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WOMEN, STATE LAW, AND THE CRISIS OF CHIEFTAINCY: THE CASE OF NSWAZI VILLAGE IN ZIMBABWE

TRACEY C. MURADZIKWA

(STUDENT NUMBER 2409970)



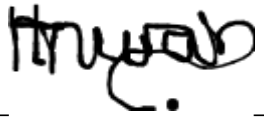
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Witwatersrand in fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Studies.

SUPERVISOR: DR. S.I DUBE

March 2024

DECLARATION

I, **Tracey Muradzikwa,** declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



_____ _____

(Signature of candidate) Tracey Muradzikwa

_____

(Signature of Supervisor)

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DEDICATION

To my mother
and to all the African women
who have broken through the glass ceiling
and yet remain invisible.

To my late dad, Amasa Muradzikwa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Lord Almighty God who has taken this far. With every breath in me, I would like to thank the Lord Almighty God whose love endures forever. I have been able to sail through this journey through Christ who strengthened me. This journey would never have been achieved without the Lord's faithfulness and favour upon my life.

I am highly indebted to my supervisor, Dr Siphiwe Dube, for his diligent and great effort and guidance during my PhD journey. Thank you for your effort to help me make this dissertation what it is. Your contribution is highly appreciated, you made the PhD journey lighter and bearable all the way to the end.

To my academic mentors, Dr Ruth Murambadoro and Dr Albert Sharra: thank you for your constructive criticism. To, Dr Ruth Murambadoro, may you continue to transform the lives of other women aspiring to be as visible in the academic space as you are. To, Dr Albert Sharra thank you for your time and effort to make this journey a success.

With deep gratitude, my appreciation goes to all the academic staff in the School of Social Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand. Pursuing a PhD has been a life-transforming experience, especially with the exposure it has offered me in various countries that were involved in the programme. This has helped my career and personal development hugely.

My doctoral research would not have been complete without the supported I received at various stages in the form of the following awards, grants and scholarships: University of the Witwatersrand Post-Graduate Merit Award; NextGen Social Sciences Research Council Erasmus Mobility+ Global Minds Fellow Fund. I would like to extend my gratitude to my host supervisors: Dr Vicky Bockhaven at Ghent University in Belgium, and Prof. Alicia Campos Serrano at the University of Madrid in Spain.

I would like to thank all the participants in this study for being part of the knowledge production process. I would have had nothing to write here if you had not shared your knowledge. I am also grateful to my research assistants.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my mother, Mrs Muradzikwa, and my sisters,

Elizabeth and Melody Muradzikwa, my brothers-in-law; Jabulani Mkoko and Knowledge Munenge and my for the support they gave them throughout this journey.

ABSTRACT

Increasingly, post-colonial African states have been grappling with the issue of the gender-gap within traditional leadership institutions, resulting in contestations between state laws and traditional customary laws. Using the landmark succession of *Indunakazi* Sinqobile Mabhena of Nswazi in Umzingwane district, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe as a case study, the dissertation provides a new perspective on female traditional leadership through studying the in-depth the negotiation of the legitimacy of Mabhena's chieftaincy. The study is a "feminist ethnography" of the daily life of Chief Mabhena in a Nswazi community to establish how the governance strategies of women chiefs are configured in practice, with a focus on debates and contention regarding the succession and legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Drawing on more than one year of fieldwork and making use of a qualitative narrative ethnographic research methods, the Zimbabwean case shows how African women play a significant role in the reconceptualization of legitimacy in traditional leadership and the perceptions of the people of Nswazi on the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena in particular. A key finding of the thesis is that the legitimacy of traditional leaders primarily lies with the community accepting the rulership of the appointed leader through celebrations, ceremonies, and commitment to the well-being of the people that preserve their heritage and lineage. To that end, the naturalization of male chieftaincy primogeniture is put to question.

Keywords: ***Chieftaincy; Gender; Indunakazi; Intersectionality; Legitimacy, Women in Traditional Leadership***

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction: An overview of the research

In 2003, a chieftaincy succession wrangle erupted in Limpopo Province in South Africa. Some members of the Valoyi Tribe were contesting the appointment of Nwamitwa Shilubana the eldest child of Fofoza Nwamitwa as a *Hosi* (chief) of the tribe. Ms Shilubana is the eldest child of Fofoza Nwamitwa, *Hosi* of the Valoyi tribe. They argued that Ms Shilubana could not succeed Fofoza Nwamitwa because, according to the Valoyi customary law, women are not allowed to ascend to the *Hosi* position. The customary law provides that the first-born child of the *Hosi* is the legitimate heir to the throne. The contestation began as early as 1968 when Fofoza Nwamitwa of Valoyi community died. While some sections of the society thought it was time to give first born daughters an opportunity to ascend to the throne of the chieftaincy, others protested swiftly. They settled for Shilubane's brother, Richard. He served on the throne until 2001, when he died after a long illness. The dispute resurfaced again against the appointment of Shilubane, who at the time was the only heir to the throne. Two years later, she was finally appointed the *Hosi* of the Valoyi Tribe becoming the first ever woman to be a chief in the tribe (Maunatlala and Maimela, 2020).

Since then, the trend has been changing. Nolitha Ludidi who was the first female chief of *AmaHlubi* clan of South Africa in the Eastern Cape was appointed in October 2014. However, Langalibalele II Rhadebe, the *Amahlubi* traditional leader, argued that women could be appointed as regents but not as substantive chiefs; hence, he did not recognise her claim as legitimate (Ainslie and Kepe, 2016). The traditional leaders of *AmaHlubi* blamed the National Constitution claiming its failure to respect and adhere to the succession traditions and norms of a community. This shows the complex relationship between traditional law and state law; a case that is seemingly haunting many African countries. However, this did not deter Ludidi's appointment since the Constitution supersedes all other national laws. Currently, Ludidi is the third woman to become a chief in the Eastern Cape (Ainslie and Kepe, 2016).

These examples illustrate how gender remains a determinant factor in traditional leadership succession. There is, however, a long story to this. Resistance to women as chiefs has been found

to be based on a belief that the biology of women makes them bad leaders characterised as being emotional, soft, and therefore can easily be manipulated (Matemba, 2005; Eagly and Linda 2018). These arguments are also reinforced by the existing contradictions in state and customary laws on gender and traditional leadership.

Since the precolonial era, political leadership and authority in Africa have been dominated by men to a larger extent (Matanzima and Saidi, 2020; Cheater, 1986). However, this claim is not true if one looks at the work of people such as Amadiume (1995) on the Asante and others who have basically traced the misreading of gender in Africa. A minority of women have occupied complementary roles in leadership. Furthermore, with the advent of colonisation, and the socialisation that came with it, women lost much of the status and authority they had enjoyed in African society (Isola and Alao, 2019). Men are conceived as the head of the household, predominantly; in addition, leadership in the public sphere is largely reserved for men. Although these perceptions have changed over time due to regional and international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Resolution 1325, among many other international and regional resolutions which encourage equal participation of women and men in decision-making positions (Hlatywayo, and Muranda, 2014).

While it is hard for women to ascend to power, they are also faced with another challenge—making decisions when in power. This has a long history dating as far as during the precolonial Africa. In cases where an opportunity arises for women to take over chieftaincy, the society as demonstrated by Mazrui's (2016) work on democracy during the precolonial Africa, shows that women were out on the peripherals of power and could only rule with the support of an appointed male person within the lineage. As a result, the ascendancy of women in the institution of traditional leadership, particularly as chiefs with all the powers to rule in many parts of Africa, is still accepted with mixed feelings (Dodo, 2017).

In other words, despite the steady rise in the number of women chiefs in Africa, women still hold only a small percentage of positions in most institutions of traditional leadership. Zimbabwe

is haunted by this culture. For instance, out of 282 chiefs in the country, there are approximately 1.7% women chiefs compared to male chiefs. This percentage is even low when we consider the fact that women make up 53% of the total population (World Bank Report 2022). Male primogeniture, religion, succession customs, and traditions in many parts of Zimbabwe are the driving forces of a low representation and participation of women in traditional leadership (Biri and Mutumbwa, 2013; Mwale and Dodo, 2017). As Ntlama (2020), along with Dawda, Adjuik, and Manbiah-Rockson (2023) argue, this patriarchal legitimacy is embedded in the historical customs and religion of a particular community. However, scholars such as Gottlieb, Grossman and Robinson, (2018) and Lowes, (2022) have observed that there are a few African societies that have matrilineal leadership structures. These include the Akan community in Ghana (Abotsi and Galizzi, 2011), the Balobedu community in South Africa (Chauke, 2015; Were, 2020), and the Bameda community in Cameroon (Azong and Kelso, 2021) and the BaTonga in Zimbabwe (Saidi, 2013).

In the current context, women traditional leaders have also faced resistance from their community in addition to external factors. For example, in 2001 *Kgosi* Mosadi Seboko claimed her rightful place as a chief of the Balete tribe. Mosadi was not allowed to succeed her father after his death in 1966 because of Botswana's traditional patriarchal system. Hence her uncles ruled one after the other until in 2001 when she eventually decided to claim her right to chieftaincy. *Kgosi* Mosadi faced resistance from her male relatives by delaying her installation saying that she did not have the skills to lead people in the traditional leopard hunt and to preside in the rainmaking rituals which were major basis of legitimacy in traditional leadership. Kgosi Mosadi was appointed to chieftaincy in 2001 after a lengthy battle between herself and her male relatives. She is currently the first female paramount chief in Botswana (Bauer, 2016).

Due to such challenges as noted above in relation to *Kgosi* Mosadi, the opportunity for women to ascend to power as chiefs has brought up a concern with legitimacy. It seems that women chiefs are expected to demonstrate their worth beyond any doubt in order to protect and enhance the legitimacy of their chieftaincy. In illustrating how this requirement of proof of legitimacy for women who ascend to chieftaincy looks like in practice, the thesis examines how *Indunakazi* Mabhena (one of the senior chiefs in Zimbabwe who has been a chief since 1996) has navigated

her legitimacy in traditional leadership.[2] While there is a lot of existing research work done on female traditional leaders, most of the studies document the roles of traditional leaders in community development and traditional politics and much attention has been paid male chiefs. That is, this literature offers very little regarding the resistance proffered by female traditional leaders and their experiences in attaining or maintaining their legitimacy. To that end, one can point at the example of the resistance faced by Nonesi, the Great Wife of the 19th century Aba Thembu King Ngubengcuka Vusani kaNdaba. She faced resistance from her family and the colonial administration. The queen was aware that her appointment had not followed the right traditional protocols, which in any case meant a male regent was going to be chosen. However, the queen found ways to get her people accept her authority (Saavedra, 2017).

However, resistance to the rise of female leaders is not peculiar to traditional leadership but politically elected women also face resistance. For example, when Joyce Banda formed her own political party in 2012 in Malawi, senior male officials called her a mere *mandasi* (fritter) seller who could not be president (Kamwendo and Kamwendo, 2015). Joyce Banda was attacked and denied her own term in a national election. Malawians said she did not have confidence and her failed tenure would affect women chances in future (Kamwendo and Kamwendo, 2015). In the next election women in parliament 'recovered' and increased in number. Reference to the resistance women face have been drawn from colonial times to postcolonial times highlighting how women still face resistance based on gender despite various legal frameworks put forward by the national government. This study argues that these cases are just a representation of the broader picture of what rising to power for women is and demonstrate why it is hard for women to hold such positions. That said, the study highlights the resistance to the challenge of legitimacy and argues that it is imperative to understand how this *Indunakazi* (a female chief) has navigated her legitimacy after encountering resistance from both her family and some male community members and chiefs.

1.2 Women and Chieftaincy in Africa

Women make up 26.5% of the legislative bodies of nations worldwide (United Nations Women, 2023) which shows that at the top levels, decision-making globally predominantly still

has a male face. While progress has been made across the globe, women are still underrepresented in political leadership, specifically in decision-making positions. Structural barriers such as discriminatory laws and societal obstacles like sexism, harassment, financial status and violence, are a common hindrance to the rise of women in political positions. In the African context, when these barriers are coupled with traditions and customs for and against women, it makes their fight for equal participation and inclusion more challenging, particularly with respect to the institution of traditional leadership (Biri and Mutumbwa, 2013; Mwale and Dodo, 2017; Tappe and Köbrich, 2022; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021).

However, this gender disparity in Africa is not reflective of the longer history of gender relations on the continent. In fact, according to scholars such as Amadiume (1987), women have been playing a significant role in state building since precolonial times and, with a few exceptions, their roles have been complimentary to those of men. Examples of prominent women in leadership in precolonial Africa include Queen Hatshepsut, who is among the first female Pharaohs of in ancient Egypt (1468-1490 BCE). Queen Amina the female King of Hausa, Nigeria who was popular in the sixteenth century CE (Loth, 1987). Other female traditional leaders include the female King Ahebi Ugbabe and the Dahomey Warriors, the Nguni female warrior Queen Nyamazana of modern-day Zimbabwe, who drove *Changamire* Chirasamhuru of the Rozvi state (precolonial state) the most powerful king out of his capital and Queen Sheba of Egypt. Elsewhere (as in outside the African context), Queen Isabella of Castile, who was the first female monarch of Spain, ascended to power in 1474 CE and ruled until her death in 1504 CE (Monter, 2012). In India, Razia Sultan of Delhi was the first female monarch of Delhi from 1236 CE to 1240 CE (Singh, 2002). Therefore, the few examples highlight how women have been occupying positions now seemingly preserved for men and have, arguably, faced the challenges of resistance to their legitimacy since time immemorial. In that sense, the thesis deals with a familiar feature of modern gender relations.

In the contemporary era, women such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Joyce Banda who are the former presidents of Liberia and Malawi respectively, and the first female presidents in Samia Suluhu Hassan, and Sahle-Work Zwede who are the respective presidents of Tanzania and Ethiopia, have equally risen to prominent positions of leadership in society. These women rose to

prominent decision-making positions in face of the patriarchal traditions and cultures, which favour men over women. Internationally, prominent women include former Chancellor and Prime Minister of Germany and that of New Zealand, Angela Merkel, and Jacind Ardern respectively, as well as the first female Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley. However, in as much as women have been able to break through the glass ceiling, the main question that continues to be raised in society is whether the substantive or symbolic leadership is sustainable.

As research has shown, one challenge women in leadership have faced has been the pressure to cultivate masculine traits (Kiamba, 2008) thereby making them more likely to be recognised and legitimate because they are in positions considered to be masculine, which conflicts with their construction as feminine. Positions that conflict with the socially constructed feminine traits and gender stereotypes jeopardies the legitimacy of women. The preconceived masculine traits uphold patriarchal perceptions of the public, thereby reinforcing male dominated leadership and marginalisation of women. In fact, according to Pogoson (2012), men are more likely to have access to power than women whilst women are treated as a category that belongs to the domestic spheres. Thus, according to Willams (2020 p.3), masculinity remains a blueprint which determines the status of women in leadership positions. Admittedly, this phenomenon is not geographically bound as the argument can be applied globally, albeit with varying degrees of difference.

Zimbabwe, for example, has had women play significant roles in political, religious, and economic leadership spaces despite these positions being perceived as reserved for men. During the precolonial period, prominent female leaders such as Mbuya Nehanda and Queen Lozikheyi played a significant role in the liberation struggle from colonial rule (Nyathi, 2011). However, Zimbabwean literature has been silent on the role of Queen Lozikheyi in the leadership of King Lobengula, as much of the literature on Ndebele women has portrayed women as passive actors in state affairs; thereby, rendering those women invisible (Mlotshwa, 2018).[1] In post-colonial

[1] Ndebele is a term associated with the Bantu language speaking spoken by the Nguni commonly found in Swaziland, South Africa and Zimbabwe. However, due to migration people adopted various dialects. In modern Zimbabwe, majority of the Ndebele speaking group is found in Matabeleland Province and the Ndebele speaking group in Zimbabwe is known as Ndebele or AmaNdebele. In Zimbabwe 3 factors identify a Ndebele-language, geographical location and culture. In this study Ndebele will be used to refer people originally from the Nguni who later settled in what is Zimbabwe today in 1820.

Zimbabwe, Joyce Mujuru became the first female vice president in 2004 and in 2018 Oppah Muchinguri became the first Minister of Defence and War Veteran Affairs. Both roles were previously occupied by men from the time the country attained its independence in 1980. Therefore, women were and are still occupying positions previously reserved for men, but they are still mixed feelings of legitimising women in these positions.

It is within this broader context that I locate a significant gap in further understanding the specific ways in which the expectation of (and resistance to) masculine performance in leadership exists even in the institution of traditional leadership. Thus, my thesis seeks to add to the record of how women who rise to political leaderships negotiate their legitimacy in relation to the normative expectations attached to the institution of traditional leadership and gender roles. I hope to add to the existing body of literature on women in traditional leadership through exploring the experience of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Where, many of the chiefs and public figures who opposed the appointment of *Indunakazi* Mabhena raised the argument that the state, through its enforcement of constitutional law, had interfered with the jurisdiction of custom to impose a female chief on the Umzingwane community (Lindgren, 2005). Some members of the community viewed her installation as a curse upon the community and a contravention of the Traditional Leaders Act (1998), which stipulates that the appointment of traditional authorities must be conducted in accordance with the customs and practices of each community. Nonetheless, Section 56 (3) of the Zimbabwean Constitution is clear in its position on prohibiting discrimination against women, a position that is contrary to the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17). This conundrum is exacerbated by the further clause that the appointment of a chief by the president is done in accordance with the traditions of the community concerned. This indicates that state law conflicts with Ndebele customs, compounding issues of legitimacy and perception within traditional communities as Nswazi village regarding the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

Consequently, a key argument of interest for this thesis is that the ascendancy of women to chieftaincy remains a contested issue as it involves, among other things, modernising traditions and thereby facilitating a change in the gender regime and gender order. Although literature shows that governments are making progress in terms of addressing gender discrimination at all

levels of society— including in the appointment of women to chieftaincy—the stories of female traditional leaders are rarely told. In this context, this study makes the experiences of one woman holding a traditional leadership position, *Indunakazi* Mabhena, not only visible, but also instructive for how contextualised readings of gender and political leadership are important if we are to understand the complexity of the legitimacy question for women in political leadership.

1.2 The research

The legitimacy of women holding traditional leadership positions remains a contested topic in communities with hereditary leadership structures that have traditionally followed male primogeniture, despite the existence of national policy in Zimbabwe that supports gender-inclusive practices at all levels. While women do attain positions of authority in traditional leadership structures, the legitimacy of leaders in these structures ultimately comes from the community. While traditional views of gender feature strongly in attempts to delegitimize women's claims to positions of power, there are multiple dimensions of identity and legitimacy which intersect with gender to ultimately determine the outcome of contested legitimacy claims. These have not been extensively explored in the literature on traditional governance in Africa or on women in power in Africa.

1.3 Aims and objectives.

In exploring the strategies and identities that impact the legitimacy of women in traditional leadership positions, the thesis engages with the identities ascribed to *Indunakazi* and how her personal identities informed her leadership. Using the specific case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena the thesis achieves the following objectives:

1. It raises the visibility of women in traditional leadership positions in the extant literature.
2. It explores the strategies or identities of *Indunakazi* Mabhena that maintain and inform her legitimacy.
3. It examines the perceptions of the Nswazi community regarding the legitimacy and leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

Considering the problem identified above, the thesis explores the presence of women in the institution of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe. An effective exploration of the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena is made possible using an intersectional approach. An intersectional approach critiques existing assumptions that only existing gender norms and class shape the legitimacy and experience of female traditional chiefs. The following research question guided this study:

What ways and strategies does Indunakazi Mabhena of Nswazi community use to legitimise her authority in androcentric institution?

Several sub-questions are also used to unpack the experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, and the narratives related to the legitimacy of her authority:

1. What are the underlying narratives of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's experiences?
2. What identities or strategies influenced the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena?
3. What are the perceptions of the Nswazi community regarding the leadership and legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena?

1.4 Justification and relevance of the study

This study explores the multiple, intersecting dimensions of identity that shape the leadership experiences of a specific female traditional African leader. The study takes cognizance of the view that gender as a single axis cannot explain in depth the challenges and privileges of women in male-defined spaces. The study further explores culture, religion, family roles and the politicization of chieftaincy to make visible the experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena as a traditional leader. This study thus sets a precedent and creates a pathway for further studies that would explore the experiences of female traditional leaders through the multiple, intersecting dimensions of their identity, thus raising their visibility in a historically male-dominated space.

1.5 Theoretical framework: A Short Overview

According to Lutz and Linder (2004), legitimacy is the extent to which a community accepts the authority of traditional leaders. That is, legitimacy determines the legality of power and authority

in a community or society. However, the concept of legitimacy in traditional leadership is always ambiguous, because the guiding principles of succession can be manipulated and contesting parties may justify the manipulation of these practices for their own interests. In most cases these guiding principles are often patriarchal, thus further marginalising women in male dominated structures such as the institution of traditional leaders. When using Afrocentric conceptualisation of legitimacy such as those constructed by the Nswazi community, Appiah (1992) and Schatzberg (2001), legitimacy is depicted as primarily patriarchal and gendered, hence it is essential to explore further how this informs the leadership of women in traditional leadership. Therefore, for these reasons, the thesis finds it imperative to foreground theories of legitimacy in examining the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. However, these are engaged critically through an intersectional approach that seeks to unseat the gendered assumptions of legitimacy theories, especially in relation to traditional leadership in Africa.

Intersectionality is best suited to explore the questions of legitimacy, women and the traditional leadership institution because it explores the lived experience of women in complex socio-political structures, which in this case is traditional leadership. Intersectionality is based on the idea that we experience discrimination or privileges based on the different positions that we occupy and identity markers that we ascribe to ourselves and/or ascribed to us. Intersectionality is both a metaphor and prism that help to explore the colliding factors that inform experiences of people based on the identities they occupy in their varied spaces (Crenshaw 1991). This is a point on which I will expand later, but it suffices here to signal that intersectionality informs the analytical framework of the thesis as part of shifting focus away from a purely gendered analysis of women's traditional leadership to one that takes seriously the role that other identity markers play, especially in the context of Africa.

In other words, the interrogation of legitimacy through intersectionality (as a frameworks of this thesis) provides an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics around traditional leadership and women. In studying the recognition of *Indunakazi* as a chief in traditional leadership, exploring how different identities such as gender, education background and marriage can influence her leadership, the thesis goes further than simple explanations to illustrate how these identities influence the *Indunakazi's* legitimacy.

1.6 Methodology: A Short Description

An ethnographic, qualitative research approach was used in the study to examine how the identities ascribed to *Indunakazi* Mabhena impeded or facilitated the governance. Data was collected using interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. Secondary information was also used, which consisted of archival records, newspapers and journal articles. Although I did not find references to *Indunakazi* Mabhena in the archival records, I used this gap as a departure point for collection of data through her first-hand account in this study.

Gramling and Carr (2004) note the importance of first understanding and acknowledging the effects of power relations in the methods that are employed in fieldwork and how these can impact the process and construction of knowledge.[3] In the rural setting of the study, and given the political significance of ethnicity in the study context, it was very important that I, as the researcher, identified and addressed the power dynamics that existed between the participants—which included the *Indunakazi*, *Indunas (male* chiefs*)*, *usobhuku* (villagehead) and *umlisa (*headman*)*—and myself. This I did by reflecting on my social positions and how they shaped my interaction with the research participants. This reflexive process is documented in Chapter 3.

1.7 Structure of the research

This thesis is presented in seven chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter has presented the contextual background of the study, research questions and a brief discussion of the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 2: Methodology: The Research Journey. This chapter presents the methodology of the study and describes the research instruments and how they were used to answer the research questions and to meet the research objectives. Furthermore, the chapter explores how my experiences influenced and shaped my research design and my role as a researcher. Moreover, the chapter also discusses the theoretical framework that informs the thesis, which is intersectionality. Since the methodology chapter is important for understanding thesis, including its intersectional approach to discussing legitimacy, I have put the methodology chapter before the first literature review chapter.

Chapter 3: Literature review: *Unpacking legitimacy, traditional leadership, and gender politics.* Due to the vast literature with which the thesis deals, I have divided the traditional

literature review into two chapters that deals with the broad context of traditional leadership and then the specific context of Zimbabwe. The first of these chapters (Chapter 3) explores literature on women in leadership from an African perspective and discusses the debates on the legitimacy of chieftaincy in a democratic dispensation and how such debates influence the leadership of women.

Chapter Four: Traditional leaders, legitimacy, and gender recognition in Zimbabwe: history and background. This chapter, the second of the literature review, provides an in-depth understanding of what legitimacy in general looks like in the Zimbabwean context. It does so through tracing the trajectory of the institution since precolonial times, arguing that in order to understand legitimacy in Zimbabwe's institution of traditional leadership, one must understand the institution before what it is today. The chapter further highlights how issues of legitimacy has seemingly been becoming a debatable issue due to the polarisation of the institution by politics.

Chapter 5: An exploration of the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. This is the first of two chapters in which the findings of the study are presented. The chapter explores *Indunakazi* Mabhena's journey to chieftaincy through the first-hand accounts and reflections of the *Indunakazi* and her family members and former colleagues. These highlights Lindgren's (2005) study and analysis of the contestation of the *Indunakazi*'s succession, from a gendered perspective.

Chapter 6: "*Inkosi yinkosi ngabantu*": Understanding community perceptions of the legitimacy and leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. This chapter presents the findings of the study regarding the perceptions held by the Nswazi community about the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and factors informing these perceptions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendation This chapter is a discussion and summary of the study.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY: THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study. It explores the dilemmas and contradictions which I faced as a young woman conducting research in a male dominated institution. A constructivist, qualitative research design and feminist ethnographic research strategy is used in this study. The chapter describes the research site and the selection of the sample size and justifies the use of the selected research methods used in this thesis. Data was collected using interviews, archival records and participant observation. Narrative analysis is used to analyse data. Ethical considerations, my positionality as the researcher, and particular strengths and weaknesses of the research are also covered in this chapter.

2.2 Research design

This section provides the research design for the study.

2.3 Constructivist approach

The research uses a constructivist approach to understand the experiences and subjective truth of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and the community of Nswazi. According to Creswell (2004) constructivism' s philosophical underpinnings involve construction of knowledge and truth. Researchers are led and guided by participants in developing personal of their lived experiences rather than relying on already existing meanings and theories. They are primarily three assumptions underpinning a constructivist worldview: (a) theories and meanings are constructed by human beings as they interact with the world, (b)individuals' worldview is interpreted and influenced by social and historical contexts and (c) meanings are products constructed through interaction (Crotty, 1998).

The employment of a constructivist, qualitative research design and feminist ethnographic research strategy demonstrates a thoughtful approach to understanding the lived experiences of female traditional leaders. Taking a constructivist approach in this study means reconstructing life herstories and communities' perspectives based on their lived realities (Bogner and

Rosenthal, 2023). It focuses on producing knowledge through interviews, observation, archives and focus group discussions.

A constructivist approach allows me to construct knowledge about *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership and the perceptions of the community through experiencing life in Nswazi directly and reflecting on these aspects (Honebein, 1996). These aspects include the dominance of men in her leadership and the role of men in supporting women in leadership positions. Being situated within the community allowed me to explore the experiences of an *Indunakazi*. Additionally, I was able to observe and learn about the perceptions of the community on having a female chief and reflect on my position as a researcher.

I chose a constructivist approach for two primary reasons. Firstly, the institution of traditional leadership is male-dominated, and research typically has been based on male experiences which overlook women. Consequently, most knowledge production has been male-centric. In Zimbabwe, the number of female chiefs is both numerically low and less representational compared to other African countries, such as South Africa, Botswana, and Malawi. The voice of women chiefs is, thus, 'just a whisper' that continues to be drowned out by the voices of men and of women in elected positions—such as Members of Parliament (MPs) and councillors. Secondly, when the phrase 'women in governance' is used, it usually denotes women in parliament or other elected positions. Hence, in this study, a constructivist approach amplifies the visibility of the experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, whose experience as a female chief cannot be assumed to be similar to those of the urban elite or of male chiefs. This approach reduces the risk of generalising *Indunakazi* Mabhena and her community.

2.4 Qualitative design

This study used a qualitative design, employing interviews, review of archival records and participant observation to gather data. A qualitative design is important as it allows participants to comprehensively narrate and capture their experiences, construct their contextual meaning to their lived experiences and realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is further explained by Creswell (2013) who noted that qualitative research is used by researchers because (a) a problem needs to be solved (b) it empowers participants (c) it allows individuals to create and share their own experiences and (d) theories are developed.

2.5 Research strategy

Political ethnography is a form of ethnographic research that allows an in-depth investigation of political institutions and the examination of their complex relation to structures of power (Thibault, 2021). In so doing, political ethnography in this particular study helps in analysing the structures of power and gender complexities surrounding the succession system that shape the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Political ethnography in this study allows the underlying narratives of the *Indunakazi's* leadership to be examined, moving away from the ordinary narrations and perceptions of women in leadership.

In support of the above view, the approach is also useful for a closer encounter with the Nswazi community and the traditional leadership institutions. For example, in developing the Weberian analysis of legitimacy, Weber as cited by Pardo and Prato (2018) suggests that there is need to examine legitimacy not only from the prescribed rules and laws. He further notes that legitimacy needs to be analysed from the social construction perspective in order to understand why the governed reject or accept the government in power. Pardo and Prato (2018) agree with Weber in suggesting that this can be done by using an in-depth ethnography research. The study engaged an ethnographic approach to have an in-depth understanding of how the Nswazi community has socially constructed legitimacy and perceptions, thereby, providing informative data on Nswazi chieftaincy and addressing the research problem of the study (Longo and Zacka, 2019). As a result, this enabled me to observe how the community accepts and/or rejects *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership.

From the outside, one can assume the gender embodiment of being a woman is the primary barrier a woman could face to attain chieftaincy in her family, but by engaging more deeply with the participants, it became apparent to me that the root of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's challenges was her family background and religion, among other factors.

2.6 Research site

This section discusses the research site.

2.6.1 Geopolitical context

The study was conducted in Nswazi, a village in Umzingwane District, which is approximately 75 kilometres from the city centre of Bulawayo. Umzingwane District is in the northern part of the province of Matabeleland South in Zimbabwe. Umzingwane was formerly known as Esigodini District before Zimbabwe gained independence, but in postcolonial Zimbabwe Esigodini has developed as the largest town in Umzingwane. Umzingwane District has a total of 20 wards partitioned into North, Central, East and West regions. According to Umzingwane District profile, Nswazi carries approximately 10 000 people with 23 villages.

Within this context, *Indunakazi* Mabhena leads 4 wards: Mathendele (Ward 6), Nswazi (Ward 7), Irisvale (resettlement area Ward 13) and Mbalabala (resettlement area Ward 20). Wards 6 and 7 are in the southern part of Umzingwane covering low-lying areas but with some mountainous parts. In each of these wards, elected councillors operate within the municipal system that runs parallel to the traditional system. The map below shows the areas under the jurisdiction of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

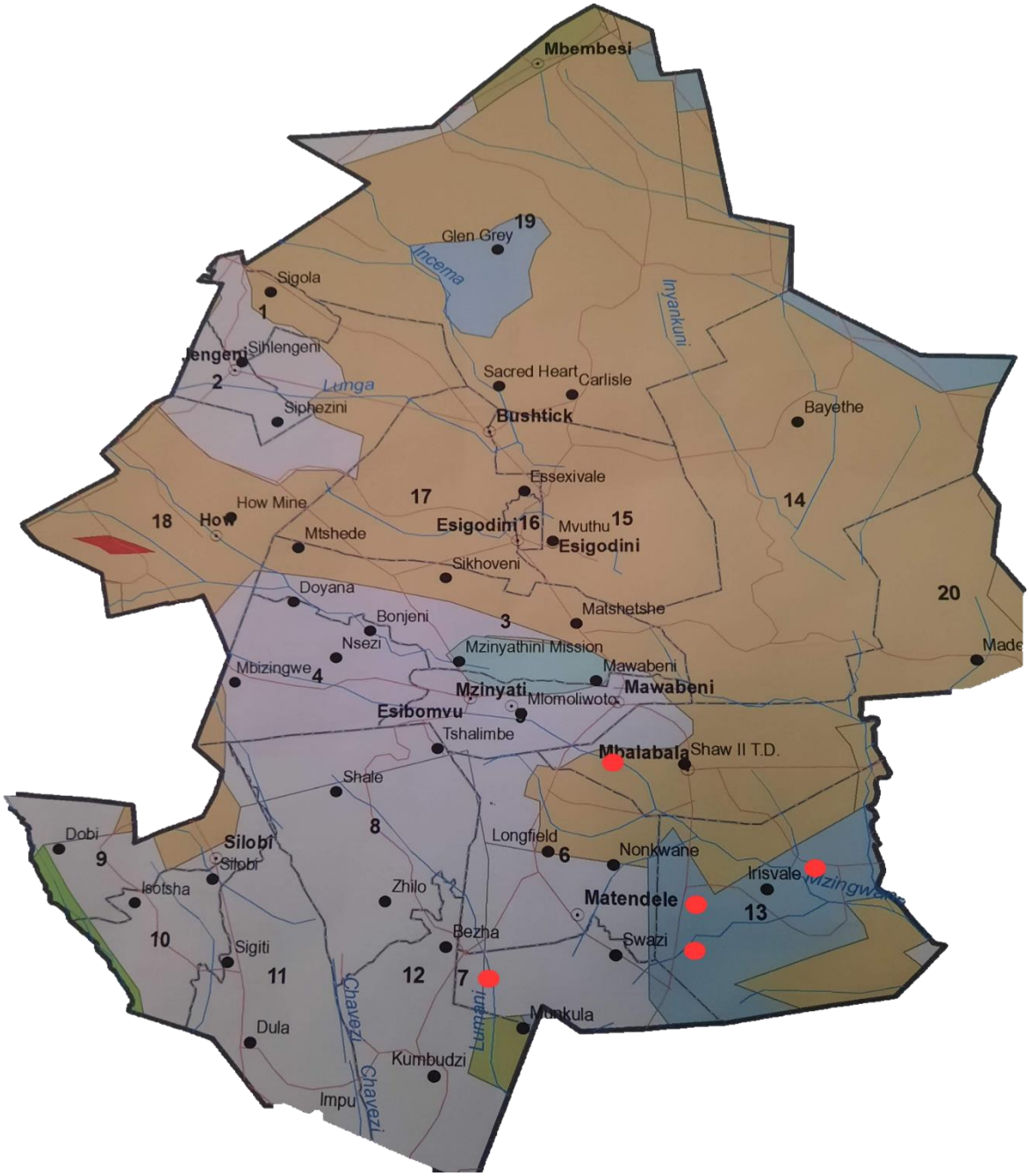


Figure 1 Map of Umzingwane District. Red markers indicate under the jurisprudence of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. This photo was taken at the Umzingwane Rural District Council offices.

Matabeleland South is one of the provinces that was most affected by the atrocities committed during the Fifth Brigade Gukurahundi genocide. Gukurahundi occurred from March 1983 to December 1987 when the Unity Accord was signed between the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Many Ndebele civilians were killed, raped or tortured during the Gukurahundi genocide. It should be noted that the Gukurahundi genocide shaped the subjectivity of Ndebele women, and that is when some of their challenges became more pronounced (Mlotshwa, 2018). For example, Ndebele women were faced with the burden of heading households after many men were killed during the genocide. Additionally, to understand the evolution of existing relations between the Shona and Ndebele one must understand this historical event in Zimbabwe-the Gukurahundi. The genocide had an impact on the relations between Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups and resulting in tensions between the two groups. Both events led to a power struggle between the Shona and the Ndebele. As a Shona researcher, my handling of my positionality in this was key (this is explored further in Section 2.11).

Indunakazi Mabhena's geographical context is also key in the examination of her leadership. Matabeleland is an economically, politically and ethnically marginalized province in Zimbabwe (Mabhena, 2014). In terms of chieftaincy, Matabeleland has had three female chiefs while Mashonaland has had two female chiefs. Matabeleland has been politically and ethnically marginalized in terms of its participation in mainstream politics and economics (Ndlovu, 2019). Therefore, it is important to explore whether the geographical realm of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's authority also contributed to the challenges she experienced in her leadership. This highlights the importance and complexity of intersectionality, as it is impossible to determine with certainty which aspect of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's identity had more influence on her experiences as a leader. These aspects include her marriage, relocation to Botswana, contested religious philosophies and age.

2.6.2 Political environment

Zimbabwe's ruling political party, ZANU PF has dominated Zimbabwean politics since 1980 and has been at the helm of the government of Zimbabwe and decision-making. To maintain this political domination and grip on power in Zimbabwe ZANU PF has been using violence against

its political rivalries (Maringira and Gukurume, 2022). Zimbabwe has more than five opposition political parties, but the main opposition is Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC) led by Nelson Chamisa and is usually associated with the younger generation. This zeal to continue dominating national politics by ZANU PF has led to a hostile political environment in Zimbabwe. The Central Intelligence Officer (CIO), military among other security sectors have seemingly been used by ZANU PF to control and monitor opposition political party members.

One of the most difficult experiences I had during the fieldwork was having people assume my research assistants and I were either journalists, CIOs, or ZANU-PF party agents. My research took place when preparations for the 2023 elections were underway, and many people in Nswazi believed that the government was sending secret agents out to identify those who spoke against the ruling party. During a visit to one of the shopping centres in Nswazi, one elderly man had this to say:

> "My children, I have a lot to say concerning your research, but I do not know who you are: campaigns are under way and CIOs are everywhere. I will not say anything; sorry. Unfortunately, especially on this chieftaincy. [*He then covered his mouth, signalling that he was silencing himself]*."[2]

My research team comprised of young people that is two Ndebele male research assistants and myself. This did not sit well with the "police" of the *Indunakazi* until they approached us in an intimidating way to gather information of our identity. Age plays a critical role in the politics of Zimbabwe. The younger someone is, the greater the chances they will experience political persecution due to the assumption that the young people are opposition party supporters such as Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Zimbabwean politics is controlled by gerontocracy elites. Age became another signifying marker shaping my research experiences.

2.7 Collection of data

Initially I planned to spend several weeks residing in Nswazi village and Bulawayo City Centre for a period of twelve months to support the ethnographic methodology of this study. However,

[2] In-depth interview, male participant, Nswazi, October 2022

Covid-19 restrictions reduced the time, and I was able to spend 9 months in the village, instead of the 12 months proposed.

Ethnography as a choice of methodology requires the researcher to have a keen interest in the socio-cultural context and ways in which the research participants construct their worldviews. In this study, I found myself participating in educational programmes in the community, such as career guidance, because the community elders thought that as a young, educated woman, I would be able to make an impact on the girl children. This initiative helped me build a rapport with members of the community, thus creating an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the historical background of the community through constant engagement with influential community members. Moreover, engaging with school children made me realise that *Indunakazi* Mabhena served as a role model to the girl child. In this study, ethnography played a significant role because I gained real-life knowledge about the community's perceptions of *Indunakazi,* as well as the challenges that the community faced and how these challenges are tackled.

I embarked on my research in 2020 but it was virtual as I was limited to be in the field due to travel restrictions caused by COVID-19. Nevertheless, data was later collected while I was physically present in Nswazi, Zimbabwe from October 2021 to June 2022. Respondents in this chapter are anonymized therefore either pseudonyms or the gender and age of a participant are used throughout the study except in *Indunakazi's* case whose identity remained known to the reader. The table below summaries the number of participants in this study.

Table 1 Numbers of participants in the study

	Focus Group Discussion	**Interviews**	**Key Informants**	**Total**
Male	12	10	5	27
Female	10	12	1	23
Grand Total	22	23	6	50

Key informant were participants who were well versed with issues of chieftaincy, elders of the community and family members. These key informants inhibit social roles in the Nswazi

community hence they provide in-depth knowledge and information on chieftaincy. For example, amongst the key informants there is a participant who has witnessed the leadership of Makheyi, Howard and now Sinqobile, this key informant has a better understanding of the changes that have taken between throughout these three epochs. Community elders also played a crucial role as key informants as they are carrying with them historical events or phenomena that were relevant in this study. Therefore, key informant interviews produced more valuable knowledge because of the status and expertise of chieftaincy in Nswazi.

Document Review

The documents and data to be reviewed include journals, newspaper articles and existing studies in female traditional leaders from other countries among other literature sources.

In support of the above archival research was conducted at the National Archives in Harare and Bulawayo, focusing on recordings of chieftaincy succession processes and traditional leadership in Umzingwane from precolonial times to the present. I spent two months visiting the archives, during which I reviewed the delineation reports, journals, reports and letters of colonial officials and missionaries that leant insight into traditional institutions and the status of women during the colonial era.

The delineation reports were used primarily for information about the dynamics that surrounded the Mabhena chieftaincy from the time Makheyi Mabhena was stripped of his powers, in 1987. They demonstrated that the contestation of the Mabhena chieftaincy was not only because of gender but the dispute could be traced as far back as the 1960s. Although the documents contained in the archives are gender blind, its fixation on historical texts was important in shaping my understanding of the history and dynamics surrounding the Mabhena chieftaincy.

Through the archives I was able to explore some of the issues that arose when the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's chieftaincy was contested, these had their roots in the colonial period. For example, one of the arguments was that *Indunakazi* Mabhena should be disqualified from the chieftaincy because of the past crimes of her grandfather, Makheyi. Additionally, the absence of women in the historical narratives is indicative of women's political status from the pre-colonial

period to post-colonial Zimbabwe. The existing literature shows that women were hardly recognized; hence, it is likely that there is little information available on women in rural governance. Although the Mabhena family emphasized the role that older female family members had played in the chieftaincy, the archival records yielded no mention of a woman in the history of the Mabhena chieftaincy. Thus, although the archival records assisted in the analysis of the development of the customs and traditions followed by the Mabhena chieftaincy, they did not do justice to the history of women in African political systems of that time. Therefore, the absence of women in archival records justifies the use of an intersectional lens in this study. A feminist approach seeks to amplify the marginalized voices by filling the gaps on women's experiences in archives through studies such as this study which focuses on *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

2.7.1 Sample Selection

Purposive and snowball sampling non-probability techniques were used to recruit participants. The two techniques were found to be appropriate because of their strength in identifying informative cases. Researchers in qualitative studies use purposeful sampling researchers to deliberately select individuals and research sites to explore the key features of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Through purposeful sampling researchers can conduct rich informative and in-depth understanding studies (Patton, 2002). In this study a purposeful sampling approach was used to identify participants who met three criteria during the time of the study: (a) members of the community who were serving or served in chieftaincy from the time of the Chief Mphetshengwa to *Indunakazi* Mabhena (b) community members who had knowledge of the Nswazi chieftaincy (c) elders of Nswazi community. The selection criteria emphasized gender and age.

In women studies researchers use snowball sampling to "partake in the dynamics of natural and organic social networks" in identifying participants for their research (Noy, 2008 p.329). It allows researchers reach the hidden or hard to reach populations due to discrimination or other forms of marginalisation from the society (Sadler, Lee, Lim and Fullerton, 2010). Older relatives of *Indunakazi* Mabhena (particularly women) who had comprehensive information on chieftaincy were hard to come by because some of them were too old or sick to have this discussion. Some have also relocated to other provinces mainly due to marriage or business.

2.7.2 Semi-structured interviews

After using archival research to broaden my knowledge on the Mabhena chieftaincy, I conducted semi-structured interview questions with individual participants. Neuman (2014) suggests that interviews are reliable as they can refine unclear answers followed up during the interview. Furthermore, interviews are useful because thorough questions can be asked, unclear and uncommon issues are explored allowing non-verbal data to be gathered through observation (Marshall & Rossman 2012).

Not much has been written in the archives on women traditional leaders thereby creating gaps in Zimbabwean history. Such gaps are viewed as worthwhile in feminist studies as they tend to bring more questions to a subject of interest. It is evident that women are an invisible category in traditional authority scholarship as shown in the archival record. I used some of the questions to target gaps in the archival records. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate in this study given their ability to provide more data through probing further from participants during interviews.

Using fifty semi-structured interviews with participants from the 4 wards under *Indunakazi* Mabhena's jurisdiction, I was able to explore the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena from the perspectives of different individuals who were knowledgeable on issues of chieftaincy and the community at large (Interview schedule in Appendix). I conducted 50 interviews, 27 were men and 23 were women. Although, I intended to have more women than men for my interviews participants, men were more forthcoming and flexible to converse than women. During an interview session one of the women said issues of chieftaincy have been inclined to men even if there is a female traditional leader. This seemed to be true as most participants in this focus group discussion agreed. These interviews were with women, men, traditional healers of the community, community elders and religious leaders. These interviews proved to be important as we discussed about the community's perception on the leadership of the *Indunakazi*, the *Indunakazi's* experiences and around issues of exploring her leadership.

2.7.3 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews are often held with participants who have "expert and special knowledge on a topic" (Taylor and Blake, 2015 p.153). Engaging interviews with key informant interviews allows individuals to gain insider information on topics that cannot be discussed in public such as in FGDs as they might not offer freedom to speak (McKenna et.al, 2011, p. 118). Key informants can also either help or deter researchers gain access to certain participants. The institution of traditional leaders is sacred not everything is meant for the public or is easily discussed. Some information maybe for public knowledge but because it is revered some people may not be keen to talk about it. Therefore, I selected five informants who had first-hand knowledge on issues of chieftaincy which can be made public and those that were constantly mentioned as *amadala e*Nswazi by community members (elders of the community). These five key informants consisted of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, two family members from the Mabhena family who play a significant role in the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. There are also two male community members who have witnessed the leadership of chieftaincy from Makheyi Mabhena to Sinqobile Mabhena, whilst the one witnessed Howard Sinqobile Mabhena's chieftaincy only.[3]

2.7.4 Focus group discussions.

Two focus group discussions were held in Wards 6 and 7 which comprised of 12 men and 10 women (Guideline for focus group discussion in Appendix) respectively. The first group of participants in Ward 6 was made up of male participants between the ages of 25 and 75. Young people (18-early 20s) were not keen to engage on issues to do with chieftaincy because there is a perception that they feel they are excluded in issues to do with chieftaincy. The second group from Ward 7 was made up of 6 female participants who were between the ages of 35 and 50 and both participants were randomly picked. Both focus groups lasted an average of 45minutes. Focus group discussions allowed participants to converse with each other.

[3] Since the participants were assured confidentiality and anonymous, therefore the study will not provide thick descriptions of the 4 key of informants.

2.7.5 Participant observation

According to Cook (1997), participant observation is a threefold process which involves the researcher first gaining access to be able to gain trust within the community, then, staying in the community to understand the community and collect data from an insider's view, then returning to the academic world to analyse the data that has been collected. If one of these stages cannot be completed, it does not make other stages invalid. For instance, while I had anticipated attending court sessions, meetings and ceremonies where the chief presided over affairs that were within her jurisdiction, as the research took place during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, all gatherings and court sessions were banned during the time of my fieldwork.

I chose to be a participant observer so that I could acquire first-hand knowledge of the traditions and the running of courts in Nswazi. However, one of the challenges I faced during this study was that *Indunakazi* Mabhena, the primary subject of the study, is temporarily based in Botswana where her husband was working during the time of the study. As a result, I did not have the opportunity to attend any ceremonies or court sessions which she presided or observe her in any of her other roles as chief (*Umama* to both her family and the community*)*, teacher, wife and Christian woman, within the everyday life of her community. The *Indunakazi* explained the provisions she made in her absence, these include returning to Nswazi as and when there are issues that need her attention, holding meetings with her council every time she is in the country.

In addition, one of the headmen also stated that they have regular meetings through the phone with the *Indunakazi* providing her with weekly updates of issues of the community. Therefore, after having interview sessions with the *Indunakazi* and Mr Sibanda (husband to the *Indunakazi*) in Botswana, Gaborone I thus had to spend my time in Nswazi learning about her from secondary sources, as my interaction with her was through telephone conversations., All communication after the interviews in Gaborone were undertaken through WhatsApp calls and chats through her husband, Mr Mabhena. The *Indunakazi's* absence went against culture and tradition, as a chief is supposed to be present within his/her community. Globalisation, along with emigration to escape the political instability and economic collapse that are pervasive in Zimbabwe have taken a toll on some of these traditions. However, this does not justify the *Indunakazi's* prolonged absence

from her people rendering them shepherd less. On the other hand, her absence can be misconstrued as lack of commitment and interest on things traditional.

2.7.6 Documenting non-verbal data

During the interviews and focus group discussions I paid attention to non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is communication without linguistic content (Mast and Cousin, 2013). Therefore, emotions are transmitted through body language such as facial expressions, stances, and gesticulations. Non-verbal communication is important as it can display personal emotions particularly during social interactions. Observations from the fieldwork shows that the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena has been an ignored elephant in the room, hence it is a hardly spoken or discussed topic in public spaces. Since the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena is an elephant in the room body language was observed to identify people's feelings towards the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Therefore, capturing perceptions of local community members and experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena through nonverbal communication was therefore important to avoid losing data in translation.

As an ethnographic researcher, I also documented non-verbal information to aid my data analysis. In social sciences research, non-verbal cues have been recognized as a formidable source of information (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). For example, during the interviews many people raised a fist whenever they spoke about how traditional authority has been politicized. Raising of a fist is a symbol associated with ZANU PF. Why would participants raise a fist when talking about chiefs as extended arms of politics in Zimbabwe? Why would participants wince when asked about the absence of *Indunakazi* Mabhena in Zimbabwe? Why did *Indunakazi* Mabhena look at Mr. Sibanda (husband to *Indunakazi* Mabhena) before answering some questions? Perilingual and facial expressions during the research communicated people`s feelings and attitudes on chieftaincy in Nswazi. These methods were imperative in allowing participants to express their perceptions and I was able to observe the facial expressions and gestures during these interviews.

2.8 Data analysis

The research used a narrative analysis. A narrative analysis approach was found to be appropriate in this study given its ability to what Clandinin and Connelly (2000 p.80) calls "experience the experience" persons understudy. This is because narrative analysis allowed research participants construct their own understanding of legitimacy in chieftaincy and the *Indunakazi's* narrative from her own experiences. Research participants shared their own experiences and opinions on chieftaincy, then these narratives were interpreted. Narrative analysis focuses on interpreting the main narrations of an individual or a society's experience using the first-hand narrative. It was imperative that I use this approach in my research as there was a need to give the *Indunakazi* a voice and narrate her own experiences and the community. Moreover, with narrative analysis, instead of focusing on what has been said in this study I also interpreted the body language, how participants reacted when explaining a scenario and language used when describing about how they feel about something. The process of coding data leading to the formulation of themes consisted of four processes which are (a) organizing data by transcribing the collected data (b) the coding process which involves identifying recurring themes and ideas relevant to the study (c) identifying key themes (d) interpreting data and identifying overarching themes that relate to the research question.

All the data collected was translated into English and transcribed verbatim, to avoid some local meanings being lost. Local words were retained in the manuscript. The process of organizing data entails transcribing interviews highlighting themes that answer research questions. Coding involves identifying recurring themes or patterns that are applicable to my research purpose. For example, I used 'family background' as an initial broad structural code. I coded all data relating to the family background and then sorted the data into different structural codes, such as 'historical background of Mabhena chieftaincy', 'kinship tensions' and 'hierarchy of the family'. This helped me identity markers within 'family background' that influenced the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

2.9 Ethical considerations

Before conducting fieldwork, I gained permission from the relevant authorities. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Witwatersrand. I obtained clearance for the research from

the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, the District Administrator's office and the *Indunakazi*. Consent for participation from the research participants was solicited through a consent form which assured safety to participants during and after interviews. However, due to COVID-19 I avoided paperwork; all consent was thus done verbally and recorded on an audio device. Participants were engaged only on voluntary grounds and were permitted to withdraw from the study at any point. It is the responsibility of the researcher to make sure the participant was not vulnerable during and after the interviews. All major identifiers were removed from data; therefore, pseudonyms were used.

2.10 Strengths and limitations of the study

Several beneficial and limiting factors related to my positionality as a researcher have been discussed in Section 2. 11 (Positionality of the researcher). This section discusses strengths and weaknesses not related to the researcher's positionality.

2.10.1 Strengths

This section discusses the strengths of the methodology used in this study.

Triangulation. The use of triangulation through using multiple research methods strengthened the validity and reliability of the study, as the potential weakness of one research instrument was covered by the relative strength of another. For instance, archival records mostly focused on the history of the Mabhena chieftaincy, which suggests the misunderstanding on issues of legitimacy and succession, by explicitly explaining the disputes that surrounded the chieftaincy of Makheyi Mabhena. Thereafter, the researcher used interviews, and observation and compared the resultant data to the findings from the archival records. In as much as interviews detailed information, they may not have such deep information on the history side.

When I interviewed *Indunakazi* Mabhena, I did not say, "How has gender shaped your leadership?" Rather questions asked included, "What factors have shaped your experiences?" Asking a question focusing on the single axis of gender would presume that only gender had influenced her leadership and risk other factors being overlooked that are beyond gender and her identities. A broader question showed that I considered that there could be other factors beyond gender or that I might have overlooked factors based on my personal experiences. This also

helped me to capture her narratives and descriptions of the realities underlying her experiences as a female chief, thereby bringing visibility to the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena as a demonstration of the underrepresentation of women in chieftaincy.

Language preparation. The population of Matabeleland Province is made up primarily of Ndebele speaking people, with very few Shona speakers. It is important to learn the language spoken in the area of study for an ethnography. This demonstrates to the participants that the researcher is not only interested in acquiring knowledge but has a commitment to understanding their way of life deeply. For this reason, and also for validity and credibility purposes, I spent 6 months learning Ndebele. This helped me to follow on a basic level what the interpreter and the interviewee were communicating and whether the interpreter had interpreted correctly.

2.10.2 Limitations

Limitations are the circumstances surrounding a researchers' research design or methodology that are beyond their control.

Single case. The study focused on just one female chief in Matabeleland, *Indunakazi* Mabhena yet Matabeleland has 3 more chiefs and Zimbabwe has a total of 5 chiefs. A serious limitation was that, at the time of the research, she was staying in Botswana where her husband was working and was not physically present in the Nswazi community. This limited my use of observation as a research method for engaging with her within the context in which she fulfils the role of chief.

Access. Gaining access to the *Indunakazi* was challenging. Firstly, the Chief had relocated to Botswana where her husband was teaching, I therefore had to travel to Botswana to meet her. After the meeting in Botswana all communication was done on WhatsApp. In her absence, other authorities in the traditional leadership implemented protocols for dealing with issues that arose during her absence. She only returned to Zimbabwe to attend to issues that could not be handled in this way. Her absence in Nswazi limited my access to her during her court sessions.

Gender Roles. All communication was done through Mr Sibanda which prolonged my research period. Before embarking on this research journey my assumption was that it would not

be difficult to access the *Indunakazi* as I was also a woman trust would be earned easily, but being a woman did not give me easy access to the *Indunakazi.* Gaining access to the *Indunakazi* was challenging. In all of my efforts to make initial contact with the *Indunakazi*, I communicated with Mr Sibanda and brother (Mr S. Mabhena). Seemingly, Mr Sibanda was playing a husband and father figure as the head of the house to the *Indunakazi*. However, this prolonged every communication I tried to have with her. Eventually I travelled to Botswana to meet her in person so as to overcome this obstacle and asked her consent for me to engage with her community. Upon my arrival in Botswana, however, all forms of communication were still undertaken by her husband and the interview was conducted in his presence. My interactions with Mr Sibanda and Mr Mabhena led to a reflection of my position as a young woman seeking the audience of a powerful women in a male dominated institution. It is not disputed that the outcome of my study might have been influenced or sharpened by my gender.

Contrarily, I cannot dismiss the presence of Mr Sibanda as a disadvantage to my research work. Rather, it helped me acquire more data on issues that seemed to be uncomfortable or sensitive to talk about, because, during the interviews *Indunakazi* Mabhena would look at Mr Sibanda signalling him to respond. It was only after Mr Sibanda's response that the *Indunakazi* would then discuss further. This substantiates the use of nonverbal communication as stated above, because with these body languages provided important information was passed to me.

Covid-19 restrictions. The study took place in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when there were travel and gathering restrictions. This limited the sample size as it was not easy to have access to some of the target participants—especially the elderly–as some had succumbed to Covid-19 and others were sceptical about engaging with me due to the perceptions on Covid-19. As a result, I did not get as much exposure to community gatherings, meetings, or court hearings. Additionally, some participants were not comfortable with mingling with me as there was fear that people coming from urban areas were vectors of the virus. I wonder if male researchers such as Lindgren and Fayayo (2020) went through the same ordeal, or it is an experience peculiar to women.

Language barrier. As I was not fluent in Ndebele, I needed an interpreter for all interviews and focus group discussions that took place in Umzingwane in order to avoid compromising the

quality of the data. I hired an interpreter who was also a research assistant. One of the main obstacles I faced with the research assistants was that, at times, they failed to probe further in the way I expected. Additionally, using assistant researchers did not give me the freedom to build new networks in the way I may have been able to have I worked alone. For example, as one of the research assistants was from Nswazi, participants were not at ease to discuss some issues in his presence. Therefore, to avoid compromising the quality of my data I would make a follow-up to these participants later on without the research assistants and in this way, participants felt safe and comfortable to interact with me.

Bias. Gatekeepers tended to twist a project or participants to suit their mission. Mr Mabhena was my gatekeeper for the family, he spoke on chieftaincy from a family's perspective. I realised that he deliberately left out some family members that might have had information relevant to the research. He deliberately mentioned family members that were old, sick, or moved to the city or were not critics of the chief's leadership.

2.11 Positionality of the researcher

Duarte (2017 p.135) describes positionality as a methodology that "requires researchers to identify their own degrees of privileges through factors of race, class, educational attainment, income, ability and gender and citizenship, among others" to understand their social positions in social hierarchies. Making positionality explicit helps to reveal power dynamics between the researcher and the research participant. In most cases, the researcher is the powerful and the participant is the "meek" (Hoong Sin, 2007). As a researcher I might have shaped my questions and my approach to the fieldwork based on my assumptions.

As a young, educated, Shona woman in Zimbabwe, given the history of Zimbabwe's atrocities and status as a patriarchal state, a reflection of how my positionality shaped my research should not be overlooked. My gender and the fact that I was unmarried disadvantaged me, as these characteristics are attributed lower status than being male or being a married woman, in the community. My educational and ethnic background and age, however, acted as privileges that afforded me easy access to the community and a chance to build a rapport with the community.

In addition, the researcher's proximity to the participants can enhance the depth and validity of the findings. Accordingly, Berger (2015 p.13) supports that "the degree of researcher's personal familiarity with the experience of participants potentially impacts all phases of the research process including recruitment of participants, collecting data through interviews and observations, analysis and making meaning of the data and drawing on conclusions". In this study, my proximity to the research topic and participants as a Zimbabwean woman was additive, as it brought additional insights to various dimensions of the research.

2.11.1 Reflective and reflexive engagement with positionality in the study

As I continuously engaged with my research participants in Nswazi, who were not as privileged as I was in terms of access to education and in geographical location (Mashonaland), it was important that I used a reflexive key point to reposition myself regularly to reduce bias and build trust with my research participants. It was also important that all parties involved in the research, including myself, acknowledged how we were all classed, gendered and how we were othered, despite being in certain privileged positions.

I used an intersectional approach to reflect on my positionalities: rather than dwelling on a single factor to explain my own experiences, I explored how my different identities have shaped what I experience as a woman.

Historical context and ethnicity. In Section 2.11, my positionality as a Shona researcher in a Ndebele area was discussed in the context of historic conflict between the two ethnic groups. My topic of study was contested by some participants as memories of the Gukurahundi genocide committed by ethnic Shona against ethnic Ndebele are still a reference point to most people in Matabeleland South, which is a Ndebele dominated area. The most asked question during the initial stages of my study was why I had chosen Ndebele chiefs and not Mashonaland chiefs as my focus of study:

Why did you choose our chief and not chiefs in Mashonaland: are there no female chiefs in Mashonaland? What is your home area: are there no chiefs in your home area? [11]

These are questions I expected when I chose to conduct my research in Matabeleland Province. Ethnographers have ways of negotiating their way through to attain trust and confidence from their participants. One's ethnic identity has a role to play in how much information one might choose to give to a researcher during interviews. To avoid questions about my identity creating a significant barrier to the research, I ended up using the name '*Masibanda*' when introducing myself, which is a popular clan name (*isibongo*) in Matebeland. *In Ndebele culture, isibongo* plays an integral role in one's identity, hence its significance cannot be overstated in a research context where I was trying to earn the trust of my research participants. Consequently, since *Masibanda* or Sibanda is a popular clan name in Matabeleland and Masibanda is my *isibongo*, which refers to females belonging to the Shumba totem, I ended up using this *isibongo* because it helped my research participants to identify me as part of the Ndebele.

Regard for studying Ndebele culture. As an educated young person, the elders accommodated me because they saw benefit in a young role model engaging with their youth on the importance of studying cultural heritage, as the youth in their community tended to be dismissive toward learning about Ndebele culture, perceiving it as "outdated", given that "times have changed".[7] The youth also tended to see chieftaincy as the business of "*amadala*" (old men). For these reasons, the arrival of a young person willing to understand the Nswazi culture was pleasing to the elders.

Role model for education. Secondly, there is a high rate of school dropout among young girls—often cohabiting with *otsheketsha (*goldpanners) or migrating to South Africa or Botswana—hence my arrival as a young, educated women was seen by the elders as an opportunity for their young women and girls to be exposed to a role model who had successfully pursued a path to higher education.

Ethnicity. In terms of the privilege associated with my ethnicity, because Mashonaland is the most developed and recognised province in Zimbabwe, there is a general assumption that people in Mashonaland are better positioned because of their status in the social, economic, and political hierarchy of ethnicities and provinces in Zimbabwe. Mashonaland or the Shona people

are generally regarded as the dominant ethnicity in Zimbabwe and hence can control or navigate through the hierarchies with relatively more influence and easy access.

Reflecting on the domination of the Ndebele by the Shona, particularly in the political and economic structures of Zimbabwe, it became clear that an awareness of the power dynamics resulting from me, the researcher, being Shona and the participants being Ndebele, was imperative. Therefore, during the fieldwork I used the 'privileges' I have as a Shona person to understand how an absence of these privileges shaped the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and particularly her visibility. For example, during the interviews I acknowledged that my ethnic and geographical location afforded me certain privileges in the society that they might not have as Ndebele women in Matabeleland. This I did to show my self-awareness to the marginalized society thereby validating the participant's life experiences, giving the participants more room to express themselves.

However, while I had initially assumed that as a Shona researcher entering a Ndebele community, my ethnicity would disadvantage me in my role as researcher because of the ethnic tensions emanating from the legacies of Gukurahundi atrocities, I discovered that I was wrong. Instead, my presence as a Shona woman in the community was perceived as a recognition of the value of the Ndebele community in the knowledge production structures of Zimbabwe. This forced me to revise my perceptions of the relations between the Shona and the Ndebele. In as much as there are historical tensions between these two main ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, I found that social relations have not been tainted to the extent that I assumed. In this regard, I viewed this study as having a heuristic element, as it served to correct my assumptions about the status of Ndebele Shona relations.

Gender. Although Zimbabwe has made progress since independence, there is still a huge gap in the recognition and redistribution of resources and access to power between men and women. My perspective as a researcher regarding this imbalance was shaped by my own experience working in the Judicial Service Commission in Zimbabwe, where I encountered female judges experiencing discrimination and marginalization. While their female judges outnumber male judges across Zimbabwe, the level at which these female judges are recognized and represented does not correlate to their numerically superior representation. For example,

Zimbabwe has never had a female chief justice. In addition, female judges still play an ancillary role in the Judicial Service Commission, which remains dominated by men.

While traditional leadership has been male-dominated, I noted in the literature that even the scholarship around traditional leadership has been dominated by male researchers. Maxwell (1999) wrote on the social history of a remote chiefdom in north-east Zimbabwe. Lindgren's (2002) study, while not solely on traditional leadership, explores issues of identity in the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Both researchers were white European males whose identities held symbolic power, not only positioning them more powerfully in relation to the women in their studies, but also in relation to the African men in their studies. I assume that in Lindgren's (2002) study in Matabeleland, he experienced privileges during his fieldwork as a male researching a male-dominated institution; in addition, his experiences were likely to have been influenced by his gender and older age, which were attributes he shared with those in traditional authority.

In terms of my own experience of this gender imbalance as a female researcher in this study, I found that at first it was a challenge to gain access to the community elders and I had to employ male researcher assistants to facilitate access. Once I had made direct contact with these elders, however, I found that my age, gender and presence in the community ceased to be an issue and going into the field without these male research assistants no longer pose a challenge for me.

Race. Issues of race in knowledge production are a reality that it cannot be overlooked. In Africa, race is closely linked to the legacy of colonialism, and still impacts societies across the continent in many ways, with white Europeans still holding disproportionate power socially. I wondered whether the race of Lindgren could have advantaged him to certain spaces that were inaccessible to me. Race has been used as an organising principle in the construction of knowledge, power structures and social hierarchies. Hall argues that race operates by invisibility.

In research, race can be another source of power held by the researcher over the researched. It can also be a source of differential power between researchers (as was noted with gender). During my research fellowship at Ghent University in Belgium, I interacted with white female researchers who had done their research in Africa. While there were commonalities between their

experiences and mine, it was clear to me that their race had put them at an advantage. Most had done their research either in areas experiencing conflict or on traditional authorities. One of the white female researchers explained how her race favoured her, but her colleagues' race and gender (male) favoured him more during fieldwork.

Given my personal experience, I reflected on the differences that may have existed between Lindgren's experience, as a white European male, and mine, as a young black African female. There is a possibility that Lindgren did not reflect on his positionality as a white male, might have failed to observe its effect; he also may not have experienced the problems or challenges in his research in Matabeleland that a woman of another race might have faced. Reflecting on the challenges I faced in gaining access to the Chief and the community, I asked myself whether Lindgren experienced the same challenges or because he was a white older male, he had better access to the community than I did.

2.12 Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical framework that was embraced for this study.

2.12.1 Intersectionality

This study is situated within an intersectional paradigm. To understand the identities that shape female leaders' experiences in claiming and maintaining legitimacy in an African context, the study is informed by Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional lens. The term 'intersectionality' was first coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to emphasize the discrimination and exclusion faced by African American women in the United States. Intersectionality describes how the different aspects of identity can contribute to the creation of systems of oppression and inequalities. For example, the experiences of a Black woman cannot be explained from a gendered perspective alone but must recognise other dimensions of identity that interact with each other (Crenshaw, 1989). The main aim of intersectionality was to bring recognition to the experience of marginalized groups (Collins, 2000). The development of intersectional theory significantly advanced research on women of colour and others who experience multiple forms of oppression in society (McCall, 2005).

Intersectionality has been used to explore how "race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability and age operate not as a unitary, mutually exclusive category, but as a reciprocally constructing phenomena that shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2014 p.15). Therefore, in this study intersectionality using May (2015) analysis of intersectionality, it has been used as a heuristic device which allows an exploration of the underlying narrative of the *Indunakazi*. As studies on the institution of traditional leadership have tended to focus on male power, the intersectional lens is used to avoid universalizing the experiences of women in political and traditional positions of authority. The concept of intersectionality has been used by black feminist activists who recognise that gender and race are overlapping identities that must be considered together in analysing black women's experiences (Nash, 2008). Intersectionality is a vital approach in gender studies as it seeks to unpack or construct the various overlooked nuances that shape the experiences of women in systems of oppression (McCall 2003).

There is vast international literature that has engaged the concept of intersectionality in gender studies. For example, Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008) use intersectionality to analyse and understand women's multi-layered identities and the challenges that women face due to these identities. In earlier studies, Ross-Sheriff (2006) focused on the experience of Afghan women and Samuels (2003) on Black-White multiracial adoptees, using intersectionality to elucidate the multiple identities of women, their challenges, survival skills, and capacity to be in control despite oppressive life conditions. Sylvain (2011) outlines how the San women of Omaheke in Namibia experience how their self-constructions make it difficult for them to work with international human rights organizations. Research by Lee and Brotman (2011) explores the particular way that structural violence within the Canadian refugee regime shapes the life of LGBTQ refugees. These studies have presented intersectionality as a concept that only examines the systems of oppression of a particular category. Following the work of Mugge and Erzeel (2016) who examine how elected women wield their power and how their influence in such offices have been influenced by age, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, generation and ethnicity influence entrance to elected office and the power elected officials wield. An exploration of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership not only focuses on systems of oppression but also how some identities such as motherhood, educational background and marital status can progress the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

Thiam (1986; 2014), a Senegalese sociologist, has written extensively about the interlocking nature of the multiple systems of marginalisation and oppression that affect African women in trying to decolonize the colonial perspective of the challenges African women face, and in reversing the tendency to universalize the plight of African women. In her book *Speak out Black Sister*, Thiam (1983) highlights how socio-economic, religious and political systems are typically male dominated, thereby creating systems that usually place women at the very bottom of power structures. Thiam's approach to intersectionality is one which allows women to describe their own experiences using their own words without being inclined towards socially constructed factors. Drawing examples from Thiam's use of intersectionality, the study allows the local community to shape and define what legitimacy in Nswazi chieftaincy is.

Intersectionality is based on the idea that we experience discrimination or privileges based on the interplay between the multiple dimensions of our identities. Intersectionality is a metaphor and prism that helps to explore the colliding factors that inform experiences of people based on the identities they pose in their spaces (Crenshaw, 1991). There are nuance experiences that emanate from different spaces which result in differences in how challenges or privileges are encountered in communities by individuals. The intersectionality paradigm produces an analysis of women's experiences from various identities, spaces and cultural aspects which departs from the perception of universalism and essentialism that the privileges and oppression of women are homogenous.

The study of *Indunakazi* Mabhena explores leadership in an African context, where factors such as motherhood and marriage are used as instruments for raising the visibility of women leaders. Msila and Gumbo (2016) point out the importance of femininity in traditional African contexts. Within the African context, there are diverse norms which can shape the leadership of women, and these include political, sociocultural, ethnic and historical (Amadiume, 1987; Mama, 2003). With regards to *Indunakazi* Mabhena's case the research provides an understanding on how various identities that subjugated female traditional leaders were engaged in trying to legitimize their authority in traditional leadership institutions.

To deepen the dissertations' conceptual framework, intersectionality was used as a decolonial methodological approach which offers a space for the voices and lived experiences of

the marginalized (Manning, 2021) without universalising the challenges of African women. Further the study highlights how colonialism has contributed to shaping the position of female traditional leaders today. Drawing examples from Mohanty (1984), this study does not take a generalized perception of women as an "always-already constituted group, one which has been labelled powerless, exploited, sexually harassed" (Mohanty 1984, p.384). She further highlights the problems of using the word "woman" when writing about women, which seemingly makes the experiences of women similar and ahistorical (p. 344). In this case, the women of Matabeleland cannot be categorized with Shona women because their challenges were different. The Ndebele women have faced the 1983-1987 genocide lives of men were mostly lost, leaving women as heads of households and a lost identity due to the genocide. Therefore, intersectionality as a decolonial approach in this study is used to challenge not only the Eurocentric and African-male-centred narration but it also highlights the overlooked impacts of Gukurahundi in shaping women's position in present day Matabeleland. Moreover, it challenges the African male-centred ways of local knowledge production that undermines the contribution of women. However, as findings will demonstrate in Chapter 5, *Indunakazi* Mabhena's contested ascendancy to power will show how Gukurahundi deepened patriarchal traditional gender roles that restricted the *Indunakazi's* women's agency and voice in traditional leadership.

In support of the above view, in African research, the perspective offered by intersectionality shifts the experiences and agency of women from the margins to the centre. For instance, Akungu (2019) employs an intersectional lens to explore the biases that resulted when patriarchal and colonial lenses were used when studying marginalized groups. Similarly, Mohammed (2022) examines the importance of intersectionality to ensure that feminist topics that were historically pushed to the periphery are centred in African feminist discourse. The approaches used by Akungu (2019), and Mohammed (2022) provide a model for this study. A model that explores colonialism, patriarchy and exclusion of women in knowledge production to address the experiences of women.

In addition, intersectionality sought to explore the complex forms of oppression that individuals face due to their multiple identities (Brotman, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). May (2015, p. 6) proposed that intersectionality "Asks that we imagine future possibilities and reconsider

omissions, past and present, from a "matrix" mindset: while it also helps to expose historical silences and to understand oppression and privilege as lived experiences and processes situated in and shaped by material, political, and social conditions." Nash (2008) notes that intersectional discourse can ignore how victims might be both victimized by patriarchy and privileged by race. To address this, Garry (2011) has broadened the concept to be more inclusive, emphasizing both oppression and privilege, thereby representing and including the 'Other' category.

In reference to above Lutz, Vivar and Supik (2016), the fluidity of intersectionality makes it difficult to measure oppression. They add that it is difficult to determine all the categories that are needed and to tell which category belongs were. Clark (2017) argues, however, that this fluidity helps researchers to go beyond the usually expected categories, giving the participant more room to express themselves and the researcher an in-depth understanding of the study. In this study rather than dwelling on gender and ethnicity only which are Lindgren's main sources of the experiences of women it highlights other factors which were also mentioned by participants such as age and marriage. Rather than merely looking at the systems of oppression, the study went beyond oppression and also considered the *Indunakazi's* privileges. The broadening of intersectionality to include cultural, economic and other structures makes it more complex, but in this study, it provides an opportunity to view the intersections of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's identity, going beyond gender, class and age. This study employs an intersectional lens from an African perspective, because of its acceptance of the different experiences of women.

Moreover, an intersectional lens is best suited to explore the interrelationship of legitimacy, gender and the institution of traditional leadership including other factors and how these contribute to inequalities in the leadership of women. Intersectionality explores the interconnectedness of varying multiple identities and how these create barriers and opportunities that might influence the progression of the leadership of women in traditional leadership. In this study, the identities that are ascribed to *Indunakazi* Mabhena are explored in terms of how they shaped her experiences and the perceptions of the community. The study does not dispute that gender norms create barriers for women, but rather sees gender as one of the several key aspects of identity that need to be explored to understand the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

In support of the above view, Dangarembga's (1988) novel, *Nervous Conditions*, is a classic example of how systems of oppression in post-independence Zimbabwe have reinforced hegemonic masculinities placing women in the peripherals. Dangarembga stresses the challenges that women face as barriers to progress in their leadership positions. She addresses six main issues which are race, class, gender, colonisation, patriarchy, and education. Not only that, Dangarembga also highlights how women in the novel defy patriarchal norms to achieve in their held positions as mothers and daughters. Similarly, in this study factors such as gender and class that shaped the trajectory of women in Nervous Conditions, are some of the identities that shaped the legitimacy and leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

Intersectionality has not been used as extensively in African studies as in Western feminist studies, although there has been research on the multiple identities in the oppression and marginalization of women (Poltera, 2019). While some have argued that intersectionality is Eurocentric and does not have the capacity to adequately describe the experiences of women in Africa, this study argues that intersectionality already existed as a paradigm in Africa. During the colonial period, women were already expressing their resistance against systems of oppression such as colonial rule, patriarchy, and other cultural practices.

As stated above, the common systems of oppression for women in Africa are colonial rule, patriarchy and other cultural practices, but there are some privileges that some African women especially the elite have, which other women will not have. I am from a privileged ethnic grouping in Zimbabwe, Shona. I used this privilege to explore the Ndebele women community. By understanding, acknowledging and embracing my privileges during the interviews or focus group discussions before my participants, this allowed participants to speak openly about the experiences and perceptions of the *Indunakazi*, her privileges and her systems of oppression.

Applying intersectionality to this study

Intersectionality is used in this study as a tool to bring visibility to the experiences of a marginalized group by capturing narratives through a qualitative approach. Intersectionality can be used to link chieftaincy, gender, the state and customary law to understand the nuances on how power shapes chieftaincy and how female leaders bargain or navigate through inequalities.

The theory allows for an exploration of how gender alone cannot explain the experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Therefore, intersectionality is key to exploring and understanding the experiences of a female chief and the perceptions of her community.

An intersectional approach in this study recognizes that the experiences of female chiefs are not constituted only by gender and class or gender and race but time, space and surrounding circumstances (Williams, 2018). Intersectionality is fluid and ever changing; these are salient identities that inform the experiences and legitimacy of female chiefs. In other words, women in rural areas are empowered through salient identities, but their experiences are rarely mentioned, as they are represented by the urban elite. Spivak (1988), in her work *Can the subaltern speak?* Is critical of the discriminatory discourses and limited representation of rural women and obscuring of their voices, compared to urban women.

Intersecting intersectionality and African feminism

While intersectionality is useful in describing the multiple identities of inequalities, it fails to acknowledge the difference between gender activism in the Global South and Global North (Kerner, 2017). Thus, a blend of African feminism and intersectional lens is imperative in this study as it helps to explore how varying identities which are relevant to the African context are barriers or opportunities in the women in traditional leadership. It is important to situate this study within an African feminist paradigm, as this helps to analyse and explore the overlapping identities that create inequalities from an African woman's perspective. The study takes cognisance of the positionality of an African woman. However, in my perspective, in African feminism the general designation of 'African' has tended to bury the diverse experiences of women in the continent. It is undeniable that women across the continent face common experiences due to colonisation and capitalism, but these experiences need to be examined on an individual basis. Therefore, this study makes a case study of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, but this is not to say her experiences are peculiar to other African women as there have been examples mentioned in the first chapter.

Intersectionality is well-suited for exploring the questions of legitimacy for women in traditional leadership institutions because it explores the lived experience of women.

Intersectionality is particularly relevant in the African context as it emphasises that there is no single factor that influences the discrimination or privileges experienced by African women but rather, there are several identities that are inseparable. The study draws intersectionality with some caution on Western feminism, but post-colonial African feminist who address the intersectionality of African women will be integrated to give an appreciation of literature on African women that has been long preserved for either the male authors or Western feminist theorists. In this study, intersectionality helps to explore the identities assigned to women and how these impact on their legitimacy as leaders within traditional leadership institutions. In relation to legitimacy, a key focus is on how women have been able to attain authority in male-dominated traditional leadership institutions.

2.12.2 Incorporating the intersectional lens in data collection

The intersectional theoretical lens was integrated into the methodological approach used in this study, as it explained the various identities or structures that hindered or facilitated the legitimacy and leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena from an African perspective. Intersectional theory informed my data collection instruments and choice of words. For example, to understand the experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, I avoided generalizing her experiences with those of other female chiefs or female urban elites.

To successfully apply intersectionality during the research period I did not limit my participants to questions pertaining to the *Indunakazi's* gender or sex during interviews or focus group discussions. I avoided using leading questions that would make their responses limited to gender or sex. The below conversation is an illustration of how I phrased my questions and how they responded during a focus group discussion; this allowed them to go beyond gender or sex.[4]

Tracey: What do you think influences the leadership of the *Indunakazi*?

Dorothy: A lot of issues have influenced the leadership of the *Indunakazi* and being a woman is one of them.

[4] The names used were all pseudonyms used during focus group discussions.

Thandi: To respond to your first question, I refer to issues mentioned by the previous speaker issues such as religion, war veterans and politics. Religiously, the *Indunakazi* has stopped practicing some traditional rituals because she is a Christian and people are not happy with it. Then war veterans, sometimes victimise people in order force them to adhere to the chiefs even if there is something wrong, we see as a community and lastly the politicians have infiltrated the institution such that people have lost hope in the institution.

Ntombi: I think that the *Indunakazi's* leadership is influenced by her age, she is young, whilst others see the need of having a young person, the elders and those of her age find it difficult to be ruled by a young person, and this is worsened by that she is woman, that old man are mostly against young leadership in this community.

Sibo: A strong educational background has helped the *Indunakazi* be a good leader in this community.

The above responses show how respondents' were not limited to gender or sex; my questions were formulated in ways that did not restrict my participants. Rather, participants, especially in focus group discussions, conversed in ways that brought up other factors that they believed influenced the experiences of the *Indunakazi*. As the chapter progresses some sections will highlight how the methods used in the study were appropriate in expounding on the intersections of the *Indunakazi*.

2.12.3 Challenges encountered in data collection.

Scepticism about the research

Possibly due to the historical legacy of how the Ndebele (Nguni) people and the province itself has been portrayed, many people in the Nswazi community appeared to be sceptical about my intentions when I came to stay in their community. Since ethnography requires the researcher to build genuine relationships with the respondents—not only seeing them as participants but co-producers of knowledge—I had to use this opportunity to build rapport and trust with members of the community. For this reason, the methods used in this study needed to be flexible and

beneficial to both the members of the community and me. For example, whilst focus group discussions allowed participants to share their different opinions on the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* in one setting which they felt it was more secure and comfortable, this provided me with information on how the perceptions of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's legitimacy were divided.

I observed during the selection of participants that women were not as keen to participate in this study as men were. This was because most women, alluded that traditional leadership is old men's business. Reflecting on these statements, I wondered how much support *Indunakazi* Mabhena was getting from women in the community. An intersectional approach in this study was important to explore how patriarchy as a socio-cultural dynamic intersects with other factors in the leadership of women in male defined spaces.

Impact of the chief's absence

During the fieldwork I experienced accessibility challenges as some of the male council members were unwilling to engage with us because according to one of the villages, "there was no communication by the *Indunakazi* herself that you were coming to us", despite producing a letter from the chief. It dawned on me during the interviews after negotiating with these council members that it was an indirect way of them addressing the Chiefs' absence. Originally, I envisioned attending the courts and meetings that the *Indunakazi* presides over. This would have allowed me to observe how men interact with the *Indunakazi*. I adapted my methodology since the *Indunakazi* was absent and all meetings and court proceedings were banned due to COVID-19. I was able to travel to Botswana to meet her and, preceding interviews were held online, communicating through WhatsApp.

Impact of Covid-19 restrictions on ethnography and data collection

My fieldwork occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, hence my study initially started with virtual interviews due to the travel restrictions and curfew that were in place in Zimbabwe and worldwide. Virtual interviews were not ideal for my participants as it involved them giving out their contact details, which introduced the possibility of compromising their privacy and confidentiality. Conducting my research virtually was initially a challenge because participants were often not keen to speak over the phone for security reasons and some were not accessible

through mobile. One of the most challenging aspects of using the virtual approach was that it was difficult to establish rapport, impossible to make observations, and impossible to familiarise myself with the context. While I did have research assistants who were based in Nswazi since I was unable to be there, I resumed fieldwork in Nswazi when all travel restrictions and curfew were lifted. I managed to be physically present in Nswazi for the actual field work from October 2021 until March 2022.

After arriving in Nswazi, I observed social distancing rules. This meant that during the focus group discussions, participants were advised to maintain social distance and each participant was given a disposal mask. All interviews conducted in Nswazi conformed to the protocols prescribed by the ministry in its approval letter, concerning COVID 19. Virtual interviews included the use of email, telephone, and WhatsApp. As Nswazi is rural, many people did not have access to networked computers and had limited literacy; therefore, telephone interviews were the most useful. Virtual interviews were time consuming; each call took about an hour.

Power dynamics between researcher and participants

Some participants were concerned about the political nature of the interviews and initially were not willing to discuss anything with me. I had to produce my student card and, in some instances, ask to hold interviews far from their home areas. Asking participants to have interviews in a location of their choice was also a way of addressing the power dynamics between the participants and me. The participants could also make decisions and not have the interviewer control the entire research. Therefore, to manage power dynamics between the researcher and the participant, the interviewer allowed the participant to have control over issues wherever possible, although the final data analysis was determined by the interviewer. Additionally, holding interviews away from participants' homes was to ensure that participants are not left vulnerable to any risks or threat as promised in the consent form. This shows that the challenge of power dynamics in research is a permanent phenomenon because the researcher will still have power and control over the research procedures although participants are involved.

Gender dynamics

The role of spouses in research and leadership of women has often been overlooked. The presence of Mr Sibanda during the interview sessions and the role he played as a mediator between the *Indunakazi* and myself was a challenge at first until I used that opportunity to analyse what influence he has in the leadership of the *Indunakazi*. This led me to probe further during the interviews what role Mr Sibanda played in the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, an issue I initially overlooked. In as much as Mr Sibanda initiated a conversation that led to a deeper understanding of the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, some of the information might not have been revealed if he were not there. On the other hand, some information might also have been left out due to his presence. However, observations made in this study reveal that presence of Mr Sibanda not only in the interviews but leadership of the *Indunakazi* indicate how patriarchy is an earmark in Nswazi. It is therefore imperative to examine what informs this approach of having Mr Sibanda lead her, speak on her behalf. Is it her Christian background which highlights that women should obey and be submissive to their husbands? Or is it the African culture that sees men as the head of the house hence should lead family decisions?

During my interactions with the *Indunakazi*, I observed that when I asked her a question, she usually waited for Mr Sibanda to respond before she responded herself. Mr. Sibanda is the *Indunakazi's* husband who seemingly played the role of the *Indunakazi's* secretary in Botswana. As a result, my questions became more inclined and directed toward Mr Sibanda than the chief herself. This constituted an example of symbolic power: despite our positions as Chief and researcher we were still black Zimbabwean women from patriarchal backgrounds where a man was seen as the head of the house and his opinions are regarded more authentic and valid than those of women. I found it impossible to ask Mr Sibanda to let *Indunakazi* Mabhena speak first; as a result, I had to let the conversations flow and observe her silence, body language, emotions and facial expressions, and later translate these into linguistic terms (Breidenstein *et al*., 2013). Reflecting on such observations made me realise how sometimes it is not the voices of women that is needed to amplify their visibility, instead it is their effectiveness, their actions. What effective measures are they taking in enhancing development in their communities? What steps are they taking to legitimize their authority?

Constraints of rurality and traditionalism

Researching in a rural setting is one of the most challenging aspects of research. While I initially assumed that the reasons participants were difficult to reach during the period, I was trying to collect data remotely (due to Covid-19 restrictions) were that they did not have smart phones or were uncomfortable answering questions over the phone about political issues. My later observations in person, however, revealed that it had more to do with the traditional African cultural values that govern life in rural institutions and communities. The elders were more inclined to sit down with me to have conversations than to speak over the phone. As the chairman of the chief's council explained: "modern day technology creates a gap between the learner [the researcher] and the knowledge bearer [elders of the community]". Additionally, it was extremely important to observe the expected procedures and protocols as a visitor in Nswazi to demonstrate respect and recognition of community's way of life. If I had ignored these procedures and protocols and allowed the research to be overtaken by modern technologies, it could have negatively impacted my research. For this reason, I found that my research assistants, who were based in Nswazi, played a vital role in setting the tone for a conversation, even when the meeting was online.

2.13 Conclusion

The research process presented above demonstrates how voice, representation and power are significant components of research, on both the researcher and the participant. Although the reflection chapter connected with various literature on researching in Africa, there is still limited work on women researching in Africa. The chapter established that gender was not the only underlying theme during my research journey However, I used a reflexive approach to examine the main issues that shaped my research, and these were age, ethnicity and methodological challenges. The chapter also concludes that it is not always that a woman's voice or agency in contributing to knowledge production is hindered by patriarchy. In the case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, she has removed herself from the community and further surrounds herself with elderly man who overshadowed the visibility of the *Indunakazi*. This chapter challenges female researchers in Africa to have a critical reflection of their positionality when in the field, this helps female researchers to be aware of the power dynamics that existence between the researcher and participant and how these shape the experiences of women in the field.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW: UNPACKING LEGITIMACY AND GENDER DYNAMICS IN TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of a wide range of relevant academic literature on legitimacy as the key political concept of the thesis in order to situate the thesis within the varied discourses of traditional leadership and the politics of gender and governance. The chapter briefly discusses the role of traditional authorities in postcolonial Africa and gender dynamics in traditional leadership. Sources of legitimacy are discussed, focusing on symbolic, divine and state legitimacy as normative sources in traditional leadership. In the last section of the chapter, the thesis situates the African case broadly, discussing the status of women in traditional leadership and how this intersects with gender norms in shaping the legitimacy of female chiefs. Ultimately, the chapter provides an overview on women and legitimacy in chieftaincy and foreshadows the next chapter which focuses specifically on Zimbabwe.

A key framing argument of the chapter is that gender relations in Africa and, in general, the participation of women in decision-making processes vary from one community to another. With specific reference to the subject matter of this thesis, the opportunities for women to participate in chieftaincy decision-making systems are limited due to succession customs that follow the male primogeniture systems, except for a few examples of matrilineal societies. In fact, while there has been considerable research on traditional leadership across Africa (McCormack, 1979; Ribot, 2002; Ntsebeza, 2005; Akrong, 2006 and Brempong, 2000; Dodo, 2013; Logan, 2013; Day, 2014; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2018; Makahamadze, Grand and Tavuyanango, 2018), many scholars have tended to examine the intersections of gender, legitimacy and chieftaincy from a female chiefs' perspective particularly in patriarchal societies (Dodo, 2017). What these studies have failed to explore, however, are the perceptions of the communities they study and, specifically, perceptions of the leaders and what shapes these perceptions (Oomen, 2005). To this end, as an illustration, the exploration of *Indunakazi* Mabhena has been covered in Zimbabwean and international newspapers, but little has been written by academics who are better at providing

thick descriptions of events that are not simply the affirmation of one side of the succession narrative.

Thus, this thesis contributes to the limited literature on women and legitimacy in traditional leadership by examining the leadership and legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena by foregrounding the role of the Nswazi community in how *Indunakazi* Mabhena is received, perceived, and legitimates her authority. That is, this study of *Indunakazi* Mabhena makes a valuable contribution to the literature on chieftaincy, not only in the Zimbabwean context but across Africa. The institution of traditional leadership has been perceived to be independent from the government in terms of its governance approach. The findings of this study support Mamdani's (1996) assertion that the powers and sovereignty of traditional leaders cannot be separated from those of the national government. This is highlighted in the way that governments in post-colonial Africa have involved themselves in the leadership of chiefs.

3.2 Legitimacy

In order to limit the reach of the dissertation's conceptual framework, it is important to highlight the specific ways in which I engage with its key concept, namely, legitimacy. In this section, the objective is to discuss approaches to legitimacy and how they can be connected to the institution of traditional leadership in this study.

Weber (1984) was one of the first scholars to use the term "legitimacy". He identified three sources of legitimacy to authority namely tradition, charisma and reason/law (Weber, 1984). Weber emphasises that if authority is accepted as just and appropriate by those that are governed by it then it is considered legitimate. Legitimacy is, therefore, the acceptance of authority and obeying the commands of that authority. In this study legitimacy is examined based on what the community describes as a chief.

Political legitimacy in emerging democracies such as Africa is important for building trust in institutions (Carter, 2011). For example, most African governments that have acquired power through coups are not recognized by their citizens because they have not followed established political procedures to gain power and authority. Although they have international recognition, these countries are likely not to have access to funds such as from the World Bank and

International Monetary Fund because their legitimacy is questionable. From a traditional leadership, how does a succession dispute shape the legitimacy of traditional authorities? What is the community's attitude and opinion on traditional authorities whose authority is contested? I seek to explore the various sources of legitimacy *Indunakazi* Mabhena has utilised to gain and maintain her legitimacy.

The term "legitimacy" reflects a concept based in Western experience, norms and standards. Like many other concepts within the field, the term legitimacy is a broad term which differs according to place or context. For instance, Beetham (1991) defines legitimacy as power acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules, and with evidence of consent, we call it rightful or legitimate. Using the case of Indunakazi Mabhena legitimacy is read or understood as a social practice that is constructed as conforming to standard norms created by the society at a given period. This study generates knowledge on how gender can shape or inform the legitimacy and the perceptions of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and the people of Nswazi, respectively.

In support of the above, Schatzberg (2001), in *Legitimacy in Middle Africa*, argues that scholars should be cautious when using Western concepts or theories to other cultures, as there is need to understand the connection between spiritualty and politics in Africa. I avoided using the term "legitimacy" during the interview and focus group discussions, to allow participants explain legitimacy in their own terms. For this reason, I asked questions like: 'what makes one an' *Induna(kazi)?* What is an *Induna(kazi)?* Or 'How do you view the chief's leadership?' Data analysis on the identities or factors and strategies used to legitimize the chief were based on the participants' response. This is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, looking at the sources of the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and the attitudes and perceptions of people, respectively.

In the institution of traditional leadership, attention has been devoted to legitimacy as a concept whose operations are male centric as it is a male dominated institution (Mamndani, 1996; Logan, 2013; Ubink, 2008; Trzcinski, 2010; Mershon and Shvetsova, 2019; Agyemang, 2011). Using *Indunakazi* Mabhena's case, I show that the conceptualisation of legitimacy by the community is patriarchal creates complex challenges for women to claim their legitimacy. Language operates as a representational system. This is further substantiated by Grossberg, Hall and Du Gay (1996), who allude that representation is the process by which members of a culture

use language to produce meaning. According to this view, meaning is thought to be constructed. Legitimacy in traditional institutions relies upon rural communities' support and loyalty. Questions about who is using the term and how is it used are imperative in feminist studies on traditional authority as they show how legitimacy is gendered. The study conceptualises "legitimacy" in accordance with the area of study and during fieldwork, I allowed participants to define and conceptualise legitimacy in their own terms and did not impose already existing terms.

3.3 Legitimacy in Traditional Leadership

The starting point of understanding issues of legitimacy and traditional leadership in Africa, tracing back before the colonial inception and understand chieftaincy from and Afrocentric position. This is because sources of legitimacy have developed overtime such that modern constructed sources of legitimacy have been used to make debates and arguments on legitimacy in traditional leadership. Therefore, an understanding of sources of legitimacy in this study will be holistically understood in the contexts of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras which influenced the institution of chieftaincy (Reid, 2011). These periods are distinct due to the political structures and policies on chieftaincy implemented by colonial and post-colonial government (Ubink, 2008) hence legitimacy is redefined.

Pre-colonial period, some African institutions were still free from any Eurocentric influence (Koenane, 2008) hence relied on their customs and traditions for legitimacy. Traditional leaders legitimized their authority primarily through culture and traditions with the help of divine interference (Lutz and Linder, 2004). This is to say, in the pre-colonial era, chieftaincy was defined and legitimised exclusively by gender, tradition and divinity. Pre-colonial Africa covered various political orders as they were 'hierarchical and militarised forms of kinship or chieftaincy' (Ubink, 2008 p.7). Therefore, this study makes a contribution on how the influence of Eurocentrism or settler colony and still has on the African political systems.

In most traditional or indigenous societies, the legitimacy of traditional leaders is rooted in patriarchal precolonial traditions. Oyewumi (1997) and Yusuf (2004) have all shown that tradition in the pre-colonial was always changing, rigid patriarchy is a construction of the colonial modern – patriarchal notions existed in the precolonial, but they were not institutionalized or even permanent. These patriarchal precolonial traditions were described by Chauke (2015, p35) in

noting that “the institution of traditional leadership was founded and grounded in the patrilineal systems whereby only the firstborn male children were afforded the opportunity to succeed their fathers”. Nevertheless, this approach has seemingly excluded the legitimation of women in traditional leadership, an issue that is still prevalent in most post–colonial Africa. Additionally, religion also played a significant role in legitimizing chiefs as they relied on their relationship with their ancestors for legitimacy (Ranger, 1982). The study observes that patriarchy in the institution of traditional leaders is a continuation of what existed colonial Africa therefore the legitimacy of women in traditional leadership will remain limited or questioned.

Colonialism ushered in a new dispensation in relation to the traditional authorities’ legitimacy. The colonial state captured traditional authorities by designating them as its agents of indirect rule in rural Africa (Mamdani, 1996) and intensifying patriarchy in African societies. Accordingly, the colonial and post-colonial era saw chiefs losing their legitimacy and sovereignty to the ruling governments. This is supported by Mamndani who asserts that the powers of traditional leaders cannot be separated from the state as the state can give power and not legitimacy to the chief. This is further evident in contemporary politics where the government has played critical role in appointing and dismissing chiefs. While both female and male chiefs would be affected by the politicization of chieftaincy, women could be affected more as state politics is favourable to men in many countries (Thanikodi and Sugirtha, 2007; Caravantes, 2021). There are instances where legitimacy has been conflicting and that is, between that from the state and that from the community.

The influence of colonisation and postcolonial regimes has shaped the legitimacy, experiences and structures of traditional institutions (Chinsinga, 2006). Colonial authorities selected chiefs that were weak and not sympathetic to a nationalist agenda and could thus be manipulated into reinforcing the authority of the chiefs, headmen and village heads in their selected areas of jurisdiction. Moreover, the colonial authorities did not regard the power of female chiefs, and these were largely stripped off of their power (Oyewumi, 1997; Day, 2014; Dodo, 2017; Okrah, 2017). Could we therefore say the appointment of female chiefs today is for political expediency for the ruling political party? For example, the colonial administrators in Makoni, Zimbabwe manipulated tradition by appointing weak chiefs who facilitated enforcement

of policies that reinforced their authority (Ranger, 1982; Abraham, 1974). Two issues are highlighted in this paragraph, the controversial appointment female traditional leaders and the uncustomary way of appointing chiefs which was introduced by colonial rule. This is still common in post-colonial Africa and in examining the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena it is imperative that the motive behind the appointment of Indunakazi Mabhena be explored.

In postcolonial governments chieftaincy has been politicized and legitimacy now involves appointment by the government or elections. For example, in Uganda, since Museveni came to power in 1986, chiefs have been appointed by the government. In Kenya, too, chiefs are selected by the government. These changes have impacted their legitimacy in their communities, as chieftaincy has become a political appointment. In Sierra Leone, according to the Chieftaincy Act a chief is legitimate when "(s) he was born in wedlock to a rightful claimant in a recognised ruling house in the chiefdom" (Day, 2012). Legitimacy on the colonial and post-colonial period has primarily been built upon and measured by one's loyalty to the ruling regime and since that time the legitimacy of chiefs has been mainly politicized.

Although the constitutions of many African countries, with a few exceptions, legitimise women chiefs through their Constitutions, gender discrimination is still endorsed in chieftaincy. In Lesotho the Constitution prohibits discrimination on gender basis and its Electoral Law endorses participation of women in politics. However, gender discrimination on gender basis is still in existence as daughters are barred from chieftaincy succession.

Although, legitimacy evolves, the above discussion shows how legitimacy can be manipulated to shape and justify the exclusion of women in traditional leadership. Traditions are not static, and they develop with the changing times, therefore, traditional leadership, chiefs, local populations and state officials have relied on borrowing various sources of legitimacy to justify their rule (Williams, 2010). The sources of the chief's power and legitimacy have become so complex that they cannot be limited to their control of land and being leaders of an ethnic group (Tieleman and Uitermark, 2019) due to globalization and modernization (Okrah, 2017). An example can be drawn from Ghana's 'return chiefs', who legitimize their authority on traditional grounds but use their professional and international experience to effect local development and

modernize institutions (Bob-Millar, 2009). The study unpacks various approaches *Indunakazi Mabhena* has used to legitimize her authority in a male terrain.

3.4 Sources of Legitimacy of Traditional Leaders

Sources of legitimacy are holistically understood in three phases namely pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial era as they inform each other in understanding the shifts and constant processes of chieftaincy (Reid, 2011). Pre-colonial era is a period when African institutions were authentic and not yet encountered by other worldviews (Koanene, 2008). This is to say much of pre-colonial chieftaincy was defined and legitimized by tradition. Colonialism ushered in a new dispensation in relation to the traditional authorities' legitimacy, a phenomenon which was adopted in many post-colonial governments in Africa. The colonial state stripped off the independency of chiefs' power therefore the powers of the state and chiefs were not disconnected (Mamndani, 1996). To understand today's limitation and dependence on chiefs' legitimacy examples can be drawn from South Africa on issues of land. Chiefs have limited power in land use in the absence of the state's support particularly on communal resources, this reduces the local legitimacy of chiefs (Bennette, Ainslie and Davis, 2012). Accordingly, the colonial administration produced the roles and responsibilities of chiefs, and the post-colonial made a replica, as a result reducing their legitimacy.

Traditional leaders legitimize their authority through divine interference coupled with succession customs of a community (Lutz and Linder, 2004). Similarly, traditional leaders derive legitimacy from their ancestry, bloodline (Karlström, 1996; O'Laughlin, 2000; Ribot, 2002). The arrival of colonialism and, later, globalization, among other factors, has resulted in the institution becoming diluted with contemporary ideologies and canons (Okrah, 2017). While the political legitimacy of traditional authorities is based on protracted existence as sanctioned by history (Weber, 1948), in recent times, chiefs have been found to derive their legitimacy from the state and, in rare cases, from citizens whom they govern (Antwi-Bediako, 2018). Literature suggests that, in the contemporary era, legitimacy in traditional leadership institutions no longer relies only on religious beliefs and traditions but has resorted to other sources of legitimacy (Bob-Millar, 2009).

In regard to the legitimacy of contemporary political systems, Beetham (2013) identifies three elements that are required for one to be regarded as legitimate: conformity to established rules, justification of these rules by shared beliefs and recognition of power through acts (performance). Beetham (2013) argues that these three elements are interlinked and an absence of one is likely to delegitimize power. On the contrary Appiah (1992) identifies three normative sources of legitimacy in traditional leadership: symbolism, the state, and divination. From an African perspective, Appiah (2004) argues with Beetham in suggesting that the absence of one of the three elements of legitimacy in traditional authority does not deem one to be illegitimate. In traditional leadership, there is a degree of consent or an understanding between the institution and the communities involved. Therefore, to understand the nuances surrounding legitimacy in traditional leadership the study used legitimacy in the context of how the Nswazi community constructs and defines legitimacy.

This thesis explores whether these sources have become either more or less important over time, and whether additional sources are operative in the context of this study. A key finding in this regard is that legitimacy has evolved and expanded beyond the three tenets of legitimacy.

3.4.1 Symbolic Legitimacy

Appiah (1992) states that symbolic legitimacy is legitimacy attained by means of recognising, acknowledging and continuing to adhere to the customs and traditions of the past in the present day. He adds that traditional authority acts as a symbol of past traditions and customs that are still practiced despite the changes that were brought about by colonialism (Appiah, 1992). However, Schimdt, Lambani and Nengome (2016) assert that culture is used as an instrument to exclude women from inheritance in most African societies. Culture plays a significant role in empowering and recognising marginalized categories in a society (Imatunga, 2006), if it is not used to manipulate the communities. Feminists, still argue that some cultures in Africa continue to limit women leaders to a private role, supressing their potential as female leaders (Msuya, 2020) under the guise of culture. For example, in Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa, culture was the basis for contesting the ascendancy of these women. Therefore, the fundamental feature of symbolism is culture. Kuada (2010) notes that culture and leadership are inseparable in Africa. Accordingly, traditional authorities play a symbolic role as representatives and custodians of the

community and its values and customs, unity and stability, and thus represent what makes the community what it is (Logan (2006).

3.4.2 Divine Legitimacy

Appiah (1992) explains divine legitimacy as the legitimacy traditional leaders experience due to playing an intermediary role between the community and the world of ancestors. He further argues that divine legitimacy is the most critical source of legitimacy in traditional authorities because of the fears by members of the community that if they fail to comply with the chief's will representing divine orders, they might be cursed (Appiah, 1992).

Religions such as Christianity and Islam in contemporary Africa have relegated or co-opted the role of ancestors on traditional leaders in most parts of Africa. However, in some instances African Independent Churches have supported the institution of traditional leaders for example, the Zionist Christian Church in Sekhukhulume plays an influential role in supporting traditional leaders with a biblical reference on the importance of obeying authority (Oomen, 2005). This brings to question how traditional or legitimate is a Christian traditional leader. The influence of other religions particularly Christianity in Africa was inevitable. Religious pluralism has seen most African communities shunning or questioning the importance of divine legitimacy in traditional leadership (Wee, 2014).

3.4.3 State Legitimacy

Post-colonial African governments have recognized chieftaincy institutions through national constitutions. In Ghana, for example, chieftaincy is recognized under Article 270 (1) of the constitution, which states that "the institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional council as established by customary law and usage, is guaranteed". Chapter 11 of the South African Constitution recognizes the role and status traditional leadership through customary law. Article 246 of Uganda gives recognition to indigenous governance. However, most Constitutions in Africa on recognising traditional leaders are silent on gender inclusion and recognition. The state is male, this study argues that laws are made by men and for men, since most African governments rely on chiefs on electoral domination, the government goes with the status quo of the dominating male chiefs.

The continued existence of the institution of traditional leadership is still controversial, despite the recognition of these institutions by national governments. Sexist and disjointed interpretations of customary law infiltrate the very fabric of the contemporary legal systems of post-colonial Africa states (Hay and Wright, 1982; Mamdani, 1996). However, it can be noted that the existence of legal pluralism has seen a conflict between customary law and constitutional law in most African countries in terms of gender equality in traditional leadership.

The state legitimacy of traditional authorities is differently noted with post-colonial states. For example, studies in South Africa show that although chiefs are viewed as part of state institutions, they are subordinates of the state law (Ray, 1996). State recognition of the legitimacy or appointment of a chief lies in the constitution. For example, the Ashanti of Ghana's procedures for choosing chiefs is controlled by the State and the state can reject the chosen candidate (Busia, 2018). In Zimbabwe, the state through the President appoints a chief in accordance with the customs and traditions of that community, but in appointing the chief the State cannot directly override the decisions of the traditional authorities (Makahamadze, Grant and Tavuyanango, 2009; Chigwata, 2016; Kurebwa, 2015). There is thus contestation on the grounds of legitimacy between state law and traditional values.

3.5 Chieftaincy and Legitimacy in Africa: A Historical Perspective c.1880-1890

The conceptualisation of democracy in Africa is so broad and diverse and its measures and principles are often adopted from the Global North (Brooks, Ngwane and Runciman, 2019). To contribute to the decolonisation movement in African studies the study uses democracy in the African context and how democracy is understood in local communities. Therefore, even the debates of traditional leaders and their legitimacy in democracies should be based on what local communities understand as democracy. The contextualisation of democracy using the Western ideologies distorts the African concept of democracy. Karlström (1996) in his examination of democracy amongst the Buganda established that "if Africans have shown themselves by no means uninterested in democracy, the democracy which they envision often does differ significantly from Western liberal conceptions". Accordingly, to Chabal (1998) democracy in postcolonial Africa takes three forms and these are "an end to one political party system, emergency of political competition and free and universal multi-party elections" (p. 295).

However, the institution of traditional leadership which existed since precolonial has a different form of what democracy is (Koanene, 2018). Thus, the debates on the relevance and significance of traditional leaders in African democracies continues to be a debatable issue.

The debate around the legitimacy of the institution of traditional leadership is polarized, with two schools of thought: modernist and traditionalist. The former perceives traditional authorities as incompatible with democracy. The latter accepts the co-existence of the two on the basis that traditional institutions are not overshadowed by modern laws and the societies' prehistoric roots remain recognized and unchallenged (Ray 1996; Ntsebeza, 2003). For example, many African governments have the final say on the appointment and removal of chiefs, which violates the pre-colonial systems where chiefs were appointed as descendants of a ruling lineage (Chinsinga, 2006). This is supported by Mmndani (1996) who adds that the state and chiefs are powers that are not disconnected, chiefs' authority is not independent from the state. The uncertainty of the legitimacy of traditional authorities in African democracies is due to the absence of a selection system which does not fully conform with the tenets of legitimacy congruent with democracy (Ainslie and Kepe, 2016) which is a principal characteristic of democracy.

Considering the above, while modernisation is seen as progressive, traditionalism is seen as regressive and thereby lacking in legitimacy (Omer, 2018). Accordingly, modernisation is assumed to promote equality whilst traditionalism is assumed to be gender blind as the appointment of women to chieftaincy is still accepted with mixed feelings (Dodo, 2017). As a result of these contestations between modern and traditional debates, the instrumentality of traditional leaders in African democracies is undermined. Modernists argue that traditional leadership institutions are patriarchal, archaic and exclusionary to women, hence are not compatible with modern governance systems (Mamdani, 1996; Ntsebeza, 2005; Rugege, 2002). However, for the rural people the institution of traditional leadership continues to be relevant as it upholds Afrocentric cultures and tradition (George and Binza, 2011). Traditionalist schools of thought, on the other hand, argue that traditional leadership institutions are compatible with modern day politics as they have democratic features in their structures and remain an important governance system in rural areas (Logan, 2009; Keulder, 1998; Ayittey, 1992). The main argument between the two schools of thought is premised on democracy and equality.

From a feminist perspective Herring, Johnson and DiBenedetto (2012) notes that democracy is based on the participation of women in politics and other decision-making spheres without discrimination. Consequently, many African countries continue to struggle to find a basis for the legitimacy of traditional leadership institutions in democratic institutions (Ndlela, 2008).

The argument that traditional leadership is not legitimate because it is not compatible with democracy and decentralization continues to be intensely debated. The modernist school of thought argues that traditional leadership is an anachronism that is not compatible to decentralization and democracy and should not have been legitimized in the 21st century (Ntsebeza, 2009). Traditional leadership has therefore been characterized as a relic from a time that is swiftly fading away (Chinsinga, 2006). This is so because the bifurcated states during the colonial era saw a divided mode of rule between the urban citizens and rural subjects, which saw the centralization of all power in chiefs (Mamdani, 1996), that is still evident in today's traditional authorities. The citizens enjoyed governance through civil and political freedom liberties whilst the subject was under a 'decentralized despotism' overseen by a chief under the colonists (Mamndani, 1996). Accordingly, Mamdani (1996) concludes that where there is no democracy is not legitimacy. This is evident in the way that gender inclusion policies are enforced more rigorously in urban areas than in rural areas. Mamdani's bifurcation of states is highlighted in the status of most African women, whereby the women in rural areas or local governance are separated by state law and customary law.

Modernists argue that traditional authorities are no longer relevant as they are incompatible with modern day democratic electoral rights, principles of rule of law, accountability and transparency (Ntsebeza, 2005; Rugege, 2003; Mamdani, 1996). The hierarchical and patriarchal system that is antithetical to liberal democratic ideals enforces exclusionary rules and has a limited capacity for downward accountability (Beall et-al 2005 & Mamdani, 1996). Decentralized despotism clearly describes the exclusionary hierarchal manner that traditional leaders use to govern their 'subjects' which is against principles of democracy (LiPuma & Koelble, 2009).

Countering the modernist argument, traditional authorities are still legitimate in modern-day governance (Keulder, 2000; Ayittey, 2010; Chauke, 2015). Ayittey (2006) argues that the absence of modern democratic principles of governance in African traditional institutions does

not make these institutions democratically illegitimate. For instance, while in modern politics elections are a yardstick for legitimacy, in African traditional society's legitimacy is determined through culture, tradition and the community. Focusing on the absence of elections to label traditional institutions as undemocratic is questionable. This is so because traditional governance offers everyday participation to members of the community with the help of a council of elders, as opposed to modern governance where there is periodic voting. Therefore, Logan (2009) argues for a hybrid understanding of traditional leaders in Africa. Accordingly, the legitimacy of traditional leaders can be captured in the slogan 'a chief is a chief because of their people', as the legitimacy of a chief's authority is confirmed by the community (Chauke, 2015).

There is a paradoxical relationship between tradition and modernity. The modern systems that arrived from Europe in the colonial era continue, to the present day, to alter the shape, structure and organization of traditional leadership authorities. Modernity, which came in form of Christianity, Western missionaries and globalization, deepened the subordination of women in authority although it gave them a sense of liberation from some practices that were abusive (Ubink, 2000). It is one of the interests of this research to establish the (dis)continuities in traditional leadership institutions, particularly on the inclusion of women.

Between 1880-1893, traditional institutions were significant to the political, social, political, and economic life of African chiefdoms (Khonou, 2013). Prior European colonisation, African societies had their own unique way of governance that shaped the political, social, and economic structures of the African societies (Dusing, 2001). The institution was a source of maintaining order and stability in Africa communities. Traditional leadership was embedded on governance principles of *Ubuntu*. Traditional leaders were not only shaped or influenced by their subjects but there was also accountability to their leadership.

Colonial control significantly earmarked the significant change in the legitimacy of chiefs and the fluidity of their power became limited (Ntsebeza, 2005). The coloniality of African political systems through modernization cannot be overlooked as modernisation was used as a tool to dominate and control African societies. There is also a historic misconception that Europeans brought concepts on governmental structures to Africa and failing to acknowledge the

kingdoms that were already existing. Arguably, there were functional states that existed in pre-colonial states such as the Ashanti kingdom, Zulu kingdom, and the Great Zimbabwe.

Colonial rule and the need to modernise African societies saw an end to African democracy in traditional leadership as some customs were outlawed and some powers of the chiefs were stripped off (Amadiume, 2015). Chiefs became more loyal and accountable to the colonial and postcolonial masters than members of their communities. Arguably, colonialism did not totally disrupt precolonial political structures but rather external influence (Bell 1987). The top-down approach that was introduced by the inculcating colonial masters in the African political systems detached traditional chiefs from the local communities which likely compromised their legitimacy. A look into chieftaincy from the precolonial era helps the study to explore how the traditional leadership has evolved with time particularly on issues of legitimacy.

In view of the above, the study does not regard the fact that colonial rule regarded traditional leaders, but they did so with the aim of making sure the chiefs pursued the colonial masters' interest (Ragolane and Malatji, 2023). Traditional leaders during the colonial period had judiciary, administrative and political power, roles that were later relegated to them by colonizers in a bid to control their power. It was at the inception of colonization that the powers of chiefs were limited, and some chiefs were replaced with those that were sympathizers of colonial rule (Chigwata, 2011; Dodo, 2017). There were so many changes during this period within the institution of traditional leaders. For example, some communities were brought together despite being from different ethnic groups and chiefs were imposed even if they were not of that ethnic group (Ndlovu and Dube, 2012). This was the beginning of a legitimacy crisis in traditional leadership because, during that period a common belief in religion and culture was the backbone of what brought a community together. Secondly, how would a chief from another clan claim legitimacy from ancestors when he (in rare cases she) is not from that grouping?

The study acknowledges some imperfections that exists within the African institutions. However, despite these imperfections traditional institutions were resilient and functional to sustain social cohesion, peace and economic development (Amadiume, 1997). The institution of traditional leadership underwent various changes which resulted from either colonial invasion or natural evolution of the institution (Keulder, 2010, Dodo 2017). It is important to examine the

emergency of African political modernities and how they clash and concur with modern governance as it will help understand the plight of legitimacy in African governance. Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1993) invention of tradition is a classic reference on how old traditions from the past re-merge or are used in modern society to give a perception of continuity of the past. This is timely research that makes an analysis of the already existing characteristics and structures of the institutions that have been generalized since time immemorial. The institution can be understood from the three different regimes that saw changes in the institution.

Many Africans abolished or at least planned to abolish the institution of traditional leadership. A classic example is Kwame Nkrumah, he was determined to end the powers and influences of traditional leaders in Southern Ghana, but he was not successful. Indeed, a chief might have been resilient to the efforts of independent governments in most parts of Africa such as Botswana and Cameroon, but their legitimacy has largely been comprised, thereby influencing the public perception on the legitimacy of these chiefs.

According to Stroeken and Kaputu (2020 p.65) precolonial systems' sources of legitimacy differed from one community to another. They give a classic example of how selected chiefs in Equatorial Guinea in Africa were found to be legitimate rulers due to their involvement in administration of life-medicine. The seniority of elderly in the clan is also a source of legitimacy. The different definitions of what legitimacy is as defined in Chapter 2, does not provide the sacredness that lies within chiefs in Africa. There is not much spirit-based explanations of legitimacy when using the Eurocentric definition, an ethnographic study covers these gaps by allowing participants to describe in their own terms what legitimacy is.

Patriarchal systems of oppression embedded in the institution of traditional leadership brings to question the legitimacy of female traditional leaders, which this study seeks to examine. Accordingly, the historical analysis of traditional leadership highlights how the state-chiefs relationship continues to be influenced by political interests and strategies of ruling regimes (Nkomo, 2021 p.iii).

3.6 Status of Women in Traditional Institutions of Governance in Africa

Given that gender is still a determinant, or organizing principle for leadership, it is important to explore the experiences and challenges of women who have defied the odds in this regard; thereby changing the gender order and gender regime. In other words, gender or sex are often used as a succession criterion in traditional leadership. For instance, where a woman is the eldest child in a family, generally she cannot be considered the rightful heir. The succession may be contested on grounds that her sex excludes her from the legitimate claim to leadership authority (Yusuf 2004). Sex discrimination in succession disputes illustrates how legitimacy is socially constructed in ways that continue to marginalize women in leadership positions. The fact that there are women who have succeeded in challenging the discriminatory customary laws, calls for the need to explore the challenges these women face, how these women overcome the challenges, and how they also establish their legitimacy within the institution once they are appointed.

In fact, in recent decades, ideas of customary chieftaincy have been changing, attuned to democratic and development ideals, which has caused an increase in the number of women taking on roles in traditional leadership structures (Dodo, 2017). For instance, the current status of women in Africa was set by colonisation. Colonisation sparked the changes in the status and role of women in African governance systems through its education systems. The education system that was founded on Eurocentric educational system. The Eurocentric education system was designed in such a way that male dominance is nurtured and reinforced, thereby boosting gender discrimination in leadership positions. This is not to say prior colonisation patriarchy did not exist, patriarchal African men and European men integrated in the marginalisation of women in leadership positions in the African governance systems.

That said, female customary chieftaincy rarely occurs in Africa and in particular in Zimbabwe due to the essentially patriarchal nature of this institution. Arguably, while the conservative and patriarchal ideals of male leadership are —to some extent a colonial construction, rather than a characteristic of authentic African leadership, they have become a key part of political leadership narrative on the continent. The historical body of literature on traditional leadership is therefore male centred with early missionaries and colonialist favouring the narrations of male experiences. Therefore, studies on women chiefs even in postcolonial

Africa and apart from experiences in countries like Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana, studies of women chiefs in Africa are scant. Consequently, as this study argues, there is a need to examine how the patriarchal leadership narrative is negotiated by women in traditional leadership.

A study by Lambani and Nengomi (2018) concludes that the general examination of the role of women in traditional leadership tends to focus on how they are marginalized or how they are invisible as leaders. That is, knowledge production in the academic studies of women in traditional leadership has tended to focus on the roles and significance of the wives, mothers, or female relatives of male traditional leaders (Nelson, Chowdhury and Caudhurī, 1994; Kannae, 2022). This study generates knowledge on how women's behaviour and bodies intersect in shaping the legitimacy, experiences and visibility of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, and how she used aspects of her identity to express her agency in her leadership.

Lindgren's (2002) doctoral thesis focuses on the politics of the Ndebele community in Zimbabwe and its relationship to the national politics of Zimbabwe. Lindgren (2002) writes extensively on Matabeleland, particularly focusing on issues of ethnicity and hegemonic masculinity. Although, Lindgren's study is not primarily gendered, he dedicates part of his thesis to discuss how the Ndebele ethnicity is largely built on male centric structures that have marginalized women. Lindgren (2002) uses *Indunakazi* Mabhena as a classic example of 'resistance femininity'[4] in his study. This study builds on Lindgren's (2002) analysis on the experiences and identities of *Indunakazi* Mabhena two decades ago. Lindgren's (2005) study on *Indunakazi* Mabhena illustrates how Ndebele ethnicity is bound together with origins, nationality and gender.

Part of Lindgren's research extensively discusses the installation of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and the disputes that surrounded her ascendancy to chieftaincy in detail. Lindgren's arguments seem to suggest that these disputes were based on two aspects of her identities which are ethnicity and gender. However, my study still argues that a deeper analysis of women in traditional leadership and their processes of negotiating and, ways of maintaining power is still missing in the literature on gender and politics. This study extends from Lindgren's work, by examining *Indunakazi* Mabhena's intersecting identities that have shaped and hindered her legitimacy; thereby bringing out her agency in navigating through patriarchal structures from the family to national level.

Historical sources report instances of women holding high positions of authority in many societies across the globe (Gunson, 1987; Day, 2012). However, in many parts of Africa the status of women was impacted with the inception of colonization as the colonizers stripped women leaders or influential women off their authority. This evidence suggests that pre-colonial traditional systems did not discriminate against women's appointment to political structures (Agarwal and Ribot, 1999; Dodo, 2013; Becker, 2008; Fyle, 1999). Women have played significant roles in African political systems, but little has been written about female monarchs (O'Barr, 1975; Argorsah, 1991; Taylor, 2018; Sadie, 2020) thereby making them invisible. The status of women in traditional institutions today does not reflect their precolonial status, where they played a significant role in indigenous African political systems (Day, 2012). Western sexist notions of the position and role of women in decision-making positions were not questioned or amended by post-colonial governments or academic scholars (Okeke, 2000). Accordingly, despite the progress of women challenging sexist notions and traditions since colonial rule, their social status remains largely tied to their relationship with men (Fatton, 1989; Kiamba, 2008).

Diop (1987), in his book *Black Africa*, describes bicameralism, a system of governance used in some societies in the past. In African bicameralism women played a significant role in the public affairs of the society, fulfilling even the duties of male rulers. Nevertheless, colonization subordinated women to male authorities (Kandiyoti, 1990; Oyewumi 1997; Day, 2012; Celis and Lovenduski, 2018, Dodo, 2017) thereby distorting the daily activities women engaged in, historically. Colonization saw the use of gender as an identity determine one's eligibility into leadership. (Oyewumi, 1997), a principle that was adopted by most African countries. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on making the experiences and existences of women in traditional leadership visible.

The use of gender as an organizing principle establishes power relations at all levels in a society. Kimmel (2010) summarises the scale and influence of gender used as an organizing principle in most societies in advancing that "virtually every society known to us is founded upon assumptions of gender difference and the politics of gender inequality". Realistically, women's differential access to power and control of resources is central to the gender discrimination in

institutions (Reeves & Baden, 2000). Kimmel's (2010) point is fundamental to addressing the question of how traditional masculinities have impacted the leadership of women.

Historically, women played a significant role in the history of their countries; and some actually rose to extraordinary levels of power (Fraser, 1988). Achebe (2011) writes extensively about the leadership of Queen Ahebi of Nigeria and the challenges she experienced even after attaining power. Henderson and Jeydel (2007) note that women who held power during the 20th and 21st centuries challenged the existing socially structured gender roles, thus they have been invisible in many scholarly works. The study makes a contribution to the "herstories" of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, a female *Induna* who defied the odds and challenged the standing succession customs of the Nguni.

Arguably, in most African societies there were some women in traditional leadership positions (Habbakkuk; 1989 in Dodo 2017). There was a tradition of women chiefs in pre-colonial African states. West Africa particularly Nigeria was popular with women chiefs and in Senegal the Mende chiefs were women. In Senegal between 1914 and 1970, of the 146 chiefs accepted, 10 of them were women even though it was deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions (Day, 2014). However, Coquery-Vidrovotch (1994) suggests that it is not proper to explain these women in pre-colonial states as chiefs as there were no chiefs prior to the colonization, but the warrior chiefs. Coquery-Vidrovotch's claim is disputed, did she mean women could not be war chiefs, is that not restricting the political roles of women? The sentiments shared by Coquery-Vidrovotch links with debates in this study on women in traditional leadership, whether women are given equal responsibilities and accordance with that of men. McComarck (2004) denotes that the appointment of female chiefs on the onset of colonialism was a colonial invention as women were used as "puppets" as they were considered too weak to be resilient towards colonial structures than men. Arguably, the Shebro and Mende women who had highly political power protected their states from British protectorates.

In several African countries such as Sierra Leone, Ghana, Malawi and Botswana, women have served as chiefs or have held other important traditional leadership roles (Anunobi, 2002). They have played other roles such as those of queen mothers, queen sisters, princesses, chiefs and holders of offices in towns and villages sometimes as regents; occasionally warriors, and in

one well known case, that of Lovedu, the supreme monarch of Nigeria (Sudarkasa, 1986, cited in Machakanja, 2015). Despite this, little has been written about them (Mensah et al., 2014). It is thus evident that the rise of women to political power is not a new phenomenon in politics as there have been female rulers throughout history (Day, 2014).

Famous female rulers included Queen Nzinga of Angola and Congo, Yaa Asantewa of the Ashanti kingdom and Queen Amina of Nigeria. According to Steady (2013), Asante queen mothers became prominent during the British rule as they played a motherly role in protecting their societies against colonial oppression. In Sierra Leone, Madam Yoko was a Mende leader of great influence whose ability was known only after her husband appointed her as the great wife because of her charisma. In contemporary times, Botswana welcomed its first and only female Paramount Chief in 2003, *Kgosi* (chief) Mosadi (Bauer, 2016). In 2019, Mamatouma Siryon became a Paramount Chief of Salayea District, which is known to be intrinsically male dominated in terms of traditional and political leadership.[5]

In light of the above, across sub-Saharan Africa, the highest office of a woman in traditional leadership has been the position of queen mother. Queen mothers can be found in Ghana, Benin, Nigeria, South Africa, Eswatini and Uganda (Nyokabi, 2018). Queen mothers in Ghana have power that is independent of the king (Stoeltje, 2003). There is a gap in the knowledge about women in chieftaincy—especially in Southern Africa, as much of the literature has been centered on the liberation struggles. Even historic and current records have hardly documented the existence of female chiefs (da costa Rosaria, 2015).

Arguably, Abraham (1987) as cited in Ganga (1972) asserts that, during the colonial period, female chiefs were selected by the colonial administration because they were weak and thus would easily sell out chiefs working against them. McCormack (1975) illustrates how many women attained institutional political power without of British influence. In Malawi, Theresa Kachindamoto was appointed as the Paramount Chief of Dedza District in 2003. She is known for eliminating child marriages in Malawi. In Zimbabwe, there have been five female chiefs since

[5] Liberia: 'Powerful Female Paramount Chiefs' Taking Lead by Mae Azango, frontpageafricaonline.com. ac

independence. There has been demonstrable work that show the effects of colonial rule on women and how they were stripped of their power in political, economic, social and cultural spheres (Sudarkasa, 1986; Amadiume, 1987; Dodo, 2013). Amadiume (1987) contends that the movements and organisations that were created by women were co-opted by westernised approaches that lacked an African context.

Historically, studies of female rulers globally are scarce as women have been marginalised in knowledge production. To make known the significance of women, Monter (2012) in his study uses numismatic evidence, which is informative on how female rulers created iconographic representations for themselves in the form of coins, medals and other forms of literary and cultural texts. However, in Africa there is not much evidence on the significant roles that women played except in oral history. Studies have focused on women as parliamentarians, heads of state and religious leaders (Clayton, 2014, Bauer, 2020, 2021). However, despite the remarkable changes and gains that have been made by African women parliamentarians little is known as much as it is in the Global North (Bauer, 2012). Studies that focus on the experiences of women usually generalise women as a homogenous group, with their experiences largely focusing on gender and culture only.

Steegstra (2009) focuses on the importance of Krobo queen mothers as traditional leaders in Ghana. Of significant importance to this study is how Steegstra (2009) fills a gap in knowledge on the position and status of queen mothers in a patriarchal society. Stoeltje (1994) concurs with Steegstra that queen mothers have seldom been a topic of concern in academia. Kiamba (2008) suggests that women who have broken cultural barriers or norms are often recognized by society. This study, too, seeks to rectify the gap in knowledge on the status and experiences of female chiefs.

Mingle (2015), in her academic thesis, examined the leadership of Nana Kofi Abuna V in Essipon traditional area in the Western region of Ghana. Nana Kofi rose to chieftaincy in 1998, becoming the only female traditional leader in Sekondi Traditional Council (Mingle, 2015). She discusses how Nana Kofi's embodiment as a woman impacted her roles and responsibilities in her area of jurisdiction and concludes that women continue to face challenges in chieftaincy because of their multiple roles, which require conflicting behaviours. For example, Nana Kofi

Abuna often displayed masculine traits in her leadership in order to be accepted and respected by her community.

In addition to the above, Mingle (2015) used a social relational approach by engaging with the community on their perceptions and attitude towards their chief. The social relational approach is imperative in studies of this nature as individuals do not always possess sufficient knowledge to explain everything about their lives (Maynard and Purvis, 2013). Likewise, my study explored the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, her research journey and the community's perceptions on her leadership.

In related studies, Achebe (2011) and Day (2012) highlight the gendered nature of political authority in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, respectively, showcasing the agency of female traditional leaders. The two writers have moved away from depicting women as inferior to men or merely looking at their duties as queens but female kings, women who can play roles preserved for men. Rather they showcase women as key figures in the socio-cultural and political development of African societies. Day (2012) demonstrates the role of women during the colonial period, for example including Queen Yammacouba and two other female chiefs who ceded the Freetown colony. Integrating feminist ethnographies in their work allows the writers to capture the lived experiences of women chiefs in their natural habitat (Ghosh, 2016). Therefore, studies of this nature are useful for bringing visibility to the marginalized voices and lived experiences of women, which were previously hidden.

In the same vein, the invisibility of women in traditional leadership is embedded in the cultural norms that shape the roles of women and men (Carter and Peters, 2016; Klenke, 2004) thereby limiting their legitimacy. The tendency of research to ignore gender in traditional authorities creates the illusion that there are no women in traditional authorities or that, if there are, they offer nothing worth studying (Htun and Weldon, 2010; Bauer, 2016). Nevertheless, the number of female traditional leaders is rising along with the number of elected female representatives (Muriaas et al., 2009). For that reason, a decolonial approach is imperative in the study of women chiefs and the status of women in Africa as it reshapes the agency of women and how they have been represented in post-colonial Africa.

Amadiume (2005) in support of the above, illustrates how responsibilities were not masculinized or feminized. Achebe's (2011) study provides a vivid journey of Queen Ahebi, including from the language she used and, the terms and how she conceptualized her terms in an African context, which brings out Queen Ahebi's previously hidden knowledge on the female king. The study generates knowledge on women chiefs occupying roles preserved for men and how legitimacy is forged.

The legal status of women allows them to be in certain positions, but society continues to shape their positionalities (Dangarembga, 2022), thereby compromising their legitimacy in male-defined spaces such as chieftaincy. Dangarembga (2022) insinuates that the power relations that are embedded in the 'private' sphere shape power at all levels in the society. Swantz (1966) argues that there is a universal assumption that males should have dominance which emanates from epistemological biases, but this notion is discredited by the considerable power yielded by women in communal or household spaces. In most societies, males tend to monopolize positions of authority and are more involved with formal political institutions than women are (Stephens, 1963). The aim of the study is to examine how the positionalities ascribed and attained by *Indunakazi* Mabhena have shaped her leadership and the perceptions of the community.

Although there has been a significant increase in the number of female chiefs, since the independence of some African countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Malawi, the institution of traditional authority is still not gender inclusive. That is, titles and positions are still inherited by men (Lutz and Linder, 2004). The ascendancy of women to chieftaincy does not ensure their legitimacy, as women still face challenges to claim their legitimacy Kiamba (2008). How then do women who take male gendered roles legitimize their authority where they are not seen as qualified heirs in chieftaincy? The study seeks to answer this empirical question by focusing on the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, the first female Nguni chief in Zimbabwe and examine the strategies that have been effective in her leadership.

To strengthen the critique on how discourses of culture/tradition are invoked in gendered ways which seek to police and suppress women rather than men reference is made to the work of Sofola (1998). The work of Sofola, for instance, is very relevant considering how she conceptualizes what she terms the four cornerstones of "African womanhood" – (i) as a woman;

(ii) as a daughter; (iii) as a mother (symbolically and practically), and (iv) as a wife' (1998:61). This will align with the intersectionality analytical lens used in the thesis.

The invisibility of the experiences and existence of women in traditional leadership has led to a dearth of scholarly literature on exploring the leadership of female chiefs, particularly in Zimbabwe. In many instances, the stories of women have been accepted from a single narration (male), which can result in a critical misunderstanding of reality. Women have also played a formidable role in chieftaincy selection among the Chewa people of Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia, by appointing a Paramount Chief, the Kalonga, who rules on behalf of his mother, called Nyangu (Muriaas, 2019). In countries like Botswana, while no woman has served as president, there has been a female paramount chief, *Kgosi* Mosadi Seboko of the Balete people of southern Botswana who was appointed in 2003 (Bauer, 2016). Despite the importance of female traditional leaders in Africa, their impact on policy is largely unexplored in the literature.

The presence of women in previously male-dominated positions needs to be retold and reconstructed and have women becoming more visible in their achieved positions. Adams (2008) acknowledges that there is a knowledge gap with regards to the participation and experience of traditional female chiefs. A few scholars have written on traditional governance looking at the role of chiefs in Africa. Scholarship in southern Africa on gender discourses within the traditional institution is rare (Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). Dodo (2017) writes on traditional governance systems focusing on best practices for governance and how gender equality may be embraced meaningfully. Dodo (2013) acknowledges the existence of women in traditional leadership, although they have been overshadowed, but little is offered on the role female chiefs' play in local governance. Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study helps to fill this gap, by exploring the leadership of women in traditional leadership.

Additionally, the current wave of gender discourses that encourage non-discrimination against women in national, regional, and international spaces has played a significant role in supporting and encouraging effective inclusion of women in decision-making positions. For example, the CEDAW Article 14 emphasizes the need to include rural women in decision-making positions. The Abolition of Marital Power Act 34 of 2004 of Botswana, they gave the husband power over the person and property of his wife (Matemba, 2005). However, this does not mean

that on a societal level woman has gained the legitimacy to hold positions of power in these contested spaces. Despite this, some women have survived and sustained their positions in male-dominated spaces, resisting patriarchal notions and structures that continue to place women at the periphery.

It is important that this study highlights the political traditional roles from which women have been excluded from the colonial period to the present day. This is necessary for creating understanding on how the precolonial and colonial eras have shaped present day power and gender dynamics in traditional leadership.

3.7 Challenges and Barriers to Legitimacy of Women in Traditional Leadership

Women and men in politically elected leadership positions are likely to face common legitimacy challenges. However, for women the hurdles are seemingly higher. In addition, they face many hurdles in the form of structural and gender biases and discrimination. Unlike men, women have different expected qualities to be chiefs. For instance, in Botswana a chief was appointed only because she had a masculine resemblance to her late father (Dodo, 2013). Positions previously reserved for men usually have maintained the male traditional model that discriminate against women, thus reinforcing hegemonic masculinities (Bornstein, 2007). Traditional leadership in Africa has tended to be male-dominated and embedded within long-standing customs and traditions that inform the identities and practices of African communities (Dodo, 2018; Day, 2012; Chauke, 2015). In Africa, chieftaincy succession is overwhelmingly hereditary and patrilineal, with only a few exceptions—such the Akan in Ghana, who are matrilineal. Increasingly, states have begun to challenge the legitimacy of the gender-gap in traditional leadership institutions, resulting in greater inclusion of women in these spaces. For women to attain leadership positions in traditional structures, they must often be resilient and able to defy formidable odds.

Some scholars have argued that gender was not a determinant of identity in pre-colonial Africa (Oyewumi, 1997). Studies of the Yoruba culture report that gender is a colonial construct more than it is a social one in this society (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 1997; Ouzgane and Morell, 2005). Arguably, this is an overgeneralisation which seems to be saying nowhere in

Africa was gender ever a determinant before colonialism. Oyewumi's (1997) argument overlooks the huge diversity and various systems which not only existed in the recent past before colonialism, but also through the millennia for which we have no knowledge. The status and role of women is believed to have been determined mostly by age in most African societies (Amadiume, 1987 and Oyewumi, (1997). Oyewumi (1997) contends that biological determinism is a colonial invention that has never been used in African society. Mugo (2004) argues that, traditionally, these elderly women are not really women in terms of gender constructs but are socially constructed as men due to their menopausal status. Cheater (1985) argues that even the elderly women that were given 'honorary male' status because of the mystical view, traditions around menstruation tended to have limited roles, as they did not normally frequent the male world of public decision-making.

Additionally, obstacles militating against African women's ascendancy to chieftaincy positions include cultural barriers and ritual disqualification. Respect for African traditions, including the superstitions and taboos which usually marginalize women in leadership, discourage women from occupying positions which have previously been reserved for men (Okrah, 2017). Women who occupy these positions are often ridiculed as being ill-mannered (Kiamba, 2008). Some African proverbs have been reconstructed which reinforces the marginalisation of women in positions reserved for men. An example is in Zimbabwe where there is a Shona proverb- *musha mukadzi* (the home belongs to the woman). This proverb has been redefined in ways that domesticate women private spheres, which is the home, because society has socialized private and public positions to be female and male oriented, respectively. This challenges women to occupy positions reserved for men as they are likely to find challenges in legitimizing their authority even after occupying these positions. The study aims to examine the varying identities that have hindered the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

As stated above, ritual 'disqualification or disability' has prevented women from participating in public domains—with menstruation being the major disabling feature (Aidoo, 1985). Many communities in Ghana require a chief to be confined for a few days before enstoolment so as to be taught the rituals and performances of a chief. Nana Abuna Kofi, the first female chief in Essipion, Ghana, was not taught some rituals and rites during her confinement

because she was still a menstruating woman (Mingle, 2015). Consequently, menstruating women in some of parts of Africa, like Ghana, are considered not fit for public roles**.** Traditions around menstruation in various part of Africa still play a role in shaping the experiences of women in communities as in some instances they are limited to preside over certain rituals such as land cleansing, rainmaking celebrations and appealing to the ancestors. Therefore, this illustrated how certain feminine identities are still a determinant in the leadership of women thereby limiting their effective participation in traditional leadership.

Conclusively, most African states have dual systems that have different criteria for legitimacy, resulting in conflict between the two systems of governance. According to Beetham (1991), legitimacy is validated by law and the first prerequisite of legitimacy is to say one has legally accessed power within the constraints of certain laws governing access to that power. However, some of these laws may be gender-biased (Beaumont, 2016), as is the case in Lesotho, where women are viewed as minors who depend on male relatives under the law (Makoa, 1997), making it difficult for women to independently claim their authority. This provokes questions such as 'How do gender norms and state law impact the legitimacy of women leaders?'

3.8 Conclusion

Despite the rise of women in chieftaincy positions worldwide, little is known about their claim to legitimacy. Generally speaking, there is a lot of reference to West African literature on female traditional leadership, but not much on women in traditional leadership in Southern Africa. This limited availability of literature on women as traditional leaders has reinforced the narrative that women are not active in traditional leadership, or that their participation is passive and lacks agency. Yet they are examples of women in South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe whose work is hardly recognized in academic. Consequently, the thesis focuses on women in Southern Africa, specifically Zimbabwe, not to encourage a separation of women in the African region, but to better contextualise how a focus on women from regional to local level is imperative to get a nuanced understanding of women in traditional leadership on the continent. From such a perspective, more work on women in traditional leadership needs to be done. To that end, the next chapter examines traditional leadership in Zimbabwe highlighting the dynamics of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe in general before dealing directly with the gendered context of chieftaincy.

CHAPTER 4: TRADITIONAL LEADERS, LEGITIMACY AND GENDER RECOGNITION IN ZIMBABWE: HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on legitimacy in the Zimbabwean context. An outline of the background of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe and issues of legitimacy is imperative to understand the legitimacy of female traditional leaders in the present day. This chapter provides a historical analysis of legitimacy and gender recognition in Zimbabwe from the precolonial to the postcolonial period. In pursuit of the aims of the thesis, the rest of the chapter focuses on the historical analysis of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe from the precolonial era to the postcolonial period. It then discusses how Zimbabwe's two postcolonial regimes have influenced legitimacy and makes the argument that the lack of political will to enhance gender recognition in traditional leadership has had adverse effects. The chapter then examines the political status of women in Zimbabwe and, specifically, women in chieftaincy in Zimbabwe. This chapter provides a crucial background to how ideological forces such as colonialism, nationalism and modernisation have distorted legitimacy in traditional leadership.

The chapter observes that the inception of white settlers was the beginning of state-chiefs relations that were based on political interests, thereby compromising the legitimacy of traditional leaders. The same can be said of the New Dispensation, which has adopted Mugabe's regime approach of using chiefs during the election period to garner votes in the rural areas. Legitimacy in postcolonial governments has been compromised due to political interference and this has influenced the perceptions of the people on the legitimacy of chiefs. The politicisation of chieftaincy and other dynamics of chieftaincy such as gender and succession disputes bring into question the effectiveness of legitimacy of chiefs today. While its focus is on the post-colonial state, this chapter preludes its examination of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe with a review of the key events of the precolonial and colonial periods that influenced the legitimacy of traditional leaders. It is imperative that these events are analysed as they inform present day debates and controversies around legitimacy in traditional leadership. Therefore, legitimacy

remains a contested phenomenon between contemporary political systems and institutions of traditional leadership.

4.2 Chieftaincy in Zimbabwe

Traditional leadership in Zimbabwe, as in other African countries, takes a variety of forms. The structures, organisation and systems of traditional leadership differ among the Shona, Ndebele, Tonga and Venda ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, although there are also a few similarities (Chigwata, 2016). Practices—including succession practices—also differ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). The institution of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe has three succession methods that are shaped or informed by the precolonial Munhumutapa, Tonga and Zulu kingdoms, or states. The Munhumutapa succession method is the most widely used method in Zimbabwe as it is followed by most, if not all, of the Shona sub-ethnic communities such as Karanga, Ndau, the Manyika and the Korekore. In the Munhumutapa succession customs, chieftaincy is held between the houses of the founding chiefs through a process of rotation. Each house is required to create a roster of succession in rotation within its sub-houses. For example, if chief A has 3 sons (B, C, and D) in the event that chief A dies, his firstborn son (B) will succeed him. After the death of chief B, the second-born son (son C) will take over chieftaincy rather than the son of the late chief B.

Unlike the Munhumutapa succession method, the Ndebele ethnic chieftaincies follow the Zulu succession method.[6] The succession method of the Ndebele ethnic communities follows the lineage of the eldest sons. However, if a chief marries a woman from another royal family even if the son is not the eldest, he will succeed his father, the son of a woman from another royal family takes precedence over other male children whose mothers are non-royal families. Chieftaincy is passed from father to son. For example, if chief A has three sons, son B, C and D, son B will succeed his father and in the event that son B passes on, son B's eldest son succeeds the throne and so on unless there are issues where the chief dies without an heir. The Ndebele

[6] Historically, the Ndebele identity is constructed from the Zulu. The Ndebele cannot be defined without the Zulu as they originated from the Zulu before settling in Zimbabwe, this is why some of the practices of the Ndebele are similar to that of the Ndebele (Lindgren, 2005)

succession method follows a single line and not rotation as it is among the Shona shown in the above paragraph.

Lastly in terms of the different methods of succession, the Tonga succession method is the least common method which is seldom told. Traditionally, amongst the BaTonga chieftaincy succession is rotated using maternal and not paternal lines. Zimbabwe's matrilineal societies are found in Mutoko, Mudzi and Binga. The distinct succession methods in Zimbabwe indicate that the legitimacy of chiefs is informed by the succession methods of each area. Therefore, legitimacy is not homogenous but, rather, varies from one group to the other. That is why it is important to contextualise discussion of legitimacy based on the geographic area under study.

The above were ways of succession from customary law perspective, however, in terms of state law, traditional leadership is guided by Chapter 15 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Makahamadze, Grant and Tavuyanango, 2013) which not only recognizes that traditional institutions work in parallel to modern structures and institutions, but also highlights the roles and functions of traditional leaders, which include being custodians of customary law and natural resources in communities and facilitators of development in their areas if jurisdiction. The Constitution also provides for a traditional leadership structure comprised of three tiers- the chief, followed by the headman and, finally, village heads (Chigwata, 2015). The institution of traditional leadership is part of, and is governed by, the Zimbabwean constitutional system, which suggests the supremacy of state law. Chapter 15 of the Constitution thus brings customary law into the constitution, which in turn creates opportunities for antagonism and diversity (Tsabora, 2019). As stated in Chapter 1 the institution of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe is made up of three hierarchies: —the chiefs, headmen and village-heads—which are not elected but appointed through hereditary succession. Therefore, inheritance is the most common source of legitimacy in Zimbabwe's institution of traditional leadership. The standing succession customs in Zimbabwe's traditional leadership systems are embedded in patriarchal notions, which has seen slow progress in terms of increasing the visibility of women in traditional leadership. The diagram below shows the current hierarchy of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe.

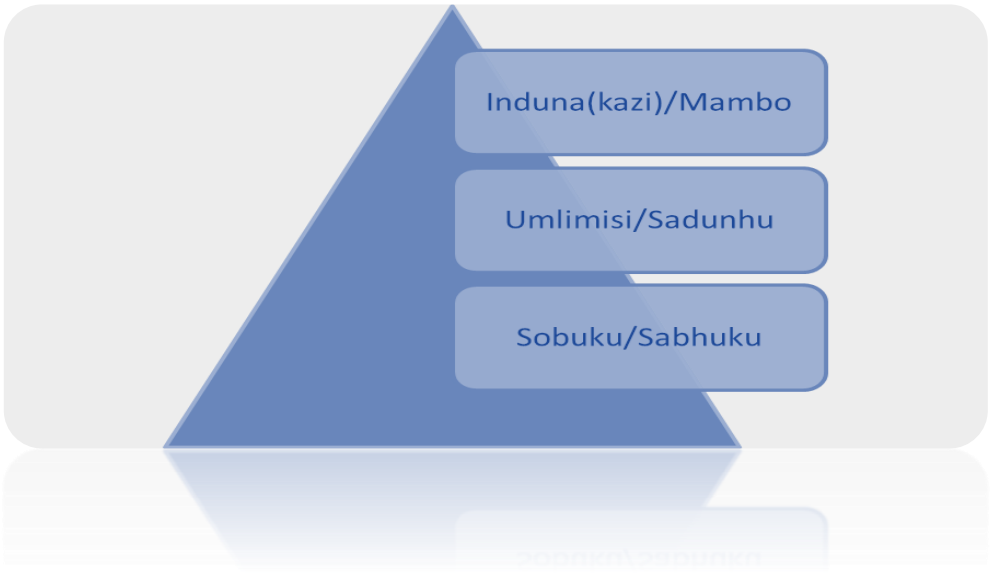


Figure 2 Hierarchy of the traditional leadership in Zimbabwe.

As shown in the graphic above, the highest level in terms of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe is the chief, called the *Induna(kazi*) or *Mambo (*chief*).* Chieftaincy is usually a hereditary position preserved for male persons. It is the responsibility of the family to select a rightful heir and then submit the names to the President of Zimbabwe through the district and provincial level central government structures and the Government Minister of Local Government and Public Works. The President confirms the selected candidate in accordance with the succession customs of that given area. Hierarchically, the chief is endorsed and installed with the blessing of the President and the position of chief is followed by that of the *umlisa/sadunhu* (headman). Headmen are selected by the chief. They are usually nominated from the chief's inner circle, such as those families or close friends who have been active in the chieftaincy for a long time. The Ministry of Local Government, in consultation with the responsible chief and the clan, is responsible for appointing the *umlisa/sadunhu*. Even so, the central government, as represented at district level, plays the facilitation role in the process of selecting the heir whenever the vacancy arises.

Last in the traditional leadership hierarchy is the *sobhuku/sabhuku* (kraalhead) who is selected by the *umlisai/sadunhu* with the guidance of the *Induna(kazi)/Mambo* and his or her council members in line with the royal family's customs and traditions. The *sobhuku/sabhuku* are

endorsed for appointment by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works on behalf of the President, in accordance with the Traditional Leaders Act (29:17).

The institution of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe largely follows the male primogeniture system, with the role inherited by a son from his father (Nyathi, 2017; Dodo, 2013). Even though the legal framework at the state level in Zimbabwe prohibits discrimination based on gender, succession customs and traditions obstruct women from attaining positions of authority, such as the chieftaincy. Since the ascension of women to chieftaincy is usually contested, it makes it difficult for women to claim or maintain their legitimacy.

In regard to gender recognition and chieftaincy in Zimbabwe, Section 56 of the Zimbabwean Constitution contains a significant gender equality and non-discrimination clause, yet the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17), is silent on gender recognition in its institution. The contrasting views on gender equality have led to the eventuality of traditional leaders and state structures being at loggerheads. Whilst traditional leaders believe that women have other significant roles to play, the state structures and laws cannot argue that there is a need to include more women in traditional leadership. Although this has been the stance of the State, it is noted that the State itself has failed to meet the expected number of women in its structures. For example, in the 2023 elections, statistics show that only 11% of the candidates were women (ZIMFACT, 2023). There appears to still be a lack of political will in the government as women are still underrepresented and there has been a decline in women participating in elections, as the 2018 statistics showed that 14% of the electoral candidates were women in comparison to 12.4% in 2013. However, this study looks beyond numerical representation and focuses more on symbolic and substantive representation.

There are two administrative structures for the chiefs. The Council of Chiefs comprises all the chiefs in Zimbabwe; Chief Matshane Khumalo of Matabeleland North is the current President of Chiefs in Zimbabwe whilst Fortune Charumbira who has served as president for some time is the Deputy, President. The Provincial Assembly of Chiefs qualifies all chiefs of all provinces; a chief is selected to be the head of all the chiefs in that province. The powers of the chiefs have been reduced since the introduction of the Rural District Councils, whereby most powers were shifted to the District Councils, leaving the chiefs with less influence. The creation of Rural

District Councils in post-colonial Africa was inherited from the colonial era, whereby the colonial masters created Villages Development Committees (VIDCOS) meant to limit the powers of the chiefs. Thus, results in a tension between the legitimacy of elected councillors and traditional leaders.

4.2.1 The history of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe: c.1880-1890

Before colonisation, the institution of traditional leadership, whose legitimacy was derived from tradition and culture, was the only governance system in Zimbabwe (Chigwata, 2015). In precolonial times, chiefs were responsible for the distribution of land and safeguarding their communities and served as the custodians of customs and heritage (Mashele, 2004). A chief's legitimacy was attained through installation by the most senior headman in the area and after consulting spirit-mediums (Makahamadze, Grant and Tavuyanango, 2013). The intervention of spirit mediums and ancestors not only prevented succession disputes, but also gave the chief religious authority. Colonisation undermined the legitimacy of chiefs, as the chiefs' accountability and legitimacy was no longer based on the people's interest but the pursuit of the interests of colonisers.

Since the legitimacy of chiefs during this period was largely based on the spiritual sanction of ancestors, as stated above, chiefs were expected to adhere to religious expectations. Chiefs were not removed from power until death or unless they failed to obey the directives of the ancestors. Additionally, chiefs served as intermediaries between living beings and spiritual beings, and allegiance to the community was highly important. Bourdillion (1993) describes how *Mambo* Chirisamhuru's downfall was caused by his failure to heed the advice of ancestors which later led to an uprising led by *Mambokadzi* Nyamazana, a female chief. Religious legitimacy was significant in precolonial Zimbabwe because it generated power for the chief and instilled reverence and fear in their subjects (Vaughan, 2003.)

The defeat of *Mambo* Chirisamhuru (Bourdillion, 1993) highlights two important issues. First, as spirituality was an important source of legitimacy, the rebellion of the army against the chief was interpreted as being motivated by frustrated ancestors. In Sinqobile Mabhena's journey to chieftaincy, this is seen in the way retribution was used as a sign to reprimand chiefs that went against ancestors. This will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter. Second, there has

been significant debate regarding the status of Nyamazana wife of King Mzilikazi and was also female warrior, with respect to whether she was a traditional chief or a spiritual leader. This shows how the history of women has been shaped and influenced by whomever was writing the narrative—and for which audience.

Precolonial historical accounts in Zimbabwe hardly mention female chiefs (Weinrich, 1971; Cobbing, 1974; Schimdt, 1992; Maxwell, 1999; Ranger, 2010, 2018). Dodo (2013), however, has documented the role of women in the precolonial political systems of Zimbabwe and a few other African countries. He states that women did not have direct influence in issues of decision-making; rather, they influenced the kings' or chiefs' decisions using their relationship with them as their mother, sister, or aunt. He further notes that female chiefs were removed from chieftaincy by colonial rule, but he does not give examples of such women in Zimbabwe. Dodo's characterisation has been criticized by African feminist readings of chieftaincy and women in power in precolonial Africa who argue that women in precolonial Africa were powerful and influential (Parpart, 2019 Clarke and Nyathi, 2010) provide a detailed account of how Queen Lozikheyi played an advisory role in the leadership of King Lobengula. This suggests that, in precolonial Zimbabwe, women may have exercised power as advisors to kings and not as rulers in their own right.[7]

It is clear that the legitimacy of chieftaincy in precolonial Zimbabwe was largely based on the primogeniture male, spirituality and succession customs of a given community. However, it is a matter of debate whether there were female chiefs in precolonial Zimbabwe or whether women were limited to roles as spiritual leaders. In other words, there are different narratives regarding the history of traditional leadership and gender recognition. These divergent narratives continue to impact women's efforts to be included in traditional leadership as chiefs, and not simply as mothers or sisters of the chief. The lack of clarity around women's status and position in precolonial Zimbabwe's political systems thus continues to influence their legitimacy today. *Indunakazi* Mabhena's succession dispute was characterized by a common argument, often raised

[7] During the precolonial period the hierarchy of chieftaincy was from the King until colonial inception when Kings were removed, and chiefs became the highest authority in chieftaincy. Therefore, when referring to precolonial period the term Kings will be used.

during data collection in this study, that there has never been a female chief in the history of the Nguni in Zimbabwe.

4.2.2 Colonial rule and the redefinition and (in)visibility of legitimacy and female traditional leaders in Zimbabwe

African systems began to be replaced, or diluted, by colonial administration in the 1890s. The powers of chiefs were reduced to functions of a government officer through legislative laws and administrative structures. There was political manipulation of chiefs in Zimbabwe aimed at containing African nationalism, thereby driving a rift between the chiefs and African nationalist. Weinrich (1971), who pioneered the study of chieftainship in Zimbabwe, highlights how the Rhodesian government manipulated traditional leaders, consequently leading to the weakening of their legitimacy. This compromised the legitimacy of traditional leaders at the dawn of independence. Colonialism thus transformed the legitimacy of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe, whereby succession customs and sources of legitimacy were transformed through the administrative policies and legislative structures that were enacted during this period. The post-colonial state adopted an already existing system that compromised the legitimacy of traditional leadership.

Legitimacy in colonial Zimbabwe was secularised, replacing African, spiritually sanctioned legitimacy with Western-oriented politics, thus compromising the chiefs who, hitherto, had been selected, protected and anointed by the ancestral spirits. Spiritual legitimacy was partially replaced with state legitimacy, as colonial rule established modern systems of governance alongside the traditional systems. The importance of the traditional systems also atrophied as a result of the increasing influence of missionaries who disregarded traditional African religious practices. Amadiume (1997) states that while there may have been harmful traditions and customs in African society that needed to be abolished, Christianity eradicated most of the customs and traditions of African societies. Therefore, the contestation of legitimacy during the colonial period was redefined by the secularisation of institution through the implantation of Western-oriented political structures that weakened African political systems. Since the Western-oriented political systems were patriarchal, it became apparent to women that they were not included in these structures. They were thus further marginalized and excluded.

Makumbe (1998) argues that the patriarchal structure of traditional leadership is the result of colonial intervention. Makumbe's (1998) argument could be supported by the evidence of female authority being eliminated during the colonial period in a way that was different from the precolonial period (Nkomo, 2015). Women were invisible to the colonial authorities. Schimdt (1991) notes that "[h]aving accepted the idea that women were perpetual minors in society and presumably played no part in public life, administration officials assumed that they had no political function".

The Ndebele case was different from other ethnic groups in Zimbabwe however, as in precolonial times only men were eligible for chieftaincy in Ndebele communities (Ndlovu and Ncube, 2012). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) states that the Ndebele governance system was embedded with patriarchal ideologies that considered women as minors incapable of leading men. One cannot dispute that precolonial traditional leadership was characterised by some patriarchal structures; however, women played complimentary roles in the political system.

Female chiefs were removed from power and replaced with male chiefs. In Zimbabwe, for example, after the death of Mupotedzi of Honde Valley, she was replaced by a man, (Alexander, 1997). In Manica reserve, the headmen Shezukuru and Kanganya were not replaced; no new appointment was made (Nkomo, 2015). Female chiefs thus lost their legitimacy and authority during the colonial period. In Shona society, the authority of women eventually faded into oblivion (Makahamadze, 2009). This relegation and distortion of female chiefs authority and relevance is still haunting female traditional leaders in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Although female traditional leaders are not removed from power their relevance and visibility are limited to community level.

The deterioration of the legitimacy of chiefs before the establishment of the Rhodesian government can be traced as far back as 1896, to a Ndebele-Shona uprising which was spearheaded by chiefs. This raised the suspicion and fears of the Rhodesian settlers, prompting them to reduce the powers of chiefs to constables (Weinrich, 1971). Chiefs that were supporting nationalist movements had their powers delegated to chiefs that were loyal to colonial administration. For example, in 1963 *Mambo* Mangwende was stripped of his powers for his

allegiance to nationalist movements (Carry and Mitchell, 1980). This demonstrates how legitimacy has been influenced and transformed by the ruling governments.

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, chiefs became titular figures who played ancillary roles. While during the colonial period chiefs facilitated the occupation of colonial settlers, modern day chiefs have become political pawns. Colonial administrators-maintained relationships and alliances with chiefs to buy stability cheaply, as the chiefs were trusted and depended on by African societies (Boone, 1995). Colonial policies and legislation created parallel structures as chiefs were used as representatives for colonial governments. Colonial governments changed the traditional institutions because, in their view, these institutions were outdated and anachronistic in nature and, hence, could not be compatible with modern political systems. Ntsebeza (1999) posits that colonialism disrupted the pre-existing traditional governance systems and undermined the foundation that underpins the chiefs' legitimacy.

At the dawn of independence, in 1980, the influence and powers of traditional leaders almost came to an end as a result of their collaboration with the Rhodesian government. Chiefs lost their power and influence at independence through the government's drive for democratisation and modernisation (Lotti, 2020). According to Makumbe (2000), the reduction of the chiefs' power and influence, which began in 1980, was sealed by The District Councils Act of 1980. This Act reduced the powers of chiefs by limiting their control over land distribution and allocation. The Act effectively stripped away the chiefs' powers and bestowed them on District Councils, rendering the chiefs less influential. One of the questions asked in this study was how the existing systems of District Councils inform the legitimacy of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe; particularly, the *Indunakazi*.

4.2.3 Dynamics of chieftaincy in contemporary Zimbabwe

The following section explores the dynamics that surround chieftaincy in Zimbabwe, including the issues of legitimacy and gender recognition in traditional leadership.

4.2.4 Traditional leaders as arms of political parties

Traditional leaders in Zimbabwe and many other parts of Africa have played an increasingly partisan role. Traditional leaders in Zimbabwe have openly involved themselves in partisan

politics by campaigning and endorsing the ruling party, especially during the election period. Section 280(2) of the Zimbabwean Constitution mandates that all traditional leaders—chiefs, headmen and village-heads—are prohibited from participation in partisan politics. Observations show that state legitimacy appears to have been replaced by political party affiliation, in the case of Zimbabwe. It has become the norm for traditional leaders to be partisan, and it is rare to find traditional leaders in Zimbabwe going against the ruling party. The lack of political neutrality on the part of chiefs has compromised their legitimacy. There being partisan exposes their subjects who are anti-ZANU PF. This study argues that the impacts of politicising the institution of traditional leadership is not peculiar to women but affects all traditional leaders. For example, the case of *Induna* Ndiweni who faced criticism from the ruling party after attending a Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) congress which was held in Gweru and speaking out against human rights violation that existed in Zimbabwe.

According to Chigwata (2015), it is the relationship between the state and chiefs that has most eroded the trust and confidence of many rural communities in their chiefs. A study by Ndoma (2021) found that rural communities recognized, accepted and supported their chiefs but these chiefs should stay out of partisan politics. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of traditional leaders in rural communities remains resilient despite attempts by the independent government to bring an end to the institution when Zimbabwe earned its independence. The colonial and postcolonial governments have sought ways to maintain cordial relations with chiefs for political interests. The state-chief relations in Zimbabwe, currently, are polarised by the politics of the ruling party in Zimbabwe, ZANU PF.

Ranger (1982) gives a detailed account of how the colonial administration relied on chiefs to reinforce their colonial policies on subjects. He gives the example of the Chendambuya chieftaincy, where the colonial administrators were dependent on the ‘weak’ chiefs, who could be easily manipulated, meaning there was no means for them to fail enforce policies. The study seeks to examine how factors such as politicization of chieftaincy shapes the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

Relations between the state and traditional leadership in Zimbabwe have been characterised by the politicisation of traditional institutions by the ruling regime, thereby bringing into question

the legitimacy of the chieftaincy. One outcome of this is that traditional leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the election results in Zimbabwe's rural areas (Chigwata, 2015; Makahamadze, 2017; Kurebwa, 2020). Bratton and Masunungure (2018) support the narrative that the traditional authorities have become politicized in Zimbabwe where chiefs have been found to act as election agents—especially for the ruling party. Although Section 281 of the Constitution categorically states that chiefs must not involve themselves in electoral politics, chiefs continue to play political roles on behalf of the ruling party, ZANU PF. In 2008, chiefs distributed food and agricultural inputs on behalf of the ruling party to gain support from the communities. In 2017, Chief Charumbira, president of the Chiefs Council, publicly announced his endorsement of former President Robert Mugabe for the 2018 elections, which was unconstitutional. The relationship between chiefs and the state are supposed to be beneficial to the community through development projects. However, in the current political climate of Zimbabwe traditional leaders are compromised and their legitimacy has become more tied to their loyalty and accountability to the ruling party rather than the rural population.

The use of chiefs as voting banks, or tools to manipulate subjects to support the ruling regime, is not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. The use of chiefs as political agents for those in power has been in existence since the colonial era, where chiefs were used to enforce white settler authority and those who failed to comply were removed from chieftaincy. According to Thomson (2010), clientelism has permeated traditional authorities in Zimbabwe and has been used by politicians to push the agenda of ZANU PF. Leading up to the 2018 elections, the government of Zimbabwe gave every chief in the country a personal vehicle. This gesture buttressed the view that the chiefs had become a political appendages of ZANU PF. The legitimacy of chiefs in contemporary Zimbabwe thus has become controversial as they have so often been co-opted by the ruling party. The politicization of chieftaincy collapses the traditional structures that are based on appointment by the people.

4.3 Legitimacy and Chieftaincy in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has had several turning points regarding the institution of traditional leaders and what entails legitimacy. In the 1980s, there was a decisive decline and limitation of the chiefs' power, while the 1990s was a period of political instrumentalization. In the 1980s, the legitimacy of

chiefs was brought into question as the nationalists reduced the powers of chiefs—and, particularly, those chiefs that collaborated with colonial rule. The legitimacy and influence of traditional leaders was limited through policies and laws which explicitly stated the roles and responsibilities of chiefs. To weaken the chiefs' power further, the postcolonial government established Villages Development Committees (VIDCOS) and Ward Development Committees (WADCOS), which democratically elected councillors (Makumbe, 2010). Some scholars have criticized these VIDCOS and WADCOS as being used by ZANU PF for political reasons instead of spearheading democracy and development in rural communities (Hammer, 2005). The powers and influence of traditional leaders was later resuscitated in the 1990s when the Traditional Leaders Act 1998 (Chigwata, 2016) came into force. The legitimacy of traditional leaders has been controversial from precolonial to postcolonial Zimbabwe. The sources of legitimacy in Zimbabwe have been under scrutiny due to the changing dynamics in the institution, including issues of gender recognition, succession customs and politicisation of the institution by state and political parties and, in, ZANU PF. Thus, the different regimes and changes that have taken place in Zimbabwe since colonial rule have shaped and informed the legitimacy of traditional leadership in various ways.

In support of traditional authority, the 2013 Constitution recognised and legitimised the powers of the chiefs through the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17). Section 3 (1) of the Act highlights the legitimacy of chiefs by explaining their appointment, duties and roles. A chief is confirmed by the President in accordance with the standing customs of a given community. However, in the case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena there is a legitimacy of crisis because she was not appointed in accordance with the succession customs of the Nguni. This study examines the question of the legitimacy of her authority, analysing how *Indunakazi* Mabhena has been able to legitimize her authority despite challenging the succession customs of Nguni traditional leadership.

Traditional leadership in Zimbabwe has been polarised primarily by the government's need for political expediency, which demands that loyalty should be to the ruling party and thereby compromising the needs of the people, represented by chiefs. The post independent governments-the Mugabe regime, and the New Dispensation, adopted a captured institution (traditional

leadership). While it was expected that the New Dispensation would bring back the glory and legitimacy of a chieftancy that is community-oriented, and apolitical rather than focusing on political allegiance. This was substantiated by what a male participant said during an in-depth interview in Nswazi, traditional leaders have become an "arm of politics". In as much the Constitution explicitly states the criteria for chieftancy, the legitimacy of a traditional leader has been reduced to political party affiliation. Legitimacy in traditional leadership has therefore been influenced and shaped by a chief's loyalty to the ruling regime.

The manipulation of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe has witnessed some chiefs being imposed, as well as succession disputes being politicized, thereby compromising the traditional legitimacy of the institution. For example, the resurgence of the Nemanwa chieftaincy in 2017 under *Mambo* Bere is said to be a political appointment and has remained contested (Mafirakureva, 2022). The controversies around chieftaincy and state politics have, in many ways, compromised the legitimacy of traditional leaders as chiefs have become more loyal and accountable to the state than to their community members. Therefore, contestations of legitimacy emanate not as much from state law as from the misinterpretation of state laws that has led to chiefs losing their independence to the state apparatus.

4.3.1 The impact of government intervention on the legitimacy of traditional leaders

The appointment and legitimacy of traditional leaders thus has been altered through the government's intervention, which usually goes against the succession customs of a given community. Historically, succession disputes were resolved through the intervention of the *mhondoro*/*idlozi*—the ancestral spirits (Lan, 1983 cited in Olga, 2014). As has been stated earlier, during the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe were rewarded for their loyalty by being allowed to keep their positions, while others were removed from their positions because they had sympathised with the colonial regimes. Such practices weaken the legitimacy of the institution thereby destroying the very foundation on which a chief stand.

The Constitution explicitly states that chiefs are appointed by the President after a name has been submitted by the family and community concerned. It further emphasises that the Minister of Local Government may only intervene a year after the family has failed to agree on a successor.

In practice, however, it would appear that the government intervenes as and when it is politically expedient. For example, during the land reform programme in 2000 village heads in newly resettled areas were selected because they had played a significant role in the land reform programme (Tarisayi and Munyaradzi, 2019). The study does not dispute that there are occasions on which the government should intervene in succession disputes. Rather, it advances that the government should intervene for the purpose of conflict resolution and not because of political motives. Therefore, government intervention in succession appointments compromises the legitimacy of traditional leaders because some chiefs have been selected based on their contribution to the ruling party's political interests.

4.4 Women in Leadership in Zimbabwe

4.4.1 Background on the political role and status of Zimbabwean women

The political role and status of women in Zimbabwe has been overlooked since the colonial period. Women's authority and influence in traditional leadership was redefined at the inception of colonialism. This legacy has continued into postcolonial Zimbabwe. Although the postcolonial government has instituted diversified policies and laws that uphold the equal participation of women and men in politics, there is still a masculine posture in the political structures of Zimbabwe. An understanding of background of women in politics is important to understand the context, nature and scale of the challenges faced by women in general. This section demonstrates that the status of women in chieftaincy is not separate from the general status of women in Zimbabwe.

The marginalisation and invisibility of women can be traced back to the beginning of the colonial period. Women played a significant role in the national struggle but not much recognition and visibility has been afforded to them. Narratives that leave women behind the role women play in politics will seem like women in Zimbabwe were passive actors in state building. Nevertheless, women were excluded from the Lanchester House Conference, which provides clear evidence that, while women might have fought the liberation struggle to free the nation, they were not free themselves from patriarchal systems in society. It should be noted that the political status of women in Zimbabwe today does not reflect that of women in precolonial Zimbabwe (Schimdt, 1991), as the postcolonial Zimbabwean government left intact many

patriarchal practices instituted during colonisation. Similarly, regarding chieftaincy, little has been written about the women who were chiefs during the colonial period in Zimbabwe, for example those headmen in Manicaland.

Although women were not given much recognition in independent Zimbabwe, a few laws were enacted to elevate the role and status of women in the new Zimbabwe. These laws include the Equal Pay Regulation (1980), the Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA), (1982), the Labour Relations Act (1984) and the Matrimonial Causes Act (1985). Essof (2013, p. 34) disregards these laws as giving full empowerment and legitimacy to women to access equal opportunities, rather than "affording women superficial access to state structures". This is supported by reports that women during that time were rarely elevated to ministerial positions beyond those in social welfare and were largely excluded from decision-making positions (Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2015). Likewise, in traditional leadership women chiefs can rise to chieftaincy but are not elevated further to positions beyond their communities; they are thus limited in terms of exercising their authority.

Equal participation between women and men in politics should not be focused on numbers alone, but rather on issues of access to power and opportunities similar to those available to men. In view of this, the participation of women in politics without barriers—especially those emanating from patriarchal structures—is important as it promotes sustainable development (Mlambo and Kapingra, 2019). In political spaces, women in Zimbabwe still face multiple challenges and politically motivated violence prevents equal representation, participation in politics and access to power. Mandiyanike (2012) notes that the political playing field in Zimbabwe has been uneven between women and men since political violence is masculine such that women find it more difficult to participate in politics.

4.4.2 Women and chieftaincy in Zimbabwe

This section provides a brief background about women in Zimbabwean politics which will be narrowed down to women and chieftaincy in Zimbabwe in the next section.

Zimbabwe has ratified international and regional conventions that seek to uphold the rights of women and equality. Sections 17(c), 56 and 80 of Zimbabwe's Constitution (2013) protects

the rights of women. Section 17(c) stipulates that the State and all government institutions must ensure women have equal access to resources as men. Section 56 provides a guideline for the protection and promotion of the rights of women, men and children.

Hegemonic masculinities have had a profound impact on gendering political systems in Zimbabwe and most parts of the world. Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society and women are vulnerable to discrimination. Therefore, even if women manage to ascend to positions that are traditionally reserved for men, they are likely to face challenges in legitimising their authority in these positions. This is not to say that men do not face legitimacy challenges, but for women the challenges are multiplied due to discrimination on the basis of their gender and sex. Women make up 53% of the voters but hold only 11% of the seats in Parliament. Political participation in Zimbabwe is still dominated by men. In 2013, the government introduced a quota system that reserved 60 additional seats for women, making a total of 270 instead of 210 seats; women still constituted approximately 31% of the lower house in the Zimbabwean Parliament, yet they comprised 53% of the population (Zimstats, 2022). Zimbabwe has never had a female president and the first female vice president was appointed in 2004. Women occupy peripheral roles which continue to place men in dominant positions thereby upholding the masculinity of politics in Zimbabwe. The dominance of men even in spaces meant for women are highlighted in this study in chapters 5 and 6.

Zimbabwean women have been portrayed as passive actors in politics since the national struggle. Although they played a vital role as *zvimbwidos* and *mujibhas* (war collaborators) who disseminated food and information to the guerrilla fighters, little credit has been given to these women. This is evidenced by the absence of women during the Lanchester House negotiations, illustrating that while women might have played a significant role in the national struggle there was no guarantee that postcolonial Zimbabwe would emancipate them (Law, 2021).

Zimbabwe remains male-dominated, and politics remains a man's club; in this context it is a challenge for women to attain leadership positions in male-gendered institutions such as the institution of traditional leadership. The few women who have risen to positions previously reserved for men often face challenges of invisibility, hypervisibility and name shaming (Mlotshwa, 2018). Examples can be drawn from the cases of women such as Fadzayi Mahere and

Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga members of parliament from CCC the main opposition political party in Zimbabwe, who have been humiliated and called derogatory names.

Chigumadzi (2018) in her book *These Dry Bones Will Rise Again*, affirms that women who occupy positions previously preserved for men are seen as "unruly women" (p. 20). This has also been supported by Kiamba (2008) who notes that women face persecution and criticism from other women who give them derogatory nicknames or call them out for abandoning the duties expected of women in African society. To buttress this notion, Ncube (2020) highlights how women are respected as mothers if they uphold existing hegemonic masculine structures. Ncube provides the examples of Grace Mugabe the wife of the late President of Zimbabwe and Joyce Mujuru, former Vice President of Zimbabwe, who were also married to powerful and influential men and earned the respect of the people, who addressed them as '*Amai*' (mother). However, when these two women allegedly made bids for the presidency of the party or the country, '*amai'* was changed to '*hure*' (prostitute) and for Grace Mugabe she was associated with mental health challenges. Patriarchal systems thus limit women to ceremonial or secondary roles in politics.

In light of this, culture and religion remain a limiting factor for women in Zimbabwe (Rwafa, 2016; Mhuru, 2023) and those women who strive to be outstanding in politics or other positions traditionally held by men face opposition. This begs the question: what strategies should be used to raise the visibility of women in politics? That question is relevant in this study of the legitimacy of female traditional leaders as little has been explored to establish the distinction in terms of gender recognition between male and female traditional leadership systems in Zimbabwe.

4.4.2.1 Locating the place and role of women in post-colonial traditional leadership in Zimbabwe

Chieftaincy in Zimbabwe is commonly male dominated, with a few exceptions where communities are matrilineal. The philosopher Kwasi Wiredu has described some customs practiced in chieftaincy succession as anachronistic and outmoded because of the modernization and development of social systems (Okello et al., 2012). The political position and presentation of Ndebele women since pre-colonial Zimbabwe has been that women are seen as *asibatwana* (children) (Ndlovu and Ncube, 2012). Zimbabwe's different ethnic groupings have not all documented the historical and current status of women to the same extent (Cheater, 1985). For

instance, little has been written about Queen Lozokheyi, a *de facto* regent who saw the reinstatement of Ndebele autonomy against colonial rule (Ndlovu and Dube, 2012). Some scholars have argued that *amaNdebele* did not have female chiefs in pre-colonial times (Gatsheni, 2008; Ndlovu and Dube, 2012; Nyathi, 2017). Since independence, having female chiefs is still seen as taboo by the *amaNdebele*, although Matabeleland province have had more female chiefs than Mashonaland provinces, which has two female chiefs. This study helps to address this gap in knowledge on the experiences of women in chieftaincy.

Studies on the institution of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe have focused largely on the relevance of traditional leadership in contemporary Zimbabwe, the role of chiefs in fostering democracy, human rights and peace in Zimbabwe (Chigwata, 2015; Makahamadze, 2017). A few studies, including the work of Dodo (2013), have focused on traditional governance systems, highlighting best practices for governance and how gender equality may be embraced meaningfully. Dodo (2013) acknowledges the existence of women in traditional leadership although they have been overshadowed but offers little information on the role that female chiefs play in local governance. In 2021, 6 of the 272 chieftaincies and 15 of the 452 headman positions in Zimbabwe positions were occupied by women (Lupande, 2021). Although, there has been a steady rise of women in traditional leadership, there effective participation remains a challenge.

The appointment of women to chieftaincy has been understudied in post-colonial Zimbabwe (Dodo, 2013; Muriaas et al., 2017). The patriarchal structures of the institution of traditional leadership continue to exclude women from chieftaincy despite efforts by the government to include women in local governance (Mungwini, 2007). The government has demonstrated a lack of political will to monitor the implementation of gender policies in chieftaincy appointments. This is evidenced by the small number of women in traditional leadership positions and the absence of women in higher national institutions such as the Senate.[8]

[8] Zimbabwe's Parliament has two chambers, the Senate and the National Assembly. The Senate has been in existence since 1980, although at some point it was removed from the Parliament and re-established in 2005. The Senate consists of 80 members who are selected from the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe; the remaining 20 are allocated to traditional chiefs and people with disabilities. Since its inception in 1980, there has never been a female traditional chief representative in the House of Senate.

Most studies in Zimbabwe focus on inclusion of women in politics, overlooking the effective representation of rural women (Mandiyanike, 2012). Kurebwa's (2013) scholarly thesis examines the representation and participation of rural women in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, and highlights the need to have greater representation of women in positions such as local councillor and ward councillor. Although his study used a qualitative approach, it is limited to elected members, overlooking the need for these rural women to attain leadership positions in traditional structures. Likewise, a study by Musingafi et al. (2015) examined the perceptions and experiences of rural women in local governance but excluded their participation in traditional leadership. Although, the term 'intersectionality' was not used in this study, the analysis of women in local governance was not merely on gender basis.

In Fayayo's (2020) doctoral thesis, which examines rural governance and contestations of power and influence between elected officials and traditional leadership, he refers to *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership. His study questions whether *Indunakazi* Mabhena's gender influences her contribution to democracy in Zimbabwean politics. Although Fayayo (2020) does not use the term 'intersectionality', his study brings out an intersectional approach as he explores how identities related to geography, history and the age and political background of traditional leaders can contribute to, or shape, their contributions to democracy. This study thus represents the first known academic work focusing on the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena as a case study.

The ascendancy of women into chieftaincy positions beginning in 1980 shows that the independent government aimed to move away from the oppressive colonial positions towards women's rights to political participation and inclusion (Mungwini, 2017). Zimbabwe has made strides in the inclusion of women in chieftaincy, as five women have been appointed to chieftaincy since 1980. Some have argued that there is still some resistance from the male chiefs, who still view women's presence in chieftaincy as taboo (Dodo, 2017). This research investigates the attitudes and perceptions of the community and male chiefs towards a female chief.

Examples of the struggles of women with regard to participation in chieftaincy can be drawn from the wrangle for succession that has taken place between Saunders Mlotshwa and Silibaziso from the Mvuthu area of Hwange District in the province of Matabeleland North. The dispute started in 2015. The daughter of the late chief, Silibaziso Mhlotswa, approached the High Court

to intervene regarding her exclusion from the chieftaincy. She argued that she was the rightful heir and should not be disadvantaged based on gender (Chakanyuka, 2017). Her uncle, Saunders Mhlotswa, who has been the acting chief since the death of her father has, together with some local leaders, defended her exclusion from succession to the chieftaincy on the grounds that it is not in their Nguni custom to appoint women. The High Court acknowledged that Silibaziso had been discriminated based on gender but referred the matter to the Constitutional Court for ruling, citing that it was beyond its jurisdiction to make a judgement (Chakanyuka, 2017). This case has attracted attention from many civil rights groups in the country. Although the Supreme Court ruled that Silibaziso be appointed to chieftaincy, the family has yet to appoint her. This shows the contestations between the state law and succession customs in chieftaincy.

The installation of women as chiefs is thus still a contentious issue in Zimbabwe and highlights a conflict of interest between the patrilineal system and contemporary gender laws against discrimination. Moreover, it reveals the contestation between the modern state and its laws and the hegemonic monarchical system operating in the context of a republic. This study allows a deeper understanding of the transformations that have occurred to the institution of chieftaincy, looking, in particular, at how the rule of law has been used to enforce gender mainstreaming within the modern state, among other issues.

4.5 Conclusion

Conclusively, in chapter four the researcher established that there is still a gap in literature on the female traditional leaders particularly in Zimbabwe. Little has been written about women in traditional leadership and this reinforces the already existing narratives of women being passive actors in African precolonial political systems. This literature gap has reinforced the narrations that women chiefs did not exist in precolonial or colonial Zimbabwe thereby justifying the resistance of women rising to chieftaincy positions. Furthermore, this chapter establishes that challenges and dynamics in chieftaincy are not peculiar to women but rather gender and other factors such as customary law have intensified the challenges of female traditional leaders. The study makes a great contribution to the studies of legitimacy and gender recognition in traditional leadership.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP OF *INDUNAKAZI* MABHENA

"The most challenging issue in my leadership is that I am under pressure to prove to the community, and other patriarchs—especially those that were against my appointment—that I can lead exceptionally. The expectation ns from people are too high."

Indunakazi Sinqobile Mabhena, Gaborone, Botswana, 2021

5.1 Introduction

This is the first of two chapters presenting the findings of this study. This chapter focuses on *Indunakazi* Mabhena's journey to chieftaincy, exploring key events in her life and leadership role. This chapter seeks to answer the main research question: what strategies and identities have influenced the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena? The trajectory of how she ascended to power is traced together with how she navigated the patriarchal and other systems of oppression to legitimize her authority. Sources of her legitimacy are also explored, including her age, charisma, education, role as a mother, and the developments she has facilitated in her community. This demonstrates that her gender played a role in shaping her leadership trajectory as well as in overcoming the pitfalls that surrounded her ascendancy to the chieftaincy. The chapter highlights how she attained and maintained her legitimacy and how she used her femininity to legitimise her authority in a role traditionally reserved for men. The chapter also analyses how the same elements that she has used to attain legitimacy have also presented barriers, or limitations, to her use of power in her position of leadership.

The chapter examines the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, which in this study is illustrated as a way of expressing her authority within her 'subordinated' context. Instead of perceiving certain aspects of her identity, such as motherhood, age and marital status, as factors that hinder her legitimacy, this study demonstrates that these aspects have served as significant registers of power and have also shaped her community's perceptions. The next chapter explores how some of these aspects of identity have limited *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership and how they have shaped the perceptions of the Nswazi community.

The chapter presents qualitative research findings on how various identities were critical for *Indunakazi* Mabhena's authority, based on the researcher's observations and interviews with the community and the *Indunakazi*. As indicated in Chapter 3, the research findings are based on the fieldwork conducted in Nswazi village from 2020 to 2022. I conducted a narrative analysis of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions looking for two broad themes- strategies or sources of maintaining legitimacy implored by *Indunakazi* Mabhena and the perceptions of Nswazi community on the leadership and legitimacy of the *Indunakazi*. These themes derived from the recurring responses from participants that answered the main question and relevant to other objectives. I labelled and grouped responses into these themes during the data analysis that were recurring I grouped these responses into 3 groups- the *Indunakazi's* rise to chieftaincy, experiences and perceptions of the community as they were most relevant and recurring issues during the interviews. From these three groups I further highlighted issues brought up as strategies for the legitimacy of the *Indunakazi*.

5.2 Personal background of Sinqobile Mabhena

Born in 1974 to Howard Mabhena and Nomalanga Khumalo, Sinqobile (which means "we conquered") Bahle Mabhena is the eldest of four girls.[9] Her mother is currently a politician in one of Zimbabwe's opposition parties, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Little is known and said to the researcher about her father, the late Howard Mabhena. Sinqobile grew up in Nswazi village and attended primary and secondary school there. Sinqobile's mother described her personality as a child as follows:

> "Growing up she was a quiet, respectful, and very caring child. When she lost her father, a long time ago, she immediately became responsible for her siblings, and they looked up to her. Even when she grew up and started fending for herself, she has never forgotten her roots and what her mother did for her and her siblings. She has always behaved mannerly. She has boldness just like her father."[10]

[9] Interview with *Indunakazi* Mabhena, Gaborone, Botswana, July 2021

[10] In-depth interview with Nomalanga Khumalo, mother to *Indunakazi* Mabhena, October 2022

Sinqobile earned a teaching degree in 1997 in Bulawayo and taught at several schools in Matebeleland, including Mawabeni and Nswazi Primary Schools. She married Regiment Sibanda, from Filabusi, in 1997. They have a son and two daughters. The family currently lives in Botswana where Mr Sibanda (husband to *Indunakazi*) works. She moved to Botswana with her family in 2010 and travels regularly to Zimbabwe for chieftaincy business.

Sinqobile Mabhena is a Christian and a member of the Brethren in Christ Church, one of the most prominent churches in Matabeleland South. The Brethren in Christ Church was established by the first group of missionaries who set up a mission station in Rhodesia during the colonial period — Matopos Mission (Urban Mead, 2018). The church grew quickly, as the native language Ndebele were used for teaching and preaching, which attracted African followers. While I was not able to interview church leaders from the Brethren in Christ Church during this study, literature shows that, as of 2016, the church had never ordained a female minister (Urban-Mead, 2018). The perceptions that the church has on female leadership may in so many ways influence the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Therefore, Sinqobile's religious background has significance in exploring the influences that have shaped her approach to leadership: Christian principles, tradition — or both. Drawing reference from Urban-Mead (2018), and in light of the denomination's absence of female ministers (as of 2016), it was imperative to find out from church members how the *Indunakazi* was perceived by her church, and whether the church supported a woman assuming a role traditionally reserved for men since the church also has limitations to the rise of women to priesthood, a male dominated position. It was also important to establish whether the church played any role in legitimizing her role as *Indunakazi*. Section 5.8.3 will provide in-depth findings on the role of the religious affiliation in the leadership and legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

Background of the Mabhena clan and chieftaincy

During my first interview with *Indunakazi* Mabhena in Gaborone, Botswana, she gave a brief background of the Mabhena clan and its chieftaincy lineage. The interview was conducted in Gaborone because that is where the *Indunakazi* and her family are based, and I thus had to travel to Gaborone to interview her. She explained the origins of the Mabhena clan so that I could understand how the chieftaincy ended up being held in the Mabhena clan even though they are

not originally a royal family, the charisma and loyalty that Masuku, the first chief of the Nswazi had. She explained as follows:

> "My great grandfathers' ancestors migrated with Mzilikazi and other Ndebele people who were integrated into the group as they moved towards what is Bulawayo today. The Mabhenas are originally Nguni people who lived on the east coast of South Africa before migrating with Mzilikazi to where present-day Bulawayo is. History shows that around the 1840s the Mabhena family, like other Nguni people, settled with Mzilikazi at the Umzingwane River. In 1870, Sifu Masuku and other male clan members became responsible for the settlement. As the settlement became too big to govern, Ndamoya Mabhena was asked to govern what is Nswazi settlement today, thus becoming the first Mabhena chief."[11]

Based on the *Indunakazi's* account of the history of the Mabhena clan, the manner in which they ascended to power might have played a role the contestation of her appointment, as the Mabhena's are not, originally, a royal family. This suggests an aspect to the contestation surrounding the *Indunakazi's* ascendancy to chieftaincy that was not related to her gender.

The diagram below shows the chieftaincy lineage of the Mabhena clan. The data was obtained from interviews with several elders from the Nswazi council of elders who had knowledge of the Mabhena clan's chieftaincy lineage.

[11] Umzingwane District File and interview with *Indunakazi* Mabhena in Gaborone, Botswana, 2021

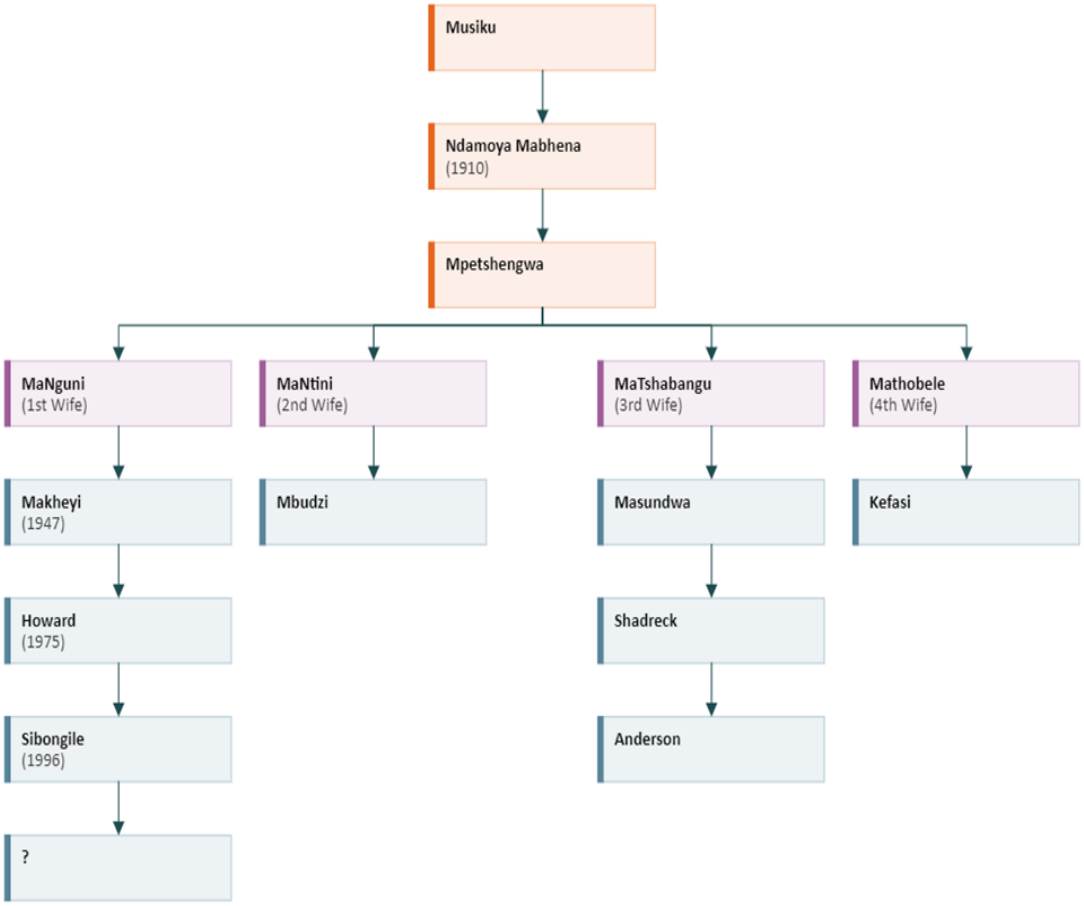


Figure 3 The succession lineage of the Mabhena clan.

As shown in the diagram, Ndamoya Mabhena was the first chief of Nswazi in 1910 Ndamoya was handed over chieftaincy by Masuku when the area became too vast for him to govern. After the death of Ndamoya, Ndamoya was succeeded by Mpetshengwa, Mpetshengwa had four wives: MaNguni, MaNtini, MaTshabangu and MaThobele. Little information was provided in interviews about MaNguni's children, except for those that ascended to the chieftaincy. MaNguni was the mother of Makheyi Mabhena, who was the father of Howard Mabhena, who was Sinqobile Mabhena's father. MaNtini's only surviving child was Mbudzi. MaTshabangu had three sons and MaThobele had one: their sons Anderson and Kefasi were put forward as possible candidates during the dispute over succession to the chieftaincy.

According to the Nguni customs, a chief's eldest son with his first wife is the first person in line for succession. In this case, Mphetshengwa's first wife, MaNguni, was from Zansi and thus

was also his senior wife, therefore her children were in line for succession.[12] In 1947, Mphetshengwa was succeeded by Makheyi, MaNguni's eldest son. In the 1970s, however, Makheyi was stripped of his powers as chief after reports of embezzlement of funds.[13] During a focus group discussion, some respondents agreed that if a person from the royal family commits any sort of crime, they must not only step down as chief but the entire royal family must be stripped of their status and the chieftaincy must go to a different family within a different clan. However, this did not happen in this case: *Induna* Makheyi Mabhena was just stripped off his powers and his eldest son, Howard Mabhena succeeded him. However, at the time, Howard was only thirteen years old and was not eligible to be appointed to chieftaincy until he turned twenty-one. As a result, Mlungisi, the headman, was appointed as Acting *Induna*. Howard Mabhena was appointed to the chieftaincy in 1975 when he came of age. Upon his death in 1993, a dispute arose around the appointment of his eldest daughter, Sinqobile Mabhena, who was finally appointed to the chieftaincy in 1996. The council's failed attempt to strip the Mabhena clan of the chieftaincy might have heightened the questioning of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's chieftaincy and legitimacy as the chieftaincy is said to have been affected by Makheyi Mabhena's alleged crimes before he was removed from power. This is to say the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena can be traced from the death of her father as it is evident that prior the ascendancy of her father there were existing tensions on the legitimacy of the Mabhena clan. Thus, substantiating the fact that the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* is not only shaped by gender but rather her gender intensifies the controversy surrounding her legitimacy.

5.3 Dispute over Sinqobile Mabhena's appointment as chief.

In the Ndebele culture, it is unheard of to have a woman as a chief. After Howard Mabhena's untimely death in 1993 following a car accident, a successor was needed. As his house was in line to provide a successor, Sinqobile, as Howard's eldest child, believed that she was suitable and qualified to be the successor — notwithstanding that, according to the Ndebele traditions and customs of succession, chieftaincy is based on the male primogeniture system (Nyathi, 2017). Since Howard Mabhena did not have any male children to succeed him and Sinqobile Mabhena

[12] At the founding of the Ndebele state around the late 1830s the Ndebele state was made up of three social classes, Zansi, Enhla and Hole. The Zansi was the highest social class group which comprised of original followers of Mzilikazi who migrated with him from South Africa.

[13] Delineation Report Report, National Archives, and Zimbabwe.

was his eldest child, she was chosen to succeed him by Howard Mabhena before his death as he had confided this to his very close family members.

During an interview with a male participant who plays a significant role in the Mabhena family and is also a close family friend, he indicated that Howard Mabhena's family was required to present the heir after the *ukuzilela*.[14] In addition, several family members and close allies of the Mabhena clan confirmed, during the in-depth interviews in Nswazi, that Howard Mabhena had chosen Sinqobile Mabhena as his successor just before he passed away. However, since women are not allowed to be appointed to the chieftaincy, the appointment was contested by some male family elders and male chiefs in Matabeleland, on the basis of her gender. Howard Mabhena's instruction thus led to a succession dispute. This illustrates that although the *Indunakazi*'s appointment was confirmed before the death of Howard Mabhena, it was not validated because of gender. The naming of a successor by the current chief is not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. For example, Ndiweni chieftaincy, in which *Induna* Felix Nhlanhla Ndiweni was named by the late Khanyisa Ndiweni as his successor before his death (Khanyisa Ndiweni) in 2010.

At the burial of Howard Mabhena, Sinqobile performed the *ukhama ubaba* rituals, which are usually led by the son of the deceased *Induna*.[15] According to an *Induna* during the interviews although Sinqobile is the eldest child, she could not perform the *ukhama ubaba* ritual, as it was considered taboo to have a woman perform this ritual-but however she proceeded and performed the ritual. This was her first action by which she claimed her place as the successor despite criticism from some family members. Her actions were criticized from many, especially the male members of Mabhena family and other chiefs within the region. They suggested that a male candidate—Howard Mabhena's brother, or his brother's son—should have been chosen, instead of a woman. Anderson Mabhena and Kefasi Mabhena—Sinqobile's half-brothers— were also

[14] *Ukuzilela* is a period when close family members of the deceased put on black clothes or do not make any social gatherings for a whole year (cleansing period).

[15] *Ukhama ubaba* is when the chid of a deceased chief is handed over the sceptre of the chief.

potential candidates for the chieftaincy as critics pointed out. A 60-year-old male focus group participant who witnessed the dispute reported:

> "It was morally wrong to consider some of the names brought forward, because some had been imprisoned twice for stealing cows, others were dubious and untrustworthy characters."[16]

This raises the question of whether Sinqobile had been chosen by her father because there was no son or other male relatives whose character and conduct qualified them to be suitable candidates to succeed Howard Mabhena, or whether he had chosen her because he deemed it her right as his eldest child. This also raises the question of whether criteria for the appointment of an *Induna* are sometimes lowered in order to accommodate the available male children as candidates, at the expense of the female children who may have met the criteria.

During one of the in-depth interviews during this study, a male participant from Mbalambala who experienced life under both Makheyi and Sinqobile Mabhena's tenure, reported that the other male children from the Mabhena clan that were considered for chieftaincy either did not reside in Nswazi or were not morally upright.[17] Since these "most appropriate" candidates were not fit to rule, Sinqobile was validated as her father's successor. The appointment of a female candidate was thus seen as a last resort, and not as the natural line of succession. This is supported by Ayittey (1993) who alludes that a chief's son can be blocked from chieftaincy if found mentally unfit to govern or if his past behaviour and mannerisms are found wanting. The fact that male candidates were scrutinized and found not worthy to be chiefs first, before Sinqobile Mabhena could be appointed, is corroborated by Okrah (2017), who also claims that when women are appointed as an 'afterthought' in male-dominated spaces, this may also impact their leadership style.

Two factions emerged within the Mabhena family around the succession of the chieftaincy. One faction, backed by the late Welshman Mabhena (Sinqobile's uncle) and male chiefs from the

[16] Male focus group discussion ,60 -year-old man, Mbalambala, 0ctober 2021

[17] In-depth interview Mr. Mabuza, February 2022

Matabeleland region, opposed the appointment of Sinqobile. The other faction, which supported her, was backed by her grandmother, *Gogo* Flora Masuku, Job Mabhena (another uncle), and her mother, MaKhumalo, as well as the local government officials who took a stand on the issue. This illustrates the interplay of family, local and national politics and how family dynamics can easily escalate around the issue of gender. In light of the dispute surrounding *Indunakazi* Mabhena's ascendancy to chieftaincy, the study examines how she was able to legitimize her authority after her ascendancy was contested.

The contestation of Sinqobile Mabhena's appointment was prolonged because of the disagreements between these parties. In 1995, male chiefs from Matabeleland and other prominent figures, including Welshman Mabhena and Agrippa Ngwenya, secretary-general of *Vukani Mahlabezulu* (Wake Up, People), held a meeting disputing Sinqobile's installation.[18] At the meeting, the chiefs and others present resolved to suspend her appointment pending consultation with a descendant of Chief Masuku who had, in 1910, given Ndamoya Mabhena the Nswazi settlement to govern. Further consultation had to be made as well with other stakeholders (Lindgren, 2005). Nevertheless, this decision was not endorsed by the Ministry of Local Government, which argued that other relevant stakeholders from the family had not been present. Those members of the Mabhena family who were in support of Sinqobile's appointment also remained resolute in their support, despite of the outcome of this meeting.

Amid the dispute over the ascendancy of Sinqobile to the chieftaincy, a spiritual leader from Swaziland intervened. Mr Sibanda, the husband of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, gave a detailed account of how he perceived divine intervention to have facilitated her installation, in addition to the support she received from the government:

> "At the height of the contestations, there came a female royal spiritual leader who drove from the Mabhena clan in Eswatini to Zimbabwe specifically for that.[19] Although what was happening in Nswazi was all over the newspapers, she had not heard or read about Sinqobile, and she did not even know her on personal levels. One morning, she woke-up and said to her people in Swaziland: 'There is a problem: one of our daughters in Zimbabwe is in trouble. So let us go there. She was driven from Swazi to Pretoria—where

[18] Vukani Mahlabezulu is a radical pressure group that advocates for complete secession of Matabeleland and the revival of the Ndebele culture. See Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009).

[19] Nguni descendants are also found in Eswatini.

> we originally come from—to pick up someone from Pretoria who had to be present. Let me remind you that this spiritual leader had been blinded after several instructions by the ancestors [which she had not followed] to come to Nswazi and resolve the matter. As soon as the traditional leader arrived at the Mabhena kraal, she regained her sight. The doubt that people had on the ascendancy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena was eroded by her narration of how she ended up being in Nswazi to confirm the appointment of *Indunakazi* Mabhena"[20]

Mr Sibanda's account shows how illness can be used as a source of legitimacy in the African perspective. Despite a confirmation from the traditional leader critics still contested the ascendancy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, thereby disregarding the importance traditional leaders in the institution of traditional leadership. Therefore, this confirms Schmidt's (1992) argument that customs and traditions that are in use today are not the ones practiced in precolonial period as they can be used in favour of the majority, as in the *Indunakazi's* case.

Sickness has been a common phenomenon in shaping the legitimacy of traditional leaders in various parts of Africa. Reference can be made to Pendle's (2020) study on spiritual and divine authorities, which explores how Nyachol, a female prophetess in South Sudan, used divine sickness as a register of her authority during South Sudan's conflict. Nyachol fell sick after a raid on the Dinka community and later appeared to people and claimed to be possessed by the divinity of MAANI. Nyachol's sickness was supposedly used as an expression of agency against oppression. Similarly, this suggests that after the experiences that *Indunakazi* Mabhena endured, she used the sickness of a siSwati *sangoma* as a register of power that could help to attain legitimacy.

Moreover, Daneel's (1970) research on shrines and ancestral calling highlights how callings pertaining to shrines sometimes caused afflictions, including infertility, and were considered a confirmation that Mwali (God) had chosen them. Just as good health is a sign of a good relationship with the ancestors, sickness can be used as a source of legitimacy when trying to convey an important message (White, 2015). In most cases, sickness is inflicted on an individual who defies the orders of the ancestors, as Mbiti (1969) notes; but this is not always the case. It

[20] In-depth interview with Mr Mabhena, Gaborone, 2021

can thus be deduced that illness played a significant role in facilitating the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

A royal *sangoma* (spiritual leader) within the royal family plays the role of relaying messages from the ancestors to the *Induna*(*kazi*). Additionally, a *sangoma* is instrumental in protecting the chief from spiritual attacks that might weaken them or make them vulnerable in their appointed positions. The presence of the siSwati spiritual leader may have played a significant role in confirming the ascendancy of Sinqobile Mabhena because spirituality, divinity and chieftaincy are intricately connected. Nevertheless, some family members were still adamant that Sinqobile should not ascend to the chieftancy. Thus, while spirituality as a source of legitimacy played a critical role in the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, despite confirmation from the *sangoma*, some family members still denied this legitimacy,

The family (apart from critics such as Welshman Mabhena and some *Indunas* from Matabeleland) agreed to Sinqobile's appointment. Therefore, her name was submitted to the Minister of Local Government, John Nkomo, who forwarded the name to President Mugabe. The intervention of the Minister before proceeding to the President was in accordance with Subsection 2 (b) of the Traditional Leaders Act, which states that:

> Provided that, if the appropriate persons concerned fail to nominate a candidate for appointment as chief within two years after the office of chief became vacant, the Minister, in consultation with the appropriate persons, shall nominate a person for appointment as chief.

Sinqobile was finally appointed to the chieftaincy in December of 1996. This intensified the conflict around her status.

Critics of her appointment also used the Traditional Leaders Act, 1993 to support their position, citing Section (2) (a) (i) which states:

> In appointing a chief in terms of subsection (1), the President—
>
> (a) shall give due consideration to—

> (i) the prevailing customary principles of succession, if any, applicable to the community over which the chief is to preside.

Plural legal systems have the potential to generate internal conflict, disadvantaging those who become caught-up between two or more legal systems (Banda, 2006).

While Zimbabwean law has played a role in gender mainstreaming the institution of traditional leadership, there has been inconsistency on the part of the government in addressing the needs of rural women. For example, in Nkayi, Matabeleland North, in 2014 *Induna* Dakamela was made to step down and hand over the chieftaincy to her late brother's eldest son because of her embodiment as a woman. Nkala (2020) reported that one of her male counterparts, Chief Sikhobokhobho, commented that the national courts did not have an outright solution to gender aspects of traditional chieftaincy (Nkala, 2020). Against this background, state law has failed to be consistent in enforcing laws on gender equality in traditional leadership institutions. Such inconsistencies of the law on issues of chieftaincy legitimacy contributed to the ambiguity around *Indunakazi* Mabhena's legitimacy.

Among the Ndebele people, gender is the most significant personal characteristic considered when dealing with succession (Nyathi, 2017), as chieftaincy is inherited only by the eldest qualifying son. It is considered a taboo to have a woman as a chief as women are considered to have the same status as *abatwana* (children). For example, despite Sinqobile Mabhena's age (23 years) at the time of the dispute, *Induna* Khanyisa Ndiweni addressed her as "this girl", denoting that he considered her on the same level as a child. She thus was not afforded the same respect she might have had if she had been male, as they have been other male chiefs appointed to chiefs at that age.

A male participant who was part of the council in the community introduced the idea that it was not gender, but ethnicity and the interference of national political systems that was the basis of the ongoing dispute about Sinqobile Mabhena's chieftaincy:

> "The appointment of Sinqobile is still contested not because we are against her, but an error was made to the ancestors, and she is a Shona president's appointee. How does

> one interfere with the culture of the Ndebele which he had no knowledge about? The Mthwakazi[21] group and I have been deliberating on this Mabhena issue."[22]

The question of ethnicity refers to President Mugabe, a Shona, who had appointed Sinqobile — the same President who was considered responsible for Gukurahundi. It was not the *Indunakazi Mabhena's* ethnicity that was at issue, but the Presidents who was seemingly ignorant of Ndebele customs and thus should have deferred to that rather than making the decision. In addition, interference by national political systems in chieftaincy is a common occurrence in Zimbabwe. Thus, ethnicity remains at the centre of political debates in Zimbabwe, despite the move toward national integration and nationalism after colonisation.

In an interview with Phathisa Nyathi, a renowned Ndebele historian, he had this to say about *Indunakazi* Mabhena's appointment to the chieftaincy:

> "Historically, there was never a female Ndebele king or chief because these are positions that were awarded to warriors, of which Ndebele women never went to war. Nyamazana and Queen Lozikheyi were queens, not female kings: they did not play roles that were meant for men. They had their roles in Ndebele politics; women were consulted for advisory roles. It was a taboo or unheard of for women to go to war. Ndebele women were influential, but not as kings, warriors, or chiefs: influential as mothers or sisters to the king. Perhaps what needs to be revisited is the term 'chief' which does not exist in the Ndebele vernacular but was introduced by colonial administrators. An *induna* is a male chief and *indunakazi* is a female chief, which already shows the discrepancies of a female chief: an *induna* is a bull and, culturally, there are no female bulls. Women had, and still have, influential roles that they play in the politics of the Ndebele, but not as chiefs."[23]

The findings of this study concur with this: the literature records no *indunakazi* in Ndebele history, but the honorary title of *ndlovukazi*, usually given to the wife or sister of a king, is found. The *ndlovukazi* might have had a crucial role to play in chieftaincy in the pre-colonial Ndebele nation, but that position cannot be equated to that of an *induna*.

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[21] Mthwakazi is a male-dominated organization in Bulawayo that seeks to have the precolonial Ndebele state re-established in present day Matabeleland.

[22] In-depth interview, Council members, Nswazi, 15 October 2023

[23] In-depth interview with Phathisa Nyathi, November 2022

After Sinqobile Mabhena was appointed to the chieftaincy, some members of the Nswazi and Bulawayo communities—particularly, men and the elderly, remained disgruntled by her appointment. Questions were raised before and after her contested ascendancy. For example, before she was married the question raised was how she would play the roles of a daughter-in law and chief concurrently. Would this mean an end to Mabhena chieftaincy? These were questions that were asked by many during the dispute of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's appointment.

Similar questions were posed in by the media. The media played a major role: it highlighted the dispute and, thereafter, *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership. The appointment of *Indunakazi* Mabhena made headlines in several Bulawayo newspapers because it was a new development for the Ndebele community. Several prominent *indunas*, including *Induna* Khanyisa Ndiweni, did not attend her installation ceremony as they saw it as an attack on Ndebele culture and tradition. The installation of Sinqobile Mabhena did not bring an end to the debate around her legitimacy, however, as Welshman Mabhena, who was Governor of Matabeleland North, insisted that the case be taken to the High Court.

One participant, an 80-year-old male, noted:

> "Even after Sinqobile was installed, people still fought her. But her community supported her."[24]

Gogo Phelandaba, another participant, during an in-depth interview in Irisvale, stated boldly:

> "Sinqobile's appointment was a bitter war for her, but she was strong like *amadoda* [the men]. She was bullied by very big and old men. She was attacked by words and threatened. Rumours about her were said which I cannot even say today. But Sinqobile is a lion—a fighter, just like her father."[25]

The sentiments expressed by *Gogo* Phelandaba highlight that, because *Indunakazi* Mabhena occupied a position reserved for men, masculine traits were expected of her. This resonates with Mingle's (2015) study, where she highlights that Nana Kofi Abua switched between masculine and feminine traits to gain the acceptance and support of the community.

[24] Focus group discussion, male group, 80-year-old farmer, Nswazi.
[25] Focus group discussion, female group, Gogo Phelandaba (pseudonym)

However, *Indunakazi* Mabhena's strong traits bring an end to the criticism about her ascendancy to the chieftaincy. A 65-year-old female community member who had witnessed the Mabhena chieftaincy from the time of Sinqobile's father, when she was a young girl, said:

> "The installation of Sinqobile undermined the reverence of the Ndebele tradition. I am not against women leaders, as I am a woman myself, but things should be done the right way."[26]

Similarly, a chief from Bulawayo who participated in the study stated:

> "I can accept a female president, but not a chief. That installation 'messed up', and insulted, the Ndebele traditions."[27]

Okafo (2006) observes that the African tradition respects relevant traditions, commands and political sovereigns or superiors. These emanate from legitimate tradition-based leaders that are generally supported and accepted by the local community. Although *Indunakazi* Mabhena was appointed at a time when legislation against discrimination based on gender had come into effect in Zimbabwe, the interference by the national government in traditional leadership succession dispute to support the appointment of a government loyalist did not legitimise Mabhena's leadership. According to custom, it was imperative that her leadership be accepted by the local community she was to lead in order for her leadership to have definitive legitimacy (Matavire, 2012). In her case, spiritual legitimacy played a key role in strengthening the community's acceptance of her legitimacy.

5.4 Sinqobile Mabhena's performance as chief

While Sinqobile Mabhena's ascendancy to chieftaincy was controversial, her eventual appointment brought a measure of stability to the community, as the lengthy contestation of her appointment had resulted in the community being without a chief for four years. Despite the dispute concerning her leadership, she has generally been successful in her role. In this study, her success has been measured by the years she has been in power despite a succession dispute and,

[26] Focus group discussion, female group, Mbalambala, 23 October 2021
[27] In-depth interview, anonymous chief, Bulawayo, 21 February 2022

most importantly, her success in attaining visibility in a male-dominated space within her community.

According to tradition, a chief should be a man who is trustworthy, loyal, respectful, transparent and humble. A respondent who worked with *Indunakazi* Mabhena on several community projects indicated that *Indunakazi* Mabhena has been transparent in all of the processes that have taken place in the development of the Nswazi community. Her humility was applauded by elderly women, who continue to receive financial and welfare support from the *Indunakazi*.

Although *Indunakazi* Mabhena does not meet the criterion of being a man, she has been able to legitimise her authority by making use of her feminine qualities. These include compassion, empathy, sensitivity and receptivity. She has used these feminine qualities to express her agency, thereby attaining and maintaining legitimacy in her leadership.

Indunakazi Mabhena' family has also supported her leadership, although it is dominated by men. The Mabhena family advisory committee, or *ekhitsheni*,[28] which traditionally is headed by the senior women of the Mabhena clan, is largely dominated by men-a reversal in this clan. The dominance by men of a traditionally women-led institution exposes a reversal of customs and traditions in this clan. [29]The dominance of men in the *ekhitsheni* illustrates a shift in power, and possibly a lack of confidence in the authority of women in decision-making positions. Explaining how the *ekhitsheni* plays an important role in the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, a family member said:

> "The *ekhitsheni* plays a significant role as an advisory council in the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Issues concerning the community are first discussed within the family *ekhitsheni* and then taken to the council of elders. However, due to the *Indunakazi's* absence it is no longer as effective as it was in the early days of the *Indunakazi's* rule."[30]

[28] The word '*ekhitsheni'* did not exist, historically, in Ndebele tradition. This word appears to have been coined from the English word 'kitchen', since in Ndebele custom *umkhulu* (kitchen) is deemed to be for women while men gather in the *idale,* such matters are normally discussed *edale*. And since women cannot enter *edale,* I believe that is why they coined it *ekhitsheni,* as the kitchen is a place run by women.
[29] In-depth interview, family member, Nswazi, November 2021
[30] In-depth interview, female family member, Nswazi, November 2021

This suggests that the absence of *Indunakazi* Mabhena has affected some structures and that this may have compromised her legitimacy because, instead of being a custodian of the traditional customs, she has failed to uphold some of the customs. In addition to the *ekhitsheni*, *Indunakazi* Mabhena has a council of seven men and two women. The role of the council is to make sure that the *Induna*(*kazi*), *umlisa* and *sobukhu* are conducting their duties diligently and that the community's peace and unity are always maintained. It is the responsibility of the council to present the community's needs to the *Indunakazi* during meetings. Nevertheless, the *Indunakazi's* absence has effectively rekindled the community's desire for male leadership because they hardly see presence in the community which has been replaced by men who dominate her leadership structures.

Indunakazi Mabhena explained how she discharges her duties personally and through delegation to members of her council, given her physical absence:

> "There are some cases that village heads and headman cannot resolve or conclude without the consent of the chief—such as land disputes. So, if I am asked to deal with such issues, I travel back to Zimbabwe. If also there are any programmes that the government wants me to attend as a chief, I will travel to Zimbabwe. My absence has not affected my duties as chief. I delegate duties to my council, as stated in the Constitution, the same way I would delegate them in my presence."[31]

While *Indunakazi* Mabhena asserted that her absence was not negatively impacting her performance as chief, it has drawn criticism from the Nswazi community. An *umlisa* (headman) gave his perspective on how well this arrangement of *Indunakazi Mabhena* working with the council in her absence, worked:

> "Since she started staying in Botswana, as her council we have not had any problems with communicating with her. She comes when we need her. Personally, I talk to her almost on a weekly basis, giving her updates of the community. Almost every member of the council has a responsibility besides our main responsibilities. However, her absence has left a dent on her reputation, as the community feels abandoned."[32]

At the beginning of the study, I assumed that *Indunakazi* Mabhena's absence hindered her legitimacy. This assumption shaped some of my interview questions. However, the findings show that, as much as the community wanted their *Indunakazi* to be physically present, her absence

[31] In-depth interview, *Indunakazi* Mabhena, Gaborone, July 2021
[32] In-depth interview, *Umlisa*, Nswazi, October 2021

somehow showcased that her leadership is decentralized, through her delegation of duties, that would ordinarily be carried out by a chief, to her council members. In view of that, by returning to the community when the community or state officials need her, she demonstrates her ability to balance her family and community responsibilities. More convincingly, her performance despite her absence has shown that the family is not a hindrance to her chieftaincy duties. However, from a political practice point of view the *Indunakazi's* absence might prove that she is limiting herself in performing her duties, through her prolonged absence from home and her subjects. This provokes the community to question her ability to be an effective leader for her community.

Many respondents alluded to the *Indunakazi*'s integrity when discussing her character. Female respondents in the focus group described her as being soft-spoken, humble, rational, motherly and empathetic. Her behaviour since her youth seemed to have played a role in cementing her leadership and progression. One participant, a former teacher, said:

> "I had no problem with Sinqobile being a chief, from the disputes that surrounded her appointment. I had confidence in her because she is humble, soft-spoken and a woman of few words. I knew she would bring change to the community. Unfortunately, her good behaviour is overshadowed by the few events that took place within the family, which I cannot disclose."[33]

A participant in the men's focus group commented:

> "As a man, I do not mind having an *Indunakazi*. What matters is her leadership qualities. Sinqobile is respectful, committed, trustworthy and resilient. Her resilience is important, because the institution has been infested with politicians and other rogue elements disrupting our community." [34]

It is interesting to note that the feminine qualities cited by these participants as validating *Indunakazi* Mabhena's legitimacy are qualities that are typically cited in arguments against the inclusion of women in spaces that have traditionally been reserved for men. *Indunakazi* Mabhena, however, appears to have used these attributes successfully to maintain social order in her community.

Some participants also commented on *Indunakazi* Mabhena sharing qualities that her father, Howard Mabhena, had possessed, and how this gave them confidence in her ability to lead and

[33] Male focus group discussion, Mbalambala, October 2021
[34] Male focus group discussion, Mathendele, November 2021

thus contributed to her legitimacy. One participant, a 75-year-old farmer from Irisvale, commended the leadership of Howard Mabhena and commented that it was reflected in Sinqobile Mabhena's leadership:

> "I worked with Howard Mabhena before he died. He was a man of integrity who loved his people, and we did not have problems with him. I knew, therefore, that Sinqobile would resemble her father in being a charismatic leader. So, from day one, I have never had a problem with her becoming chief."[35]

Women holding positions traditionally reserved for men can be expected to behave like men; they may be elected because they resemble their male relatives. For example, there was a case in Botswana where a woman was appointed to chieftaincy, and it was later revealed that she had been chosen because of her audacity and her physical resemblance to her late father (Dodo, 2013). Some scholars have argued that she was only appointed to rule because of her masculine qualities and not because it was her right to do so (Kiamba, 2008). In Sinqobile Mabhena's case, it was clear that her similarity to her father in her approach to leadership contributed significantly to her legitimacy within the community.

Indunakazi Mabhena's behaviour and approach to leadership have been aligned with the needs of the community, which has also strengthened her legitimacy. For example, cognizant that part of the community has not been happy with her appointment, she has strictly prohibited politicians from meddling in, and possibly disrupting, both the institution and the stability of the community. In an interview during this study, she explained how she has remained apolitical in order to safeguard her community's interests:

> "I am bold when it comes to dealing with politicians. They do not bully me or my community. And I am happy that my people have supported me on this. There is freedom in my community: I do not favour anyone from any political party. All my community members are treated the same."[36]

One participant, a member of her committee, reported:

> "I remember, a few years ago, when I worked on *izilo* [sacred day set aside (Wednesday) whereby no work is done among the Ndebele], she personally called me out and gave me a punishment and said: "I wanted to do this so that I set an example to both the

[35] In-depth interview, 70-year-old Irisvale farmer, October 2021
[36] In-depth interview with Indunakazi Mabhena, Gaborone, July 2021

> committee members and the community that no one is above the rules of the community". [37]

The *Indunakazi's* commitment to showing no favouritism to members of her committee was admired by many of her constituents, particularly when it came to the issue of affiliation to a political party. There have been reports in Zimbabwe that chiefs are more inclined to assist or support ZANU PF supporters in their communities than others, on issues such as food handouts (Kurebwa, 2020; Chigwata, 2016; Ndoma, 2021). This would leave members of other political parties vulnerable.

Indunakazi Mabhena has worked successfully with other male chiefs, which has helped to dispel the scepticism that some of these chiefs have had about female leaders. Her leadership qualities have thus won her respect not only within her community, but also from her counterparts in other communities. Her personal qualities have helped her build constructive relations with key individuals in traditional leadership and the community, strengthening her legitimacy.

An *induna* who reported that he has worked with *Indunakazi* Mabhena said:

> "I have worked with the chief very well. I seek advice from her time and again and I respect her very well." [38]

Another participant, an *Induna,* acknowledged that *Indunakazi* Mabhena had a good work ethic.

Indunakazi Mabhena had this to say about her relationships with her peers:

> "The appointment was contested by many, with some fighting for interests. However, this did not deter me from diligently fulfilling my duties. After being appointed, instead of continuing to fight, I worked with my critics— respected them like my elders, that they are—and, since then, we never faced problems."[39]

The above quote illustrates how the *Indunakazi's* performance as a chief which sees her shifting gender roles between femininity and masculine.

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[37] In-depth interview with a committee member, September 2021
[38] In-depth interview an *Induna,* Bulawayo City Centre, October 2021
[39] In-depth interview *Indunakazi* Mabhena, Gaborone, October 2021

5.5 Navigating patriarchy

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the institutional dynamics that *Indunakazi* Mabhena and other chiefs face is the lack of funding to develop their areas of jurisdiction. In this area, *Indunakazi* Mabhena has shown strong leadership by finding external funding from local donors to develop and support her community. The ability to source external funds for the community illustrates a resistance to neoliberal policies that economically marginalize women (Baldwin, 2016). These external funds are funds that either came from her personal earnings or are donated through her. Findings indicate that the developments that have taken place in Nswazi attest to the commitment and enthusiasm of the *Indunakazi* Mabhena despite a lack of funds from the government. Examples of this are her successful sourcing of external funds in 2011 for an ambulance for the community, continued support for education—for example, her programme to donate textbooks to schools in Nswazi—and the programmes she has initiated to support women entrepreneurs, which have included raising fowl, crafts and gardening. For the *Indunakazi* to be legitimised by her community there had to be funds for community developments, such as the clinic and shelter she built for community.

While women are economically marginalized, to maintain certain positions in politics one needs to demonstrate sound financial stability (Ndlovu & Dube, 2012). Despite lacking adequate funding for her community, *Indunakazi* found other means of developing her community by sourcing external funds. She overcame the general perception that women are financially marginalized, which can reinforce the dominance of men, particularly in the economic sector, thereby impending the progression of women in leadership roles (Krook, 2017).

Findings in this study indicate that most of the developmental programmes that the *Indunakazi* and her council have embarked on have been empowering to women. The needs of women may be better addressed by women leaders because they are able to draw on their own experiences as women to understand and address the challenges faced by other women. For example, the deputy head of Nswazi High School indicated that *Indunakazi* has brought about improvements, in terms of the education and well-being of girls, because as a woman the *Indunakazi* has experienced some of the issues that she helps the community with. She was convinced that the issues that the *Indunakazi* has addressed might not have been addressed had

there been an *induna,* instead. This suggests that the wellbeing of women and girls in Nswazi has been prioritised because a woman is in this leadership role.

During a focus group discussion with women, participants attested that the resilience that the *Indunakazi* has demonstrated in her community in matters of development has boosted the people's confidence in her. In fact, she has become a role model for other women in her community. There is a need for women to be at the forefront of development, not because of their preponderance in the world's human population, but because of the realization that for effective national development to be achieved, the entire human resource should be fully mobilized to participate actively as agents as well as beneficiaries of development (Mensah et al., 2014).

When *Indunakazi* Mabhena was appointed to chieftaincy there was only one clinic in the area; it was far for those who lived in villages such as Mbalambala. The *Indunakazi* not only facilitated the renovation of Nswazi Clinic, but it was developed to eventually become Nswazi Health Centre. Observations showed that a building, which is believed to be an extension of one of the health centres in another village, was also being constructed in Vulindlela village at the time of the research. Moreover, the construction of a new clinic in Sezhube was underway. It was observed that the *Indunakazi*'s role in these projects was to seek funding from the state and non-state actors such as the Ministry of Local government and World Vision to fast track the construction of these clinics.

Findings show that Nswazi was, at the time, the only community with a safe haven for victims of gender-based violence. Mr Sibanda indicated that the *Indunakazi* had used several approaches to dealing with these issues that had been effective. Most respondents were of the view that modern approaches to gender-based violence actually aggravated the situation. *Indunakazi* Mabhena formed a team of mature men and women who were experienced in the areas of mediation, facilitation and counselling. She ensured in-laws were involved in the process and that privacy and confidentiality were maintained. *Indunakazi* Mabhena turned to traditional methods for resolving gender-based violence because she realised that most of the counsellors that had been involved in such cases were young or unmarried, and those experiencing issues were not comfortable talking with them. Realising that her age might also be a limiting factor in

addressing such issues, the *Indunakazi* selected older men and women who were seen as wise and experienced.

Indunakazi Mabhena's educational background has made a significant contribution to her legitimacy as a female chief. A participant who was a farmer in Mathendele expressed the view that education plays a significant role in chieftaincy:

> "I think educated chiefs will help the communities not only in resolving difficult issues but coming up with innovative and developmental projects for the community. I do not see any challenges because there are times where there are some cases that seem to give everyone else a hard time, until she comes in. She solves it in no time with no problems at all. I think that's partly because of her education, hence its importance. If people from other communities were to take a leaf from our book and emulate what has been done here, I think they would want to have more female chiefs."[40]

The study found that the formal education of *Indunakazi* Mabhena has facilitated informal community education in which women are empowered through training in skills such as weaving and poultry farming, or in knowledge around issues to do with reproductive health. In this respect, her legitimacy relates to her contribution in the area of the community's educational, rather than her own education; however, her own education enabled her to have a greater awareness of the community's educational needs. For example, in the training programmes on gender-based violence and poultry projects, women are taught to empower themselves, alongside their main areas of focus, and thus bring a positive change to society.

While such programmes have managed to empower communities and give them greater control over their resources and developmental projects, they have not been an all-round success. Matabeleland province is still marginalized in terms of its educational sector. This started after independence, when the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was introduced, and government reduced its expenditure on education, worsening the plight of the education sector in Matabeleland. In this context, having an educator as a chief was of significant benefit to the Nswazi people, in terms of developing the education system in Nswazi.

[40] In-depth interviews, Matendele male farmer, January 2022

For *Indunakazi* Mabhena, being an educated woman has assisted her in interpreting the Constitution and the acts of Parliament reasonably well, allowing her to align herself accordingly. Her passion for education has earned her some support in the community. A participant from one of the schools in Nswazi commented:

> "I joined the school after the chief had moved to Botswana, but her absence is not felt because she and her husband are always supporting us where they can. Of course, they cannot do much because we know there are not many funds available, but it has improved the standards of schools around this area."[41]

Another participant from one of the schools stated that:

> "The chief is very supportive of education in this area: she is always asking me what form of support she can give to the school and, sometimes, to the students who excel in their studies."[42]

A teacher stated:

> "I think having a female leader who is educated was what we needed as a community. She knows how difficult it is for a woman to pass through all levels of education, so she is in a better position to solve these challenges than any other person."[43]

During this study, *Indunakazi* Mabhena explained that she was embarking on a programme where she would interact with schoolchildren (especially girls) and parents to identify the challenges that they were facing. She added that she was also assisting Ordinary Level ('O' Level) students financially.

Respondents agreed that, despite her absence, the *Indunakazi had* played a significant role during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. She arranged educational tours on COVID-19 and how it could be prevented. She made sure information that was shared through radio and social media platforms was easily accessible to the community. She delegated council members to provide education in their designated areas. However, many respondents lamented how COVID-19 had negatively impacted the community— particularly, the girl child. With children not going to school, there was a rise in unplanned pregnancies and young men joining the local o*tsheketsha* (informal gold panners). According to the *Indunakazi,* she has successfully appointed a task force

[41] In depth interview, teaching staff 1, September 2021
[42] In depth interview, teaching staff 2, September 2021
[43] In-depth interview, teaching staff 3, September 2021

headed by Mr. Dhlamini, one of the council members, to engage with school heads and mothers to address these issues. A female focus group participant expressed a positive view of this:

> "The committee that the *Indunakazi* set up has been significantly effective as girls are starting their own initiatives, such as sewing lessons, to keep themselves busy and distracted from any misconduct in the community, and the *Indunakazi* has been supporting them."[44]

While most did agree with her sentiments, they felt that more could have been achieved if the *Indunakazi* had been present in the community. A 37-year-old female stated:

> "We appreciate the effort that the chief is putting in her community, but some of these projects would have been better if she was around. So many projects are being done for the betterment of the community, but would things not be better if she was around?"[45]

However, being an educated woman enabled *Indunakazi* Mabhena to use her agency to address the need for girls, and the youth at large, to be educated. Knowing that the education system in Matabeleland was still lagging behind, the *Indunakazi* covered the tuition fees of some of the top students and found ways to fund their further their studies should they decide to study further. During the interviews, she said that her commitment to supporting education emanates from the challenges she has seen other women experience to gain access to education. She has made an effort to help young girls who have dropped out of school due to circumstances such as poverty, unwanted pregnancies and school dropouts return to school.

The novel approach of *Indunakazi* Mabhena toward community education has not been limited to the youth. Rather, it has been all-inclusive and has integrated communal, or informal, education and formal education. For example, she has conducted training for women in her community on issues of gender-based violence and was able to reach as far as Sweden for this initiative, with a few women from her community. A male participant also applauded the *Indunakazi* for teaching women to be financially independent by using their skills, such as pottery and art. This approach aims to ensure no one is left behind on the pertinent issues that facilitate the development of the community, and for individuals, specifically.

[44] Female focus group discussion, Mathendele, February 2021
[45] Female focus group participant, Mbalambala, November 2021

5.6 Understanding *Indunakazi Mabhena's* legitimacy in Nswazi

Thus far, this chapter has presented findings regarding *Indunakazi* Mabhena's ways of navigating patriarchy, based on the internal structural and cultural context of succession traditions and customs. Within the area of institutional legitimacy, it was demonstrated that divine sanction resolved this dispute, and she was appointed to office. However, as Garthoff (2010) notes, appointment to office cannot be equated with legitimacy. He further adds that, in addition to institutional legitimacy, *Indunakazi* Mabhena also had to demonstrate personal legitimacy and performance legitimacy.

5.6.1 Personal Legitimacy

Personal legitimacy, in this study, refers to the role that the character and conduct of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, as well as her personal traits such as age, and education and, played in earning the community's acceptance and recognition.

5.6.2 Character and conduct

The way the community perceived and described the leadership qualities that they saw in *Indunakazi* Mabhena illustrates how her personal qualities played a role in legitimizing her authority. These qualities included trustworthiness, willingness, and commitment to the needs of her people, which gained her support in the community. As has been seen in other succession disputes, although being an elder son is traditionally a key succession requirement, charisma and exemplary personal conduct are also considered very important qualities in the consideration of candidates for succession. Phathisa Nyathi, a prominent Ndebele historian interviewed during this study, commented:

> "A chief is like an ambassador; he is the face of a community. Anyone who is of bad morals—even if he is the eldest son—cannot inherit chieftaincy."[46]

For example, *Induna* Ndiweni's rise to power was disputed by his older brother, Andrew Ndiweni, who claimed that he was the rightful heir. However, the social standing of Andrew

[46] In-depth interview Phathisa Nyathi, Bulawayo City Centre, 21 February 2022

Ndiweni was questioned by both the community and his relatives. He was an alcoholic and lacked charisma; he was not popular with the community because of his behaviour and character.

As this precedent shows, there can sometimes be grounds for negotiating tradition when there is sufficient reason to. A legitimate leader in the chieftaincy is one who stands in the gap between the elected politicians and the community; one who understands the community better than the elected leaders do. Thus, leadership qualities are essential determinants. Therefore, the character of *Indunakazi* Mabhena might have contributed to the community accepting and recognizing her legitimacy despite her embodiment as a woman, thereby making her leadership visible in her community.

The mere fact that *Indunakazi* Mabhena grew up in Nswazi and that her upbringing was known shaped her legitimacy and was the key driver of the community having confidence in her leadership. One male participant from Mbalambala expressed the view that Sinqobile achieved legitimacy because she was a child of the community who had been raised in Nswazi where she had interacted with her elders humbly, despite her position as the daughter of the *Induna*. In addition to this, she was dedicated in her role despite the challenges that come with chieftaincy, and a person of her character was what Nswazi needed.

The findings of this study thus demonstrate how *Indunakazi* Mabhena's character, behaviour and leadership qualities expressed her agency. Of particular interest is that she coupled traditional feminine qualities strategically to strengthen her legitimacy, while they might have been expected to detract from her legitimacy. Her personality—recognisably reminiscent of her father's—has shaped her approaches to addressing issues of concern in her community. In politics and in social and economic spheres, she has demonstrated leadership qualities that won the support of her constituents, thus strengthening her legitimacy. The *Indunakazi's* approach to leadership using her personal character illustrates how she has used her positionality to address issues of concern in the community.

The next section discusses how age has contributed to the visibility of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Commenting on the significance of age and personality in Rwanda, Vansina (2004) highlights how these can play a role in women's authority. For instance, older married women can have a

powerful position in their private households and wield considerable authority. In *Indunakazi* Mabhena's case, it can be argued that the community was more inclined to support a younger chief than someone from the older generation.

5.6.3 Age

The institution of traditional leadership is known to be heavily represented by gerontocrats, with men from the older generation typically appointed to chieftaincy (Logan, 2013). This is so because the position is highly prestigious in traditional political systems; hence, elderly, mature and experienced individuals are preferred (Mensah, et al., 2014). Whilst some positions in a society require young and dynamic individuals, others prefer older people who are perceived to be wiser than the younger generation, due to their greater experience. However, the case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena shows that age can be disregarded. Most participants—including those from the older generation—expressed support for *Indunakazi* Mabhena's governance because they did not want a chief from the older generation: they expressed a need for younger leaders that could bring change in accordance with modern times.

Thus, age did not hinder leadership progression for *Indunakazi* Mabhena. In fact, one of the many reasons the community members accepted Mabhena as their chief was her age. Despite the gerontocratic nature of the institution of traditional leadership and the fact that the leadership of the *Indunakazi* was contested, her appointment was still a "development that was long overdue as the old men continue to be dictators, just like it is in the national governments"—in the view of a woman who was part of the *Indunakazi's* first council of elders, who participated in the study.[47]

Age has, however, played a significant role—albeit in an unusual way—in the legitimacy of the *Indunakazi*, largely because the community feels that there has not been much development in the community due to the old generation that continues to control the institution. The findings of this study demonstrate how gender has intersected with other positive personal qualities to legitimize *Indunakazi* Mabhena's authority. As has been shown, while age can be said to be a register of power in the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, age has, in some cases, limited her

[47]In-depth interview with a female participant, February,2022

from effectively exercising her authority. Observations made during fieldwork found that very few people in her community opposed her ascendancy to chieftaincy; in addition, the respect given to her—particularly by those of her generation—showed that she was held in high esteem. However, there were also a few of her age mates who were not accepting her leadership because they were of the same age.

A female participant who was a few years younger than *Indunakazi* Mabhena commented:

> "I grew up with Sinqobile. Sometimes it is difficult to think that she can give me orders and I must respect them. Maybe if the *Indunakazi* was a man and of the same age it would be easy to respect him—because, by nature, men are to be respected even if they are younger than you."[48]

The above is a patriarchal view by a woman which upholds the idea that men should command more authority and respect than women. This exposes the socialisation of people in which power relations between men and women perceive women as the second citizen who is powerful than men.

A 70-year-old woman similarly explained that she found it difficult to see *Indunakazi* Mabhena as a chief because she was of the same age as her daughter:

> "My daughter is older than Sinqobile; I am a mother to her. What can she tell me that I can listen to? Older people have more wisdom than the younger generation."[49]

Reservations on the *Indunakazi*'s authority were expressed primarily by older women who felt she lacked wisdom because of her age, but this would not apply to male chiefs.

Most sentiments about Sinqobile's age were voiced by women. This suggests that women were finding it more difficult to adjust to changes in the status quo, limiting the support they gave the women who were changing the status quo, and subsequently impacting their leadership. Kiamba (2008) notes that women who occupy positions traditionally reserved for men are often given derogatory names and perceived as uncultured. In Zimbabwe, Grace Mugabe, the wife of former President Robert Mugabe, was known for castigating other women on television during

[48] In-depth interview 55-year-old woman, February 2021
[49] In-depth interview, 70-year-old woman, February 2021

election campaign rallies. In particular, she called former President Joyce Mujuru a sell-out and woman of loose morals.

Although a few people expressed difficulty accepting *Indunakazi* Mabhena because of age, many respondents did not. One participant, a 50-year-old male miller, described her as "young, intellectual, dynamic and innovative".[50]

5.7 Modernity of traditions

'Modernity of traditions' is a concept borrowed from Rudolph and Rudolph (1984) who asserted that, for political development to take place in India, traditional norms and structures had to be adjusted or transformed to accommodate modern societies. Having a female chief was a new phenomenon amongst the Ndebele, since historically there had been some women who were influential in political spaces but not as chiefs (Ndlovu & Ncube, 2012). The appointment of the *Indunakazi* Mabhena, thus, signified the adoption of modern policies of gender inclusion across all institutions in Zimbabwe, including traditional leadership.

Participants from Nswazi expressed the view that a shift from traditional norms was a development that was needed in Nswazi. Many women indicated that they believed that having a rural woman in an influential position would open doors to other opportunities for women not only locally but also at national levels, as rural women were marginalized. One participant, a female nurse who had worked with *Indunakazi* Mabhena on several projects, noted that:

> "An adoption of non-discriminatory policies in Nswazi was a necessary step towards the development of Nswazi and women in rural areas: at least if we have women occupying positions such as chieftaincy, rural women might end up in higher offices."[51]

Sharing the same sentiments, a 55-year-old woman who was a former teacher said:

> "The appointment of *Indunakazi* Mabhena was long overdue. The concerns of women were never going to be addressed—especially with how women in rural areas are already marginalized."[52]

Supporting this view, the wife of a pentecostal church pastor said:

> "Gender policies that include women in political positions have been very effective and more of these need to be enacted. Because the more they are, the more we see

[50] In-depth interview, male, February 2021
[51] In-depth interview, nurse, Nswazi Clinic, October 2021
[52] In-depth interview, former teacher, Matendele, January 2022

> female leaders—especially here in rural areas. An elevation of one female is empowerment for all of us."[53]

The question that needs to be interrogated is: does the advancement of women to influential positions, such as chieftaincy, influence the substantive representation of women in rural areas? This question will be explored in the following chapter. In most discussions, participants spoke about how the changes in gender relations that are taking place globally are inevitable and argued that traditionalists should embrace such changes. For example, regarding *Indunakazi* Mabhena's ascendancy to chieftaincy in violation of the Nguni succession custom, a 40-year-old man said:

> "A lot of changes have taken place and those are mostly beneficial to women. These customs are outdated. I have four daughters: why do they have to be deprived of my inheritance? As Christians we are told that a child is a gift from God. So why should she be treated different?"[54]

Another participant from the focus group discussion added:

> "We are past the era of seeing our women as objects. I regret why I was against Sinqobile Mabhena's appointment. But we learn new things every day: women can be good leaders just like men".[55]

This is indicative of how gender discourses have intersected with performance and personal legitimacy in the effective leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

5.8 Challenges experienced by *Indunakazi* Mabhena

During a focus group discussion interview, 10 male participants at Mbalambala, one of the villages in Nswazi, agreed that the challenges the *Indunakazi* faces were no different from those faced by her male counterparts. These challenges include politicisation of chieftaincy, lack of sufficient funds for communal developments and issues of legitimacy. Although *Indunakazi* Mabhena's challenges were no different than those experienced by other *Indunas*, the research established that she was affected differently. This is so because the perceptions that the

[53] In-depth interview with the wife of Pentecostal church pastor, October 2021
[54] Male focus group discussion, Matendele, October 2021
[55] Male focus group discussion, Mathendele, October 2021

community held of her leadership were based on gendered sociocultural beliefs. One of the 10 male participants in the focus group discussion said:

> "Within the Ndebele people the place of a woman is the household, or in the religious sphere, and this setup has been in place since the precolonial period. You have been taught that women are not recognized, but we do recognize women as they are significant players in religious issues as spiritual leaders. However, problems arise when women want to do the roles of men. Have you ever seen men doing roles meant for women? This is why women can have the same challenges with men in leadership, but the depth will be different, because they are failing to conduct their roles, yet they fight for roles that belong to men."[56]

Another male participant in the focus group discussion, who had served on the chieftaincy committees for fifteen years before passing on this role to his sons said:

> "The chieftaincy position requires resilience because it has so many challenges. For example, politicians can just hold campaigns during election time without clearance from the chief, so rebellious community members might just decide not to adhere to court decisions. All these challenges are faced by chiefs on a daily basis. It can be more intense if the chief is a woman, and lack of respect is more visible. This is because Ndebele women, since the time of Lobengula, have been regarded as passive players in politics."[57]

An *induna* agreed with the above sentiments during an in-depth interview and said:

> "Female chiefs are treated the same as male chiefs but naturally they tend to be more vulnerable than us male chiefs, or favoured less, due to the customs and traditions surrounding chieftaincy. Women have more hurdles to overcome— unlike men, who are already favoured by sociocultural beliefs."[58]

These notions show how the challenges of women are shaped by sociocultural beliefs that tend to favour the leadership of men. Kiamba (2008) argues that women tend to face a "double jeopardy" in leadership, because structures are made to favour men at the expense of women.

Several traditional leaders, during individual in-depth interviews, confirmed that the Ndebele customs are still binding in terms of the leadership of women and most people are not at liberty to accept the new gender order.

[56] Focus group discussion, male, Mbalabala, January 2021
[57] Focus group discussion, male, Mbalabala, February 2021
[58] In-depth interview, Induna, Bulawayo City Centre, October 2021

An *usobhuku*, during an in-depth interview, noted that:

> "Laws have been amended since independence, but for the people to accept that women can suddenly become chiefs is still a bitter pill to swallow. There are succession traditions and customs that need to be adhered to. Our ancestors put them in place for a reason. These customs cannot be changed overnight as there are spiritual protocols that need to be followed. I cannot say I am against gender equality, but the right steps need to be taken for it to be acceptable."[59]

Thus, the intersection of gender with socio-cultural beliefs has informed the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. There are no peculiar problems that the *Indunakazi* wis facing that other chiefs or female politicians were facing. However, in the case of the *Indunakazi*, there are intersecting issues that intensified her challenges. This section will focus on the challenges that *Indunakazi* Mabhena has faced in her leadership and how she has addressed these issues.

5.8.1 Hypervisibility

There was found to be an issue of hypervisibility in the leadership of the *Indunakazi*. Hypervisibility can simply be defined as the high visibility and representation of certain privileged groups, yet this visibility is because they are othered. These groups are usually marginalised but become privileged because they have taken positions within the privileged group (Buchanan and Settles, 2018). *Indunakazi* Mabhena falls under the marginalised category-women, but she is privileged by virtue of being a chief. However, her performance is strictly scrutinized and observed due to her identity such as gender, or it can be a space for the marginalized voices to be heard and made visible.

Physically the *Indunakazi* is invisible she has to spend the greater part of her time in Botswana where her husband is currently working. Not only is she physically invisible but seemingly her specific needs are not being met. Therefore, *Indunakazi* Mabhena is limited or unable to move up the political ladder in traditional leadership neither will she receive enough support in her leadership. This is so because the position she has occupied is reserved for men she has changed the gender order and regime of the Mabhena chieftaincy, she is perceived as the

[59] In-depth interview, *sobuku*,

woman that challenged the Ndebele customs. This is not peculiar to *Indunakazi* Mabhena as other female chiefs in Zimbabwe have also been invisible even those that are from matrilineal societies. The absence of women in the Senate since independence highlights how the rise of women at national level within the institution of traditional leadership remains a challenge.

A female participant, during an interview held at Nswazi, commented on the expectations of the community as follows:

> "Most of us in this community recognize her because she is the one who has been chosen. But it does not mean she has been accepted. Customs are clear about these positions. It is difficult to honour and respect women who defy customs."[60]

In the focus group, many participants expressed similar sentiments. A male participant in Mathendele said:

> "My daughter, when you decide to do a man's job then do it diligently to show us that your leadership style is equal or more from than of a man. Try to prove to us that what we think about women is different."[61]

The above statements establish that since *Indunakazi* defied the standing customs and succession rules, her acceptance by some community members was limited. Some seemed to support her simply on the basis that she had, in fact, been appointed chief and they had no power to change that.

According to *Indunakazi* Mabhena, the greatest challenge she faced in her leadership was the expectations of the community:

> "The most challenging issue in my leadership is that I am under pressure to prove to the community, and other patriarchs—especially those that were against my appointment—that I can lead exceptionally. The expectations from people are too high."[62]

[60] In-depth interview, female participant, Nswazi, October 2021

[61] Focus group discussion, male participant, Mathendele, September 2021

[62] In-depth interview with Indunakazi Mabhena, Gaborone, September 2021

Being completely absent from the community is also exceptional - on the negative side. People's unhappiness with her leadership impacted by this cannot be conflated with her gender. It might have been a lot of dissatisfaction with a male chief who left to live in another country too.

Supporting the *Indunakazi*, a female participant said the following during an in-depth interview in Irisvale, a village in the Nswazi area:

> "I do not think the *Indunakazi* is visible enough in her leadership at both levels which are the community and the nation. Whilst the community observe her leadership and compare it with that of the *Indunas*, the government has not given her and all other women in traditional leadership space to showcase their potential."[63]

This suggests that the invisibility of the *Indunakazi* was gendered. Not only was she facing challenges of hypervisibility from the community, but the government appeared to demonstrate a lack of political will to support her leadership. The duality of women being both hypervisible and invisible is an identity that women have acquired and must be navigated for effective legitimacy and leadership. Intersectionality thus provided a framework for exploring hypervisibility in this study as it shows how the *Indunakazi's* voice, experiences and legitimacy in traditional leadership are not recognised yet she is under extreme scrutiny because of their gender. Women such as the *Indunakazi* Mabhena because they have occupied positions reserved by men cannot be seen as feminine because the institution of traditional leadership is entrenched in societal norms that view the institution that is masculine. Despite the institution being deeply entrenched in hegemonic masculinities, there are also feminine qualities that the *Indunakazi* Mabhena is expected to display. Therefore, duality of women being both hypervisible and invisible the intersections become more noticeable when a woman occupies position reserved for men.

5.8.2 Traditional leaders as an arm of politics[64]

Analysing the *Indunakazi*'s succession disputes, it is evident that national politics plays a role in the efficacy of traditional leadership. This is done by intervening in succession disputes by

[63] In-depth interview, female participant, Irisvale, February,2022
[64]In-depth interview, male participant, Bulawayo Centre, March 2021

supporting candidates that are loyal to the regime. This can be seen in the way the politicization of the institution of traditional leadership by the ruling party in Zimbabwe, ZANU PF, has impacted the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. The institution is embedded in historical, cultural and patriarchal notions. The study found that women who have assumed roles that are traditionally held by men can be distinguished from their male counterparts in several ways; politics is one. In the case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, the intervention of political officials in her succession disputes was seen by her as immoral. For example, a close relative of hers, during an in-depth interview, said that because politicians have a reputation for being promiscuous, *Indunakazi* Mabhena was called derogatory names such as 'prostitute' and alleged to be having affairs with other politicians who supported her. The name calling of women using derogatory names is common across Africa for women politicians. Chigumadzi (2018) notes that women who assume political positions traditionally reserved for me have been called prostitutes for rejecting their socially assigned place as women (Chigumadzi, 2018). Politics can thus be used as a tool to silence women as they tend to face discrimination based on their gender.

The participation of traditional leaders in partisan politics is prohibited by Zimbabwe's Constitution, yet chiefs frequently act as enablers of the Zimbabwean government. A study by Ndoma (2021) found that, in Zimbabwe, the institution of traditional leadership has been shaped to a large extent by partisan politics. Whilst state legitimacy is one of the tenets of legitimacy in the institution of traditional leaders, the ruling regime, ZANU-PF, has used state legitimacy to control chiefs to gain a majority vote (Kurebwa, 2015). In support of Mamdani's (1996) position Kurebwa (2015) suggests that chiefs in postcolonial Africa have become allies of the ruling government in order to strengthen their local control. This is true in the case of Zimbabwe, where ZANU-PF has more leverage in rural areas to the extent of limiting opposition political parties' access to villagers especially in election time. As a result, chiefs in Zimbabwe largely lost the confidence of the people, as noted by Mamdani (1996).

In this study, a male participant in his early seventies voiced the following complaint about the interference of politics in chieftaincy, during an in-depth interview:

> "I think politics has messed up everything. Now we have chiefs doing a ZANU-PF slogan. And because of politics, there is fear amongst the committee members and council elders

> to correct politicians or anything seemingly ZANU-PF-related. For example, we cannot discuss about Gukurahundi because we do not know who is."[65]

The above notions illustrate how ethnic politics have an impact on the credibility of traditional leaders as the silence of chiefs and failure of communities to talk about Gukurahundi is perceived as favouring the regime's approach to addressing issues of Gukurahundi. Political interference in the institution of traditional leaders undermines the independence and impartiality of traditional leaders thereby questioning and eroding the legitimacy of traditional leaders. A male focus group participant at Mathendele commented on the impact of politics interfering in chieftaincy issues as follows:

> "Chiefs are an extension of ZANU-PF, and it is always worrying when it is time for elections. *Umama* tries to fight and protect her people, but she is a woman—she cannot do much. Let me not say things that will get me arrested, but chiefs are overpowered by the ZANU-PF government."[66]

These statements establish that chieftaincy has been politicised, which is a challenge that works to the detriment of both male and female chiefs, but likely more so in the case of women due to the fact that the political environment in Zimbabwe is not supportive of women. The intervention of ruling parties in traditional governance has infiltrated the day-to-day activities of chieftaincy, depriving chiefs of their autonomous rule. Although chiefs are considered traditional and customary leaders, the state has distorted the primary obligations of a chief to their subjects. Secondly, chiefs still play a significant role in Zimbabwe's elections, as was the case during the colonial and Mugabe eras. The state legitimacy of chiefs is now based more on their allegiance to the ruling party, ZANU-PF, than on traditional norms or community support. This involvement of the state in the institution of traditional leadership not only compromises the chiefs, but also contributes to shaping the perceptions of the communities towards chiefs.

In Zimbabwe, failing to comply with the demands of the ruling party is considered political suicide or being an '*umthengisi*'[67]. A war veteran who participated in the study made the

[65] In-depth interview, 70-year-old man, Matendele, October 2021

[66] Female group focus group discussion, Matendele November 2021

[67] *Umthengesi*/*umthengesi* (sell-out) is a term which was used for those that were suspected to be working with the colonial masters during the liberation struggle. In the independence era, umthengesi refers to those are who anti-ZANU-PF.

following comment (while raising his fist high, demonstrating the ZANU-PF salute), which to me indicated that Zimbabwe's ruling party is the only party that has access to control over the institution:

> "*Indunas* have been reduced to nothing: chieftaincy is politics of the fist, otherwise the *Indunakazi* will not—or would not have—survived it." [68]

The nationalist or patriotic ideologies advanced by ZANU-PF have referred to chiefs or people that are not in support of ZANU-PF ideologies as *umthengesi/vatengesi.* For example, *Induna* Nhlanhlayamangwe Ndiweni has become unpopular with the current regime, as his late father Chief Khayisa Ndiweni was also unpopular with the Mugabe regime, because they oppose the abuse of human rights and land rights in Zimbabwe. This illustrates the extent to which politics plays a role in chieftaincy, because *Induna* Nhlanhlayamangwe was later removed from the chieftaincy. Political parties have become a source of resilience in the survival of chiefs, as was shown in a study carried out by Logan (2013) on the resilience of chiefs in Africa.

In a male focus group discussion, group participants commented on how politics has challenged the position of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. A man in his sixties commented:

> "Firstly, the appointment of Sinqobile Mabhena was said to be political, as so many politicians had interfered in the dispute, which violated both the Traditional Leaders Act and the traditions and customs of the Nguni. Sinqobile Mabhena was appointed during the time when President Mugabe was beginning to lose support. Secondly, it was a period where there were many gender equity policies implemented locally, regionally and internationally."[69]

Most participants agreed to the view that Mugabe thought he would gain support from Matabeleland by choosing a woman to rule, an issue which was brought up by a male participant during the focus group discussion.

[68] In-depth interview, man, Matendele, 15 February 2021
[69] Focus group discussion, male participant, Mathendele, February 2022

> "Nkomo, [the late Vice President of Zimbabwe who was Ndebele] would not interfere in the business of *amaShona*, because he did not understand the inner workings of the Shona culture."[70]

The appointment of Sinqobile Mabhena to chieftaincy by a Shona President was an insult to the Ndebele, especially after what happened during Gukurahundi. The Ndebele saw the appointment of an *Indunakazi* as disrespectful to the Ndebele traditions.

The tension between the Shona and the Ndebele due to the Gukurahundi atrocities was thus seen by these participants as having shaped the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, with her embodiment as a woman used as a political tool.

A male participant in his early thirties elaborated on how politics was impacting negatively on the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena:

> "Definitely politics has impacted *Umami's* governance, because even with respect to her departure to Botswana, rumour says it was based on political reasons because her mother was a councillor for the opposition party and so ZANU-PF assumed she was a supporter of the MDC [The *Indunakazi's* mother's political position was only known after the formation of MDC in 1999]. Politics has really disturbed a lot because, even here at the local level, there are politicians who do not respect her. Politics is a big problem."[71]

Another participant pointed out how the appointment of *Indunakazi* Mabhena had a political element, which had evoked painful memories of the Gukurahundi:

> "Matabeleland Province still carries the memories of Gukurahundi, and this has impacted how they view ZANU-PF. There is no amount of disrespect that surpasses Mugabe interfering in our politics, with all that has taken place. I will not speak much lest I find myself imprisoned again. His government poked our wounds. For that reason, the appointment of *Indunakazi* Mabhena by a ZANU-PF and Shona President was seemingly invoking the Gukurahundi memories, whose stories and effect have been ignored by the Shona majority government."[72]

Supporting the notions above, an *ex-official* of the army said:

[70] Focus group discussion, male participant, Mathendele, October 2021
[71] In-depth interview, 35-year-old man, Irisvale, October 2021
[72] In-depth interview, 55-year-old man, Sezhube, October 2021

> "We still have scars of the atrocities that were perpetrated against us. Those things are still alive within us. Things needed to be fixed before they interfered in Matabeleland politics."[73]

Based on these statements, the research can conclude that the genocide still plays a role in shaping the political discourse of *amaNdebele*. Participants have shown how the intervention of a Shona president can influence the experiences of the *Indunakazi*. Therefore, ethnicity is a source of political manipulation as ethnicity involves alliance and factions built on loyalties.

Although *Indunakazi* Mabhena said she has not been partisan, her loyalty to ZANU-PF was inevitable because state legitimacy, in this case, was based on the loyalty to the party expected by the ruling party, ZANU PF. For states to recognize chiefs there must be sentiments of shared nationalist and patriotic ideologies. The politicization of traditional leadership has not impacted *Indunakazi* Mabhena alone, but the institution at large. Zigomo (2022) states that the political landscape in Zimbabwe is more brutal to women, therefore *Indunakazi* Mabhena's case presents an intersection of gender and politicization of chieftaincy (which *Indunakazi* Mabhena mentioned as one of the greatest challenges in her governance). If chieftaincy has been politicised, how will loyal people within the ruling party, such as *Indunakazi* Mabhena, and female opposition party politicians, work together towards the inclusion of women in politics?

Although she might not be considered an *umthengesi* by the ruling party because of her loyalty to the regime, the *Indunakazi* might be considered *umthengesi* by her community for aligning with the ruling party, ZANU-PF. For instance, during the 2022 general elections, Thokozani Dube, a councillor from Citizens for Coalition and Change (CCC) party in Ward 20 (*Indunakazi's* ward) was allegedly threatened by ZANU-PF youths of Umzingwane. The silence and failure of *Indunakazi* to address or instruct her council to deal with such issues, given that she is a custodian of peace and unity in her community, can be perceived as complicity with ZANU-PF.

In light of these issues, during an interview with *Indunakazi* Mabhena, I asked her how she was supporting other women in leadership—particularly from opposition parties. I made

[73] In-depth interview, 62-year-old ex-officio, Mbalambala, October 2021

reference to Thokozani Dube, who was the only female opposition candidate in Umzingwane in Nswazi ahead of the 2023 elections. She responded as follows:

> "I think extensive consultation with other women in backing and supporting her candidature is pivotal. Personally, I have never interacted with her closely, but I encourage her to interact with some women in leadership who can definitely give her all the support by virtue of being a woman regardless of her political affiliation."[74]

This illustrates how the *Indunakazi's* interaction with, and acknowledgement of, women leaders was selective based on her party loyalty. In previous interviews, the *Indunakazi* indicated how she has been supportive of, and worked well, with female councillors, but these councillors were all ZANU-PF members. The findings have shown that she might have been limited to give adequate support to female opposition leaders by fear of victimization. This confirms the finding that traditional chiefs are despots who have become more accountable to state politics than to their community members, thereby compromising their legitimacy within their communities.

Most chiefs, in the post-independence era in Zimbabwe, have been relegated to the status of civil servants; they are remunerated by and are generally loyal to government. Chief Charumbira, the President of Chiefs Council, publicly announced in 2013 and 2017 that all the chiefs were in support of ZANU-PF. He was spared by the courts although his action went against the Constitution. This is indicative of how there is selective application of the law by institutions of the state charged with the duty to uphold the law but controlled by the ruling party.

In 2019, *Induna* Felix Nhlanhlayamangwe Ndiweni began to lose government legitimacy when he spoke out against the current regime's violation of human rights and land-use abuses which was likely going to affect the importance of Ntabazinduna, a historical mountain. Another participant commented on this as follows:

> "It is not about what Nhlanhla was talking about: we all know that his arrest was caused by attending the then Movement for Democratic Change Congress which was held in

[74]WhatsApp chat, Mr. Sibanda, February 2023

> Gweru under Nelson Chamisa. The government contradicts itself: they expect us to attend a ZANU congress, but we cannot attend the opposition congress."[75]

This research validates the claim that state legitimacy has been redefined to mean party legitimacy in Zimbabwe. When the community resists this tendency, it is not the chief they are opposing, but the ruling party's interference and politicization of traditional matters.

5.8.3 Competing religious philosophies

Chieftaincy in Zimbabwe is founded on the principles and values of African traditional religion, yet Zimbabwe is primarily a 'Christian' nation (Alexander and Ranger, 1998). The Nswazi community has members of many international denominations that do not condone traditional religious traits and belief in traditional African cosmology. These include, Brethren in Christ, Lutheran, Apostolic Faith Mission Church and Seventh Day Adventist. At the same time, there are a few African Independent Churches that draw significant elements from African religious tradition. These include Zion and the apostolic church commonly known as *Vapostori*. The population thus straddles the two significantly different worldviews represented by the Christian and traditional churches, presenting a challenge to any chief.

As stated previously, *Indunakazi* Mabhena is a devout Christian and her religious roles (identified by her husband in a WhatsApp conversation with me) include annual prayers where major churches converge and pray for rain.[76] The *Indunakazi* has also called for churches to pray for rain and help to address problems and calamities faced by the community. These problems include drought, unwanted pregnancies, and the Christianization of some African rituals such as the rainmaking ceremony. A few of the congregants of different churches who participated in the study indicated that because the *Indunakazi* is a Christian she understands and knows that ancestors and our God cannot coexist. As Nswazi is an area with various church organizations, this creates a deep-seated rivalry Christian principle and those of African traditional religion which appear to affect the recognition of the traditional leadership.

[75] In-depth interview, male participant, Bulawayo City Centre, March 2022
[76] *Hossanas* are messengers sent to ask for rain during the rain making ceremony.

Most traditional authorities that are Christian, especially those from international denominations, are faced with the challenge of choosing between their Christian beliefs and cultural values (van der Merwe and Thebe, 2019). Many prefer to keep one foot in each world (Amanze, 2003, cited in van der Merwe and Thebe, 2019). Even when a chief manages to strike a balance, they remain confronted with societal perceptions that often presuppose bias. Thus, religion acts as a limiting factor in the leadership of chiefs, including *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

A male participant, during an in-depth interview in Nswazi, described how Christianity has negatively impacted traditions and norms in Nswazi:

> "Culture have been destroyed by all these churches, my child. I will speak the truth. However, I cannot blame Sinqobile, because she inherited most of the challenges we face as Nswazi today. It should have been fixed."[77]

Some respondents believed that since *Indunakazi* Mabhena was a Christian, she would not make an effort to safeguard African traditional religion in Nswazi. One female focus group participant in Nswazi said:

> "What causes trouble is the fact that people are now Christians even though they are in chieftaincy positions. Therefore, she puts all her faith in her religion, which makes it difficult for us to approach her even if we have matters of tradition that are bothering us".[78]

Traditional healers expressed concern that the presence of Christian beliefs in Nswazi could contribute to the decline of traditional practices. The influence of the church on traditional leadership has overshadowed the role and significance of the traditionalists in chieftaincy. Although *Umlisa* Bhaka stated that each chieftaincy has a secret traditionalist whose role is to protect the chief or the headman, traditionalists within the community are of the view that their powers and roles have been stripped away and replaced with Christianity. Historically, traditionalists were part of the traditional leadership who would receive messages concerning

[77] In-depth interview Nswazi, October 2021

[78] Female focus group discussion, Nswazi November 2021

pertinent matters, such as when it was time to ask for rain and appeasement, and the traditionalists responsible for this were different from family traditionalists (Verweijen and Bockhaven, 2021).

A participant who was the wife of an *inyanga* expressed the view that Christianity has taken the place of traditionalism, with the consequence that traditionalists are no longer respected:

> "Let's say *Ubaba* [her father] has been given a vision about certain things taking place in the village: that is a really difficult thing indeed. I remember, a while ago, he was shown certain things in a vision. He told his fellow traditional healers from the area, but he did not go to the chief, because it was hard to confide in her about such things. There are times when he is shown troubling things, but I hear him saying "but how will I tell the chief about this?" It has become tough for people who still practise traditional African religions because the institutions have been eroded by the *umulungu's* [white people's] religion."[79]

The role of the *inyanga* (traditional healer) to communicate with the *idlozi* (ancestors) on behalf of the community has been undermined and appears to have been replaced by the Christian notion of prayer. Although *Indunakazi* Mabhena and her brother, Sikhunjiliwe, maintained that out of her commitment to the community she puts the religious beliefs of the community before her own, evidence suggested the contrary. There is conflict between her approach towards some of the cultural practices and Christian values in her leadership. Most Christians are not at liberty to exercise both religious practices and evidence showed that church elders and pastors are influential in the religious decisions that their congregants make.

A congregant at Apostolic Faith Ministries commenting on the practice of African religion:

> "If my spiritual father gives me the blessing to attend the rain-making ceremonies, I will attend. If he allows me to pay for the rainmaking ceremony, I pay. But I will not do anything without the guidance of my spiritual parents. How do blessings coming from God benefit the dead people [ancestors]?"[80]

The Christian teaching that there is only one God and only one intermediary between God and humans is incompatible with traditional practices which involve appeasing the ancestors. The

[79]In-depth interview Nswazi, October 2021

[80] In-depth interview, Apostolic Church congregant Nswazi, February 2022

church discourages congregants from participating in traditional African religious practices. A participant who was a member of the Lutheran Church described their experience as follows:

> "Firstly, the church does not encourage paying any traditional ritual levies nor participating in traditional rituals, of which one is the rainmaking ceremonies."[81]

For Christians, the 'give Caesar what belongs to Caesar doctrine does not seem to extend to issues such as these and they continually exempt themselves from levies that are rooted in African traditional religion. '[38]

One participant, a committee member, lamented how the church has built barriers between the community and its beliefs in an in-depth interview:

> "The church is causing conflict between us [traditional authorities] and the people we are trying to lead. They go to the extent of telling their congregants not to give the chief any money because they want to use it for evil purposes. That person will begin to disrespect the headsman, the village head, and the chief. However, that same person will come to us when they have problems. I do not know where all these churches came from. They are so many now and at times it is their pastors that are the biggest sinners."[82]

While *Indunakazi* Mabhena indicated she respected traditional practices, some community members and traditionalists believed otherwise. This raises the question of what role these religious contestations play in shaping the perceptions of the Nswazi community.

Presumably, the conflict between the Church and traditional values presents a serious challenge to *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership as the community was more inclined to religious obedience for the stability of the community. This is largely because while one of her roles as chief was to be a custodian of the traditional practices of Nswazi, she was also a Christian. While the Constitution gives every citizen the right to exercise the religion of their choice, at the same time community members are expected to adhere to the traditional practices of their community. In an in-depth interview a male participant added that:

> "Christianity is one of the problems we are facing, I am sorry to say. But, as I have said, I am a Christian. These are not supposed to be combined, even, in our culture. So, if we

[81] In-depth interview, Lutheran congregant Mbalambala, November 2021

[82] In-depth interview, committee member Sezhube, February 2021

> were to look at the Bible, we will notice that it says that your forefathers would worship on that mountain. The Lord had patience with his children who had not received the word. What we believe now is that we must worship in a certain way. However, if we believe that we receive rain by going to *Elitsheni*, then let us do it properly. Let us do it the right way, it will work."[83]

Indunakazi Mabhena's religious beliefs as Christian have thus shaped her leadership, while she is leading at a time when many traditional practices have faded and any external forces, such as the Church, are viewed as a challenge to the authority of culture. The traditional Ndebele, through their traditional ceremonies, were masters of their environment who controlled change around them. *Indunakazi* Mabhena found herself in a society that was already changing as colonialism had challenged tradition, which was "fading away into oblivion" (Nyathi, 2001 p.25).

5.8.4 Absence from the community

This study found that the community appeared to have lost confidence in their chief because of her absence from Nswazi, as she lives in Botswana. Logan (2013) and Chigwata (2016) argue that the legitimacy of traditional authorities is based on their physical proximity to their subjects and land distribution issues. Rural citizens tend to have confidence in and loyalty to their traditional leaders because of their physical presence, unlike politicians who come during election campaigns and then leave again. This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, a difficult time when the community was particularly aware of the absence of the head of their community. One female participant aged 45 spoke to this issue as follows:

> "Which mother leaves a child during such a time? We feel exposed and vulnerable with the chief's absence in such a time."[84]

A 50-year-old female said:

> "The village was affected. There were issues, including crimes, that she alone was e give a verdict on, where the council has no jurisdiction. The victim and defendant will want their issue handled swiftly, but the issue takes long as we will be waiting for the chief to return and investigate it. It is a major problem, which leads to mishaps—because, as a committee, our powers are limited, and she must come in and finalize issues.[85]

[83] In-depth interview, Mathendele, October 2021
[84] Female focus group discussions, 45-year-old woman, Nswazi, November 2021
[85] In-depth interview, Sezhube, March 2022

Some responses indicated that the community did not have confidence in the *umlisa* or *usobhuku* of their villages, but only in the chief. While *Indunakazi* Mabhena's appointment continues to be questioned to the present day, some participants believed it would still be better to have the chief present than to have the committee act as her proxy. For instance, one 47-year-old male business owner complained about how there was no effective communication between them and the *Indunakazi's* council (*umlisa* and *usobhuku*).

> "How do we know the committee tells her our grievances? So many issues have been discussed in village meetings, but rarely do you see any changes. The chief cannot know what is happening in her community, so the headman is not doing enough.[86]

Therefore, proximity as a source of legitimacy has been in existence since immemorial. The presence of a traditional leader is a symbol of existence for the Nswazi people, hence the presence of *Indunakazi* Mabhena may not be challenged or questions".

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. The study established that *Indunakazi* Mabhena's experiences were fluid: they changed in accordance with how the community viewed her in a particular setting. For example, her motherhood and marriage, in some contexts, could be used to her advantage; in other contexts, they could not, as the community saw those responsibilities as a hindrance to effective leadership. While it is believed that women in rural areas are marginalised than those in urban areas, the case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena has shown how woman can use various identities and attributes as sources of legitimacy and recognition in their leadership positions. This is not to dismiss the challenges that women in rural areas face, but rather to show how there is agency that lies within the women in rural areas. Such a view regarding agency challenges the notion that women is rural areas are merely oppressed and limited to traditional gender roles.

[86] In-depth interview, male shop owner, Matendele, February 2022

CHAPTER 6: "*INKOSI YINKOSI NGABANTU*": UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE *INDUNAKAZI.*[87]

6.1 Introduction

The British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) programme *African Perspective* reported a story on the installation of *Indunakazi* Mabhena on 3 November 1996.[88] There were mixed feelings as to the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena: some community members expressed their joy—singing praises to Sinqobile Mabhena such as "there is no one like Sinqobile Mabhena." A few months later, in January 1997, the *New York Times* produced a feature on *Indunakazi* Mabhena. On the other hand, tribal elders were not happy about her installation; they argued that the lack of rain was caused by disregarding the succession customs. Furthermore, they believed that the failure of Christians to adhere to traditions—such as the taboo to work on Wednesdays, and the cutting down of a tree of prayer —had angered the ancestors. The calamities that befell the community were said to be caused by the appointment of *Indunakazi* Mabhena—a Christian with no regard for the traditions and customs of the Nguni.

The above discussion highlights the different perceptions of the community with regard to the *Indunakazi's* leadership and legitimacy. The previous chapter presented the findings of this study in dealing with the *Indunakazi* Mabhena's journey to attaining chieftaincy and how she has been able to legitimise her authority after a contested succession. An examination of the perceptions of the community is important because issues of legitimacy also involve the governed and how do the governed perceive the legitimacy and leadership of the *Indunakazi*. To that end, this chapter examines the perceptions of the community's opinion on the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and what this means for her leadership.

The findings presented in this chapter were obtained by coding the perceptions of community members. I assigned labels to recurring or significant phrases, words and non-verbal

[87] A king is a king because of the people.
[88] https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p034s5l6

communications. I categorised the codes according to the nine subthemes defined in the previous chapter.

6.2 Attitudes and perception of the Nswazi community towards the female chief

Having a female chief was a new phenomenon in Nswazi and most parts of Matabeleland. This study found that there were mixed perceptions towards having a female chief. This section examines what shaped these perceptions and how such perceptions influenced the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. The research yielded five significant thematic perceptions in this respect: role of the chief's spouse, male dominance, role model and lack of trust in the village heads. Many of the participants felt that these perceptions were largely shaped by gender norms.

The term "legitimacy" was not used during the interview sessions because "legitimacy" is an elusive concept which I believe should be defined in contextual terms. Therefore, during the interviews the participants were asked questions such as "what is a chief?", "what makes one a chief?", or "how do you support the chief?" This was done to understand what legitimacy is in the Nswazi context.

6.3 The mother as a leadership symbol

In African culture calling someone a mother can signal trust and respect when conferred on a woman who is not biological mother. Many female leaders in Africa have been referred to as 'mother'. In Zimbabwe, the former vice president was called *Amai* Mujuru. These powerful women often are introduced at rallies or public events with a statement like, "Let us welcome our mother, our great pillar". This demonstrates the link made between motherhood and leadership.

Tamale (1999), in her study of women in Ugandan politics, explored the experiences of Betty Bugombe, who played a key role in conflict resolution in Northern Uganda and further afield in Africa. Bugombe became a mother figure to rebels such as Joseph Konye, a rebel leader. Bugombe explains that being referred to as mother was a sign of respect which was the first step toward have a productive conversation with the rebels (Tamale, 1999).

Respondents referred to *Indunakazi* Mabhena as '*umama* Mabhena' and commented on her being a mother figure to them. They commented on the need for her to be physically present in

the community specifically because of the motherly role she has as a female chief. One participant, a 50-year-old woman, said:

> *"Indunakazi* Mabhena is a mother to the community. That is why we call her *umama* [mother]. She is a listening leader, just like a mother. She is empathetic to the needs of the community, as a mother would be to her children. We just had a problem when she was absent during the COVID-19 pandemic: we were vulnerable like orphans. We needed her to be with us as a community, because the pandemic was taking its toll on us."[89]

An *umlisa* (Headman) commented:

> "Our *Indunakazi* has become a mother to the community, but she must be present for her people. We can go as far as we can, but the presence of a mother makes a huge difference."[90]

Another participant, a female nurse, said:

> "I personally have worked with *umama,* and she has a mother's passion for her community—especially the widows and orphans. Her ability to take care of her family has shown that she is a good leader."[91]

Zigomo (2022) argues that the concept of motherhood is not marginalising in every society, as was portrayed by early feminists. In this study, participants expressed the view that women could be better leaders than men because women tend to think with a motherly heart. This was evidenced by how participants were eager for some cases to be handled by the *Indunakazi* or in her presence, it was easier to communicate and discuss some community issues in the *Indunakazi's* presence than with the council. When women lead, they do so with *uthando luka mama* (motherly love). Women are viewed as more rational and inclusive than men, therefore the gender of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, coupled with her age, played a role in legitimizing her authority.

Indunakazi Mabhena's authority is asserted through the title '*umama*'. This title is given not only because she is a chief but because of the reverence that mothers in African cosmologies have. "*Umama*" signifies respect and trust. Most participants had concerns regarding *Indunakazi*

[89] In-depth interview 50-year-old woman, October 2021
[90] In-depth interview umlilisi, September 2021
[91] In-depth interview female participant, Irisvale, February 2022

Mabhena's absence, but the fact that she has shown a motherly figure made the community respect her.

There are proverbs and superstitions that surround the respect of mothers in Africa that have contributed to the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and other female political figures. Proverbs and superstitions are important not only to impart wisdom but also as a means of encouraging good behaviour in a society. An example is the saying '*uzabalomnyama ungadanisa umzali'* (a curse befalling you if you fail to respect your mother). The curse will result in the person wearing a sack and begging for food. Such superstitions are meant to reinforce the authority of mothers in homes and in turn this *authority* has been translated into political power as in the case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

This study found that most community members did not have confidence in their village heads during the absence of the *Indunakazi*; this was especially true for women. Several participants quoted the saying, '*intandane enhle ngekhothwa ngunina'* (things are done better by a mother), referring to how some community issues such as unwanted pregnancies, land disputes and contestations between traditions and Christianity would be dealt with better by the *Indunakazi* herself than by the village heads. Thus, the study found that *Indunakazi* Mabhena had earned the confidence and trust of her community because of how the community connects womanhood and motherhood.

The use of narrative analysis during the data analysis revealed that a number of phrases, myths and superstitions were invoked to describe the translated power of a mother to the *Indunakazi*. This demonstrates that studies undertaken using a decolonial approach allow participants to portray motherhood on their own terms, using phrases and terms that the outsider might view as dismissive of the leadership or contribution of a woman in a society.

Motherhood as a source of legitimacy validates African womanist theory which uses an Afrocentric framework that is family centred. African womanism has a theoretical grounding in African culture and history. Africana womanism focuses on the concerns of women after the concerns of the community are met (Barry and Grady, 2019) just like a mother does with her

children. In the context of this study, *Indunakazi* Mabhena was found to act to meet the needs of the community despite the challenges she faced.

6.4 Interference of the spouse

The perception most frequently articulated by participants was that Mr. Sibanda, *Indunakazi* Mabhena's husband, was the one who was really leading Nswazi. Although *Indunakazi* Mabhena gained greater support and legitimacy from her community when she married, participants expressed that her marriage had negatively impacted her relationship with the community.

One issue has been Mr. Sibanda's intervention in Nswazi politics. A participant in a women's focus group discussion mentioned that sometimes during meetings the chief could be seen consulting Mr. Sibanda for guidance; other participants concurred with this. The perception of participants about Mr. Sibanda's involvement in *Indunakazi* Mabhena's chieftaincy was that it had resulted in most community members losing trust and confidence in *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

A male focus group participant said:

> "...but as a married woman, she brings her husband when executing chieftaincy duties. We do not want her husband at the community meetings: we only need the chief."[92]

A male participant in his late thirties, whose wife was a former secretary to one of the village heads, believed spousal support was necessary, but should be done in a manner that respected her role:

> "As a community, we respect the chief's husband, but you cannot see me going to my wife's work and interfere in her business. That is disrespectful. If she wants advice she comes home, we talk about it. Many spouses support each other but not the way we are seeing here in Nswazi. That is why we are still not ready for female chiefs."[93]

[92] Male focus group discussions, Zhilo shops, February 2021
[93] Male focus group discussion, Zhilo shops, February 2021

Political spouses may play a significant role as the most influential advisor of their partner; they may undermine or aid the leadership of their partners. Prior to her marriage, the *Indunakazi had* relied on her mother and Sikhunjiliwe, her half-brother, as her most trusted advisors.

On the question of how the chief should be addressed, given that she was a married woman, a member of the Mabhena family (MS) told me (TM) the following:

MS: The biggest challenge we had with the chief—which led to a lot of arguments—was that when people pay homage in her home, it is supposed to be to the Mabhena clan and not the Sibanda's' clan, where she is married.

TM: So, she did not want people to acknowledge the Mabhena name, but rather her husband's, or there was confusion on how to pay homage in her home?

MS: The *Indunakazi* wanted people to pay homage to the husband as the head of the house, but this was unacceptable as it makes it look like the chief is from the Sibanda clan.

Indunakazi Mabhena's close relative commented on this issue as well:

> "The first challenge is when people get into the chief's homestead. When they announce their arrival, which clan name should they use? She is married, and in our Ndebele culture the home belongs to Mr. Sibanda. So, at the beginning, people were confused about which surname to use. The head of the family is Sibanda; the chief becomes someone else somewhere in front of the council."[94]

These comments demonstrate that people's perceptions of the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena were shaped by gender constructs around what a married woman should be and how they should conduct themselves. Participants felt Mr Sibanda had failed to draw the line between himself, as a husband to the *Indunakazi*, and her duties. Observations showed that the community respected Mr. Sibanda but thought that he should operate and cooperate with the community in ways that did not jeopardize the relations, visibility and legitimacy of the *Indunakazi* and the community.

[94] In-depth interview with a male Mabhena close relative, December 2021

6.5 Male dominance

Indunakazi Mabhena's committee consisted of eleven members, only one of which was a woman. The *ekhitsheni* continued to exclude women. Female participants indicated that gender inequality starts at the national level and has an impact down to the local level; hence, laws must be enacted that support women in rural areas. Many female respondents lamented that the *Indunakazi* Mabhena's committee was male dominated, saying that women who are leaders are expected to support other women and facilitate the feminist agenda, as suggested by *MaNdlovu*, a shopkeeper.

> "The institution of chieftaincy is still male dominated; we have more men than women acting as advisors to the chief. Some respondents felt that the emancipation of *Umama* Mabhena is not as autonomous as we perceive. This is so because there is dependency on male patriarchs; that is why she has more men than women in her committee."[95]

The expectation of these participants was that when there is a female leader it is an opportunity for gender norms that previously marginalized women to be changed to accommodate women. Given the stereotypes that are deep-rooted in historical and patriarchal norms, it could be difficult for the chief to make such changes as her position was still questioned by some people.

Thus, *Indunakazi* Mabhena's ascension to chieftaincy has not brought gender-inclusiveness to the institution because she herself still encountered challenges as a result of her gender. Similarly, the appointment of Silibaziso Mlotshwa of Hwange was still challenged by some Mlotshwa men despite the High Court of Zimbabwe confirming her appointment to chieftaincy in 2020. Participants expressed the view that the chief could have done more to involve women in her committee. In addition, her *ekhitsheni*[3]—which, traditionally, should be made up of women was dominated by men. My observations confirmed this; I also noted that the members of the *ekhitsheni* were from the older generation, which supports the argument that women and young men were marginalized.

[95]Focus group discussion, MaNdlovu, Nswazi, November 2021

However, the absence of young men in issues of chieftaincy is compounded by several factors. Firstly, it is important to note that Nswazi has *otsheketsha*, (gold panners) coming from surrounding areas such as Filabusi and many of the young boys have left school for mining. Secondly, some have migrated to neighbouring Botswana and South Africa. Zimbabwe's economy has been deteriorating for years and there are little opportunities for youth, hence most young men and women have opted to either drop out of school and migrate or migrate as soon as they finish their studies (Nhapi, 2022). Not only does the absence of the young generation in Nswazi impact the economy, but culture and traditions slowly fade away because there is no generation to which to pass on knowledge. These concerns were raised by many older people interviewed.

Female respondents expressed the view that *Indunakazi* Mabhena was not given the same access to support and power that men were given. Observations from the study show that men are still not comfortable to share power with women especially giving women responsibilities that are masculine. Hence, we hardly find women with other responsibilities beyond the community positions. Furthermore, there has never been a female chief in the Senate since 1980 nor in the National Council of Chiefs executive. This shows how traditional gender roles still play a role in shaping the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena.

6.6 Role Model

The chief had set a precedent for other communities by challenging customs that were biased against women. As an educated woman who was bold and resilient, yet humble, she had become a role model to many girls in the community. Although respondents acknowledged that they hardly saw the chief, they indicated that the impact she had made on the community in her absence had been significant and that most women had validated her assertive leadership. One female participant explained:

> "Having a young lady as a chief in this community during the time she was installed was embarrassing to other communities that had old male chiefs; but seeing today how the community has developed, we do not regret having her as chief. A female chief will be

> an inspiration to our young girls who are dropping out of school and migrating to Botswana or South Africa or be married to these o*tsheketsha* [gold panners]."[96]

The perceptions around *Indunakazi* Mabhena being a role model was only seen by young girls and women. For the younger men *Indunakazi* Mabhena was seen as a woman who has defied the odds. This is evident of how patriarch can be reinforced; the young women are seeing a change in gender order which is necessary whilst the young men's socialisation has an impact on how they perceive issues of gender equality fulfils the status quo of womanism that creates and upholds a future generation that is empowered.

6.7 Validation of assertive female behaviour

One participant, a villager from Zhilo, commented that the resilience that *Indunakazi* Mabhena displayed during the dispute over her chieftaincy had earned her support. The narratives about *Indunakazi* Mabhena's ascendancy to power showed that she was determined despite the strong hegemonic structures that were against her. In terms of her resilience throughout the dispute, a male participant commented:

> "I was around when all the disputes began. External forces were pushing against her installation. I did not think she was going to continue fighting. However, she has proved to be stronger and bold beyond what I expected from a young woman, during that time she was 23 years old or younger."[97]

A 45-year-old woman commented in relation to the above:

> "I might not have been around when *Indunakazi* Mabhena was appointed to chieftaincy, but after her installation she has continued to face resistance from some male chiefs and patriarchs, but she does not get bullied by those people."[98]

A former war veteran commented in relation to the same topic:

> "It has not been easy for her: she is surrounded by many obstacles which cannot be discussed openly. But people know it; that is why they appreciate her efforts. But mostly, because she did the unthinkable as a woman and decided to sit in *umdala's dare* [old men's meetings]—a lioness among lions—it can never be easy."[99]

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[96] In-depth interviews female participant, November 2021
[97] In-depth interview, female participant, Nswazi, January 2022
[98] Female focus group discussion, Sezhube, February 2022
[99] In-depth interview, male participant, November 2021

This comment illustrates that some members of the community saw *Indunakazi* Mabhena as having travelled a difficult road but prevailed by demonstrating assertiveness throughout. From a cultural perspective. *Indunakazi* Mabhena navigated through a hegemonic masculine structure. Society and cultural norms often perceive assertive women as not well-mannered while men who display such behavior are strong and focused. However, in the Indunakazi's case, her assertive behavior was accepted and praised by others especially men who were not in leadership or any communal committees.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the challenges faced by *Indunakazi* Mabhena as well as the perceptions of the community towards her and her chieftaincy. The community is not dismissive about a female traditional leader in their community. However, women more than men perceive of the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena as an empowering factor for the women in rural areas. This study of *Indunakazi* Mabhena provides some insights into the concept 'doing gender'—particularly in terms of society's expectation of what a woman is and should be. The aspects of the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena presented in this chapter highlight how her legitimacy as a social actor depended upon an acceptable interpretation of 'doing gender' within Nswazi: to some, she had 'undone' gender, bringing her legitimacy into question.[100]

[100] Doing gender in this research refers to how the Indunakazi Mabhena represents herself based on the societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This study examined the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena as the first female Nguni chief in Zimbabwe. Her ascendancy to chieftaincy was surrounded by contestations by male chiefs and some family members, primarily because of her embodiment as a woman. Using the intersectional lens and relevant feminist discourses to explain her legitimacy and leadership, this study found that the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena was not shaped merely by her gender. Factors such as age, education, marriage and leadership qualities contributed to shaping her legitimacy. The study established that elements of identity that are often perceived to be a hindrance to women in leadership were used by *Indunakazi* Mabhena to her advantage, but she still faced legitimacy challenges. The study explored how she was able to attain, and maintain, her legitimacy from the time it was first contested to the time of the study (2023).

7.2 Contributions of the study

The thesis provides an account of the ways in which a female chief, whose ascendancy to chieftaincy has been contentious, navigates issues of legitimacy in a patriarchal institution of traditional leadership situated in a sensitive geopolitical and economically marginalised environment. This thesis provides insightful data that point to very complex dynamics of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's life as an educated traditional leader (physically divorced from her area of jurisdiction), a wife, Christian, Ndebele among other identities. Much of the literature that focuses on women's political participation often focus on women in parliament with less emphasis on women in traditional leadership, especially those assuming a chieftaincy role. Furthermore, this literature often projects women in politics as a homogenous category without engaging with implications of their different identities and subjectivities in their political lives. The thesis, with its intersectionality lens, therefore, makes an important contribution to the field of political studies and gender studies within an African/postcolonial feminist perspective by documenting the lived realities of a female chief in a sub-Saharan black African community. The thesis also demonstrates how gendered and stereotypic discourses around traditional leadership and culture are reproduced and contested at the same time by the very community under the chief's jurisdiction.

Despite the socio-political tensions and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research was conducted with determination and resilience, as researcher gathered data which responded to the research questions. The narrative of facing assumptions and intimidation during fieldwork, including being mistaken for journalists or government agents, underscores the complexities and risks associated with conducting research in politically sensitive environments. The employment of a constructivist, qualitative research design and feminist ethnographic research strategy demonstrates a thoughtful approach to understanding the lived experiences of female traditional leaders. By utilizing interviews, archival records, and participant observation, the candidate was able to capture the nuanced narratives and complexities surrounding *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership within the Nswazi community.

Furthermore, the value of empirical research in providing contextually rich insights cannot be overstated. Despite the challenges encountered, the researcher's physical presence in Zimbabwe from April 2021 to June 2022 facilitated a deep understanding of the socio-political dynamics at play, enriching the empirical basis of the study.

7.2.1 Unpacking gender dynamics and legitimacy in traditional leadership

The literature review chapter established that there is still a gap on literature on women in traditional leadership primarily because it is unusual to have female chiefs or kings as it was in the past. Chapter 2 unpacks gender dynamics and legitimacy in traditional leadership with an intersectional approach. Traditional leadership in the African and historical contexts were examined, highlighting dynamics of legitimacy in different parts of Africa with examples of African women whose rise to leadership has been contested. The few women who have occupied this role are hardly visible as they are perceived as defying the odds. For example, in Zimbabwe there are five female chiefs, and some are from matrilineal societies, but little is known or written about them.

In post-colonial Africa, the institution of traditional leadership has been conceived to be an archaic system of governance. However, Logan (2013) sees it as an integral part of a hybrid governance at local level. Hegemonic masculinities have been reinforced through knowledge production and maintenance of gendered terms that are more masculine. Firstly, in terms of knowledge production, little focus has been paid on women in traditional leadership. Archives do not do justice to the presence of women in African political systems. For example, it is not

clear when women stopped to be politically influential, in which parts of Africa where they, what lead to their "non-existence", yet they were previously in these positions and where are they now? All these questions invoke a deeper exploration of the knowledge production on traditional leadership since precolonial, could we then trust the archives yet there seems to be gaps on the representation of women in history. A revisit into the writings and structure of traditional leaders is necessary, as one wonders whether indeed there were no female traditional leaders. Or the people (the white Europeans) who produced this knowledge lacked an in-depth understanding of the structures and systems of traditional leadership, hence provided only what they understood. Therefore, the limited availability of literature on women and traditional leaders needs to be scrutinized further, where women chiefs not in existence or they not just recorded appropriately.

To unpack the underlying narratives of women in positions previously reserved for men an intersectional lens was relevant. The intersectional lens was utilised to explore the nuances surrounding the leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Intersectionality as a relevant theoretical framework analyses various forms of social inequality, discrimination and oppression and how they intersect and overlap in multidimensional ways. However, the study established that there is a possibility that the experiences of women in traditional leadership is still conceived as shaped only by their gender, yet there are other intersecting factors that can shape the legitimacy of female traditional leaders and it remains unaddressed in Zimbabwe. This is so because, in as much as Zimbabwe legislated gender equality and policies, yet these policies are not legislated with an intersectional perception as experiences of women are not only homogenised, but they reveal the extent to which the contestation of state and customary law influences women in traditional leadership. that specifically addresses the experiences of women traditional leaders. here is no effective implementation of gender equality in traditional leadership, a phenomenon found at the national level addressing of the experiences of female traditional leaders because they are not able to address the specific needs of female traditional leaders as a group. These policies and laws are legislated in ways that homogenise women in governance.

Intersectionality was relevant in this study as it challenged the dominant narratives that usually marginalise or undermine women's experience and roles in male dominated

institutions. By bringing out the various forms that influence the leadership and legitimacy of female traditional leaders in Zimbabwe that are seemingly overlooked, intersectionality has achieved one of the study's objectives-to unpack the underlying narratives of women in traditional leadership. Intersectionality can also help practitioners and policymakers to improve on equal access to power and gender mainstreaming in male-dominated institutions. Thus, the intersectional lens provided an analytical tool that is valuable in efforts towards gender recognition in traditional leadership which will advance the legitimacy of women in leadership positions.

This study has addressed a gap in the literature on women in traditional leadership. It highlights that the experiences of women in chieftaincy are not informed by gender only. Intersectionality enabled an exploration not only of the systems of oppression that hindered the legitimacy and informed the experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, but also of the ways she was able to employ gender constructs around her embodiment as a woman to her advantage to strengthen her legitimacy. The study found that Sinqobile Mabhena used the so-called 'instruments of oppression' to navigate through the patriarchal structures of traditional leadership. However, her approach to navigating these structures has been controversial. While she may have navigated patriarchy in the institution, it is unclear if she has become empowered in exercising her authority.

7.2.2 The importance of positionality reflection in research?

A fascinating finding I established is that the data obtained is seemingly shaped by these identities- my gender, marital status and ethnicity are the main personal characteristics that shaped the progression of my research. Chapter 2 provides an analysis on my research journey. The chapter highlights my experiences as a young, Shona female researcher conducting research in a Ndebele male dominated institution. The experiences I encountered during my fieldwork, described in Chapter 2, demonstrate how positionality plays a distinctive role for male and female researchers in male-dominated spaces. Acknowledging and understanding my positionality helped me reflect on my own biases, assumptions and privileges which influenced by research journey and outcome. Through my personal experiences I established that positionality has a crucial role in shaping research outcomes.

Observations establish that positionality shapes the data a researcher collects and how this data in collected.

Existing instructional literature on fieldwork is male-oriented, which substantiates the narrative that research as a form of knowledge production is androcentric. In as much as there are instructional studies and literature on fieldwork, little has been done on female researchers researching in male-dominated spaces. In many instances, researchers are conceived as one holding a higher status than the research participants, particularly when the participants are invisible or marginalized in the research context. However, this is not always the case—particularly if the respondent is male and elderly and the researcher is young, female and an outsider there are struggles of power balance and gender norms between the two.

7.2.3 Underlying narratives of *Indunakazi* Mabhena's leadership

Chapter 5, as the first empirical chapter, makes a contribution to meeting the first research objective of the study: examining the *Indunakazi's* underlying narratives of her experiences in leadership and narratives from the community on how they perceive the leadership and legitimacy of the *Indunakazi*. The chapter reveals that although *Indunakazi* Mabhena wielded power in a position previously reserved for men, her legitimacy and visibility is not equivalent to that of men. In Zimbabwe patriarchal authoritarianism is still the order of the day in politics and women leaders still negotiate their way around legitimacy in positions reserved for men (Kambarami, 2006). It is evident that in Zimbabwe women are legitimised as long as they show obeisance to patriarchy. This chapter established how the intersections of patriarchy and politics construct the narratives of the leadership and experiences of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Therefore, men remain with the privileges of access to power than women.

In addition, the study established that the appointment of Indunakazi Mabhena reflects how women rising to power through their male relatives appear to have limited sovereign legitimacy. In this study of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, responses indicate that *Indunakazi* Mabhena's support and legitimacy were derived from her father's legacy—that is, his approach to leadership which was admired by many. Findings on the rise of women in politics are linked to Maphosa et-al's (2015) that the hope of women in ascending to political power

is linked to male figures. For women who have decided to rise to power independently they are seemingly forgotten, or little is known about them. For example, the wives of Zimbabwe nationalist leaders' relevance are effective and recognized in the politics through the spouse. Therefore, sometimes when women rise through men their legitimacy is often questioned, whether they are the right candidates or not, as is evident in the leaders of *Indunakazi* Mabhena and some female politicians in Zimbabwe.

The research established that male traditional leaders are perceived to be natural leaders whose approach to leadership or absence from their communities is rarely questioned or scrutinized. Women's leadership and experiences and ability to make deliverables is based on their gender in some cases. This raises the question of whether the perceptions of the community, and challenges faced by the *Indunakazi,* are the consequences of her own actions as a person, her gender, her background of rising to chieftaincy because most if not all male chiefs in Zimbabwe do not reside in their communities. Most traditional chiefs no longer reside in their communities as it historically because they are residing in the urban cities. The case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena offers an example of how 'politics is personal', her personal experiences are entwined in politics of traditional leadership. The concept highlights ways in which the personal struggles of women are based in political issues. Women's experience of marginalisation, gender stereotyping and discrimination is shaped by larger economic, social and political systems which are beyond their control.

This chapter demonstrates that the dispute around *Indunakazi* Mabhena's legitimacy was not really about her being a woman. Historical issues remained that had not been dealt with before her father ascended to chieftaincy. The study shows that women can be pawns in an androcentric war—androcentric because usually these wars, or political factions, are dominated by men, as was in the case with *Indunakazi* Mabhena's chieftaincy.

The invisibility of women in politics is a glaring truth in male-dominated spaces (Afolabi, 2019). The research established that the presence of women in traditional leadership is invisible due to systematic sexism in the society. Systematic oppression hinders the presence and equal representation of women in leadership. The institution of traditional leadership has been dominated by men; subsequently, the experiences, attitudes and narratives surrounding

the institution that have been documented have been largely those of men, while the narratives of women have rarely been told. This study aimed to raise the visibility of the experiences and views of women in chieftaincy, through the specific case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. The results indicate that the recognition and descriptive representation of the *Indunakazi* has been overlooked because she has made herself invisible through her temporary move to Botswana. Her absence also raises a gender aspect: a male chief would not be expected to follow his wife to another country for work.

This study has revealed that although *Indunakazi* Mabhena has successfully been appointed to chieftaincy, there is still a glass ceiling limiting her leadership. In-depth interviews with the *Indunakazi* revealed that she still faced challenges in exercising her authority effectively although she had been appointed to chieftaincy through the right channels. This shows how gender and sex still play a determinant role in the legitimacy and visibility of women in male-gendered roles.

Interviews and observation from the study indicate that *Indunakazi* Mabhena sought assistance from male elders of the family and community by appointing in influential positions such as being headman or part of the chiefs' council. This stresses the existence and significance of the spirit of family in traditional leadership. Therefore, this substantiates how the concept of African family can be interventionist. *Indunakazi* is looking up to the male elders as the typical head of the house of a typical African family, hence relies on these 'heads of the house' as interventionist who will assist her in cementing her legitimacy.

7.2.4 Identities or strategies that influenced the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena

Chapter 5 revealed the strategies and identities that influenced the legitimacy of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. The study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of literature on the role of men in supporting women in traditional leadership. There has been limited exploration and examination of the role of men in supporting women in traditional leadership, possibly because it is an institution that is male dominated with women playing a supportive role. In this case, the role of men in the leadership of the *Indunakazi* contributed to building the perceptions of the community about her leadership, shaping her experiences and visibility in

traditional leadership. Moreover, the support that the *Indunakazi* receives from men that surround her somehow neutralises her legitimacy. Indunakazi Mabhena's approach to leadership does not challenge the existing patriarchal structures rather, it reinforced the power imbalances between men and women. Thus, substantiating Kandiyoti (1988)'s patriarchal bargain, where women comply with societal norms in order to maintain legitimacy. Although this may be seen as an unjust way of negotiating for legitimacy by feminists, the researcher argues that this negotiation of support is important as there were instances where Indunakazi is made visible through these.

The research established that women who occupy male-gendered positions are likely to face challenges in legitimizing their authority—particularly in traditional leadership, as in the case of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. Gender intersects with other varying factors which include the historical background of the Mabhena chieftaincy and contestation of religions. The experiences of *Indunakazi* form various intersecting identities which act not only as systems of oppression, but also form points of privileges—such as being an *Indunakazi* and being educated. The privileges that shaped the *Indunakazi'*s experiences reveal how Ndebele women's experiences cannot be universalised or conflated with those of Shona women, thereby making the intersectional lens a relevant theory in this study. This is supported by Ndlovu-Gathseni (2009), who highlighted that the subjectivity of Ndebele women is a consequence of intersections of region, ethnicity, sex, history and nationalism. This sets apart the Matabeleland women from the other women in Zimbabwe (Mlotshwa, 2022). In support of this, the study does not dispute that the challenges that the *Indunakazi* faces are peculiar to women only but asserts that women are likely to face the same challenges but with greater intensity, in this context. As explained by Zigomo (2022), women in Zimbabwe face challenges that are more pronounced than men because the political arena in Zimbabwe is structured to favour men. For example, at the level of national politics, women face more discrimination and are called derogatory names that men in parliament are hardly called. Such tags have been used to delegitimise the authority of women in politics. Historically, Ndebele society was, and still is, male dominated. As women were considered *abantwana* (children), they did not directly influence political issues but did so indirectly through their spouses, uncle, fathers or brothers (Deele, 1974). Despite Zimbabwe being a signatory of international and regional gender conventions such as the CEDAW, the Zimbabwean Constitution such as

section 26 of the Constitution, cultural beliefs that favour men are still pervasive. Although the *Indunakazi* successfully ascended to chieftaincy, her leadership was seen to be shaped by Ndebele sociocultural beliefs that continue to place women in subordinated positions. Therefore, social structures and long-standing succession customs have continued to limit the visibility of the *Indunakazi*.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 established that, although *Indunakazi* Mabhena successfully established and maintained her legitimacy, gender norms still have an impact on her leadership. While she demonstrates d some capacity to lead, her approach to leadership seemed to have reinforced male dominance in the traditional leadership structure. For example, the number of women in her council of elders was even lower than tradition requires. Therefore, the inclusion of the *Indunakazi* did not entail empowerment and independence in her leadership.

Patriarchal Bargains

Focusing on the role of spouses, the study established that Mr Sibanda played a significant role in shaping the experiences of the Indunakazi. Spouses may play a significant role in shaping a person's political aspirations. Most studies that have explored this have focused on the role of a wife in the career of a chief or politician; the role of a husband in the career of a female leader has rarely been explored (Ya, 2021; Moagi and Mtombeni, 2020; Sabloff, 2020). There is a general perception that wives not supported by their spouses are handicapped in their participation in politics. The *Indunakazi* had a heavy burden trying to fulfill socially constructed traditional roles as a mother and a wife; she needed help and support to balance the two.

This study has established that spousal support has effects on the legitimacy of women, it can either hinder or facilitate the legitimacy of women in political positions. In the case of the *Indunakazi*, the community criticised the continual intervention of the Mr Sibanda. Observations during the study revealed that the *Indunakazi* was faced with the challenge of addressing the traditional view that the man is the head of the family; this prevented her from negotiating the gender roles. In this study, participants from the community were found to respect *Indunakazi* Mabhena's married status as a significant rite of passage but resented her

husband's interference in her role. While *Indunakazi* Mabhena's submission to her husband reflected traditional values and might have won the approval of some, it also may have hindered her capacity to lead. While neither *Indunakazi* Mabhena nor her husband were asked directly about his role in her chieftaincy during the interviews, it can be concluded from data collected through observations that either *Indunakazi* Mabhena has failed to separate her personal life from her leadership, or that they were in conflict—although marriage, as a respected and revered institution, earned her visibility and legitimacy in her community.

Women are rising to positions of influence, but most women are appointed standing on the shoulders of men. Examples can be drawn from cases of women in politics in Zimbabwe. Joyce Mujuru, the first female vice president of Zimbabwe, was allegedly appointed to power because of the influence that her late husband, General Solomon Mujuru, had in the government. However, she faced resistance after the death of her husband. The same can be said of Thokozani Khupe of the Movement of Democratic change, an opposition party in Zimbabwe, whose rise to power was made possible by the influence her husband had in the party. In Zimbabwe, Grace Mugabe almost rose to the ranks of the ruling party through her husband. Although this example is from a different system of governance, emphasise is on how women's legitimacy in traditional leadership continues to be informed by men. This shows that the rise of power for some women is not really based on their own merits who they are married to or related. The researcher argues that women continue to rely on men to gain political legitimacy.

7.2.5 Perceptions of the Nswazi community regarding the legitimacy and leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena

Chapter 6 presented the perceptions of community members on the legitimacy and leadership of *Indunakazi* Mabhena. I argue that legitimacy is not peculiar to women but becomes intense due to gender biases and societal constructions. Issues of legitimacy in traditional leadership are imperative because the chief rules at the inclination of the people: without the people, there is no chief. However, with the changes that have taken place in traditional leadership particularly on issues of sources of legitimacy, it was imperative that the study analyses the

perceptions of the community on the legitimacy of a female traditional leader.

Results of the study showed that the perceptions of the community focused on *Indunakazi* Mabhena's embodiment as a woman. Having a female chief was a new phenomenon in Nswazi village and the district at large. Thus, it was up to *Indunakazi* Mabhena to either reinforce or change the perceptions of her people regarding the legitimacy of women participating in the institution of traditional leadership.

Use of the title *umama* suggests that the *Indunakazi* was seen more as a glorified mother figure than a chief—accentuating her gender over her position of authority. Body politics and gender norms in traditional leadership influence the perceptions that the society has of women in leadership. Gender norms are informal rules which people conform to; these are harmful or discriminatory. Gender norms have created barriers for women to effectively participate and legitimise their authority in traditional authorities (Ilesanmi, 2018). An *umama* is not associated with power but with caring and nurturing. This suggests that women can be accepted as a mother figure for their nurturing ability more readily than being accepted as chiefs. Therefore, the study concludes that women in leadership positions are seen as women first, then leaders: gender is their first identifier. Some scholars, however, might disagree with this view on grounds that 'nurturing talent' is also a leadership function.

7.2.6 Beyond numerical representation

The relevance of women traditional leadership in Zimbabwe remains limited and this is disconcerting with the legislatives that have been passed in Zimbabwe since 1980. Although Zimbabwe and many other countries have a conducive legal framework and a quota system for supporting women's representation in elected bodies; their legitimacy, remains obscured. The Zimbabwean quota was only for 2013 and 2018 with a 30% quota which is highly low if women want to accomplish anything in the legislature. An analysis of the *Indunakazi's* leadership provides some insights into the situations of women in positions previously reserved for men in terms of whether these women have influence or power. The low representation of women in traditional leadership can be explained by a variety of intersecting factors and is not bounded by gender only. In as much as women can support each other, the number is too low to win in some elections held within the National Council of Chiefs. The

chances of women being elected to the National Council of Chiefs are limited. Women who occupy positions previously reserved for men struggle usually to gain recognition beyond the communities they are leading.

In this broader context, seeking to move beyond a simplistic understanding of representation of the *Indunakazi*, I used the intersectional approach to explore other factors that contribute to the limited representation of women in traditional leadership. In terms of numerical consideration in the leadership of women Goetz and Hassim's (2013) framework on women's political effectiveness in exploring gaps in women's inclusion in politics and their influence in their positions, substantiates the notion that numbers do not translate to substantive representation of women. However, this depends on the numbers in relation to the Zimbabwean context with the 30% quota there might not make a difference but 50% should; also, there is plenty of evidence from all over Africa that there have been significant substantive and symbolic representation gains. Therefore, leadership of women should not be understood as a matter of numbers only; instead, it should be understood as a matter of equal access to power and influence and effective representation.

7.3 Limitations

The snowball approach used in this study proved to introduce bias into the study. The gatekeeper, who was a younger brother of *Indunakazi* Mabhena, was found to select informants who were either detached from the chieftaincy or were not critical of her leadership. In addition, some participants would not give me names for key informants who were knowledgeable about issues related to the chieftaincy because they did not agree with their views. Also, when I approached some prospective participants and explained what I was doing in the community, they asked who had referred me to them. This affected collection of my data as those that were knowledgeable about chieftaincy were not easily forthcoming.

7.4 Recommendations for further study

It is recommended that similar research be conducted to understand the leadership of the other four female chiefs in Zimbabwe: *Indunakazi* Mathe, Ndube, Mvuthu and *Mambo*

Chimukoko.[101] This would enable a broader understanding of the issues that women in traditional leadership face across the different Zimbabwean cultures, with their various succession customs. The perspectives and experiences of the two chiefs who are from matrilineal clans—*Mambo* Chimukoko and *Indunakazi* Mathe—could yield interesting insights when compared with those from patriarchal traditions. These two chiefs are from different ethnic groups, hence a comparison of the two would reveal whether the challenges that *Indunakazi* Mabhena has faced are peculiar to her or are similar to those faced by women irrespective of ethnicity. The study recommends that examining women in matrilineal society is imperative to explore whether their experiences are similar or different and, in what ways. Focusing on matrilineal societies further provides a nuanced approach to research on women in traditional leaders as new insights might be gained.

The management of the history of the Mabhena traditional leadership seemed to have lapsed, with the result that some records had been lost. Some written notes that traced the history of chieftaincy in the Mabhena clan and to which the elders referred during interviews were torn and barely legible. It is thus recommended that these collections be captured digitally to preserve them and make them accessible to the public.

7.5 Conclusion

The study concludes that women are perceived as 'creatures' of fate in traditional leadership as their ascendancy to chieftaincy is an afterthought—only when all possible male candidates were not able to assume the leadership role was a woman selected. There is not a designation for a 'female chief' in Zimbabwe, but women have occupied these positions as second options; thus, they do not have an equal standing and, despite their presence, patriarchy is perpetuated. Gender equality and recognition still only receive lip service in most parts of Africa. This is evident by the way many African governments, after appointing women as chiefs, make little effort to address the challenges they experience. Thus, gender empowerment and equity in traditional leadership is not yet a reality, and it can be expected

[101] Silibaziso Mvuthu has not been confirmed to chieftaincy by her family despite the High Court ruling that confirmed her succession.

that the legitimacy of women in traditional leadership will continue to be challenged.

The notions above are further worsened by the complex relationship between traditional laws and state law. Traditional law is supposedly meant to be equal as state law, but it tramps traditional law and this is further complicated by gender policies, where women are appointed in accordance with state law disregarding traditional law. This has an impact on the political legitimacy of women in traditional leadership. Thus, women's trajectory in leadership particularly in traditional leadership continues to be influenced by the complex relationship between state and customary law and gender intersecting with other factors such as marriage.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participant information Sheet: *Indunakazi* Mabhena's family and council of elders

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is **Tracey Muradzikwa,** and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. I am doing research on women and chieftaincy in Zimbabwe under the supervision of Dr Siphiwe Dube. The title of my study is, **Women, State Law, and The Crisis of Chieftaincy: The Case of Nswazi Village in Zimbabwe**. The primary aim of this study is to examine the experiences of a female chief in chieftaincy and how female chiefs have been able to legitimize authority in male dominated landscapes particularly, the institution of traditional leaders.

I would like to request your participation in this research through an interview and attending cases, meetings and ceremonies that are within your jurisdiction in your area. For the purposes of data accuracy collection during the interviews, I also request that you allow me to audio record the interview to maintain accuracy of the information you share. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time of the interview. However, you should note that it will be impossible to withdrawal your data after publication of the thesis. The interview should take between 45minutes to an hour and will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you.

Confidentiality and anonymity during this study will be limited. Although, they are no specific foreseeable risks, the research may pose low risks to you, therefore, where possible transcripts will be coded to protect your identity or I will not publish data that exposes you, or anything that you might share with me but not willing to have it published. The storage and safety of data collected during the interviews will be kept in accordance with the University's regulations for 5 years. The data will be safely guarded in a password encrypted storage device. However, the thesis will be published on the University of Witwatersrand Library Website and anonymity maintained where required.

This research is **ONLY** for academic purposes, therefore any information provided will only be used for academic purposes and publications. You have the right to access the transcript yourself before it is included in the thesis. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za or:-

University of Witwatersrand

Solomon Mahlangu House, Room 10004, 10th Floor Senate, East Campus
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Wits phone number: + 277117174358

Consent Form

State law and women in chieftaincy crisis. The case of Nswazi, Zimbabwe rural community chieftaincy.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood information about the study as provided in the Participant Information sheet dated …….

2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and the researcher has answered any questions about the study to my satisfaction.

YES	NO

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without any consequences.

YES	NO

4. I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time, without giving any reason and without any consequences.

YES	NO

5. I understand that the researcher will use an audio recorder for accuracy and transcription purposes.

YES	NO

I……voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

…… ……

Signature of participant…….... *Date*……..

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

..…… ……..

Signature of researcher Date

Appendix 2: Interview Guide: Indunakazi Mabhena

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

The primary aim of this study is to examine the experiences of a female chief in the institution of traditional leadership and how female chiefs have been able to legitimize authority in male dominated landscapes particularly, the institution of traditional leaders. The interview will be guided by the following questions: -

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Who is chief Mabhena?
2. What is your understanding of the history of chieftaincy of the Mabhena clan?
3. In your understanding, what are the succession processes to chieftaincy in Nswazi?
4. Your appointment to chieftaincy was contested, can you tell me about your succession dispute?

5. How do you manage life as a mother, a teacher, a wife, and a chief?
6. What are the effective procedures of resolving succession disputes, in your understanding?

7. In your view, how has the succession dispute to your appointment shaped your governance practices and relations with the community and the State?

8. How do you see your relations with other (male) chiefs?

9. What elements do you consider to be important for your governance to be credible or legitimate?

10. Can you describe any challenging moments or experiences as a female chief?

11. Are you aware of any perceptions that the society has on traditional leadership and women? What are these perceptions and how have you changed them as a female chief?

12. Can you describe the state of gender equity in chieftaincy?
13. What role has your gender played in shaping and informing your version of traditional leadership?
14. What are your thoughts on gender equality and women's participation in chieftaincy?
15. In your view what do you think are the contributing factors towards the low participation of women in traditional leadership?

Appendix 3: Interview Guide: Key informants

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Name of participant (pseudonym)	
Age	
Current position	
Date	
Time	
Length of service in current position	
Name of Ward	

The primary aim of this study is to explore. The primary aim of this study is to examine the experiences of a female chief in the institution of traditional leadership how female chiefs have been able to legitimize authority in male dominated landscapes particularly, the institution of traditional leaders. The interview will be guided by the following questions:

1. Can you explain your role in chieftainship and your relationship with Chief Mabhena?
2. What is your understanding of the history of chieftaincy of the Mabhena clan?
3. From your observations as a member of the council of elders/Mabhena family, how does Chief Mabhena manage life as a mother, a teacher, a wife, and a chief?
4. What are the succession processes to chieftaincy in Nswazi in your understanding?
5. Tell me about your knowledge on Chief Mabhena's succession dispute.
6. In your view what are the effective procedures of resolving succession disputes?
7. As a member of the royal family, how has Chief Mabhena's succession dispute influence her governance?
8. In your understanding, what elements are important for Chief Mabhena's governance to be credible or legitimate?

9. What practices, traditions or customs in traditional leadership have evolved overtime?

10. In what ways do you think Chief Mabhena's gender has shaped and informed her version of traditional leadership?

11. What are your thoughts on gender equality and women's participation in chieftaincy?

12. In what ways do you think the State and National Council of Chiefs have contributed to gender transformation in traditional leadership?

Appendix 4: Interview guide: Focus group discussions



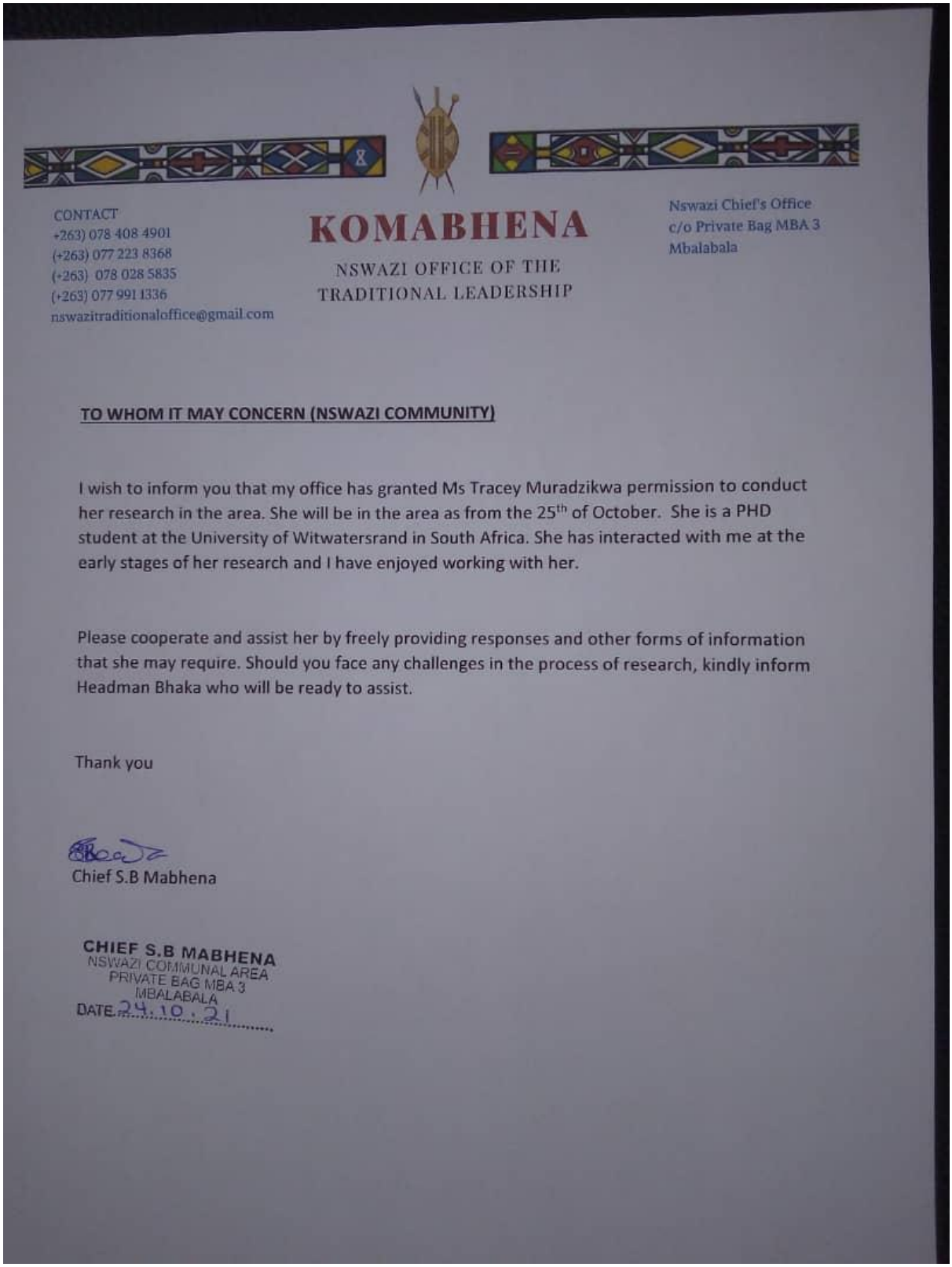
Group Type	
Gender	
Name of Ward	
Date	
Time	

The primary aim of this study is to understand the crisis of legitimacy surrounding women as chiefs and to determine how female chiefs have been able to legitimize their authority in a male dominated landscape. The interview will be guided by the following questions: -

1. What elements makes one a chief?
2. What do you know about chieftaincy in Nswazi areas?
3. What is your understanding of the history of chieftaincy of the Mabhena clan?
4. What are the succession processes to chieftaincy in Nswazi in your understanding?
5. In your view, how do succession disputes shape or influence the governance practices of a chief?
6. In your own opinion what do you think were the contributing factors to Chief Mabhena's chieftaincy succession contestations?
7. In your understanding, what elements are important for Chief Mabhena's governance to be credible or legitimate?
8. What practices, traditions or customs in traditional leadership have evolved overtime?
9. In what ways do you think Chief Mabhena's gender has shaped and informed her version of traditional leadership?
10. What do you perceive of the leadership of Indunakazi Mabhena?

11. What informs your perceptions on Indunakazi Mabhena?
12. What are your thoughts on gender and traditional leadership?

Appendix 5: Permission from traditional leadership



CONTACT
+263) 078 408 4901
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KOMABHENA

NSWAZI OFFICE OF THE
TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

Nswazi Chief's Office
c/o Private Bag MBA 3
Mbalabala

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN (NSWAZI COMMUNITY)

I wish to inform you that my office has granted Ms Tracey Muradzikwa permission to conduct her research in the area. She will be in the area as from the 25th of October. She is a PHD student at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. She has interacted with me at the early stages of her research and I have enjoyed working with her.

Please cooperate and assist her by freely providing responses and other forms of information that she may require. Should you face any challenges in the process of research, kindly inform Headman Bhaka who will be ready to assist.

Thank you

Chief S.B Mabhena

CHIEF S.B MABHENA
NSWAZI COMMUNAL AREA
PRIVATE BAG MBA 3
MBALABALA
DATE 24.10.21

Appendix 6: Approval from government

MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

Telephone 263 4 707615
Fax 263 4 797706
REF: ADM/23/8

ZIMBABWE

Office of the Secretary
P. Bag 7706
Causeway
Harare

14 July 2020

Ms T. Muradzikwa
2493 B. Burombo Rd
Ruwa, Harare

APPROVAL OF AUTHORITY TO UNDERTAKE ACADEMIC RESEARCH: MS TRACEY MURADZIKWA: UNIVESITY OF WITWATERSRAND STUDENT

The above subject matter refers.

It is a pleasure to advise you that the Head of Ministry approved your application to undertake a field research on **State law and women in Chieftaincy crisis, a case study of Nswazi Village, Zimbabwe.**

Please be advised that the research findings should not be subject to external consumption and must be solely used for academic purposes only. You are mandated to complete the Official Secrecy Act before commencement of the research project. In addition, the final copy of the research findings should be submitted to the Office of the Permanent Secretary upon completion.

It is hoped that the research findings will help the Ministry in coming up with relevant strategies in the study area undertaken.

MIN. OF LOCAL GOVT. PUBLIC WORKS AND NATIONAL HOUSING
HUMAN RESOURCES 1
14 JUL 2020
P. BAG 7706, CAUSEWAY
ZIMBABWE TEL: 04-793700

E. Mahurayi (Mrs)
Principal Human Resources Officer
FOR: PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLC WORKS

cc: Director, Human Resources

Appendix 7: Ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Muradzikwa

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H21/01/24**
PROJECT TITLE	State law and women in chieftaincy crisis. The case of Nswazi village, Zimbabwe
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss T Muradzikwa
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Social Science/
DATE CONSIDERED	29 January 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	15 March 2024

DATE 16 March 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr S Dube

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES