi, u ela vhusiku na masiari;
Sase ja ṭhanga dzawo ja naka hani?*

[They say do not take it lightly that it is named Luvuvhu;
Luvuvhu flows down the mountains of Venda;
The river that never runs dry, it flows night and day;
How beautiful is the field that has its reeds?]

*Tshukhwi-! mvula yo nafhi Luvuvhu?
Maḡi o tswuka o tou pilivhili!
Matanda, mathukhwi hune zwa bva a ri hu ḡi;
A yo kudzwafhi? Hamakuleke ndi tsini.*

[Alas-! where did the rain fall Luvuvhu?
The water is as red as scarlet!
Where the logs and filth come from, we do not know;
Where are they going to be discarded? Makuleke is too close.]

*Naa a ngaho iwe Luvuvhu ndi nnyi?
Ḍuvha musi ḡo kovhela ḡula ḡi lidza mifhululu;
Ḍuvha ḡa fhisa khovhe i rwa maḡi nga besu;
Ngweḡa dzo vhamba muḡavhani.*

[Who is like you, Luvuvhu?
When the sun has set, frogs ululate;
When the sun is hot, the fish slaps the water with a feather;
Crocodiles spread on the sand.]

*Tshiruxwe tsha bva tshi vhuya nga ḡuvha u kovhela;
Ḍowamulambo i hone heneḡha Luvuvhu,
Khuhumulambo i dzula khunzikhunzini dzau;
Mashudu mahulwane kha maḡulakhovhe.*

[If the parrot departs, it returns because the sun has set;
The water snake is present right here at Luvuvhu,
The chicken that lives in water resides at your shores;
A great fortune to fish snatchers.]

The name Luvuvhu seems to have been derived from the Tshivenda word for 'river bushwillow' (*muuvuvhu*). In the first stanza, the poet commences by foregrounding the notion that this river was not simply named Luvuvhu but that there are certain features that depict its uniqueness in Venda. Firstly, Luvuvhu flows through the mountains that form part of the landscape of Venda. By mentioning this, the poet hints at the beauty of both the river and its surroundings. Secondly, Luvuvhu is a non-perennial river, and its continuous flow throughout the year leaves the poet in awe and means the plants in its vicinity are evergreen.

In the second stanza, the poet wonders about the source of Luvuvhu's perennial waters. The poet rapidly shifts from this wonder to a lament about the waste that fills the river. It is possible, however, that the first line of the second stanza refers to the

poet's assumption that the logs and the waste products could only be flowing with the river because they were swept into it by heavy rainfall. Other than that, the poet could be indirectly lambasting people for throwing waste into the river. Due to this contamination, the water is no longer crystal clear but dirty. The poet wonders where this waste will be discarded by the river. He mentions that this waste will not be discarded in the Makuleke area. Makuleke is located between the Luvuvhu River to the south and the Limpopo River to the north. It is primarily a sandveld environment, giving it the appearance of a wilderness. Therefore, one could conclude that the waste collected by the Luvuvhu River would be dumped here. However, the poet's point is that the Luvuvhu River flows beyond this area, which suggests that the poet does not even know where this river really ends.

In the third stanza, the element of praise comes out clearly. Here, in the first line of the stanza, Luvuvhu is personified, *Naa a ngaho iwe ndi nnyi?* (Who is like you?) by being addressed as a person. Through this line, the poet intends to appreciate the uniqueness of the Luvuvhu River. The sound that frogs make is 'croaking', but the poem calls it 'ululate'. In Tshivenda culture, ululations denote celebration and joy. In the context of the poem, creatures like frogs are at ease and rejoice because of the river. This delight is also expressed by fish and a big population of crocodiles that sun themselves on Luvuvhu's sandbanks.

In the last stanza, the poet appreciates how the Luvuvhu River caters for birdlife at its edge. This is because either side of the Luvuvhu River is surrounded by forests that support a rich array of animal and bird life. Overall, the Luvuvhu River is praised for its natural beauty, perennial flow and its sustenance of animal and bird life. As far as the poet is concerned, there is no river that can be compared to Luvuvhu. Another poem that appreciates natural phenomena in Venda is "Tshipise" by Mutsila (in Ngwana, 1958:16).

Govhani ja mulambo Nzhelele;

Ndi nnyi a hu divhaho?

Fhasi ha thavha Tswime;

Naa ni a hu divha naa?

Ndarieni, ndarieni ri yo tamba

Nga maḍi a fhisaho.

[The valley of Nzhelele River;
Who knows it?
Under the Tswime Mountain;
Do you really know it?
Let us go, let us and bathe
In the water that is hot.]

*Maḍi a kundaho tshikali;
Naa a hu athu u ni dina naa?
Ane wa ṭamba wa bva u si na tshikha;
Riṅe ha athu u ri dina;
Nḍarieni, nḍarieni ri yo ṭamba
Nga maḍi a fhisaho.*

[The water that has no dirt;
Has it not fed you up yet?
Waters in which you bath and come out clean;
We are not yet fed up with it;
Let us go, let us go and bathe
In the water that is hot.]

The name Tshipise appears to have been derived from *tshisima tsha u fhisa* (the spring that is hot) or *tshi a fhisa* (it [the spring] is hot). In this poem, Tshipise is praised as a place that is among the best known resorts. Hence, the poet asks “*Ndi nnyi a hu ḍivhaho?*” (Who knows it?) as a way of inviting those who know the place to corroborate his claims about the place. According to the poet, whoever bathes in the waters of the natural hot spring Tshipise comes out clean. Tshipise is depicted as having cleansing powers and anybody who steps into its waters comes out pure. This purity is ascribed to the fact that Tshipise’s waters have no dirt. The poem is typical of how natural phenomena such as mountains, rivers, springs, forests and other aspects of nature are often sources for Tshivenda praise poetry.

5.13.4 Animal Names in Tshivenda Poetry

A dog is named Tshamaṭo (the ever vigilant one) when there is someone in the family causing problems and not taking advice; then family members may decide not to comment any longer and just keep quiet (silence is golden). *Dzothwa* is the male head of cattle that is dark brown in colour; *dzothwana* is the female *dzothwa*; *ntswu* is a male head of cattle that is black in colour; *tswana* is the female *ntswu*; *dilu* is the

male head of cattle that is brown with darker stripes running across the body; *dilwana* is the female *dilu*. Most of the animal names are characterised by their cries or manner of doing things (Nemukongwe, 1995:39–40). Ngwana’s (1958:39–40) poem “Musi dzi tshi hamwa” (When they are milked) is a typical example of how one might praise a domestic animal.

*Hee Maemu! Hee Maemu;
Tavhanya na tshingo,
Yo vhuya maḡali yanga,
Tzworr-! Tzworr-! Tzworr!*

[Hey, Maemu! Hey, Maemu;
Hurry with the milk pail,
My maḡali has returned,
‘Sounds denoting that milk drops into the pail’]

*Naa kholomo dzo ḡwafhi Maemu?
Ndi vhona Maḡali yo ḡadza khamelo luraru;
Dzi bva thavhani Muhali;
Zwi a vhonele nwananga.*

[Where did the cattle spend the day, Maemu?
I ask because Maḡali has filled the pail three times;
They are from the mountain, Valiant One;
It is evident, my child.]

*Matshelo dzi a vhuvelela,
Hu ḡo ri khwali i tshi lila,
Nda bva nḡe maphoḡomolegaku ḡa mufumbu,
Muḡhannga a sa ḡiho vhutete nga u shavha u tetemela.*

[Tomorrow, they are going back,
When the francolin bird chirps,
I will come out, I, breaker of porridge rounds made of chaff,
A lad who does not eat soft porridge for fear that he will tremble.]

In times past, animals were very important in the life of a Muvenda, especially domestic animals (Mafela, 1997). Mafela (1997) states that animals were used for various purposes, like hunting, ploughing, meat, skin hides and paying the ‘bride price’. In fact, prior to the introduction and subsequent adoption of the Western way of life, the Vhavenda used to see their wealth in terms of domestic animals. In this way, domestic animals served as a status symbol and wealth (Mafela, 1997; Milubi,

1997). Domestic animals, particularly cattle, were used to pay the 'bride price'. Besides the foregoing, cattle also provided milk. In the poem quoted above, the poet dramatises how a cow might be praised in Tshivenda. It is worth noting that most domestic animals, especially cattle, goats and dogs, used to be given names (Mafela, 1997). As shown in the poem above, cattle were praised according to the names they were given. Cattle would be praised when they entered or left the kraal, when they ploughed the fields or even when they were grazing. In the poem, the cow named Maḍali is praised for producing abundant milk. The name Maḍali seems to have been derived from the verb *-ḍala* (fill; full). In the context of the poem, this would suggest that this cow is known for its ability to fill the milk pail. To the poet's amazement, the cow Maḍali fills the milk pail thrice, which necessitates the poet ask where the cow grazed during the day. Through the inquiry, one discovers that the reason for Maḍali's abundant milk is the availability of greener pastures.

The chanting of praises for animals is fading in Tshivenda culture. This is ascribed to the fact that the significance of animals among the Vhavana has shifted. Wealth is no longer measured in terms of how many cows, goats or donkeys one has, but in terms of money. People now use tractors to plough, buy clothes at clothing shops, and buy milk and meat at supermarkets.

5.14 Section Deductions

The above discussion was an attempt to show that naming is part and parcel of human existence (Mphela, 2010). For the Vhavana, naming is accompanied by a sense of meaning, purpose and philosophy. Within this macrocosmic society, a name is also a shared entity and not necessarily a personal attribute (cf. Mokgoatšana, 1999). The family name, for instance, is inherited while a personal name is not necessarily inheritable but is either acquired through one's demonstration of valour or as a means to address certain issues. Naming is also used both as an addressive and conflict resolution device. The Vhavana's naming of children, animals (domestic and wild), natural phenomena, months, seasons and other things should be taken seriously because they themselves take it seriously. The poets' interest in the anthroponymic and onomastic creativity of the Vhavana should be considered as proof that naming occupies a significant place in the life and

worldview of the Vhavenda. This is evident in their conception of cosmology, selenology and astronomy, as the next section confirms.

5.15 SOME ASPECTS OF COSMOLOGY, SELENOLOGY AND ETHNOASTRONOMY IN TSHIVENḌA POETRY

The Vhavenda currently have a calendar system based on a 360-day year, composed of four seasons of three months each and 30/31 days per month. Although cosmological, selenological and ethnoastronomical knowledge abounds in Tshivenda legends, not much information is documented in the modern-day search engines. This shows that the area is still fertile for research. If ignored, those who possess the knowledge will die with it and a significant chunk of the Vhavenda of Tshivenda ethnoastronomy, for example, will be lost. This section gives an analysis of the selected Vhavenda poets' perceptions of the moon, sun, stars and clouds in an effort to throw down the gauntlet for future research on these aspects in Tshivenda mythology.

5.15.1 Nwedzi in Tshivenda Culture: The Full Moon and the Vhavenda Calendar System

In order to distinguish *Nwedzi* (moon) from *Nwedzi* (Month) in Tshivenda culture, it is best to begin with the poem titled "Nwedzi" (The moon) by Ngwana (1958:34–35):

*Nwedzi wo tshena,
U vhone shela nne;
U a ntakadza,
Ndi luvhone lwanga.*

[The moon is white,
It gives me light;
It makes me happy,
It is my lamp.]

*Nga u penye nwedzi,
Ndi toudou tamba
Zwavhuḍi na vhaḥwe;
Ri tshi diphina muḥani.*

[May the moon shine,
I want to play

Well with others
Enjoying ourselves in the open.]

*Nga u penye n̄wedzi,
Ndi ʔoḡou ita
Tshanndzunguluwe,
Tsho dya Vhakoma.*

[May the moon shine,
I want to
Spin-around,
That devoured the petty headman.]

*Ndi ʔoḡou ita
Tshidula tsha Musingaḡi,
Vhakoma vha tshi ya Dzaḡa,
Vha fhirisa muḡinda phanḡa.*

[I want to
Sing about the little frogs of Musingaḡi,
Petty headmen heading to Dzaḡa,
Putting the servant in front.]

*Nga u penye n̄wedzi;
Ndi ʔoḡou ita
Ngano ndo dzula muḡani;
Ra fhedza nga u ita khube.*

[May the moon shine;
I want to
Narrate folktales while seated outside;
And conclude by playing the khube game.]

*Nga u penye n̄wedzi;
Ndi ʔoḡou rengeniyela
Zwavhuḡi nda ḡo kona
U yo lala ndo takala.*

[May the moon shine;
I want to have fun
So that,
I will sleep happily.]

N̄wedzi (the moon) in Venda is probably the most obvious feature in the night sky, because of its size, brightness, and changing appearance (phases). As the moon

orbits the earth, it goes through a sequence of phases, from new moon (invisible) to crescent, half-moon, full moon, half-moon, and back to new moon (cf. Mokgoatšana and Mashego, 2020). Mokgoatšana and Mashego (2020) observe that among the Mapulana in South Africa, the sky is essentially viewed as a canvas. Mokgoatšana and Mashego (2020) reveals that the intention of the full moon cycle was to allow a complete lesson in lunar education and to understand hidden messages on the lunar surface. According to Mokgoatšana and Mashego (2020), Mapulana children were taught to see the mother holding the baby on the moon from when they could look to the sky. These children were also taught to understand why a full moon has a glowing halo around it and that it symbolises the renewal of spirit and purpose. In Tshivenda lore, it seems there is a connection between women's menstrual cycle and the full moon. This is said because when a woman menstruates, it is called *u vhona n̄wedzi* (to see the moon). Mokgoatšana and Mashego (2020) corroborate this by stating that in the olden days women were reported to have their periods synced with the full moon, although that is disputed today.

On the nights when the full moon appeared in the night sky, conversations between people became intense; shepherds could spot each other from a notable distance in the still of the night, and dogs would bark that annoying gory jackal howl (Mokgoatšana and Mashego, 2020). African communities would start farming on their new year, which for many was the sighting of the first moon in September before the Gregorian calendar was introduced (Mokgoatšana and Mashego, 2020). On rare occasions, the moon passes between the earth and the sun, resulting in a solar eclipse. If the alignment is exact, then the entire sun is momentarily blocked out. The Vhavenda speak picturesquely of *mutshakavhili* (the two dawns). During the full moon, few stars can be seen as beautiful galaxies and the Milky Way is flooded by the halo of the moon. In Tshivenda the noun *n̄wedzi* does not only mean moon but is also used to refer to a month. The names of the Tshivenda months, as the next section illustrates, have meanings.

5.15.2 The Meanings of Tshivenda Months

For a discussion on the meanings of Tshivenda months, Matshili's (1967:17–19) poem "Miñwedzi yashu" (Our months) is helpful.

*Phando ri fhanda n̄waha muswa na mulala,
Miṭavho yo ḡala masimuni;
Zwivhuya zwa n̄waha muswa ri a zwi lila;
Ndi n̄wedzi wa u ranga kha n̄waha.*

[In January we split the old year from the new year,
Planted things are numerous in the field;
We yearn for the good of the new year;
It is the first month of the year.]

For the Vhavenḡa, January is named *Phando* for two reasons: (a) It is a month in which the sun is scorching hot, and (b) it is a month in which people cross over to a new year. On the first reason, *Phando* is derived from *phandu* (searing heat) and from *fhanda* (divide; split), which accounts for the notion that this month is viewed as a separator of the old year from the New Year. This is the meaning that the poet applies to the preceding quotation. In January, farms are populated by crops and other agrarian products, hence the poet says “*miṭavho yo ḡala masimuni*” (‘crops are abundant in the fields’). Whereas January is characterised by searing heat, the second month of the year is different. According to the poet,

*Luhuhi mvula a i lilwi,
Milambo i fetema vhusiku na masiari;
Vhathu vha kumbwa ha sala zwillilo;
Ndi n̄wedzi wa vhuvhili kha n̄waha.*

[In February, rain is never scarce,
Rivers flow full day and night;
People are swept away, leaving behind cries;
It is the second month of the year.]

The second month, *Luhuhi* (February) is characterised by an abundance of rain. Flash floods are common in February in Venḡa. Rivers often burst their banks due to heavy rainfall, which is why the poet says “*Milambo i fetema vhusiku na masiari*” (Rivers burst their banks day and night). Due to heavy rainfall, people’s shelters and other belongings are usually swept away by the floods. As a result, for most people February is associated with the loss of loved ones, homes, and possessions. The third month is *Ṭhafamuhwe* (March), which is described as follows:

*Ṭhafamuhwe muselwa u phirimela a guma nga ṭhafu,
Marubini ndi vhutyava-tyava,*

*Ri suka matope sa zwiguluzwana;
Ndi n̄wedzi wa vhuraru kha n̄waha.*

[In March, the bride sinks into the mud to the level of the calf,
In the ruins, it is quagmires everywhere,
We mix mud like piglets;
It is the third month of the year.]

The first line of the stanza above hints at how the name *Thafamuhwe* came about. It is a compound word, composed of *thafa/thafu* (calf, the back of the lower human leg) and *muhwe* (bridegroom). Due to the heavy rains of February, most places in Venda remain muddy into March. People not only struggle to walk but are also likely to have their legs sink into the mud up to their calves. It is not clear how the *muhwe* (bridegroom) features here, but it seems that March is not a good month to travel, even for the bridegroom who might want to visit his *muselwa* (bride) because of the muddy roads. When the bridegroom insists on visiting his bride, he should be prepared to reach his destination mud-covered. Seemingly, the sludge in the month of March is so much that movement would be almost impossible, considering that one's legs sink to the level of the calves. However, after the muddy month comes another month, *Lambamai* (April) whose conditions are the complete opposite:

*Lambamai n̄wana u lamba mme,
Nga mufuro u kundaho vha m̄ilo;
Ri ḷa ra zwimbelwa dzithumbu;
Ndi n̄wedzi wa vhuṅa kha n̄waha.*

[In April, a child denies its mother,
Because of the fullness of the belly, that overcomes even the gluttonous;
We eat until our stomachs are constipated;
It is the fourth month of the year.]

The noun *Lambamai* constitutes two words, namely *lamba* (refuse; deny; reject) and *mai* (mother). April for the Vhavanḍa is the harvest month, and therefore, abundance. There is so much food that a child no longer needs its mother's breastmilk; hence, it is called *Lambamai* (Reject (your) mother). According to the poet, even the gluttonous eat until they are tired of eating. People eat their harvest to a point of constipation. The enjoyment of food overlaps to the next month, *Shundunthule* (May) which is described thus:

*Shundunthule nthule muhwalo wanga,
Mavhele na zwiliñwa zwi vhuya hayani;
Vha rulana zwirundu zwa mihwalo.
Ndi ñwedzi wa vhuṭanu kha ñwaha.*

[In May, we are relieved of our burden,
Corn and crops are brought home;
They help one another lay down baskets.
It is the fifth month of the year.]

The month is named *Shundunthule* (Help me put down my load) because, during this month, bounteous agrarian products are brought home in full baskets. It is for this reason that one asks others to help offload the basket(s). These agrarian products are brought home to put in the storehouses for rainy days. After this month comes the sixth month, Fulwi (June).

*Fulwi maṭari a a fhufhurea,
Vhana vha tamba thulwi,
Phepho i tandula shango loṭhe.
Ndi ñwedzi wa vhuṭanu-na-vhuthihi kha ñwaha.*

[In June, leaves fall off trees,
Children playfully make heaps of soil,
The cold surrounds the whole land.
It is the sixth month of the year.]

June is not only cold in Venda but is when the plants that were green and full of fruits begin to lose their leaves. The etymology of the word Fulwi is unclear to the researcher. However, there seems to be a connection between the name Fulwi and *fula* (graze) or *fulo* (campaign). If the word *fula* is anything to go by, one would assume that in the month of June, *maṭari a miri a fulwa* (tree leaves are grazed), that is, they fall off the trees. It is also possible that Fulwi has a figurative meaning where one might say that in the month of June *maṭari o bva fulo* (tree leaves have left for a campaign elsewhere). The second interpretation is included here in light of what the poet says about the seventh month, *Fulwana* (July):

*Fulwana maṭari a tsaleli a fara lwendo,
A tovhela ho yaho mañwe,
Ri lala ro pfuṇa milenzhe nga phepho;
Ndi ñwedzi wa vhuṭanu-na-vhuvhili kha ñwaha.*

[In July, the remainder of the leaves take a journey,
And follow where the others went,
We sleep with bent legs because of the cold;
It is the seventh month of the year.]

In the poet's mind, during the month of June the tree leaves undertook a journey. However, not all of them left the tree. The tree leaves that remained only leave in July, Fulwana, which is named as an attenuation of Fulwi because of the diminutive suffix *-ana*. Due to the cold in July, people sleep with their knees bent to keep themselves warm. While the tree leaves may have been lost in both June and July, the next month, *Thangule* (August) is the one given the absolute power to rob trees of whatever leaves and buds may have been left:

Thangule miri yo tangulwa yothe,
Muya u hwala thanga na hatsi;
Phepho i tharamudza ndevhe.
Ndi nwedzi wa vhuṭanu-na-vhuraru kha nṵwaha.

[In August, all the trees are robbed;
The wind lifts both the root and the thatching grass;
The cold stretches the ears.
It is the eighth month of the year.]

August is generally associated with strong, dusty winds. Owing to the strength of the August winds, some people's roofs, particularly thatched roofs, are lifted off houses and trees are uprooted in some cases. In this sense, the month is associated with robbery (*tangula*). August is not only windy and dusty, but is also cold. It is left to the reader to imagine how the cold would affect a family that have lost their roof during this month. After the mayhem of August, people are relieved when a new month, *Khubvumedzi* (September) arrives:

Khubvumedzi tshiranzhe tshi a mela,
Mvula ya tseula i wela fhasi;
Zwo eḡelaho zwi a karuwa.
Ndi mukukumedzi nwedzi wa vhuṭanu-na-vhuṅa.

[In September, the first plants emerge,
The early rain falls down;
All that was asleep awakens.
It is lobbyist, the ninth month.]

The Vhavenda believe that the month *Khubvumedzi* (September) begins when the crescent moon can be seen for the first time and when the lower two giraffe stars (see Section 5.11) are just below the horizon and the upper two are just visible. Tshivenda lore holds that when the 'giraffe' stars are seen close to the south-western horizon just after sunset, they indicate the beginning of the growing season. This is reinforced by the word *tshiranzhe* (firstling), which has to do with the emergence of the first crops. In September the early rain known as *tseula* falls, enabling some plants to sprout while trees begin to bud, an occurrence that continues into the next month, *Tshimedzi* (October):

*Tshimedzi ndi a medza,
Mbeu i bonyolola maṭo;
Musaleli u ḡo ḷa u vhona.
Ndi ṅwedzi wa vhufumi.*

[In October, plants sprout,
Seeds open their eyes;
The sluggard will eat nothing.
It is the tenth month.]

October is named *Tshimedzi* (Cause of plants' sprout and growth). The name of the month is made up of the prefix *tshi-* (Class 7 noun prefix in Tshivenda) and *-medzi* (cause of growth). It is known as the month that makes what was sowed in September break forth. Thus, in October seeds germinate and break through the soil. The significant signs of fruition noticed in the month of October is further notable in the next month, *Lara* (November):

*Lara ḷi sia miṭavho masimuni,
Vhathu vha lora zwe vha zwala;
Shango ḷo dalafhala nga zwimedzwa.
Ndi ṅwedzi wa vhufumi-na-vhuthihi*

[November leaves the crops in the fields,
People dream about what they sowed;
The land becomes green because of plants.
It is the eleventh month.]

In November, people's minds are always occupied with the preservation of their crops. According to the poet, people dream about what they sowed. If, by this, the poet is hinting at the etymology of the name *Lara* (November), one would

immediately think of the connection between *lara* and *lora* (dream), although the connection seems improbable due to the distinct phonemes /a/ and /o/. Whatever the case, it is clear that in November the whole land is green because of the crops, forests and other agrarian products. After November, comes Nyendavhusiku (December):

*Nyendavhusiku ja kovhela u laṭe mbaḍo;
Vhusiku vhu na vhaṅe vhaho;
Vhaendi vha kovhelelwa vha a eḍela.
Ahaa ṅwaha wo fhela ri thoma muswa.*

[In December, when the sun sets, rush home;
The night has its own people;
If the sun sets on travellers, they spend the night.
Ahaa, the year has ended, we begin a new one.]

In December, people are warned not to travel during the night. In Tshivenda, December is called Nyendavhusiku (Those who/which travel at night). The idea is that there are nocturnal creatures that may be deadly to those who travel at night. For this reason, people are told that as soon as the sun sets, they should rush home before it is too late. If the sun sets on a traveller before they reach their destination, they are advised to seek accommodation nearby and continue with the journey the next day. It is unclear whether the nocturnal creatures are (ritual) murderers, animals or predatory ogres. December is the last month for the Vhavana, and oftentimes, the month is characterised by festivities in celebration of the year's end and in anticipation of the good that the New Year might bring. In short, there are ideologies behind the naming of the Tshivenda months. The months also divide into four seasons in Tshivenda, namely *tshilimo* (summer), *tshifhefho* (autumn), *vhuriha* (winter) and *luṭavula* (spring). In the next subsection, the selected poets' descriptions of these seasons provide insight into how the Vhavana perceive the seasons.

5.16. Seasons in the Vhavana's Calendar

The discussion starts with the summer season and ends with the spring season in the Vhavana's calendar.

5.16.1. Summer in Venda

Mashuwa's (1972:8) poem "Venda Tshilimo" (Venda in summer) celebrates both the beauty seen and the benefits received during the summer in Venda.

*Yo na Venda fura-u-lale,
Shango lo naka lo dilila,
Miedzini, magovhani na mivhunduni
Hothe hu na lukuna.*

[It has rained in Venda where you sleep with a full stomach,
The land is beautified and is green,
In the water courses, valleys and hills
Everywhere is beautifully clean.]

Summer typically occurs from December to March in Venda. Summer is often a season in which the land of the Vh Venda is green because of the abundant rains that come with it. In essence, people live in anticipation of thunderstorms because during summer thunderstorms are common and important phenomena. They are believed to help nature to survive during this hot season and to help crops grow better and yield a harvest. The poet mentions that the whole land is not only green, but also that there is plentiful water in the valleys and rivers. During this season, people have plenty of food to eat. For those who love the beauty of nature, Venda is advertised as full of awe-inspiring sceneries. In the next stanza, the poet says:

*Shango lothe ndi lidala,
Mafo a lavhelesa hothe a takala,
Matsina mafo a a sea-vho sa mulomo
A mbo fura sa thumbu?*

[The whole land is green,
The eyes look everywhere and become delighted,
How did I not know that eyes can laugh like the mouth does
And become filled like a stomach?

The idea that the whole land is green is reinforced in the second stanza. In the summer season, the sun is the most visible and strong, which means everything in nature gets substantial energy from the sun to support life, breeding and feeding. The warmth of the sun creates perfect conditions for both plants and animals. Summer is a good time to enjoy outdoor activities such as sight-seeing. This is

affirmed by the poet who says that nature is so delightful to watch in summer that even one's eyes smile at the beauty. Not only that, summer in Venda also allows one the opportunity to witness the following:

Tshilimo Venda zwi takala zwothe,
Miedzini ri pfa nga khuwa dza Vho-Tshihwenu,
Thavhani ri pfa nga vhazwala vha tshi tou hwedeba,
Ngeno muthu mishumo hu hone yo vuwa.

[In summer, everything in Venda is happy,
In the water courses, we hear the shouts of Tshihwenu,
On the mountains, we hear the cries of the baboons,
While for a human being, chores are numerous.]

In summer, animals are also busy; they hunt their prey and reproduce. The poet mentions that everything is excited in summer and animals' sounds are heard on the mountains. People also work very hard in summer. Those involved in agrarian activities are often seen planting vegetables and other crops. Summer is thus a season joyfully welcomed by people who have a strong work ethic, as the next stanza affirms:

Vhusiku sala nduni vha bva vhothe,
Hu mme, hu nwana a hu na a salaho,
Vhe Mukhandala, Mukhandala wa sa lima u do tswa
Nwana khuvha ha li muñwe nala ro fhiwa rothe.

[Everybody leaves the house before dawn,
Be it the mother or the child, no one is left behind,
They say, Mukhandala, Mukhandala, if you do not plough, you will steal
For a fact, everybody must eat from the sweat of their brow.]

Ndi tshone tshifhinga tshi sumba vhabva,
Vhashumi vha tshi vhonala nga mabiko,
Tshika a ri ambi i vho nga thama,
Mulanawe itali e si muvhulahi.

[This is the time that exposes sluggards,
While hardworkers are distinguished by their sweat,
Not to mention the dirt has become like a friend,
Indeed, one who eats with you is not a murderer.]

In times when Vhavenda relied heavily on agriculture for survival, anybody in the family old enough to work in the ploughing fields had to wake up early to go and cultivate the fields. It was unnecessary to explain the importance of hard work because that was the main means to supplement a family income and sustain livelihoods. To put it bluntly, those who did not work automatically did not have anything to reap at harvest time. To hasten the cultivation, the more hands on the hoes, the better. This is why the poet says even children were taken along by their mothers to go and work in the fields. The principle instilled in these children was that ‘those who work hard will have something to eat’. Thus, the summer season also became a time of inculcating strong work ethics in the children. This strong work ethic would see them through all the seasons of life, even outside the ploughing fields. The summer reveals not only the hard workers but also the indolent people, as the above stanzas indicate.

*Mutamalunako u mbo dala Venḡa tshilimo,
Ngeno mutamandele na tshilimo a tshi ya Thononda
Hune ḡambi dzi tshi imba dze davha ndi ḡa Vho-Nyambilu,
Mushumi ri tshi mu vhona tshilembeni.*

[One who delights in beauty should visit Venḡa in summer,
Whereas the one who desires neatness and summer goes to Thononda
Where expert musicians sing and say the work party belongs to Nyambilu,
With the worker seen where there are hoes.]

The idea that summer ushers in a beautiful scenery in nature is still reinforced in the above stanza. Although summer is a season of delights among the Vhavenda, it does not mean bliss for every Muvenda. The same summer sun that provides perfect conditions for plants’ photosynthesis and people’s cultivation of fields is a cause for concern in Maḡadzhe’s (1985b:16–17) poem “Tshilimo” (Summer).

*A hu na vhushavhelo tshilimo;
Mahatsini hu na vha kokovhaho;
Muḡavhani hu ḡarula nayo;
Mirunzuni hu khuda zwi shushaho;
Maḡini ndi u bikwa tshivholovholo.*

[There is no place to run to in summer;
In the grass, there are snakes;
The sand peels off the layers of feet;

In the shade hides frightening things;
The water is like a simmering pot.]

Vha ṅayo milenzhe ndi mukoki;
Vha thovho milenzhe ndi mabaphanya;
A hu na vhuyo tshilimo,
Vhuyo ho ima fhethu huthihi.
Zwa shango ndi muhoyo.

[The bare-footed have their feet turned into biltong;
Those who put on shoes have feet palmed;
There is nowhere to go in summer,
The only plausible direction to take is to stand in one place.
Things of the world are but ironic.]

A hu na tshifhinga tshilimo;
Nga matsheloni mulilo ndi tshidoda;
Nga masiari ndi yone ṅanḁo;
Nga madekwana ndi ḽone biko;
Vhusiku nguvho dzi nga mapele.

[There is no time in summer;
The morning fire increases the heat;
The afternoon is a fiery furnace;
In the evening, the sweat comes;
In the night, blankets are like leprosy.]

According to the poet, the heat in summer is almost unbearable. The poet says summer is so hot that there is no place where one can go and get relief. The water is not helpful because it is also boiling due to the scorching heat in summer. This poem is the complete opposite of Mashuwa's poem where summer was praised and appreciated for bringing beautiful scenery in the land. Whereas in Mashuwa's poem rainfall is celebrated, in Maḁadzhe's poem it seems summer is a season of drought. Whereas Mashuwa celebrates the greenery across the Venḁa land, Maḁadzhe is concerned about the snakes that slither in the grass. For Mashuwa, summer is a season of refreshment and playfulness but for Maḁadzhe, summer is a season of restlessness, danger and dissatisfaction. It is as if Maḁadzhe cannot wait for the summer season to end. The contrasting dimensions between Mashuwa's poem and Maḁadzhe's poem highlight that although seasons may occur at the same time, it does not necessarily mean that people share the same experiences about them.

One may even elevate this to a ‘philosophical’ dimension and say that seasons are different for different people; in a season where one have the best time of their lives, another might be going through horrendous experiences; one might be celebrating a new marriage while the other is going through a divorce; one might be welcoming a newborn baby while another has just buried their child. Such are the contrasting dimensions of the seasons of life. From summer, the Vhavenda’s calendar cycles into autumn (*tshifhefho*).

5.16.2 Autumn in Venda

The autumn season is described by Ngwana (1958:56) in his poem titled “Tshifhefho” (Autumn), which reads as follows:

*Tsho swika tshifhinga tsha majiwa manzhi;
Nḡala yo ri shengedzaho i vho fhira-vho;
Masimuni zwi ri ḡifhelaho ndi zwinzhi,
Ndi dzimphwe na mabvani zwi ḡifhesaho.*

[The time of abundant food has arrived;
The famine that tortured is passing;
What we enjoy from the fields is plenty;
It is the sweetest leopard orchid and watermelons.]

*Vhana vha vuwa vha tshi ḡa zwikoli na maranga;
Ḥi tshi ḡavha vha ya mazwiluni na maembeni;
Ndi tshone tshifhinga tsha muroho wa phuri.
Vhuphani vha tshi koḡela nga lunonya.*

[Children have mealies and green melons for breakfast;
When the sun has fully come out, they look for wilde mispel and custard apples;
It is the time of the pumpkin vegetable.
At Vhuphani, they add caraway seeds to their recipes.]

*Vhasidzana asivhaḡaa! nzieni miḡangani-!
Vhatukana asivhaḡaa! vha ya ḡotshini thavhani-!
Ndi tshone tshifhinga tsha Lambamai fhanu Venda,
Vhomme vha shuma vha sa tsha dzindelwa nga vhana.*

[There are the girls! looking for locusts among the reeds!
There are the boys! looking for honeycombs on the mountains!
It is the month of April here in Venda,
The mother work without being irritated by the children.]

*Nga madekwana vhuswa a vhu tsha vhuya ha fhela;
Vhana vho fura madzanga o d̄iswaho nga tshifhefho;
Hu ʒiwa mphwe na mabvani, ha gotshwa zwikoli;
Vhana vha ita khube vha rengenyela vho takala.*

[In the evenings, porridge is rarely finished;
Children are full of dainties brought by autumn;
They eat leopard orchids and watermelons, and grill mealies;
Children play their games joyfully.]

*Kholomo masiari dzo ʒwa zwihorani dzi tshi fula;
Nga madekwana khamelo i d̄ala nga mafhi luraru;
A ri tsha vhuya ra amba, hu bikwa nga luvhisi,
Aiwa vha hashu, hu kha d̄i lilwani fhanu Venda?*

[Cattle spent their days at the pastures grazing;
In the evening, a milk pail is filled thrice with milk;
We no longer say anything, fresh milk is used to cook,
Brethren, what else do we need here in Venda?]

*Vho limaho vho lindela u kaṅa mavhele avho;
Zwiṅṅari na maḍulu zwo no thomwa u ʒokwa kale
Maneto na mabiko a tshilimo ro no a hangwa kale;
Ndi tshone tshifhinga tshi takadzaho nga madzanga.*

[Those who ploughed are waiting for their crops;
Their storehouses are already standing upright
Exhaustion and sweat from summer are already forgotten;
It is the joyful time of dainties.]

5.16.3 Winter in Venda

Needless to say, winter is the coldest season of the year, falling between autumn and spring. Oftentimes, falling snow and freezing temperatures are seen. It is also common for strong winds to blow during this season. In Venda, winter generally lasts for three months from June to August. Due to the freezing cold temperatures, people in Venda not only wear thick clothes during winter but also long for the heat of the sun, as Munzhedzi's poem (in Ngwana, 1958:101–102) "Duvha Vhuriha" (Sun in Winter) confirms:

*Ahaa! wo d̄a iwe duvha ʒavhuḍi;
Iwe nguvho ya vhasiwana;
Ro u lila musi u tshee vhubvaḍuvha;*

*Iḡa u thathe phepho ri takale;
Riḡe na vhana vhashu ri ḡiphḡe;
Iḡa, iḡa u ri tshidze kha murotho hoyu.*

[Ahaa! you have arrived good sun;
You, the blanket of the poor;
We longed for you while you were still in the east;
Come and chase the cold away so that we can be happy;
So that we and our children will enjoy ourselves;
Come, come and enliven us in this cold.]

*Ro u lila hu tshee vhusiku;
Hu tshi rothola hu tshi tou thwee!
Na mmbwa vhusiku hu vhukwaikwai;
I tshi i muḡani ye i guḡani;
Zwe vhutoto nga phepho,
Ya ima ye, "Wuu-! wuu-! wuu-!"*

[We longed for while it was still night;
When it was as cold as ice!
Even the dog kept howling throughout the night;
When it reached the courtyard, it felt it had found refuge,
But still, the cold persisted,
And it kept howling, "Wuu".]

In the above poem, the poet appreciates the low heat sunlight because it is a source of warmth in winter. Hence, basking in the sun during winter is common in Venda. When where there is no sun during the day, sitting by the fireside becomes a necessity. The value of fire in winter is appreciated by Ngwana (1958:29) in the poem "Mulilo vhuriha" (Fire in winter).

*Kha vha vhase mulilo Vho Nyamuofhe ndi ore,
Ndo tou oma nga phepho ya afha nnḡa;
Ndo bva nga matsheloni u ḡolela zwilibana.*

[Nyamuofhe, kindle the fire so that I can warm myself,
The cold outside has frozen me;
I went out in the morning to check the snares.]

*Kha vha vhase mulilo Vho Nyamuofhe ndi ore,
Hai-! Hai-! u ḡifha hani mulilo vhuriha?
Iwe vhana ni yafhi ni tshi sokou vuwa?*

*A hu na vhudzulo hafha tshifangani;
Todani khuni ni yo vhasa mulilo khoroni.*

[Nyamuofhe, kindle the fire so that I can warm myself,
No! No! how satiating is the fire in winter?
Hey children, why do you just wake up, where are you going?
There is no space in kitchen;
Look for firewood and kindle the fire in the court.]

*Aiwa mashaka, phepho namusi yo dia,
Ndo vha ndi sa koni na u vala mulomo;
Ndo tshimbila hothe-hothe ndo nyenama.
A thi funi na u tsirwa nga muthu.
Ndi toda uri ndi u ore ndi u pfe.*

[Oh well, brethren, the cold has hit today,
I could not even close my mouth;
I went everywhere with my teeth exposed.
I do not want anyone to block me from the heat.
I want the fire to warm to my satisfaction.]

Winter is not only a very cold season in Venda but is also a season of dormancy, particularly for crops. Some plants die, leaving their seeds, and others merely cease growing until spring. Many animals also become dormant, especially those that hibernate, which may explain why the poet mentions the necessity of checking the snares even when it is freezing. Seemingly, the poet caught nothing because there is no mention of any prey caught by the poet. Winter then is mainly viewed as an unpleasant season in Venda. This is why people cannot wait for the arrival of a new season, spring.

5.16.4 Spring in Venda

Spring comes after winter and foreshadows summer in Venda. In spring, days become longer, unlike in winter, and the weather becomes better and warmer. The coming of spring is evidenced by the appearance of the buds on the trees and bushes. In his poem “Luṭavula” (spring), Ngwana (1958:80) describes the spring season in this manner:

*Shango lashu a si u naka haḷo;
Miedzi na dzithavha zwo ḷi nakisa lothe;
Miri i thomaho u tuma lurere yo ḷi nakisa.*

*Vhuriha ho no fhira na zwililo zwaho;
Tshikona tsha vhoḡdula tsho no thoma-vho,
Zwoḡthe zwi tshilaho zwo vha zwo lindela Luḡavula.*

[Our land is truly beautiful;
Valleys and mountains have all made it all the more beautiful;
Trees that have just started to bud have made it beautiful.
Winter has passed with its sorrows;
Frogs have also started croaking,
All living things were waiting for Spring.]

*U tseḡefhala ha shango hu vho sunguvhela-vho;
Makole a mvula a vho thoma u vhoneala-vho;
Hatsi ho lindela u vuswa nga mvula ya Luḡavula.
Vhathu vha vho thoma u lugisa malembe avho;
Makhulu vho no thoma u nanga mbeu dzavho;
Zwoḡthe zwi tshilaho zwo vha zwo lindela Luḡavula;*

[The dryness of the land has also started to disappear;
Rain clouds have also started to appear;
The grass waits to be awakened by the Spring rain.
People are starting to prepare their hoes;
Grandmother/father has started to choose her seeds;
All living things were waiting for Spring.]

*I a penya, i a penya ya dovha ya vhea mutsindo;
Aiwa, u swika ha tshilimo ho no vha tsini-tsini.
Miri yo no vha na maḡari madenya avhuḡdivhuḡi;
Fhasi ha miri heyi ri wana mirunzi yavhuḡi;
Minukho ya maluvha o no tou vha one madzanga ashu
Zwoḡthe zwi tshilaho zwo vha zwo lindela Luḡavula.*

[Lightnings, Lightnings are also accompanied by thunders;
Oh well, the arrival of summer is drawing closer and closer.
Trees already have thick and very beautiful leaves;
Under these trees we find good shades;
The smell of flowers has become our delights
All living things were waiting for Spring.]

The coming of spring essentially means rebirth, that is, the rebirth of the nature in Venda. During this season, numerous animals wake up from hibernation and breed. Birds also return to their nests because of favourable temperatures. According to the poet, the appearance of beautiful flowers is one of the signs that spring has arrived.

Furthermore, a lot of plants and trees are growing and new, bright green leaves appear on them, bringing new and fresh colours. Thunderstorms also come, but not for long. Milubi's (1986a:71) poem "Lurere lwo dzhena" (The bud has arrived) praises the arrival of the spring season in Venda in this manner:

*Vhuriha ho khebuwa namusi
Ha ralo ha siela lurere ndila
Mbilu dzashu nga dzi shanduke notshi, dzi shanduke magoñoño
A no ñoña na maluvha othe a bonyolowaho
Dzi pembele, dzi tshene dakaloni; vhutshena hadzo,
Mukhaha u sale murahu.*

[Winter has passed today
And by so doing, made a way for the buds
Our hearts must turn into bees, they must become buzzing insects
Which feed on all flowers that bloom
Let them celebrate, be bright in joy; and their whiteness,
Surpass that of milk.]

*Swiswi lo khebuwa asizwi
Vhujā vhusiku he ra țolou pupudzika khaho
Ri vho hu landula nga mulanga muswa
Vhupfa hashu na vhumuthu hashu honohu
Ho awela u țolou anewa sa mukusule kha matanda na mađaba.*

[Finally, darkness has passed
That night that had constantly groping in it
We now shun it because of a new covenant
Our feelings and humanity
Have rested from always being spread on wood and rocks like dried
vegetables.]

*Lurere lwo dzhena, vhuriha ho ri u tshenuwa; ha nzwatimela.
Mbilu dzashu dzo awela
Hone u swoțelwa hu si na musi
Dza mbo awela hone u lelemela
Ha nyamulemalema swiswini
Namusi mbilu dzi zanyuka dzo thanyisa milenzhe
Litshani dzi dikande, ndi kale dzi thambuloni ya vhudzimba
Namusi lufhalafhala mbilu dzi vho devha, dzi songo țumbulwa dakaloni.*

[The bud has come, after winter was astonished; it sunk into oblivion.
Our hearts have been relieved

From being pinched endlessly
They have rested from the floating
Of bats in the darkness
Today, our hearts walk energetically
Let them enjoy themselves, they have in hunting struggle for so long
Today our hearts blow the sable horn, may they not be snatched from joy.]

Milubi's poem reinforces the idea that spring is indeed a time of renewal for nature. This renewal is evinced by the appearance of flowers that blossom after bulbs or buds. New, green and fresh leaves appear on the trees and bushes, and the grass is becoming greener every day. The arrival of spring comes with relief from the wintry season that has just passed. Spring also encourages the Vhavanḁa to prepare for farming. They are also excited because the greener pastures mean that their livestock will have food, breed and reproduce in large numbers. Overall, the Vhavanḁa praises months and seasons, but they also know how to respond to each season and what they ought to do with the conditions brought by each month and season. The discussion of months and seasons in Venḁa also compels one to offer a brief reflection on some aspects of Tshivendanḁa star lore.

5.17. STAR LORE IN TSHIVENḁA CULTURE

On a starry night, the sky offers a dark canvas on which millions of stars of varying sizes paint their art to the awe of humankind (Mokgoatšana and Mashego, 2020). Millions move without colliding; others blink, while some appear static. At a Mapulana initiation school the initiates are told the stories of the stars (Mokgoatšana and Mashego, 2020). Milubi's (1986a:40) poem "Nḁaledzi Vhusiku" (Stars at Night) frames our discussion on some aspects of Tshivendanḁa star lore.

*Vhusiku musi swiswi ʃo ri bodobodo
Ni a penya na vhangima
Mbone dzone dzine dza funga
Ni funga nga u sielisana
Tshedza tshine na taidza
Tshi mbo shanduka zwiseo zwa zwigidigidi
Zwa vhana vha mme.*

[In the heart of darkness during the night
You shine and stand out
Lamps that light up

You light up in intervals
The light that twinkles
Transforms into a thousands of laughs
Of children who trace their descent from one mother.]

Mbone dzine nwana wa muthu a funga
Dzi shanduka zwitaitai
Zwi no taidza zwa dzima
Ha vho sala hu swiswi
Hune muthu a pupudzika tshiseo tshi sa vhonali
A fhedza nga u pungaila sa tshixele tshi mutsini.

[The lamps that a child of human being lights
Become like wicks
That blink and then turn off
And only darkness remains
Where a human being gropes, with their laughter invisible
And ends up being blinded like an infant in the smoke.]

To the researcher's knowledge there is not much documented on Tshivenda star lore. However, stars feature prominently in Tshivenda folklore, myths, folktales, poetry and songs. The Southern Cross (Crux) and the two bright Pointers (Alpha and Beta Centuari) are probably the most recognisable of the southern stars, and they feature prominently African star lore. In Tshivenda traditions, these stars are called *dzithudwa*, (the giraffes). The bright stars of Crux are male giraffes, and the two Pointers are female. The Vhenda called the fainter stars of the Southern Cross, *thudwana* (little giraffe). The long axis of the Southern Cross points towards a bright star called Achenar. This star is called *tshinanga* in Tshivenda, which means 'little horn'. Brighter still than Achenar is Canopus, one of the brightest stars in the night sky. In Tshivenda tradition, the first person to see *nanga* in the morning sky, heralding winter in May, would climb a hill and blow the *phalaphala* (black sable antelope horn), receiving a cow as prize. Venus is the evening and morning star. The evening star, Venus, is visible from time to time in the west after sunset. When it appears in the evening sky, the Vhenda call it *khumbela tshilalelo* (asking for supper).

Comets and meteors (sometimes called shooting stars) are regarded as signs of important events in Tshivenda culture. When the Vhenda saw a meteor, they would say that Raluvhimba was shooting across the sky. That Raluvhimba is linked

to stars in Tshivenda is hinted at by Matshili (1967:49) in his poem “Masase” (Bright Morning Star).

*Hee mirafho na mavhuthu
Vhuṭali no vhu isa'fhi?
Nḡivho yaṅu yo lala'fhi?
Zwisikwa nga Mwali ni nga zwi vhalana?*

[Hey, generations and multitudes of people
Where is your wisdom?
Where has your knowledge slept?
Do you think you can number Mwali's creations?]

*No kundwa nga ṅaledzi dza ṭaḡulu,
Lavhelesani ṭaḡulu hu madekwana,
Ho tshena he' wee, hu' ṅedzi-ṅedzi-ṅedzi,
Ndi ṅaledzi dza ṭaḡulu mutewa nga Raluvhimba.*

[You were unable to count the stars in the sky,
Look at the sky in the evening,
It's so white, it's all twinkles, twinkles, twinkles,
These are the heavenly stars founded by Raluvhimba.]

*Ehee! Mwali o ita vhuṭolo,
O sika ṅaledzi khulwane kha dzoṭhe,
Yone Masase tshedza tsha mutsho,
I phashaa! Yone musuma-mutsho.*

[Oh yes! Mwali did wondrous things,
He created the greatest star of them all,
Masase, the actual light of the dawn,
It's so bright! It heralds the arrival of dawn.]

*Ye swiswi tsiruwa hu dzhene tshedza,
Vhuriha i ṭaha na tshilimela,
Ya tshi swoga, sa sambi ṭa kholomo,
Zwa endedzana sa mukegulu na mukalaha.*

[It commands the darkness to shift so that light may come,
In winter, it appears with the Pleiades,
It shepherds it, like a herd of cattle,
They accompany each other like an old man and an old woman.]

*Vhuriha i vhudzisa mupfumi na mushai,
Ye' nguvho ndi nngana?*

*Mushai o hwetekana, nguvho ndi tshikapa,
Mupfumi o tou ingekanya.*

[In winter, it asks both the rich and the poor,
And says, how many blankets [do you have]?
The poor has folded themselves, the blankets is too short,
The rich have piled blankets.]

In this poem the poet is concerned because people are indifferent to the beauty and meaning of the stars. He considers their indifference to the beauty and messages of the stars as a lack of wisdom and knowledge. In the poet's mind, people should respond in reverence to Mwali/Nwali/Raluvhimba whenever they see the brightest morning shooting star *masase*. The star is so deeply appreciated and awe-inspiring that it is not uncommon to hear a person praising a beautiful or handsome lover as *masase*. In this way, this Venus morning star is ascribed exquisite qualities in Tshivenda culture. The poet also mentions that *masase* appears in winter with *tshilimela* (digging star; Pleiades). *Tshilimela* appears for the first time in June and is believed to symbolise new life. Stars have meaning in Tshivenda. There are also other stars in Tshivenda astronomical lore that require intense and thorough discussions, such as the following stars:

- Arcturus, the bright northern stars that appear early in the morning hours or before sunrise in November at the time women began their day's work;
- Capella, a very bright star that never rises very high above the northern horizon in Southern Africa. When it is visible, African people, AmaZulu in particular, know that the first flowers will bloom with the start of the rain season;
- Altair, another bright star that lies toward the north;
- Castor and Pollux, two bright stars of Gemini;
- The small but striking northern constellation Delphinus (the dolphin);
- Spica, a lone bright star in the modern constellation Virgo;
- Regulus, the brightest star of Leo;
- Orion's Belt that is known as *makhali* (the rainbow);
- The Milky Way (*mulalavhungu*), believed to be the path along which the ancestor spirits walk;
- *Matshotshonono*, a row, as of cattle, trees and stars;

- *Yavhadinḡa*, a star seen in the east some time before sunrise, preceding the morning star *masase*;
- Sirius that is called *Tshilimo*; and
- *Khohamutsho*, whose name means puller of the dawn.

5.18. SECTION DEDUCTIONS

Although there is a prevailing narrative that selenology and, to a large extent, astronomy are attributed to the Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei, who used a telescope to see four planets, African people did not need a telescope to see planets (Mokgoatšana and Mashego, 2020). Mokgoatšana and Mashego (2020) state that our ancestors never invented telescopes, not because they had little interest in discovering galaxies and planets lying billions of light years away but because for them seeing was not believing; on the contrary, “our ancestors did not invent [telescopes] because they were on speed dial. They invented faith instead of telescopes” (Mokgoatšana and Mashego, 2020:3). The Vhavenda do not only understand times and seasons, but they also know how to interpret the movements of the moon and the stars, and know exactly what to do at every moment and season. Thus, for them the universe did not exist merely for aesthetic purposes but it contained coded signals. These were not explored in-depth because of the present researcher’s current capabilities. There remains much more to be explored on the subject of astronomy and other related fields in Tshivenda lore.

5.19 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an analysis of selected Tshivenda poetry on the following aspects: Marriage rites; traditional rites; traditional dances; the selected poets’ perceptions of traditional leaders; portrayals of men and women; Tshivenda anthroponymy and onomastic creativity; Tshivenda cosmology, selenology and ethnoastronomy; Tshivenda months and seasons; and Tshivenda star lore. The next chapter presents the summary, findings, recommendations and conclusions of the whole study.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the summary, limitations, recommendations and conclusions of the study. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents the summary of the study in light of its aim and objectives. The second section provides the limitations of the study. The third section presents the recommendations of the study, and the last section concludes the study.

6.2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to examine how selected Tshivenda poetry reflects the Vhavenda people's selfhood, identity and culture.

6.2.1 First objective of the study

To fulfil the first objective of the study, it was found that the selected Vhavenda poets consider either God or their ancestors as the source of their selfhood, identity and culture. In fact, some poets derive their concept of selfhood, identity and culture from God, that is, Mwali/Nwali, whom they repeatedly link to the Judeo-Christian worldview. As a result, Jesus Christ is implicated as the sole gateway to God. Prayer and supplication are advanced as the means through which communion between God and the poets was/is sustained. The poets who embrace this worldview cannot imagine their life apart from God; hence, they believe that their origin, identity, purpose, potential and destiny come from God.

The poets who embrace the traditional (Africanist) Tshivenda religion largely connect their sense of selfhood, identity and culture to their living-dead (ancestors). Hence, ancestor veneration features quite prominently in their poetry. Furthermore, ritual performances, which are supervised by special intermediaries (traditional healers, the medium of *tshilombo* and the *makhadzi*), are acknowledged as enablers of communion with the ancestors. The selected poets present God and ancestors as responsible for human origin, identity, purpose and destiny. Whereas the poets who embrace Christianity find communion with God unimaginable without Jesus Christ as the mediator, the poets who embrace Tshivenda traditional religion consider their ancestors as indispensable intermediaries between them and God. Therefore,

African and European religions are presented as the hubs from which the selected Vhavenda poets articulate their sense of selfhood, identity and culture. The perpetual clash between European and African worldviews emerge from this, and the issue of 'intermediaries' is one of the main subjects of contention. Christianity does not consider ancestors intermediaries between God and people but in African traditional religion ancestors are regarded as the link between the two entities. One can add that within the Christian circle(s), African traditional religion is perceived as demonic, barbaric, heathen and antagonistic to what the Bible teaches as the only way to God. Rituals and other traditional performances, such as libations, initiations and dance, are interlaced with ancestor veneration by the adherents of the Tshivenda traditional religion and worldview. In the traditional poets' minds, the Tshivenda marriage and its attendant ceremonies are considered sacred only when they featured their ancestors' propitiation and goodwill. Poets who embrace the Christian worldview have Jesus Christ as central in all aspects of their lives. Their understanding of life and the afterlife is framed and influenced by biblical teachings. The foregoing details summarise the essential aspects that the selected Vhavenda poets thematise in their poetry as delineations of the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture.

6.2.2 Second objective of the study

Continuing from the two main streams that feed the selected Vhavenda poets' articulation of selfhood, identity and culture, namely notions of theocentricity and anthropocentricity, the poets also express the need to be assigned the prerogative to agentively articulate their own sense of self-identification and cultural representation. As indicated in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.3), the poets' agitations for self-identification and representation are a poignant portrayal of the Vhavenda's collective need to move from the margins to the centre of discourse on identity and culture. For the poets, this need is etched in the desire to capture the stark and naturalistic depictions of their cultural consciousness and struggle for liberation. Therefore, a poem became the route to the truth of the circumstances in which the poets lived, and possibly still live, in South Africa.

The poets' linkage of identity, memory, home and renaissance bolsters the idea that art for the Muvenda has always been a communal activity and never a private contemplation. The poets' longings for the Vhavenda to return to ancient Matongoni

(their ancestral home where they communed with Mwali) were not only intended to highlight the fact that *identity* is always linked to *place* but also to inform the reader that the Vhavanḁa have a history and a place that they view as their origin. Matongoni is submitted by some poets as the Vhavanḁa's place of origin.

The poets' use of 'I' in the collective sense is also linked to the foregoing notion, and it is meant to protest against the cultural emasculation and malnutrition brought by the imposition of foreign culture during the colonial and apartheid eras. It is as if the selected Vhavanḁa poets produce their poetry to reclaim cultural autonomy. This is evinced in the poets' encapsulation of the Vhavanḁa's mythical understanding that water is important. It was noted that the Vhavanḁa have sacred sites within their region where they conjure up their ancestral spirits. Lake Fundudzi was selected as a case study to validate this assertion, and it was discussed that water spirits or *zwiḁuḁwane* occupy a significant place in the mythical understanding of the Vhavanḁa.

By implicating their own individual agitations for self-identification and (re)presentation, their ancestral home and mythological understanding, the selected poets aim to inform the reader that the Vhavanḁa have an identity, history, a philosophy of life and a sense of culture. This education is meant to inform, or at least remind, the reader that the Vhavanḁa have always had ways through which they exhibited their uniqueness and asserted their presence in the world. The advents of colonialism and apartheid sought to obliterate their long-standing essence and presence. Against this attempt at obliteration, the Vhavanḁa poets produce poetry to encourage the Vhavanḁa to take pride in their selfhood, identity and culture. In the process, the poets devise strategies through which they can encourage the Vhavanḁa to value their selfhood, identity and culture. These are the thematic concerns that the selected Vhavanḁa poets advance as indices into the Vhavanḁa's life and worldview in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts.

6.2.3 Third objective of the study

The analysis of the selected Tshivanḁa poetry helped the researcher meet the third objective of this study in four ways. The first strategy that the Vhavanḁa poets consider important in the expression of pride in one's selfhood, identity and culture is writing in an indigenous language. This is important considering the challenges that

Tshivenda orthographic development and literary outputs had to overcome (see Section 2.2.1). In this context it would have been easy and possibly rewarding to write in English or Afrikaans. Despite the imminent challenges, such as colonialists and missionaries looking down on the indigenous societies of South Africa (Mafela, 2018), the Vhavana poets insisted on committing their thoughts to paper in their mother tongue.

Another challenge that the Vhavana writers may or may have not envisaged at the time was that there would be a band of criticism that largely ignores indigenous writing and concentrates on literature written in colonial languages (Mokgoatšana, 1999). Postcolonial critics who cannot access the language of indigenous writing exclude such writings from the domain of postcolonial writing and criticism, creating indigenous texts as palimpsests on which the *other* writes their script. Experiences shared by indigenous literature are therefore often ignored, and only those expressed in the medium of European languages are valorised (Mokgoatšana, *Ibid*). As such, writers such as Rashaka Frank Ratshitanga, Tendamudzimu Robert Ratshitanga, Ralson Ramudzuli Matshili, Tshindane Mashuwa, Wilson Muligwe Ratshalingwa Sigwavhulimu, Ntshavheni Alfred Milubi, Richard Nndwayamaṭo Maḍadzhe, Kanakana Yvonne Ladzani, and Daniel Malivhadza Ngwana, among others, who write in indigenous languages are often replaced by African writers who write in European languages since the latter are understandable to the foreign 'ear'. And yet, they still write vigorously in their mother tongue. The researcher selected texts written in an indigenous language, in this case Tshivenda, in an attempt to encourage considerations of such texts in Afrocentric and postcolonial analyses of African literature.

The second way in which the selected Vhavana poets encourage their kin folk to take pride in their selfhood, identity and culture is by challenging the meta-narratives of colonialism and apartheid. Apartheid mythology thrived on the inferiorisation, racialisation, disenfranchisement, displacement, alienation, and brutalisation of African people. Furthermore, apartheid also prospered on plundering local knowledge, resources and land. By plundering land, it distorted the distinction between home and exile. Consequently, indigenes were exiled in their own country and experienced no freedom in the strict sense of the word. Forced removals and police harassment shattered the concept of home among the indigenes. Home, that

place of security to which indigenes felt attached, bound and fixed, became a place to experience oneself as *other*, an outsider, and not connected to the body politic of the country (Mokgoatšana, 1999). Vhavenḁa poets are mainly concerned with anomalies where indigenes had been reduced to aliens without political and economic power. Through the barrel of the pen, the Vhavenḁa poets try to transcend the boundaries set by apartheid and to challenge the evil and authority of apartheid discourse. Vhavenḁa poets, such as Milubi and Ratshiṽanga, permeate their poetry with protest against injustice, oppression and dehumanisation.

The third method the Vhavenḁa poets consider effective in reviving pride in one's selfhood, identity and culture is by demystifying the distortions of the history of African people. The distortions thrive on the lie that African people have no history before their encounters with colonialists. Against this lie the selected texts (which also thematise precolonial Tshivhenḁa lore) challenge the meta-narratives of apartheid and provide counter hegemonic discourses that are geared towards unsettling the authority of apartheid praxis. For instance, the Vhavenḁa poets, particularly those who espouse the Africanist worldview, emphasise that the Vhavenḁa in particular and African people in general had a concept of God and communed with God prior to the arrival of the European missionaries. The Vhavenḁa poets' allusions to their ancestral home, beliefs and timeless legends, to name but a few aspects, also reflect the fact that history has always formed part of African lore. In their reflections, the poets make no reference to Europe being the sole custodian of civilisation (whatever that means!), particularly the civilisation of African people. It is therefore safe to assert that the works demystify the distortions of the history of African people.

The fourth strategy is connected to the former because after demystifying the distortions of history, the poets propose an alternative approach to the study of African identity and culture. This approach depends on resisting orthodox history and considering the multifaceted windows from which African selfhood, identity, history and discourse can be gleaned.

6.2.4 Fourth objective of the study

According to Asante (1998:137):

Afrocentricity is the most complete philosophical totalization of the African being-at-the-centre of his or her existence. It is not merely an artistic or literary movement or an individual or collective quest for authenticity; it is above all the total use of method to effect psychological, political, social, cultural, and economic change. The Afrocentric idea reaches beyond decolonizing the mind.

For Afrocentrists then, 'Blackness' is more than a biological fact; it is more than a colour: It functions as a commitment to a historical project that places the African person back on the centre, and as such "it becomes an escape to sanity" (Asante, *Ibid*:137). Asante (*Ibid*) further says that when the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o gave up writing in English to write in Gikuyu, he was on a path to Afrocentricity. Implicit in Asante's remark is the idea that Africans' reclamation of the centre includes expressing themselves in their indigenous languages. Afrocentrists are therefore antagonistic to the 'Europeanisation' of human consciousness masquerading as a universal will (Asante, *Ibid*). It is within the spectrum of Afrocentricity that the present researcher proposes 'ethno-personalism' as a philosophical consideration in the analysis of indigenous literature and as a fulfilment of the fourth objective of the study.

To fulfil the fourth objective of the study, the researcher broadly provided sociological background in the analyses of the selected poems because the researcher viewed the poets' discourse from within their culture. Hence, an emic criticism that is derived from the culture itself and is capable of speaking to the discourse in the language of the culture is proposed as a theoretical postulation that future researchers can consider in their analyses of selfhood, identity and culture in Tshivenda poetry. In essence, ethno-personalism calls into being the need for an internal understanding, which is still an African-based critical method, free from the invasion of Eurocentric social sciences that tend to insure a peculiar universality of European views (cf. Asante, 1998). Ethno-personalism remains applicable in the domains of both ethics and aesthetics as long as the critic bases their criticism on both the cultural and historical bases of African peoples' discourse. The central thesis is that one cannot use ethno-personalism as a critical method if one is ignorant of African cultural and historical bases.

6.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of this study were:

- What are the essential aspects that the selected Vhavenda poets thematise in their poetry as delineations of the Vhavenda's concept of selfhood, identity and culture?
- Which thematic concerns do the selected Vhavenda poets advance as significant indices into the Vhavenda life and worldview in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts?
- What are the strategies that the selected Vhavenda poets deploy to galvanise their kin folks towards embracing and celebrating their own selfhood, identity and culture?
- What are the new theoretical postulations that may be proposed for application in future analyses of selfhood, identity and culture in Tshivenda poetry?

The questions were answered in the fulfilment of the research objectives, as discussed in the previous section (6.2).

6.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher encountered the following limitations while conducting this study:

- The first limitation was insufficient material (texts) on the traditional (oral) forms of Tshivenda. Only two texts, namely *Vhakale Vha Hone* (Ngwana, 1958) and *Zwiala zwa Venda* (Matshili, 1967) represented the traditional forms of Tshivenda poetry. A wide range of Tshivenda traditional poetry would have helped to provide a broader understanding of the Vhavenda's concept of selfhood, identity and culture prior to colonialism, missionary showering and apartheid in South Africa. A broader set of raw data would have enabled the researcher to trace the thematic patterns of the traditional poets on aspects of selfhood, identity and culture. Notwithstanding, the two texts provided insightful poems on the Vhavenda's initiation ceremonies, marriage, myths, drums, music, cosmology and selenology, among other themes. A wide range of texts on these aspects would have highlighted ideological convergences and/or divergences among the Vhavenda across epochs.

- Prior research on Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture, particularly focused on how these aspects are reflected in literature, is quite limited. Citing and referencing prior studies on either of the aforementioned aspects would have helped fortify the literature review as well as provide theoretical foundations for the topic under scrutiny. This limitation therefore presented the need for further studies on how Tshivenda poetry in particular reveals the Vhavenda's selfhood, identity and culture.
- This study focused on only one genre of Tshivenda literature, that is, poetry. Even with its focus restricted to Tshivenda poetry, only a few (16) poetry texts were selected for analysis. There are still other Vhavenda poets whose works should be considered when deliberating on the themes of selfhood, identity and culture of the Vhavenda.
- The primary texts analysed were published from the 1950s to 2006. There is still a need to investigate if there are any poetry texts that have been published from 2006 to the present (2022). If any, the focus of future studies should be on whether or not such texts comment on selfhood, identity and culture. If no Tshivenda poetry are being published, the causes for this dormancy should be investigated.
- The researcher did not conduct any interviews with the selected poets because this thesis was purely a desktop study. Although some of the poets have already passed on, interviews with the living poets would have contributed immensely to a deeper understanding of each poet's formative influences and thematic inclinations. Furthermore, interviews with ethnographers, historians, anthropologists, folklorists, cultural advisers, researchers, lecturers, teachers and other experts on Tshivenda culture and the Vhavenda people would have abetted the researcher's analysis and discussion.
- While the researcher tried his best to avoid bias in the analysis of the texts, it is possible that he may not have succeeded. The internal conflict arising from the need to avoid bias throughout this study was compounded by the fact that the researcher's first language is Tshivenda and the crux of this study is the Vhavenda people, their selfhood, identity and culture. It is possible that the researcher may have expressed biased views because of this cultural

background and influence. To minimise bias, the researcher relied heavily on secondary sources to corroborate most of the claims made in the study. Some of these sources, however, were produced during the colonial/apartheid period by European missionaries and ethnographers who perceived African cultures and traditions as uncivilised. This is indicative of the need for the Vhavenḁa to publish credible and accurate knowledge about themselves rather than rely on misguided and racist publications about them.

6.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study merely scraped the surface of the broad fields of Afrocentric and postcolonial discourses. Needless to say, so much more can be written and said about Vhavenḁa, and such a task should be executed by a variety of experts, such as historians, scholars, folklorists, researchers, ethnographers, anthropologists, and archaeologists, and preferably by those who are acquainted with the Vhavenḁa. Thus, subsequent research should build on the foundation laid by this study. The following is therefore recommended:

- Further studies on the Vhavenḁa's selfhood, identity and culture should incorporate interviews with the Vhavenḁa folklorists, anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, cultural advisers, researchers and other relevant stakeholders to gain more insight into the foregoing aspects.
- Interviews with the Vhavenḁa poets should be considered to gain knowledge on the poets' formative influences, and authorial and ideological inclinations. This will help determine the source(s) of their content.
- Curricula at South African institutions of teaching and learning should be Africanised. This can be attained by ensuring that modules on history, cultural studies, linguistics, literature, and folklore have Africa and Africans in the centre as opposed to Africa and Africans featured as subsets of European history and consciousness.
- All South African universities should consider offering degrees on indigenous knowledge systems from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. This would not only be a practical demonstration of the Africanisation of an African university but also an opportunity to tap into the vast field of indigenous epistemology and pedagogy.

- Libraries, museums, archives and other centres of knowledge must be established to promote and preserve knowledge produced solely by Africans in areas of astronomy, history, archaeology, science, cosmology, cosmogony, anthropology, religion, and arts. These centres should build sustainable relationships with the communities they serve in order to keep in touch with the indigenes who might have knowledge worth transmitting to the next generations.
- Funding in the form of bursaries, sponsorships and scholarships should be provided to students and researchers to encourage research and publications of indigenous knowledge systems and production.
- Authors who write and publish in indigenous languages should be accorded the same, if not more, recognition as those who publish in European languages in the various spheres of discourse and literary criticisms.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This study concentrated on analysing poetry texts written in Tshivenda and also considered the prospects of marrying postcolonial discourse on African selfhood, identity and culture with Afrocentric discourse. The latter helped the researcher understand reality from an African epistemic inquiry as opposed to the universalising and totalising Eurocentric epistemology. Selected Tshivenda poetry texts were subjected to scrutiny, and what became clear was that Vhavenda poets use their texts as avenues to rediscover and articulate their selfhood, identity and culture.

Having come thus far, it is tempting to make absolute statements about the study. However, to speak of absolute statements is to create an impression that the researcher has the final word and that no voice can be heard after the researcher's absolute and conclusive statements. At this juncture, the researcher prefers the concept of 'post script' (cf. Mokgoatšana, 1999). Post script is preferred because this study is part of an ongoing debate in the Africological and postcolonial discourses.

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University of Limpopo

Department of Research Administration and Development

Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:

Anastasia.Ngobe@ul.ac.za

**TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS
COMMITTEE**

Date: 16 September 2020

PROJECT NO: TREC/09/2020 [NEI]

Title: Selfhood, Identity and Culture in Selected Tshivenda Poetry

Researcher: M Sebola

This serves to confirm that the abovementioned study involves secondary use of data and has no ethical implication. After review of the study protocol, the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) hereby grants the researcher permission to proceed with their research.

PROF P MASOKO

CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**



WORDPLAY EDITING

Copy Editor and Proofreader

Email: karien.hurter@gmail.com

Tel: 071 104 9484

Website: <http://wordplayediting.net/>

3 December 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to confirm that *Selfhood, Identity and Culture in Selected Tshivenda Poetry* by Moffat Sebola was edited by a professional language practitioner. It requires further work by the author in response to my suggested edits. I cannot be held responsible for what the author does from this point onward.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "KH", enclosed within a circular scribble.

Karien Hurter

