

## RIDING THE STORM OF CHANGE: MAKHADO, VENDA AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC (1864-1895)<sup>1</sup>

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Ach ja! Manchen Sonnenschein habe ich gesehen, aber auch manchen Sturm....(J)etzt weiss ich nicht: was war häufiger, der Sonnenschein oder der Sturm? Fast glaube ich - der letztere.

Adolf Schiel<sup>2</sup>

### Opsomming

#### **Aan die stuur in die storm van verandering: Makhado, Venda en die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (1864-1895)**

*Die Venda regeerder Makhado (?-1895) was een van die mees suksesvolle swart leiers in die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek gedurende die tweede helfte van die negentiende eeu. Sy regeringstyd is gekenmerk deur 'n fyn interaksie wat gehandhaaf is tussen strategiese politieke onderwerping en verset teen blanke heerskappy.*

*Terwyl die swart samelewing elders op die noordelike grensterrein aan spontane ineenstorting blootgestel was, as gevolg van blanke nedersetting, het die Venda staat onder Makhado gefloreer. Hy het as skerpsinnige en onverslane leier in 'n tydperk van intense verandering bly voortbestaan.*

*In die voordrag word gepoog om tydgenootlike sienings aan beide swart en blanke kant van Makhado weer te gee. Daar word aandag gegee aan sy styl van leierskap. Ook word gepoog om vas te stel watter faktore daartoe aanleiding gegee het dat hy vir meer as dertig jaar (1864-1895) aan die bewind kon bly.*

### 1. Introduction: Riding the storm

In his autobiography Adolf Schiel tells the story of a lively Basuto pony - Fanny - he received as a gift from the Venda ruler, Makhado.<sup>3</sup> Schiel, a civil servant of the South

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<sup>2</sup> Adolf Schiel, *23 Jahre Sturm und Sonnenschein in Südafrika* (Leipzig, 1902), p. 11. (Ah yes! I have seen a lot of sunshine and many storms... now I do not know which was more frequent, the sunshine or the storm? I almost believe the latter.)

<sup>3</sup> Schiel, *Sturm und Sonnenschein*, pp. 241-247.

African Republic, who is remembered for his authoritarian attitudes as native commissioner in the Zoutpansberg district, created in his narrative about the pony, a metaphor of power play and aggrandisement.<sup>4</sup> It is represented, in his historical self<sup>5</sup> by his thorough description of an alleged ability to remain seated on the back of the lively pony, until it was broken in. The identification of the particular metaphor in the history of the nineteenth century South African Republic (SAR), is perhaps far more relevant in respect of the Venda ruler, Makhado. It was he, more than any other indigenous ruler of his time, who could ride the storm of political change on the northern frontier of the South African Republic. For some reason Makhado's accomplishments are hardly acknowledged in the works on nineteenth century South African history. Perhaps it is as a result of the general lack of knowledge of the history of the Venda. Perhaps it is the result of a discourse of South African history, which was part of a colonial tradition. In this study an attempt will be made at recontextualising Makhado and the role he played, especially on the northern frontier of the South African Republic.

In this article an attempt will be made at presenting Makhado as he was, and still is perceived in Venda society. At the same time an effort is made to consolidate this perception with the traditional predominantly white interpretations of the ruler.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. General background

The dynamics of political change in the second half of nineteenth century Southern Africa was marked by a distinct tension between polarised forces. On a horizontal axis the Afrikaner Republics, in an effort to secure their continued independence, were forced into highly individualised relations with strong African states. Their ultimate aim was to maintain sovereign independence, despite unrelenting pressure for socio-economic and political change, prescribed by British expansionist ambitions. The vertical axis represents successive British governments and the colonies of the Cape and Natal. A dominant factor on this dynamic level was the rate and intensity of change, determined by constantly fluctuating interests in colonial expansion in Africa and the exigencies of potential economic benefits to be derived from participating more directly in the exploitation of the mineral deposits in the subcontinent. This formed the macro-stage for political interaction up to the end of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>4</sup> Dorothea Möller-Malan, *The chair of the Ramabulanas* (Central News Agency Ltd., n.p., 1953) p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> For more of this, see R. Smith, "Self-reflection and the self" in R. Porter (ed.), *Rewriting the self: Histories from the Renaissance to the present* (London, 1997), pp. 49-57.

<sup>6</sup> The study aims at seeking a symbiosis between black and white perspectives of the history of the Venda. It was to a large extent inspired by the exploratory work done by one of the authors of this article, Dr Henry Nemudzivhadi. See M.H. Nemudzivhadi, "The attempts by Makhado to revive the Venda kingdom 1864-1895" (PhD, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1998).

By the 1860s, on the eve of intensive mining operations in the South African interior, the South African Republic found itself in a precarious position. The inability of President M.W. Pretorius to make an impact in regional politics had disastrous consequences for the whites resident in the region north of the Vaal River. The South African Republic was unable to secure a share of the riches on the Diamond Fields. Its political leadership was also unable to engage constructively with foreign entrepreneurs, in gaining at least some kind of foothold in the process of industrial development aimed at opening up the potential gold wealth within the borders of the Transvaal.

In contrast to the Free State, which was gaining the upper hand in a power struggle against the mountain kingdom of Moshweshwe on the eastern frontier, the northern frontier of the South African Republic was marked by the near total elimination of a white settler presence.

As Britain intervened in the conflict between the Orange Free State and the Basuto state of Moshweshwe, transformations started taking place on the northern frontier of the South African Republic. Long and tiresome military operations in the south of the SAR weakened the northern defences of centres such as Schoemansdal and Potgietersrust. Ultimately this led to the temporary evacuation of whites on the far northern frontier.

In the 1870s the mining revolution manifested itself with the discovery of gold at Eersteling, south of the future administrative capital of Pietersburg (founded in 1886). Partly as a result of these discoveries, within the next decade, the Pedi kingdom of Sekhukhune was destined to go into decline. Other local African states, or polities, faced a similar fate before the end of the century. A strong black political presence hampered industrial activities, such as mining and the exploitation of forests and other natural resources. It also posed a threat to the development of white controlled settlements aimed at trading. Docile black communities could be brought into the ambit of white economic activities more effectively.

By contrast to almost all the African states forced into submission in the nineteenth century, the Venda of the Northern Transvaal, were able to maintain their political autonomy up to the end of the century. This was largely as a result of the role played by the ruler Makhado. He was, without a doubt, one of the outstanding figures on the political landscape of the northern frontier region.

Whilst British capitalists and imperialists were constantly at loggerheads with Paul Kruger's rural republic in order to secure complete control over the mineral wealth of the country, Makhado's astute leadership secured for him and his subjects an exceptional state of political sovereignty which could be maintained for more than thirty years.

### 3. Makhado and his times

After Ramabulana had regained his throne with the assistance of the Tlokwa and Louis Tregardt in 1836 he established himself at the royal residence at Tshirululuni. At the time a son was born to him by the name of Khakhu or Makhado.<sup>7</sup> His mother, Limani, according to custom, was supposed to have been married by Ramavhoya who Ramabulana had slain.<sup>8</sup> It did however not matter in terms of Venda law, as the betrothal beasts came from their father Mpofo. Furthermore, Ramabulana and Ramavhoya were brothers of the same mother, Nyamulanalwo. When the Voortrekkers, under the leadership of Andries Hendrik Potgieter, arrived in Venda in 1848, Makhado was still a young boy. He was probably born in 1840.<sup>9</sup>

In exchange for the services rendered, Ramabulana promised Tregardt a place of residence, and as a result the Voortrekkers of Potgieter in 1848 settled at Thivalalwe (Zoutpansbergdorp), later to be called Schoemansdal.<sup>10</sup>

The town became one of the major centres of the ivory trade in the interior of South Africa. Hunters from as far afield as Natal, the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State visited the northern frontier to participate in the elephant hunting activities. In due course Portuguese merchants from Mozambique established shops in the village.<sup>11</sup>

The Boers needed the services of the blacks for hunting elephants. Consequently Ramabulana's subjects were employed as gun carriers and later also as hunters.<sup>12</sup> The black hunters had one major advantage over their white counterparts. They had a resilience to malaria - a disease which was the scourge of the whites before a cure was found in quinine.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Oral History Interview (OHI): Aaron Makaulule, (about 82 years old), Vuvha, 29 December 1982.

<sup>8</sup> N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), *Contributions towards Venda history, religion and tribal ritual* (Department of Native Affairs, Ethnological Publications III, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1932), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Boeyens' research suggests that by 1894 Makhado was about 50 years of age. J.C.A. Boeyens, "Die konflik tussen die Venda en die Blankes in Transvaal 1864-1869" in *Archives Yearbook for South African History*, 53, 2 (1990), footnote 44 on p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Möller-Malan, *Ramabulanas*, p. 126; E.H. Mudau and M.M. Motenda, *Ngomalungundu na Ramabulana* (n.p., n.d.), p. 159; Boeyens, "Konflik tussen Venda en Blankes", p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> R. Wagner, "Zoutpansberg: The dynamics of a hunting frontier, 1848-1867" in S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds), *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa* (London, 1981), p. 324.

<sup>12</sup> J. Flygare, *De Zoutpansbergen en de Bawenda natie* (Reprint by the State Library, Pretoria, 1979, of the original published by *De Volksstem* Drukkerij, Pretoria, 1899), p.11.

<sup>13</sup> Transvaal Archives, Pretoria (hereafter TA), A18: R.H. Gage Accession, "The development of the Northern Transvaal - Historical stepping stones and reminiscences, by B.H. Dicke, 17 and 18 June 1925", p. 7; TA, A595, Le Roux Smith-Le Roux Accession, "Account of the wanderings from Durban

Amongst the many young Venda males who joined the white hunters were Funyufunyu, Rasivhetshela and Nndwayamiomva. After returning from the circumcision lodge at Tshamatangwi, the young Makhado was also recruited and assigned to a white man as a gun carrier.<sup>14</sup> It is said these employees were remunerated by their masters.

The Venda used the opportunity and learnt how to use firearms. It was a blessing in disguise. They eventually became proficient marksmen and were active in the shooting of elephants. Later on they hid some of the firearms with which they had been issued in bushes and caves. In this way they acquired arms.<sup>15</sup> It is also said that they acquired firearms from coastal traders who were intent on sidelining the white hunting fraternity at Schoemansdal.<sup>16</sup>

As the Boer population increased, they beached off farms and settled on patches of fertile land. They soon found themselves living amongst the Venda. Ramabulana felt threatened. Schoemansdal was situated a few kilometres from the royal residence. The Venda ruler was not content with the farmers living amongst him and his followers. Matters were made worse by the fact that women and children were literally forced to go out and work on local white homesteads.<sup>17</sup>

The situation became unbearable for Ramabulana. He then retired to Nngwekhulu, Mauluma and finally sought residence at Vuvha. In the course of time he sent his wife, Limani and Makhado to return to Tshiriluluni where they had to work on farms. It was at this time that the young Makhado made his first contact with whites and became accustomed to their lifestyle.<sup>18</sup>

After a number of years of active hunting, the elephant population in the region started dwindling. Furthermore Mzila started closing the Hlengweni hunting fields as a result of a personal feud with Albasini. The hunters then resorted to collecting "black-ivory" - young children who were captured and exported to the south by ox-wagon, presumably to work

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to the interior of South Africa, of one Alexander Betts Struben", p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Van Warmelo, *Venda history*, p. 29; Wagner, "Zoutpansberg" pp. 336.

<sup>15</sup> Accession A595, "Account of wanderings of Alexander B. Struben", pp. 36-37.

<sup>16</sup> Möller-Malan, *Ramabulanas*, p. 148.

<sup>17</sup> A.M. Ncube, "The Venda and the Mphephu War of 1898" (Conference Paper, Salisbury, 1972), p. 8; Wagner, "Zoutpansberg", p. 322.

<sup>18</sup> Van Warmelo, *Venda history*, p. 24.

as “inboekelinge” on farms, in households and in the evolving industrial activities.<sup>19</sup> This infuriated the Venda but they could not take up arms. The Boers had superior technology - firearms and horses.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. The struggle for leadership

A number of changes took place in the political balance of power amongst the leadership in Mozambique. This was followed by the death in 1864 of Ramabulana in Venda. The event left the throne vacant. As was customary in Venda politics, the succession to the throne was disputed among Ramabulana’s sons Davhana, Rasikhuthuma, Khangale, Nthabalala and Makhado.<sup>21</sup>

Davhana, the eldest son, immediately usurped the throne against the wishes of Makhadzi and Khotsimunene. They were important people in matters whenever a decision had to be taken about a new Thovhele (ruler). Consequently Davhana found himself isolated from the majority of people.

Thovhele Davhana, who initially successfully seized power by having himself installed, was soon isolated from the majority of people.<sup>22</sup> This left him with little support.<sup>23</sup> Also the other brothers Rasikhuthuma, Khangale and Nthabalala were considered insignificant. The only candidate who emerged as a possible successor was Makhado, who had Khotsimunene and Makhadzi on his side. This secured for him the support of the people.<sup>24</sup> Consequently his supporters, led by Funyufunyu and Madzhe, invaded Vuvha and forced Davhana out. His attempt to flee to Tshivhase failed as the latter supported Makhado and had earlier joined those who condemned Davhana as having assassinated his father.<sup>25</sup> Davhana then fled to Nngwekhulu, Mbilwi and ultimately sought refuge at João Albasini,

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<sup>19</sup> J.C.A. Boeyens, “Zwart ivoor: Inboekelinge in Zoutpansberg, 1848-1868”, *South African Historical Journal*, 24 (1991), p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Van Warmelo, *Venda history*, p. 29; Mudau and Motenda, *Ngomalungondvu na Ramabulana*, p. 161.

<sup>21</sup> Van Warmelo, *Venda history*, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Van Warmelo, *Venda history*, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> OHI: M. Ravele (about 69 years) Mauluna, 21 January 1983.

<sup>24</sup> M.M. Motenda, “Ramabulana” in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), *The copper miners of Musina and the early history of the Zoutpansberg* (Department of Native Affairs, Ethnological Publications, VIII, Government Printers, Pretoria, 1940), p. 161.

<sup>25</sup> OHI: A. Ramabulana (about 70 years), Makwarela, 29 October 1986; E. Gotschling, “The Bavenda: A sketch of their history and customs”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 35 (1905), p. 367.

influential Portuguese and leader of the fugitive Tsonga community, who was at the time the local superintendent of black tribes of the South African Republic.<sup>26</sup> Albasini's dealings with Davhana placed the white government squarely in the middle of the Venda power struggle.<sup>27</sup>

The officials of the South African Republic at Schoemansdal like Jan Vercueil, who supported Makhado, were bypassed by Albasini whose voice was heard in Pretoria. This situation was dangerous. It affected the relationship between the South African Republic and the new Thovhele, Makhado.<sup>28</sup>

Makhado was the peoples' hero. He was fearless and brave. He had after all, defeated his elder brothers. The people saw in him a leader who would drive the Boers away as they had infiltrated their territories.<sup>29</sup>

After Makhado had firmly established himself on the throne he turned his attention to Mahosi Mahulu and some other Mahosi. The message was transmitted in no uncertain terms: a new Thovhele had assumed leadership. He undertook a fact-finding trip with twelve of his councillors to Madzivhandila of Tshakhuma, Mabala of Lwamondo, Mphaphuli, Tshivase and Rammuda. The Mahosi acknowledged the authority of the new ruler by presenting livestock as part of their tribute.<sup>30</sup> It was an acknowledgement of Makhado's seniority in the royal hierarchy. Their acknowledgement of his status was even more important as a result of the fact that it was formally shown in their respective kingdoms. These territorial kingdoms were erroneously interpreted as "independent chiefdoms" by some writers.<sup>31</sup>

After his visit to the different regions, Makhado returned to his territory and overhauled his army. Age regiments were introduced. These emanated from circumcision lodges such as Mavhegwa, Mazulu, Marundela and Ngomakhosi. Military battalions were also organised to serve particular territories. They were named Mavhoi, Maunavhathu,

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<sup>26</sup> S.M. Dzivhani and E.N. Mudau, *Mahosi Venda na Vhadau vha Tshakuma* (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1958), p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Dzivhani and Mudau, *Mahosi Venda*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Dzivhani and Mudau, *Mahosi Venda*, p. 31; Van Warmelo, *Venda history*, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> Motenda, "Ramabulana", p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> OHI: A. Ramabulana, (70 years), Makwarela, 29 October 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Wagner, "Zoutpansberg", p. 323.

Manenu, Vhalube and Vhaingamela.<sup>32</sup> These battalions were in effect trained armies who could take the initiative under offensive and defensive conditions.

Makhado's complaints against the Boers were many. They, according to him, supported Davhana, who had been rejected by the people. They divided his territory up into farms and settled wherever they liked. They forced the people to pay tribute to them. Even he, Thovela, had to pay tribute to them. Makhado felt this undermined his power and authority over his subjects.<sup>33</sup>

The political dispute escalated into a crisis. The Venda had been armed by the whites for hunting purposes. Now they demanded that their firearms and ammunition be returned. Makhado's subjects refused. Their leader maintained it was the reward for services rendered. The Boers did not accept this arrangement. War was inevitable.<sup>34</sup>

### 5. The white retreat from the frontier and new challenges

As from 1865 sporadic attacks were launched on farms.<sup>35</sup> The government of the South African Republic tried to negotiate. Eventually, with all peaceful efforts unsuccessful, Commandant General Paul Kruger was sent in with an army of some 500 burghers in May 1867. He was supported by Albasini and his followers. They launched an attack on Lutame, Vhulorwa and Madzhie. The forces were however unable to realise their objectives and were forced to retreat to Schoemansdal. On 15 July 1867 the Boers evacuated Schoemansdal.<sup>36</sup>

The most northern white settlement in future was to be Marabastad. It was replaced only in 1886 by Pietersburg.

After the evacuation of Schoemansdal the village was plundered by Makhado's subjects. They wanted to ensure that the whites would not return. The event earned Makhado the

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<sup>32</sup> These battalions, according to oral information from Dzanani, were introduced by Makhado personally.

<sup>33</sup> OHI: M. Radzilani (about 95 years), Vhulaudzi, 12 July 1971; A. Ramabulana (70 years), Makwarela, 29 October 1986.

<sup>34</sup> Flygare, *Zoutpansbergen en de Bawenda*, p. 11; W.L. Maree, *Lig in Soutpansberg: Die sendingwerk van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord-Transvaal 1863-1963* (Johannesburg, 1962), p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> TA, A595, "Account of wanderings of Alexandert B Struben", p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> TA, Archives of State Secretary (SS) 89, file R782/6, pp. 314-317: J. Albasini, Goedewensch - M.W. Pretorius, 20 July 1867; *The Transvaal Argus or Weekly Gazette of the S.A. Republic*, 18 March 1868.



new name "Tshilwavhusiku-tsha-ha Ramabulana."<sup>37</sup> His accomplishments at the helm of his forces, secured his status as undisputed leader.

He was able to force the whites out of a region in which they had settled over a period of nineteen years. They left behind valuable possessions. To the Venda it was a great victory. Makhado's popularity and fame also spread to neighbouring African communities.<sup>38</sup>

For the South African Republic the evacuation of Schoemansdal was a clear defeat. Attempts by Stephanus Schoeman to act as a diplomatic agent in establishing a relationship of friendship with the Venda were unsuccessful.<sup>39</sup> Also later attempts by Paul Kruger to try and negotiate a peace with minor rulers in the region were unsuccessful. Makhado bluntly refused to meet with representatives of the SAR.<sup>40</sup>

As from 1870 Makhado's influence spread substantially throughout the whole of the Zoutpansberg. He was responsible for attacks launched on neighbouring areas. He was an active participant in succession struggles in several communities. His status was enhanced by the defeat of the Pedi kingdom of Sekhukhune in 1879 by the British forces.<sup>41</sup> This military campaign substantially affected the position of the African states on the northern frontier.

The gold mining activities of the early 1870s at Eersteling temporarily attracted a new breed of frontier people. They were primarily interested in generating wealth by means of mining. They were not part of the local hunting and farming economy. Consequently they did not pose a direct threat to Venda hegemony. However over the long term this development, which augured in the beginning of the industrial revolution on the northern frontier, was to be of significant consequence.

During the period of the British annexation of the Transvaal (1877-1881) Makhado proved himself capable of holding his own against the new government. As was the case with the republican government, he refused to make any compromises in respect of his position as

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<sup>37</sup> It means: "He who fights in the night." It is still today remembered in Venda. Motenda, "Ramabulana", p. 162.

<sup>38</sup> Motenda, "Ramabulana", p. 162.

<sup>39</sup> O.J.O. Ferreira, *Stormvoël van die Noorde: Stephanus Schoeman in Transvaal (Pretoria, 1978)*, p. 334.

<sup>40</sup> Boeyens, "Konflik tussen Venda en Blankes", pp. 99-100.

<sup>41</sup> P. Maylam, *A history of the African people of South Africa: From the Iron Age to the 1970s* (Cape Town, 1986), p. 57.

sovereign ruler of Venda. The British did not pose a threat to him. They had to contend with the Anglo Zulu War in Natal and Zululand in 1879. In the Transvaal itself the Afrikaners also posed a direct threat to British rule. This culminated into the First Anglo Boer War (1880-1881).

The subsequent conclusion of the Treaties of Pretoria (1881) and London (1884), which restored the Transvaal under Boer rule, saw the creation of a location commission with instructions for the demarcation and allocation of locations to all large African communities in the South African Republic.<sup>42</sup> The discovery and subsequent start made with the mining of rich gold deposits on the Witwatersrand as from 1886, provided the material resources for the government of the South African Republic to expand its influence throughout the state.

On the northern frontier a series of successful military campaigns were undertaken against the Balobedo of the Rain Queen, Modjadji (1890-1894),<sup>43</sup> Bagananwa of Mmalebôgô at Blouberg (1894),<sup>44</sup> and Makgoba (1895).<sup>45</sup> These campaigns were similar to the colonial wars fought by the British elsewhere in Southern Africa during the nineteenth century. It may thus be safely constituted that the objective was to create republican authority over the indigenous peoples within the borders of the state.

The position of the Venda kingdom and its ruler - Makhado - in this period was one of apparent "splendid isolation." As early as 1883 the government of the South African Republic ventured to establish peaceful relations with Makhado.<sup>46</sup> It was however not successful.

## 6. The advent of white resettlement

As a result of a settlement scheme introduced in 1886 by the SAR government for the Zoutpansberg district, and the proposed location policy, General Piet Joubert once again took the initiative of negotiating with Makhado. One meeting took place on 23 February

<sup>42</sup> E.H. Brookes, *White rule in South Africa 1830-1910: Varieties in governmental policies affecting Africans* (Pietermaritzburg, 1974), pp. 100-101.

<sup>43</sup> For a comprehensive investigation, see H.W. Grimsehl, "Onluste in Modjadjeland 1890-1894", in *Archives Yearbook for South African history*, 18, 2 (1955).

<sup>44</sup> See N.C. Weidemann, "Die Malaboch-oorlog (1894)", *Historiese Studies*, 7, 1 (March 1947).

<sup>45</sup> See L.S. Kruger, "Die Makgoba (Magoeba)-oorlog, 1894-1895" (MA-thesis, University of Pretoria, 1965); J.W.N. Tempelhoff, "Die okkupasiestelsel in die distrik Soutpansberg 1886-1899" (D. Litt. et Phil, Unisa, 1989), pp. 512-515.

<sup>46</sup> Research manuscript M.H. Nemudzivadi, "Outline of Venda history with emphasis on the life and times of Makhado 1864-1895", pp. 383-389.

1887. Makhado refused to accept any location demarcated by the Location Commission and instead himself defined his territory.<sup>47</sup> Subsequent attempts at negotiations in 1888, 1889 and 1892 were also futile. In 1892 General Piet Joubert referred to Makhado in a derogatory sense as a "naughty child."<sup>48</sup> He was even threatened. Rumour had it that Makhado would face the same destiny as Mapoch (Nyabele) in the eastern Transvaal. This strategy was a political ploy, but it hardly had any effect on Makhado, who not only steadfastly refused to pay taxes to the republican authorities, but also continued to offer refuge to numerous chiefs who had fallen foul of the SAR.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, as long as he was able to defy the authority of the government, Makhado launched attacks on neighbouring communities.<sup>50</sup>

The fact of the matter was that Makhado was in a strong position and able to resist - at least over the short term - any attempts at overthrowing him effectively. Consequently, after the death of Albasini in 1888, the republican authorities started strengthening the frontier defences in the vicinity of the Venda capital.<sup>51</sup> They were careful not to give Makhado an opportunity to confrontation openly.<sup>52</sup> This soft shoe policy was also one of the reasons why the founding of a new republican village in the Zoutpansberg (the future town of Louis Trichardt), which was approved by the Volksraad and President Paul Kruger's Executive in 1890, was shelved.<sup>53</sup>

Makhado clearly had a firm control over his people and their territory of residence.

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<sup>47</sup> Tempelhoff, "Okkupasiestelsel", pp. 516-517.

<sup>48</sup> *Land en Volk*, 5 April 1892: "De Generaal in Zoutpansberg."

<sup>49</sup> *De Volksstem*, 12 March 1893: Editorial comment, "Magato"; *The Zoutpansberg Review*, 17 February 1892, correspondence column, O. Dahl - Editor, "The native questions."

<sup>50</sup> Schiel, *Sturm und Sonnenschein*, pp. 251-252.

<sup>51</sup> G.N. van den Bergh, "Die polisiediens in die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek" in *Archives Yearbook for South African history*, 38 (1975), p. 79.

<sup>52</sup> TA, Archives of the Superintendent of Native Affairs (SN) 178, W.J. Leyds - J. Joubert, 5 September 1889.

<sup>53</sup> TA, ZAR, Published Volksraad Minutes (VRN) 1890, p. 9, Art. 7 of 7 May 1890. Copy of Executive Council Decision (URB) Art. 325 of 29 April 1890.

There were indications that he had established contacts with traders and officials of the Chartered Company in what was to become known as Rhodesia.<sup>54</sup> They were used to secure arms and ammunition. In this manner the threat of the Afrikaner Republic was countered by alliances with its opponents.

### 7. Confrontational negotiations

Matters were driven to a climax in 1894. General Piet Joubert issued Makhado with a stern warning that steps would be taken against the Venda in the near future. In the course of that year successful military campaigns had been undertaken against Mmalabôgo, Modjadji and Makgoba.<sup>55</sup> The following year, shortly before making the final attack on Makgoba, Joubert, together with a number of republican dignitaries, met with Makhado. The first talks took place on 30 April 1895. Makhado was not co-operative and threatened to withdraw.<sup>56</sup>

On 8 May 1895 the location commission under the chairmanship of Commandant H.P.N. Pretorius held a special meeting on the farm Rietvley, just nearby Makhado's royal residence. The objective was to finalise a proposed location for the Venda ruler. Makhado notified the commission through his messenger, Tromp, that he would not pay taxes and also refused to accept any geographical adjustments to the borders of his territory.<sup>57</sup> The dispute was not solved and Makhado's troops drove the members of the commission out of Zoutpansberg.<sup>58</sup>

According to rumours the Republican forces were apparently preparing for war against Makhado at the time. In the ensuing uncertainty many of Makhado's allies in the Zoutpansberg district started fleeing from the region.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *De Volksstem*, 30 January 1890: "Magato"; M.H. Nemudzivadi, "The conflict between Mphephu and the South African Republic" (MA thesis, Unisa, 1977), pp. 26-27; Möller-Malan, *Ramabulanas*, pp. 180-183.

<sup>55</sup> Tempelhoff, "Okkupasiestelsel", p. 522.

<sup>56</sup> *Land en Volk*, 16 May 1895: "Oproerige Zoutpansberg"; *The Zoutpansberg Review*, 13 May 1895: "The native rebellion: Magato".

<sup>57</sup> SN 177, p. 165. Minutes of the Location Commission, under the chairmanship of Commandant H.P.N. Pretorius, Rietvley, 8 May 1895.

<sup>58</sup> Tempelhoff, "Okkupasiestelsel", p. 524.

<sup>59</sup> Tempelhoff, "Okkupasiestelsel", pp. 524-525.

Some four months later, in September 1895, Makhado died at the fairly youthful age of between fifty and fifty five years.<sup>60</sup> Circumstantial evidence suggests that he might have been poisoned whilst on a visit to his friend the trader John Cooksley at Lovedale Park. It is possible that his own people were responsible for the deed.<sup>61</sup> Amongst the Africans in the Zoutpansberg region he had many enemies. Also the whites, especially the Republican troops stationed at Fort Hendrina, near Elim, were eager to get the upper hand over the Venda ruler. The poisoning and subsequent death of Makhado might have been a combined operation.<sup>62</sup>

His death was a setback for the Venda. Within the next three years, under the leadership of his son, Mphephu, the Venda would suffer a humiliating defeat. The fact that they were not attacked in Makhado's lifetime, is a testimony to his leadership. He was feared by his black opponents and respected by the whites.

### 8. Conclusion

For more than thirty years, between 1864-1895, Makhado was indeed the "Lion of the North."<sup>63</sup> Even today, despite successive waves of frontier change, the memory of Makhado lives on, as a leader with a similar status to that of the legendary Thohoyandou.

Also beyond the borders of Venda he is remembered. The Tau of Machaba, the Tlokwa of Mmatshaka and Ramakghopa, as well as the Kwena of Moletsi and the Koni of Matlala remember him in their oral traditions. They remember him in the following passage:

Makxato ke selwa-bosihu sa ha ramapulana  
 Yena ha ke a tia ka letswifi Makxato  
 O tia ka ngwea morwa lepulana  
 Be re o tiile lari ya makxowa  
 O sitile mamphot a tia a thopha le diesela tsa makxowa  
 Mokotha ka moka ba lwisa sekolokotla  
 Ba lwisa se sele ha re ha mafsika.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Nemudzivhadi, "Mphephu and the South African Republic", p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> R. Wessman, *The Bawenda of the Spelonken (Transvaal)* (London, 1908), p. 119.

<sup>62</sup> For more information see Nemudzivhadi, "Attempts by Makhado to revive Venda kingdom 1864-1895."

<sup>63</sup> See G.G. Munnik, *Memoirs of Senator the Hon. G.G. Munnik* (n.d. Cape Town), p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> Motenda, "Ramabulana", p. 162. This means: "Makhado is a higher fighter of Ramabulana. He does not attack in darkness. He attacks in moonlight, son of Ramabulana. They said he attacked white men's laager. He defeated Mamphado and captured white men's donkeys. Small chiefs fight bravely amongst the rocks and boulders."

His achievements at Moletsi and Matlala are embodied in:

Matangwa ndi mutshinya shango  
Phuguwe ya lila muledzhi  
la ha Madala li a fhalala.<sup>65</sup>

Dorothea Möller-Malan, an Afrikaner woman, in the 1950s wrote of him: "No matter what they said about Makhado, he was a very imposing-looking man and a born ruler."<sup>66</sup> He was above all, according to her, "fair in his dealings" with his followers, and a "proud aristocrat."<sup>67</sup>

One of Makhado's contemporaries, and a leading opponent - Adolf Schiel - said of the ruler:

Ich fand in Magato einen ruhigen, geseßten Mann. Aus seinem Gespräch ging deutlich hervor daß er ein ... außerordentlich starkes Begriffsvermögen besaß. Sein sorgfältiges Abwägen eines jeden Wortes und sein vorsichtigen Antworten zeugten von großer Schlaueit.<sup>68</sup>

His strong leadership secured the maintenance of the Venda identity in an era of crisis. Today, when basic human relations across racial frontiers are in a state of flux and re-orientation, it is perhaps justified to make a plea for the recognition of Makhado and his role on the northern frontier of the South African Republic during the second half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>65</sup> This means: "Matangwa dance destroys the land. The jackal cries at Moletsi. The inhabitants of Matlala fled in fear."

<sup>66</sup> Möller-Malan, *Chair of Ramabulanas*, p. 167.

<sup>67</sup> Möller-Malan, *Chair of Ramabulanas*, p. 168.

<sup>68</sup> Schiel, *Sturm und Sonnenschein*, p. 244. (I found in Magato a quiet, calm man. It was clear from his conversations that he had an exceptionally strong comprehension ability. His careful consideration of each word and careful answers showed his great cleverness.)