

Commercialisation of Legendary Stories of the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province: A Strategy for Economic Development of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Vhembe district is rich in legendary stories that have not been heard by many people or recorded. Developed countries such as the UK, China, Austria and Puerto Rico have legendary stories that have been marketed to outsiders as one of the strategies for generating income and hence contributing to the economic development of those countries. This review therefore investigated the possibility of the commercialization of Vhembe legendary stories.

Keywords: *Vhembe district, legendary stories, economic development*

INTRODUCTION

The world economy is propelled by the replay of history. In the real life situation, the past events, performance, activities and concern are used to design and plan the future. That is to say that the future cannot be designed if the past is not taken into consideration. A legendary story is a story where the characters or things spoken about show things that are beyond human understanding. The story has, according to history, taken place. Such stories most often are full of things that the human mind cannot comprehend. Musehane (1987) asserts that 'legends' are stories about old days' happenings, wherein a legend, as "a traditional narrative, frequently involving kings, heroes, or other important persons are presented as true". The Oxford Dictionary (n.d:693) defines a legend as "a collection of lives of saints or similar stories; traditional story popularly regarded as historical, myth, such as literature or tradition". Sometimes, the details are difficult to confirm, but usually the story names people and identities. Legends are prose narratives like myths. They are not only historical records but also include historical personages and facts". From the foregoing, it can be deduced that legendary stories:

- (a) Happened a long time ago
- (b) Talk about human beings, kings and heroes or heroines, including important persons
- (c) May be true or untrue
- (d) Are historical and mythical
- (e) Are incomprehensible, irrespective of being human

Legends and myth actually overlap in their classification. Myths have gods as principal characters, and their purpose is to explain sacred beliefs. Legends, on the other hand, focus on humans. Their purpose often is to explain or glorify the ancestral history of a group. Myths and legends often overlap, and both may be forms of literature. Every nation has legendary stories. We have Greek legendary stories. It is believed that Iliad, for example, interweaves myths of the Greek gods with legends of Greek and Trojan Kings and warriors.

Just to name a few, Greek gods existed and the Greeks regarded them as the immortal controllers of natural forces, which were suitably departmentalized. Zeus, as a weather god was known by such cult titles as Marmites (Stormy) and Casemates (Striker), and in times of drought his mountain shrines were visited. Poëiden was god of sea, Hades or (Pluto) of the underworld; Demeter was goddess of Harvest, Hera of Marriage, and Athena of courage, Craft (Ergane), and Victory (Nike), Appelo visited men with plagues or alternatively sanctions purifications.

According to Homer and other Greek epic poets, King Priam's son Paris brought Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta, back to Troy with him. To recover Helen, the Greeks sent an expedition to Troy under Agaememnon, brother of Menelaus. The war lasted 10 years although the first 9 years seem to have been indecisive. Only in the 10th year after Achililles had killed Hector, the greatest of Trojan warriors, were Greeks assured of victory. Using a stratagem devised by Odysseus, the Greek feigned retreat; the Greek fleet sailed out of sight, leaving behind as a "gift" the Trojan Horse. Inside the large wooden horse was concealed a squad of Greek soldiers who had been dragged into the unsuspecting city under the cover of darkness. They emerged and opened the gates. After the Greek fleet quietly returned, the soldiers entered Troy and a great slaughter followed. Many Trojan women, including members of the royal family, were carried off into captivity. The work of the 19th archeologist Heinrich Schlimann showed the story of the war was probably based on historical events of the early 12th century BC. Some scholars believe that the Trojans were Luwian-speaking people who came into conflict with the Mycenaean (Greeks Grolier Academic Encyclopaedia, Vol 19, 1989)

Homer may well have drawn on accounts of an actual siege of Troy. Similarly, the various versions of the romance of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table are actually built around a legendary British leader. The story told about King Lear is essentially the folktale "Love like salt". Although the Pied Piper of Hamelin has become famous through literary treatment, many other European towns have a similar legend of a piper who lured their children away. What other nations do is sell these stories to outsiders, such as tourists. If one visits these countries as a tourist, one would be showed around by tour guides who will explain the history of the country, leading to affinity to such culture. Tourists depend on the narration provided by these tour guides. Tourists pay a lot of money after their day travels. Before they retire or get to their respective hotels, they are entertained at dinner tables, where such stories would be told by locals. The Vhavenda, like other nations, have legends too. When they are sitting with the youth around a fire, old people tell stories of old happenings. Such usage is of supreme importance to a Muvenda child.

Vhembe District is known as the hub of the legends in Limpopo Province, South Africa. It is an area where the Councillor. Falaza Philemon Mdaka, Executive Mayor of Vhembe District Municipality, informs visitors in Vhembe the hub of the legends (n.d:01) that people are welcome to the beautiful region. It is a place where one will have an excellent oversight into the many services and attractions which Vhembe people can offer. According to Vhembe (nd:01), "this is the land of legends where a history dating back more than 600 years is ever-present at the many archaeological sites such as Mapungubwe,

Dzata and Thulamela. The region is an ideal location from which to enjoy the many attractions within the region." The many visitors, who prefer to choose Vhembe as a holiday destination, do so to escape the more crowded locations closer to urban concentrations, to enjoy the tranquility of this special mountain environment. The mountains, which support an enormous diversity of nature and natural beauty, will hold the visitor enthralled", Vhembe-The hub of the legends (n.d:09). Among the features that Vhembe boasts is the Fundudzi Sacred Lake, which is a short distance to the north of the Zoutpansberg, whose legendary nature can captivate tourists as well.

Legendary nature of the Fundudzi Sacred Lake

Lake Fundudzi is located in the Soutpansberg in the Vhembe District. It is found on the eastern side of the road that connects Musina. According to Van Warmelo (1989), the lake is used as the Zwitungulo derived from the verb --tungula any object associated with ancestral spirits or cult, especially, heirlooms handed down in the family and used in the rights to make libations over them, or to wear as a protective amulet, of the inhabitants. This lake is the zwifho derived from the verb -fha give at a sacred place of the Tshiavha clan. The lake is legendary because of the following aspects which distinguishes it from other lakes in the continent.

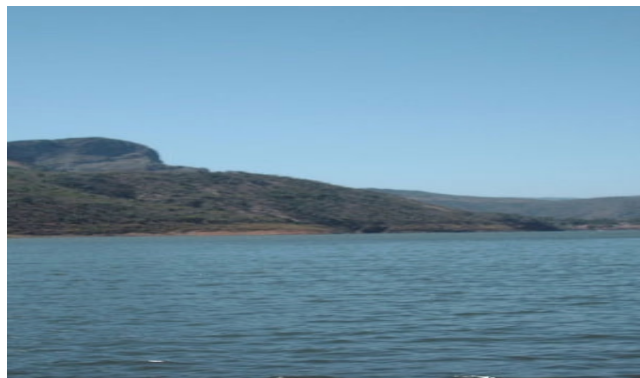


Fig 1: Mutale River Water floats on the lake

On the bank of Sacred Lake Fundudzi From: Vhembe: The hub of the legends (n.d:05)

It is generally believed that the water of the Mutale River floats through the sacred lake. Water from other rivers, if poured in one utensil, would mix and no one would be able to distinguish water from each river separately. However, the water from the Mutale River does not mix with that of the sacred lake. Mutale is known to be a river which floats over the sacred lake hence -tala float or swim. Water from the sacred lake is thicker than that in the Mutale River; hence Mutale water floats on the Lake Fundudzi. Some people believe that Mutale refers to Metal/Iron/Copper River, derived from Shona word which refers to iron; smelted ore, and lurale wire. Many people within the locality where the Mutale, know it as a river which floats over the Sacred Lake Fundudzi.



Fig. 2: Sacred Lake Fundudzi at a distance From: Vhembe-The hub of the legends (n.d:05)

Supernatural things: The lake is also known for its supernatural powers about things happening in its surroundings which are known to the inhabitants of the District. It is believed that during the night a tshikona dance could be heard in the sacred lake. However, the dances are invisible. When people proceed to the lake to take a look, it stops. This is a sacred place of the Vhavenda.

Visiting the sacred lake: It is believed that if anyone wants to visit the sacred lake, such a person should report to the local mahosi. If that is not done, it is believed that bad luck would befall that person. It is also believed that a group of whites once visited the sacred lake without reporting their mission to the mahosi. The visitors worked the first day's shift and knocked off, hoping to restart their work the following day. After they had retreated to their tents, a loud noise made by whirlwind at night was heard. When the whites woke up the following morning, they found all the poles of the fence removed, as if they had not done any work. They could not believe it. They resumed their work again, and knocked off as usual. When they returned to work the following morning, they found everything uprooted. The local people had to inform the whitemen that the place is sacred and should not be fenced in. To date, until the local mahosi *Netshiavha* and *Netshi angani* are informed and they in turn speak to the gods requesting permission to visit the lake, one cannot just go there. Sometimes permission is not given. If it is not given, visiting the lake has grave consequence. If any person insists on doing so, it is believed that bad luck may befall the person. Whoever visits the lake does not leave at will. The person has to perform some kinds of rituals to appease the gods. Before one leaves the lake, one should -kodola (stand, bent forward with protruding buttocks, hence the other name for Fundudzi is *Dzivha ǀ Nyankodolela*) referring to the ritual performed before one leaves the sacred lake.

Distinct Species of Fish and Crocodiles: This lake is infested with numerous species of fish. It is believed that some of the fish species are not found in most local rivers. There are also crocodiles. These crocodiles are not like the ones in other local rivers. The crocodiles in local rivers devour human beings, beasts, goats and dogs. However, in Lake Fundudzi, people find crocodiles with various species of fish. The startling thing about the crocodiles in this lake is that they are not harmful. What is not known is whether these crocodiles eat the fish in the water, making them uninterested in animals and people?

The Disappearance of Thohoyanḁou: Another example of a Vhavenda legend is centered on Thohoyanḁou (translated as elephant's head). According to this legend, Thohoyanḁou (elephant's head) went away at night while others were asleep. His ways are difficult to understand. Many think that he is Raluvhimba (name for God in Tshivenda). Others say Thohoyanḁou (elephant's head) returned to Vhukalanga (countries in the north). What is clear is that he could not have returned to countries from which he ran away. Some people say he went away at night, past Vuvha (name of a country north-east of Louis Trichardt). It is believed that he passed beside Hamasia (a place east of Louis Trichardt, but south of the Thohoyanḁou, capital city of Venda), until he reached the mountain of the Vhafamaḁi and crossed the Great Letaba River (today known as *Tavha*).

It is said, he did not go there alone but he went with a small group of people. Those who followed his tracks realised that the tracks stopped at Ha-Magoro (name of a country near an area called Masakona in Venda), where there is a small mountain. It is said that those who followed him returned with nothing. They reported that where the tracks stopped, they found an anthill covering the tracks. They tried to trace his tracks further but they perambulated in the wilderness without finding anything. To this day, nobody knows where Thohoyanḁou is. The above legend is like that of Moses of the biblical era. The narrator believes that what he relates is the narrated aspect.



Fig 3: Mount Magoro Photo by Prof N. M. Musehane

Legendary nature of Ngomalungundu: Ngomalungundu was a drum owned by the Vhavenda people. They used the drum to protect themselves from their enemies. It is said, that drum was not supposed to touch the ground. When they rested, they hung it on the branches of a tree. When the enemies wanted to attack the Vhavenda people, it is said they would beat the drum. Its sound made the enemies fall asleep. When they did, the Vhavenda people then took their weapons and killed them. The power of the drum was known to all the Vhavenda's enemies. Dzivhani (1958), in his work entitled *Mahosi a Venda (Rulers of Venda)*, gives legends powers of the Ngomalungundu (drum possessed with supernatural powers). According to him, *Ngomalungundu* has supernatural powers that helped the Vhavenda people conquer other tribes or nations. He further indicated in these translations that in the evening the brother to the khosi (ruler) would stand up and dances, holding spears, bows and arrows. He would stick the spear into the ground, and point it in all directions. He would then stick it into the ground again and lick it with his

tongue. The drum would frighten people. People were frightened by this because if the drum was beaten, it summoned *Dimbanyika's* (name of one of the old rulers) heart. The name of the drum was called *Ngomalungundu* (drum with supernatural powers). When beaten, people's consciousness would be broken and they were conquered. When a legend is communicated by the old generation to the young, it encourages them to be enthusiastic in what they are doing. The youths want to imitate their forefathers in defending themselves against the enemies. Legendary stories give encouragement and hope of victory.

Legendary nature of the Phiphidi Waterfalls



At the entrance gate of Phiphidi Waterfall Photo by Prof N. M. Musehane

Phiphidi Waterfalls is found at the Mutshundudi River. It is known for the *phiphili ya madi* derived from the verb stem - *pilimuwa* (bank, as of a river; embarkment). It is a sacred place of the Vhavenda clans. It is believed that sometimes one can hear the sound of *malombo* cult drums playing. Sometimes, a salem pore dress is found left on the rocks to dry, but it vanishes when a person moves closer to it.



Phiphidi waterfalls during the dry season. Photo by Prof N. M. Musehane

Value of legendary stories

Legendary stories are priceless for tour guides, tourists and society at large. A tour guide can become a source of information. Knowledge can be preserved, for example, in book

form, so that anybody who wants to follow this trade can access it. The stories can also be exported as video, DVDs and CDs. Also, we are living in an era of knowledge search. Many people can visit these sites in an attempt to learn more about the legendary stories of the area. Such places enable tourists to come together to while away time; they promote nation building and create an atmosphere of togetherness after a long day's work. It is easy for a tour guide to speak about things he/she knows well. Legendary stories can create a group of resourceful people who would tell these stories. This can help in maintaining group cohesion. This in turn can bring together all members of the society who like story telling as a means of entertainment. Furthermore, story-telling can help in the development of listening and imparting both listening and speaking skills. Also, it can help in nation building and in teaching one group to appreciate what belongs to another. Legends can be sold, both to tourists and locals. This can be achieved if story-telling is incorporated in the curriculum of the institutions of higher learning as a course of study.

The course could include some of the following related subjects, which would assist in the training of a quality story teller: language and law, law of copyright, law of defamation, anthropology, history and heritage. Language study would equip tour guides with skills to communicate or explain stories, law would equip one with knowledge of regulating story telling, and law of copyright would assist one with ownership of the story concerned. Law of defamation would teach one to know which stories are defamatory or blasphemous. Anthropology, on its part, is a science of man which brings together those disciplines whose common aim is to describe man on the basis of biological and cultural characteristics. After successful completion of the course, a prospective tour guide or story teller can be used to assist in tourism activities. These persons must be conversant with different legendary stories of the region. Specialization could be considered. Since Venda is a vast area, a guide could specialize in a part of it, as one cannot study everything in the area. Villagers could also be encouraged to record legendary and historical happenings for commercial purposes.

CONCLUSION

The information about the country's culture is often unappreciated by local people. Commercialization would eradicate the negative attitudes and lessen the perception that foreign issues are better than local ones. Hence, there is need for knowing local issues are important and one need not have to go abroad to get it. If Mapungubwe and Thulamela are commercialized, this would contribute to the boosting of the economy of the country. Mapungubwe 'thrived as a trading centre from approximately 900 AD to 1300 AD, with well- established trade routes. It flourished from Southern Africa interior to the Eastern African Swahili coast at Inhambane and Sofala (Mozambique). Arabian, Indian Chinese and Egyptian traders, who came in search of ivory, copper, iron and gold, provided a regular market for these products, which were traded for glass heads and clothing' (Vhembe, The hub of the Legends:09). Commercialisation of legends would make story-telling a profession, something that was not thought of before.

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