

SOIL AND BLOOD:

Shona Traditional Religion in Late 20th Century Zimbabwe

by

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SUMMARY

This qualitative study focuses on two questions:

- a) Do present-day Shona still subscribe to the world-view of their ancestors?
- b) How does this world-view relate to that of the modern (Western) world?

Interviews were conducted with government representatives, chiefs in Masvingo Province and people in all walks of life. Virtually all interviewees, even when participating in the "modern" sector (including Christianity), still subscribe to the traditional system. Government, however, has adopted the model of the pre-Independence government, with some concessions to tradition.

The traditional world-view (emphasising its key symbols, blood and soil) and the history of the two dominant tribes in Masvingo Province are outlined. A case study of a current chieftaincy dispute illustrates the dilemma.

Conclusion: searching dialogue between the two belief systems is needed to resolve the potentially creative ambivalence. Some key issues are suggested as starting points for such dialogue.

KEY TERMS

bira: ceremonies to venerate ancestors

chief, chieftaincy

dare: traditional court presided over by the chief

mhondoro: lion ancestors; spirits of tribal founders

mudzimu (pl *midzimu*, *vadzimu*): ancestor

mukwerere, *mutoro*: annual ceremony to appeal to the ancestors for rain

mutorwa (pl *vatorwa*): alien, member of another tribe

svikiro (pl *masvikiro*): medium of a lion spirit with considerable influence in tribal politics

tsika: traditional customs, culture – in the traditional world-view equivalent to religion in the Western sense

uroyi: witchcraft (hence *muroyi* [pl *varoyi*], wizard or witch, sorcerer)

CHAPTER 1

Of paradox and opposition

When you write your book, what you should consider is that you have gone to the lions, and the lions have told you that they can't climb trees. Then you should not come up and say, I think I am the one holding that solution. What I am trying to say is, you have gone to the people who should be believing and acting in whatever line. But they are not. They don't even know. Like the mukwerere you were telling me about — quite honestly if you ask me what it is I'd probably tell you it's a rain-making ceremony. It ends there, because I've never attended one. And probably I will never attend one. But I do believe in it. I have a very strong belief. (Modern.07)¹

Inference: Lions can't climb trees — but they believe, strongly, in climbing trees?

1.1 INTRODUCTION

My interviewee was the manager of the Masvingo branch of a nation-wide company. Thoughtful, fair-minded, he believed that Shona tradition would die a natural death in due course "because culture is an evolution". Yet when I asked him whether he foresaw a day when Zimbabwe would be totally westernised, he exclaimed emphatically: "Ah, that one will never happen. There are so many things. Some of these things are ingrained in individuals to an extent that, though they may say they are not happening, behind closed doors things continue to happen."

I found a similar ambivalence in other interviews. Town-dwellers living in postcolonial times have accepted their dual reality, explaining and balancing it in different ways:

You will find that some of our guys, what can I call it, they pretend. When they see a white man there, they want to appear modern. But behind closed

¹ All interview references are to my computer file numbers. The interview questionnaires appear in the Appendix.

doors, they are the very people that are running around [following traditional ways]... Like when my kid got sick, I never hesitated to discuss it with these guys: "Guys, look, I'm an African. You can help me." That's how it happens. One time we want to belong here, one time we want to belong there. So we are put in a vortex between our own culture and the culture that has come, because we have become industrialised and urbanised. (Modern.01)

Why should we change our culture? Let's stick to our own culture which used to be ours. To me it's only that I do not know what to do. An Indian cannot say "I am Dutch", just because he is friendly with the Dutch. We cannot say we are Europeans because we have European things in our country. Can we follow the new way, running away from the way God created us? Those who know our tradition, they must practise it fully. I cannot say people should not do modern things which they obtained from their intelligence and from the whites. But we must not destroy our culture completely. (Modern.04)

Development is the work of the government. Ancestors do help in traditional things. Let's say people forward requests to the ancestors to lead them in a certain development project or anything they want. Of course the ancestors can do that. The government must arrange projects and ask help from the ancestors — that could work. (Modern.12)

Subsequent chapters focus mainly on the old Shona world on whose time-honoured precincts modernity may be seen as intruding. This is not so much out of romantic nostalgia for bygone times — although such nostalgia inevitably featured in many interviews. Two other factors influenced me.

The one is the history of the colonial era, which Holleman (1969: 5) defines as "the time when, under the banner of a superior Christian civilization, missionary and merchant, politician and prospector, statesman and settler, could move together into dark Africa, seizing a marvellous opportunity to serve both God and greed". Because of that history, and post-Independent Africa's grim encounter with neocolonialism, some cynicism about the virtues of modernity is understandable.

Secondly, many African thinkers have come to question the intrinsic quality of post-Enlightenment civilisation on philosophical grounds. Environmentalists, psychologists, critical scholars in other fields are doing the same in their own terms of reference — and not only in Africa. I share their scepticism and must clarify my position.

1.2 MODERNITY

Appiah (1992: 173) defines modernity, rather generally, as “the characteristic intellectual and social formation of the industrialised world”. Elsewhere (eg Appiah 1992: 38f) he rightly objects to a similar generalisation of “African” thought. In this dissertation I have been equally guilty of generalisation, using terms like “Western” and “modern” as though they describe homogeneous, static phenomena. The particular brand of British and South African colonial culture to which Zimbabwe was subjected was of diverse origin, internally contradictory and evolving. (The same applies to what I have called the Shona or “traditional” world-view.) I have used these terms for convenience only, fully acknowledging their inadequacy.

The Enlightenment, the birth of what is known as modernity, was the outcome of a startling irruption of human creativity, triggered by discoveries that shattered the cosmology of pre-Renaissance Europeans. Such as that the earth is round, not flat. And that it is not the centre of the universe but a satellite in a solar system, itself part of a larger galaxy situated in an infinite but fully material cosmos. As these thoughts sank in they inevitably transformed human consciousness. Materialism eroded belief in metaphysical causation. Infinity became a challenge to human instruments of measurement. Once supported by this new logic, empiricism — as old as humankind — turned into positivism.

In explaining empirical reality impersonal facts and laws — à la Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte — took the place of more or less anthropomorphic metaphysical causes. Emancipated from such “superstitions”, human reason proceeded to annex every domain of knowledge and activity and to reshape social, political, industrial and economic realities in its own image. In the process it invaded and pervaded people’s domestic lives, their private minds, their beliefs. In 1600 Shakespeare’s Hamlet could still cry out in anguished wholeness, “To be or not to be...” A few years later René Descartes concluded with dismal finality, “I think,

therefore I am." Descartes's dictum was a first link in a chain of reductions: *being*, human existence, was reduced to rationality. Since then one new theoretical school after another has proceeded to reduce existence to its own specialism, be it natural selection, historical process, modes of production, market forces, meaning or communication. (See Van Niekerk 1995.)

One result was to separate and then subordinate the once tyrannical church to the emergent nation state. The physical world would henceforth be regulated by forces of reason. Metaphysics, speculation, "superstition" became a backwater for philosophers and theologians; a resource for the arts; a harmless pastime for a politically and economically ineffectual lunatic fringe. This was the message of the American and French revolutionary credos (that of the Russian revolution was even more arbitrary), and its impact is observable in most modern constitutions and societies — their solutions and dissolutions. As Appiah (1992: 186) puts it, "If God's answer is sought to any questions of a technical character it is to those questions that have remained recalcitrant to scientific management — questions about one's relations with others, and questions that could not even in principle be addressed by science — questions of value."

Reason coupled with positivist science have made a formidable team. Discoveries triggered technologies that became ever more sophisticated, powerful and pervasive, all aimed at a longer, more agreeable, less arduous life on a planet whose natural resources and forces human ingenuity increasingly managed to subdue, harness and exploit. But along with the confidence, if not hubris, this bred came a growing disillusionment. Some date its onset to the outbreak of World War I in August 1914:

The sense of power over the material universe with which modern man emerged... from the Middle Ages, changed on that date into its opposite: a sense of weakness and dereliction before the whirlwind that man is able to unleash but not control. ... This awareness is a far cry from that sense of intoxication with which the Renaissance and the Enlightenment sought to banish the darkness of the Middle Ages and to turn their energies confidently to the conquest of nature; a far cry from early Protestantism's conviction of the sincerity of its own conscience and the absolute value of its secular ethic;

a far cry from the sense of triumph with which capitalism pointed to the material prosperity of bourgeois civilization as its justification and end (Barrett 1967: 28).

Barrett points out that while medieval thinkers applied a very thorough rationality of their own, it operated conservatively within a framework of faith and assent to dogma, "altogether different from the untrammelled use later thinkers made of human reason, applying it like an acid solvent to all things human and divine" (Barrett 1967: 23).

Barrett, an existentialist philosopher, was writing in the 1960s. Since then there has been a reaction. Reason is searching for ways out of, ways through, even ways of transcending its self-created labyrinth. Most of these take the form of a swing away from positivism. Richard Harvey Brown (1989: 33) enumerates several modern philosophic schools which, "rather than seeking to eliminate 'appearance' in favor of 'objective' representations, ... offer remarkable methodological tools for probing the duality itself".

It seems, then, that we have various options. We can, for example, lapse into gloomy cynicism; or hoist a new banner and carry on the fight; or join the rat-race; or simply proceed unreflectively paying our debts and raising a family as best we can. Nonetheless we are inescapably part of a world in which the currency of words like "secularisation" and "specialisation" reflects the fragmentation and reduction that are placing increasing stress on the wholeness of human life and of nature. Powerful symbols that integrate cosmologies, equivalent to the Shona symbols of blood and soil that I identified in my study, have been reduced by modern theologians to rational theory with metaphysical overtones. In practice such religion functions more or less as BandAid to assist psychologists and others in holding together a splintered image of reality. This image, propagated as enlightened civilisation by colonisers, missionaries and their successors, is what many Africans are bowing to.

Perhaps I am not being sufficiently appreciative of the undoubted benefits of modernity. These words are being written on an electronic word processor. My fieldwork was facilitated by a sturdy diesel vehicle, a tape-recorder and antimalaria drugs. The benefits of modernity are self-evident and are sufficiently advertised on the media. On the other hand I observed among modern Zimbabweans a tendency to accept these, uncritically, as part of an

unexamined package deal offered by all manner of international agencies on terms that may be traced back, with very little effort, to the reductionist, rationalist mentality of the Enlightenment.

1.3 SHONA TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND MODERNITY

But even if we agreed that all our old beliefs were superstitions, we should need principles to guide our choices of new ones... We cannot avoid the issue of whether it is possible to adopt adversarial, individualistic cognitive styles and keep, as we might want to, accommodative, communitarian morals (Appiah 1992: 219).

Appiah here touches on a crucial aspect of my problem. I do not think even a tentative solution can be put forward at this stage: it strikes me as the kind of issue that must be resolved, thoughtfully, in the living and doing of successive generations of Africans. But it is abundantly evident in Zimbabwe today, and elsewhere on the continent too, that adversarial, individualistic and, one might add, compartmentalised cognitive styles conflict with accommodative, communitarian and, one might add, integral ways of doing and living. Wole Soyinka (1990: 135-136; my italics) makes the same point, while broadening its focus, with this comment on Jean-Paul Sartre's critical response to *négritude*:

[H]e rightly assumed that any movement founded on an antithesis which responded to the Cartesian 'I think, therefore I am' with 'I feel, therefore I am' must be subject to dialectical determinism which made all those who 'are' obedient to laws formulated on the European historical experience. How was he to know, if the proponents of the universal vision of Negritude themselves did not, that the African world *did not and need not share the history of civilisations trapped in political Manicheisms*? The principle of definition in the African world is far more circumspect, and constantly avoids the substitution of the temporal or partial function or quality for the essence of an active or inert sociopolitical totality.

One could argue that this notion of an essential "sociopolitical totality" is no less reductionist than the much debunked Cartesian and other modern premisses. In the

chapters that follow I attempt to show (as Soyinka does in his analyses of Yoruba belief) that this totality is complex and differentiated, its symbols and myths reflecting and regulating the existential realities of agrarian, precolonial life and society, also adapting to interaction and change with remarkable flexibility and assimilative openness. What European modernity did, with a supreme lack of differentiation and self-criticism, was to declare the totality invalid. Thus what could have been evolutionary interaction turned into confrontation. If colonial administrations had realised this, the whole colonial era might have been more constructive and less traumatic all round. It is a point that many development agencies today might do well to take.²

Perhaps the most obvious discord is also the most radical. The form of modern education — rather than its actual content — often results in a scepticism that tends to belittle implicit belief in spirit beings. Post-Enlightenment Christianity discovered this to its cost and made the kind of compromises that Appiah (1992: 185) describes as a demythologising tendency, aimed at making traditional religious conceptions intellectually palatable, or at any rate less embarrassing. The same dilemma is faced by many educated Shona. A senior government official told me:

The problem with some of us, when we adopt foreign ways, we become more foreign than what we are. ... The situation in Zimbabwe is that we are heavily associated with the spiritual world. Whilst here [in Harare] I would not demonstrate that I am heavily associated with my *midzimu*. But when I go home I don't have to distance myself from my actual fathers.
(Government.02)

This man spoke frankly. Others were less open but hinted at something similar. Only two persons I met during my two years in Zimbabwe flatly rejected the existence of *vadzimu*, and one of them insisted that he still respected the chiefs.

As mentioned above, I attribute this effect of modern education not so much to the subject matter taught as to the positivist nature of school education and much of university tuition

² This is borne out by the success of Professor Daneel's ecological activities, based on indigenous belief, in southern Zimbabwe (see Daneel 1995).

as well — the desire to lay down "not only explanatory laws to which everyone must agree, but laws that assume a purely material world and deny all subjective reality, including even that of the theorist" (Brown 1989: 33). It will take some time before curricula and textbooks catch up (a tacit admission of defeat, one might say) with the current drift away from positivism; before a new generation of teachers and students emerges that will candidly question the once unimpeachable status of "positive fact" and the "objectivity" of science. Until that happens education will continue to alienate people from their spiritual reality in an odd mirror image of Marxian theory. At the same time one must not ignore the point made by Wole Soyinka, cited by Kwame Appiah (1992: 8; my italics), namely that "the experience of the vast majority of ... citizens of Europe's African colonies was one of an *essentially shallow penetration by the coloniser*". This was patently demonstrated in the vast majority of my interviews.

A second area of conflict has to do with the nature of the modern state. I cite Montesquieu's familiar definition, being the one on which most of independent Africa's constitutions are modelled:

In every state there are three kinds of power — the legislative power; the executive power with regard to matters under the law of nations; and the executive power with regard to matters under civil law... All would be lost if the same man, or the same body of leading men or of the nobility or of the people exercised all three powers, to make the laws, to carry out public decisions and to judge crimes or disputes among individuals... (Rowen 1963: 123-124).

In terms of this division of powers, so basic to the modern concept of democracy, even the purely political rule of chiefs, in conjunction with their *machinda* (kraalheads and wardheads, sometimes blood relatives), would be suspect. If in addition to the three powers identified by Montesquieu, "the same man, or the same body of leading men" were to exercise moral and religious authority, and moreover represent metaphysical power in the land of the living, then all would indeed be lost.

In terms of the traditional Shona world-view, the question does not arise. It is answered a priori by the assumption that if the *vadzimu* are pleased the good things of life, including justice and such freedoms as are legitimate, will be forthcoming. The chief is the father, representing earlier fathers, right back to the first progenitor of the tribe. They are the ones who guide him through their mediums, the *masvikiro*. His children may turn to him in any exigency and he must demonstrate his concern for their collective good, with due regard to ancestral rules and sanctions: "It is not for me to make people fear me. My task is to balance things in my area." (Chiefs.01M)

Obviously every system has its shortcomings and is open to abuse. I am not trying to demonstrate the superiority of either of the two systems referred to here. I am merely demonstrating the difference, which leads me to ask: can they communicate, cooperate? Can they, in the long term, *coexist* in the same body politic?

Zimbabwe has been involved in foreign trade for half a millennium and more. By now it is irreversibly part of the world economy, which has become far more complex and interdependent than those long ago Arab and Portuguese traders could ever have foreseen, although the nature of the dependencies may not have changed all that much. The traditional culture with its inherent tribalism may well be said to lack the cohesiveness and sophistication needed for participation in such a system. The president of the Chiefs' Council in Parliament responded thus to this conundrum:

If you take a chief from the 19th century and compare him with a chief from the 20th century, surely one would see the difference and that there is no difficulty in bringing up this chief to go with development... If any development is to succeed and we leave the chiefs out, leave them as custodians of the ancestral spirits, then we have lost a lot. Because the people still believe the chief has got power over his people. So in order for development to move quickly, chiefs must be involved. And they must be taught the way government runs its affairs. (Chiefs.02G)

Can the compromise that Chief Mangwende proposes be put into practice? And if it happens, will the chiefs be able to integrate this new involvement without distancing themselves from the soil altogether?

Yet another area of conflict between the traditional and the modern world-view is the status of women. Whereas the motivation behind Zimbabwe's liberation struggle was, I was repeatedly assured, nationalist rather than Marxist, those who provided the wherewithal for the struggle were firmly committed to the modern credo of equal rights for all human beings — including women. The Zimbabwean civil code allows for this and formal modern education for both genders has escalated dramatically since Independence. At the time of writing there are four female ministers of state, 15 female members of parliament and one female representative to the United Nations. Yet customary law, in terms of which widows can be inherited and children of divorced couples automatically go to the father, is still recognised and operates in primary courts (including the recently reinstated chiefs' courts) throughout the country, alongside the Roman-Dutch code of the higher courts.

I don't think the ancestors are the only ones that are experiencing difficulties in these areas. For the purposes of this study, however, the question is: can the traditional symbols of blood and soil provide a paradigm that will help resolve such conflicts? Are these symbols resilient, fecund enough to interpret the dilemma of their modern children? Can the Shona contrive a creative response — determining what is bathwater, conserving the baby? Or must they inevitably turn, as modernisation and urbanisation whittle down the fabric of agrarian society, to some nonindigenous paradigm?

One could ask the question the other way round. Considering modernity's long road of alienation from metaphysical causes and what it has done to shape human consciousness, will modern educated Shona be *able* to "go back" authentically to consult spirit beings whose very existence is questioned by the voices of their education? Appiah (1992: 203) points out the "extent to which modernity celebrates cognitive distance from our predecessors, while the traditional world celebrates continuity". Is the distance becoming too great for human belief to span?

The quotations at the beginning of this chapter present some modern responses to this question. The paradox, if not opposition, is patent. It needs to be resolved, not by non-Shona scholars and experts in whatever field, but by the heirs to the blood and the soil that are in the balance as the social order changes.

In contrast to the quotations at the beginning of this chapter, the following observation by a peasant interviewee, while no less paradoxical, is strikingly less equivocal, possibly because of its lack of anthropocentrism:

Snakes, lions, people, *njuzu*, cattle and everything on earth are from God. We cannot judge who is nearer God ... Snakes are enemies but we are located in the same area. A snake says, "This is my father's area" and bites a person. The person will die so that he will never come back to the snake's father's area. A person kills snakes, saying, "This is my father's area, I don't want to see you in this area." God never said who is the greatest and the youngest on earth, nor who is the closest to him. We are all creatures of God. (Theol.14T)

Inference: All creatures are equal but fathers are more equal than others.

1.4 CONCLUSION

Paradox and opposition, then, are where I start from. On the one hand there is the old Shona culture, rich in symbol and myth, capable of interpreting reality and sustaining faith; its spirits still speaking through the mouths of the living, demanding respect. On the other hand there is the modern culture of the Western world, rich in material goods and artifacts, assertive about its own religious and scientific myths, scornful of the myths of Africa. What I set out to explore was the relative strength and adequacy of these two cultures in the experience of modern Shona people, and the chances of their joining forces, of merging their different resources in a variegated symbiotic culture, a new synthesis of matter and spirit.

What I found were many possibilities — more or less open like the minds of people, and as unpredictable. Examining and weighing these possibilities is a responsibility for the people and the authorities of Zimbabwe to shoulder or to shirk. The limited value of this dissertation is to make that point.

I make no pretence of "objectivity". Everything I saw and learned was filtered through my own experience and interpreted in terms of my own conceptual framework. The best I can do, as far as this is humanly possible, is to maintain a categorial openness that leaves

everything I was socialised to challenged, and to challenge the Shona tradition I have studied inasmuch as I have managed to understand it. In making this attempt I remain a modern person, a product of the postwar era with all its disillusionments and temptations to scepticism. On the other hand, as a product of my own troubled society and its painful history, I run a risk of romanticising Shona traditional culture, which does not seem to doubt its own credentials to the same extent that mine does. I shall do my best to treat that culture, and the many Zimbabweans who helped me gain access to it, with the realism and respect they deserve.

Thus I approach the lions, the *mhondoro*. I trust they will not be offended.

CHAPTER 2

Of method and madness

Cognitive aesthetics ... has four principal advantages. First, it permits us to move beyond copy theories of truth in both art and science. Second, it provides a framework within which the pioneering artist and the pioneering scientist are both seen as involved in essentially the same activity: making paradigms through which experience becomes intelligible. These two advantages give birth to a third and fourth; for if art and science are seen to have an essential affinity, then the possibility is opened for a fusion of the two principal ideals of ... knowledge: the scientific or positivist one, stressing logical deductions and controlled research, and the artistic or intuitive one, stressing insights and subjective understanding. Finally, insofar as such a fusion is possible, cognitive aesthetics provides a source of metacategories for assessing ... theory from any methodological perspective. ... One implication of such an aesthetic view is that no given symbol system — whether it be astrology, baroque iconography, or quantum physics — has ontological priority over any other. All are equally "real" (Brown 1989: 2).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Differences in approach often make intellectual arguments sound like colour blind people haranguing each other about the nature of green, brown and beige. Given inner consistency, you can concede any of the points of view — provided you concede the person's idiosyncratic perception of the colours. To do so, genuinely and respectfully, is essential for discourse on any topic, particularly if it is about people's metaphysical realities.

These realities are compounded of every factor that shapes human life on earth: natural and socioeconomic forces in the environment, historical inheritance, interpersonal relations, the baffling complexity of the individual psyche that interprets all these in a personal frame of reference.

Communication between different frames of reference depends on consensus. Culture is a product of that consensus and is sustained by diverse myths — what Brown calls "symbol

systems" — that interpret and articulate different aspects of a shared reality. These interpretive myths (and in this context sciences and religions, to mention only two kinds of cultural consensus, are equally mythical) have to encompass the generality of the consensus, while still satisfying the particularity of the piecemeal individual perceptions of which the whole is composed. If they don't, they cease to function and we look for new myths. What Krüger (1995: 102) says about religious myths applies equally to the broader cultural context I am referring to:

Since myths are the dreams of humankind, revealing the "true" world, they are also powerful motivating forces that may set loose tremendous revolutionary energies for changing states of affairs that are perceived to be at odds with the "real, true" world. ... Myths move with time. As the now-here changes, the whole pattern surrounding it changes. ... Myths die when their inner force is spent, and they are replaced by others more capable of serving the religious needs of a new epoch.

This was the kind of cognitive aesthetic luggage I set off with. My interest in black African beliefs has grown over time. I lived in Lesotho for more than six years, three of them teaching at a remote mission school. There, in the foothills of the Malutis, the interaction between belief systems was a living reality in the minds of my pupils, in life at the mission and in the adjacent village. I was an Anglican then and occasionally attended services at the mission church. The familiar liturgy sounded quite foreign as I tried to listen through the ears of the people around me. The symbols and myths undergirding the eucharist were tantalisingly new from this angle of understanding. The very wafer and wine tasted different.

This awareness stayed with me after my return to South Africa. It was 1976, Soweto was in ferment. The reverberations were felt throughout the country — even in the unreal bubble of white Pretoria society. I came to know a woman in Johannesburg, a singer and actress starring in a show that was an international hit at the time. One evening when we were discussing African beliefs and custom she suggested that I travel with her to Botswana: she had had dreams in which her grandmother was summoning her home. Before we could arrange the trip she went on tour to America. I did not see her again for several months and by then she no longer seemed interested in our journey. But she did mention, in

passing, that the grandmother whom I thought we'd be visiting had been dead many years. Thus the ancestors first entered my world.

2.2 ZIMBABWE

In January 1991, when I was on holiday in Masvingo, Professor Daneel introduced me to vaZarira, former president of the traditionalist branch of ZIRRCON.³ She is the medium of two powerful Duma spirits, an enthusiastic ecologist and a strong, dramatic personality. We struck up a friendship and she and her husband came to visit me in Pretoria in the course of that year. I was completing an honours degree in Religious Studies and planning a master's study which would help clarify the cross-cultural questions that had been intriguing me increasingly over the years. The South African scene at that stage was so highly politicised that a study of my kind would have produced very distorted results. Professor Daneel suggested that I do the field research in Zimbabwe and generously offered to introduce me to his extensive network of contacts in Masvingo Province. Then vaZarira asked me to write "her book". It seemed a fascinating prospect: I would live at her homestead and learn the ways of the *masvikiro* at first hand. I would obviously cross-check with other mediums and sources, but my basic project would be a case study of her.

So, in February 1992, I moved to Masvingo. I rented a flat in town where I could use my computer, although my actual home was to be at vaZarira's place some 14 kilometres east of Masvingo. Soon afterwards, however, vaZarira parted ways with ZIRRCON and, because of the circumstances in which it happened, I severed the connection with her. By that time I had met chief Murinye, whose medium she was, and had attended ceremonies at his homestead. This canny, illiterate old man, who had been chief of his particular Duma subdynasty for more than 20 years, adopted me. Throughout my two years in Zimbabwe he was a trusted friend and a solid point of reference for the information I collected elsewhere.

Gradually I met other chiefs and commoners and started forming the picture outlined in the chapters that follow. Apart from vaMurinye, my most regular contacts were chiefs Mabika and Mazungunye (also Duma), although all the chiefs whom I met, and their people, were

³ The Zimbabwe Institute for Religious Research and Conservation, which Prof Daneel founded in the 1980s to channel both traditionalists' and indigenous Christian churches' religious motivation into ecological conservation.

generous with their time and hospitality. They welcomed my interest in their culture. They knew that the old Shona world was in crisis and expressed their resentment openly. One after another my informants ascribed the horrendous drought that was devastating the country to neglect and contempt of the *mhondoro* who had guided Zimbabwe to independence, only to be abandoned by the modern government once the war had been won.

I gained access to the other side of the story, that of ZANU-PF and the government, through another person that Professor Daneel introduced me to. My temporary residence permit had become entangled in red tape and our local member of parliament, Comrade Dzikamai Mavhaire, moved mountains to sort out the problems. Week after week I travelled with him to Harare and, in between his parliamentary duties, he tirelessly pursued the matter until it was resolved. By that time we had become staunch friends. A veteran politician and fervent patriot, keenly perceptive, forthright to the point of bluntness and profoundly knowledgeable about his people and his country, he made it his business to get me and keep me informed. He opened doors for me to which I would never have had access otherwise and also placed my information in perspective — a perspective I often challenged in heated arguments, but without which I would never have gained the understanding I did in the two years at my disposal. It was he, too, who drew my attention to the Charumbira chieftaincy dispute that carries the weight of the argument in chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Then there was my supervisor, Professor Daneel himself. I was fortunate that he was on sabbatical during my first year in Zimbabwe, and spent most of his ordinary leave there during 1993. Thus I could continually check my impressions and ideas with him and draw on his intimate knowledge of the scene. I also had the benefit of his critical assessment of my sometimes wayward empirical method.

Thus, through fluke and fortune, my study crystallised organically from interaction: questions asked, answers received, living shared. The questions changed as I proceeded — changed unrecognisably from my long ago musings in the Malutis. In the end, though I had learnt much and was infinitely richer, only one thing seemed sure: some sort of symbiosis of modernity and Shona culture is emerging day by day from the decisions, the actions, the thoughts of people. No theory or prediction can do justice to that volatile, breathing reality.

I do not see this as an admission of defeat. I was collecting what social scientists call data. Somehow I had to make sense of these. Pirsig (1992: 70) is scathing about field anthropologists' refusal to theorise from empirical data:

What many were trying to do, evidently, was get out of all these metaphysical quarrels by condemning all theory, by agreeing not to even *talk* about such theoretical reductionist things as what savages do in general. They restricted themselves to what their particular savage happened to do on Wednesday. That was scientifically safe all right — and scientifically useless... Data without generalization is just gossip.

One can argue with that. Many statements made on death beds, in love beds, in child beds cannot, at any rate need not, be generalised. And they are not gossip. Still, inasmuch as academic work can strive to be genuine, he has a point. In my search for understanding of Shona traditional thought I eventually identified two key symbols: blood and soil. They helped me not only to clarify the many-tiered, interwoven social relations around me, but also to discern some pattern in people's responses to modernity. In that sense, my two symbols represent a theory. But they remain aesthetic, ephemerally effective, a torch beam illuminating discrete things in the world around me. They do not profess to constitute a comprehensive model, with what Wole Soyinka (1990: 137) describes as "the propagandistic knack of turning the unprovable into an authoritative concept, indoctrinating society into the acceptance of a single, simple criterion as governing any number of human acts".

Krüger (1995: 78) sums it up:

Explanation has to do with the discovery ... of relations between factors. These need not be of a one-to-one causal nature, they need not be expressed in terms of "laws", or of mathematical or formal logical symbols. As far as religion is concerned, we want to see how previously unrelated odds and ends hang together. Then we understand.

The understanding, too, is provisional.

2.3 IN THE FIELD

My first concern, once my residence permit had been sorted out, was to find an interpreter. There was no way I could learn a language as intricate as Shona for more than utilitarian purposes in the time at my disposal. Yet I needed desperately to understand the most subtle nuances of people's communication about things that are at best often unsayable. Fifteen years as a professional translator had left me hypersensitive to the distortions that any rendering in another language introduces. Lucky as I was in the assistant I found, there is no doubt that my ignorance of the vernacular remained a real handicap throughout my study.

I repeat, I was lucky. After one false start I met Raviro Mutonga.⁴ She had only O-levels at the time and her English was far from perfect. But even during our first interview her quick, inquiring mind grasped what I was after and her own curiosity was fired. A Catholic by conversion, she had been deeply influenced by a staunchly traditionalist grandfather and a childhood steeped in the myths and customs of her people. Indeed, in many ways she embodied the question both of us proceeded to probe. At the same time we were sisters, confidantes, fellow sleuths; sharing jokes, frustrations, insights, puzzlement. She guided me through my naivete and her sharply critical intelligence remained invaluable throughout. She eagerly pursued every new lead, sometimes walking many kilometres to remote homesteads where, she had been told, we might strike gold. Her personal charm, humility and sense of humour made her an excellent interviewer. I have no doubt that the information she obtained on solo trips was more authentic than what I, a white woman spreading Hawthorne effects wherever I moved, could have found for myself.

Our approach was two-pronged from the outset — we referred to the "modern" and the "traditional" sides. On the modern side the lingua franca was English and I was on relatively familiar ground. I did most of this work on my own, recording and transcribing the interviews myself. My informants were mainly central and local government officials, selected because of their specialist knowledge. Chief Mangwende, president of the Chiefs'

⁴ I was introduced to her by Leonard Gono, field director of ZIRRCO and one of Prof Daneel's most trusted adjutants. He died in 1994 in the prime of a tirelessly busy, constructive life. He had a superb nose for useful information and often directed Raviro and me to new sources that he came across in the course of his work. He, and the rest of the ZIRRCO team, provided companionship, a sounding board, advice and healthy criticism.

Council in Parliament, straddled the two worlds. I met him in the House of Parliament in Harare and had three illuminating discussions with him.

Towards the end of my study Raviro and I conducted a series of 13 interviews with employees at businesses in Masvingo town. The choice was random: I simply went from one company to another and, depending on management, we were given access to staff. I obtained the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and had two groups of pupils at different high schools (one elitist, the other not) respond on paper to a questionnaire. I also needed to see to what extent our angle of inquiry had skewed the information. So we compiled another questionnaire: instead of announcing our interest in Shona traditional custom at the outset, we proceeded neutrally and only obliquely tested people's attitudes to tradition. Since we were running out of time we could not pursue this line very far, but the eight interviews collected helped to balance my overall impression. (The various questionnaires are reproduced in the Appendix to this dissertation.)

On the traditional side we operated in two ways. On visits to chiefs we always went together, sometimes accompanied by members of Professor Daneel's team. Although I always had some object in mind with each visit, the interviews were unstructured and usually digressed widely and fruitfully from my original topic. Chiefs Mabika and Mazungunye both spoke English; the others did not. Raviro would translate my question, record the full answer and give me a résumé to guide my next question. Often she contributed questions of her own to clarify an issue. After the chiefs' courts resumed functioning in mid-1993 chiefs Murinye and Mazungunye also allowed us to attend sessions and record the proceedings.

On our return to town Raviro would transcribe and translate the tapes in rough drafts, which I would edit as I keyed them into my computer. Our personal empathy and my experience as a translator helped greatly: I interpreted what we called "Shona English" and sensed when a translation was off-key. We would discuss each problem until we were both satisfied that I understood properly. As our working method evolved, Raviro would simply leave a phrase or sentence in Shona if she could not render it to her satisfaction and then explain to me, with examples and vivid elaboration, what it meant. Finally she would check my version and point out anything that still worried her. Thus, while our procedure was less than ideal, we took great pains to keep errors to a minimum.

Tape-recorded interviews with commoners were treated in the same way. The difference was that the majority of these were conducted by Raviro alone, usually when I was busy exploring the "modern side" or doing other work. For this purpose she used a series of questionnaires that became more and more focused as we proceeded and issues clarified. As is evident in the Appendix, the first one was very rudimentary, exploring the ABC of Shona religious terminology and idiom. On the basis of the responses we eliminated questions that did not "work" and introduced new ones; indirect questions, for instance, about the liberation war and post-Independence experience, attitudes to chiefs and counsellors. From the answers I learned, little by little, how traditional people experience the modern world in which they are living. Rather obstinately, I persisted with questions about things like totems and the mysterious Guruuswa that continued to haunt me — and to which I very rarely got anything better than, "I was told so, I know no more than that."

The interviews were only semistructured, for Raviro followed her own nose in order to extract maximum information; as a result I had the full benefit of her astuteness and familiarity with Shona culture. Her only instruction was to try where possible to maintain some balance between male and female interviewees, older and younger people, and town-dwellers and villagers. Sometimes she was referred to somebody who was particularly versed in traditional lore, but on the whole she found her interviewees at random. In this way, albeit using different questionnaires, we collected 76 interviews: 46 with villagers, 29 with town dwellers and 10 with farmers in resettlement areas. There were also eight interviews that we called "History", but only one of these provided really relevant information so we abandoned that line of inquiry.

Spirit possession posed a challenge. Although I witnessed *masvikiro* and other mediums in trance on various occasions, I needed more if I was to grasp this crucial facet of Shona metaphysical reality at all. It struck me that, for an outsider, a *n'anga* would probably be the most accessible avenue. From one of her trips to Zaka in southern Masvingo Province in August 1992, Raviro brought back an interview with a traditional healer who had really impressed her. After studying it, I agreed and decided it warranted follow-up. I planned to visit him as a patient to try and reduce the Hawthorne effect that emanated from the colour of my skin. I did not pay that visit till April 1993. By then I had real cause to consult him: for several months I had been suffering from giddy spells, which grew steadily worse until one day I blacked out completely. I saw a local doctor who, in stolid scientific fashion,

proceeded to test every secretion and body fluid that could be tested and found nothing wrong. When this happens, I had often been told, people suspect a "traditional" cause and a *n'anga* or Independent Church prophet is the only solution. So Raviro and I set off for Zaka.

After a long walk through autumn woods we reached his homestead. He chatted amiably, a good-looking, unassuming young man. I enquired whether his spirits could also help a white person. He said I was just another human being and his spirits help all people. He sent his pretty younger wife to prepare whatever was needed for the session. When Raviro wanted to tell him what I'd come about, he stopped her and said there was no point telling him: the spirits (he was possessed by three) already knew and he was only the mouthpiece. The séance was a novel experience for me — hitherto I had observed spirit possession from a safe distance — and Raviro was amused by the way I jumped every time the spirit burped or roared. The diagnosis was not dramatic but touching in its simple directness. I was given some medicine to keep bad spirits at bay: a small, neatly sewn, sausage-shaped sachet called a *gona* which I had to keep on my person at all times and never allow anybody else to handle. The contrast with "Three times a day after meals" and "Keep out of the reach of children" was thought-provoking.

The next morning I woke up with a clear head for the first time in months and never had a recurrence of the giddiness. I felt no need to analyse or pursue the experience and have had no further dealings with *n'anga* since that day. The visit simply affirmed the reality of what I was studying and left me feeling confident and serene.

Because of the drought *mikwerere* (also called *mitoro*) were much talked about and I attended two of these ceremonies, when tribal *mhondoro* (and the supreme God too, according to Daneel 1994) are called upon to relieve their children's suffering. The most awesome appeals, however, are made at the major rain shrines where humans approach the supreme God directly via a single medium. In the south the two major historical rain cults are those of Matonjeni in the Matopos and, to a much lesser extent these days, Musikavanhu near Chipinge in the east. I was fortunate enough to visit the shrines of both these cults (see chs 3 and 5). I owe the trip to Matonjeni to Professor Daneel, whose *The God of the Matopo hills* (1970) is still a classic on the subject. Chief Mabika introduced me to the

present chief Musikavanhu, and we visited him twice. Indeed, I thought of incorporating a study of that cult in my project but reluctantly gave up the idea: both the distance to the chief's home on the Mozambican border and the limited length of this dissertation made it impracticable.⁵ Yet in both instances first-hand acquaintance enriched my understanding.

We did conduct a case study of the Charumbira chieftaincy in Masvingo district. I obtained the official history of the tribe from the National Archives in Harare; I kept in touch with the District Administration official dealing with the case; we interviewed spokespeople of the rival houses, the tribal elders, friends and acquaintances of the last chief Charumbira (he died in 1989) and, of course, his son who was acting chief at the time. At one stage we were suspected of spying for the lawyers of one of the factions and Raviro, in the course of a spot-check of tribespeople's views on the late chief's legitimacy, narrowly escaped being manhandled by an irate member of another house — which did not quell her enthusiasm in the least!

My study was manifestly qualitative. Sometimes, when I suspected myself of jumping to conclusions, I conducted what Raviro called a "census", such as the one mentioned above. Another was a purely quantitative minisurvey of a mixed town-rural random sample to find out which traditional ceremonies respondents had attended in their lives, how often and how recently. I also analysed and categorised the responses in our semistructured interviews from a quantitative point of view. The results of these limited exercises were useful to discipline my thinking. But they were not what my thinking was about, nor do they feature prominently in the picture I present here.

It was hard work and we had a lot of fun. During the last few months I marvelled at the way new information was beginning to fit into a framework which was emerging more and more clearly, like the outlines of trees through mist that evaporates as the sun rises higher.

⁵ Rennie (1973) wrote a PhD thesis on the subject. His finding that the cult is extinct and that the chieftaincy has become totally "secularised" struck me as something of a sweeping statement. When I showed chief Musikavanhu (a former high school headmaster and an MP) Rennie's article in Schoffeleers (1978), he confirmed my impression.

2.3.1 Limitations

Certain limitations, notably the fact that I do not speak Shona, are obvious from the description of my working method. Others are implicit in any qualitative method, as quantitative scholars unfailingly point out. Yet others have to do with the specific circumstances in which my study was conducted.

Firstly, I lived in Masvingo Province, where most of my information was collected, for only two years. Thus my acquaintance with Shona culture, warm and intimate as it was, was comparatively brief. It occurred, moreover, at a specific point in Zimbabwean history and I have to be cautious about drawing generalised conclusions. One weakness of David Lan's excellent study (Lan 1985), for instance, is that he made somewhat arbitrary inferences on the basis of his findings in the early 1980s, when the status of chiefs and mediums respectively was greatly skewed in the immediate aftermath of the liberation war.

In my case, apart from evolutionary changes over more than a decade of independence and the host of variables impinging on every historical situation, there are two major factors that could have distorted the picture. The one is the transition from socialism to what is officially described as a "liberalised economy", following the collapse of the Berlin wall, the "capitalist revolution" in Europe and the more or less radical economic and political impact this is having all over the globe. In Zimbabwe, as in many other developing countries, one effect has been the introduction of ESAP (the controversial economic and structural adjustment programme which is a condition for IMF aid) and a drastic rise in cost of living as various subsidies are curtailed or withdrawn. This, coupled with massive unemployment, is causing great material hardship and disillusionment, which President Mugabe's government has to deal with as best it can. The second factor, reinforcing the effects of the first, was the drought which devastated the continent in the early 1990s. Because rain has always been a key barometer of good relations with God and the spirits in the traditional culture, the acute awareness of ancestral power that I encountered everywhere may have been exaggerated.

2.4 STRUCTURE

Chapter 1 gives a thumbnail sketch of the two forces meeting in African societies: modernity and, in this case, Shona tradition. I indicate my approach to both and isolate a few areas of interaction and conflict.

In this chapter I have described my approach to this study and the way I conducted it, acknowledging both my own limitations and those inherent in any geographically and historically confined investigation.

Chapter 3 deals with the "theology" and practice of Shona traditional religion as I understand it, including the widespread and widely accepted phenomenon of spirit possession. I also attempt to indicate, very briefly, the relation between traditional belief and Christianity.

Chapter 4 explores the two cardinal symbols mentioned above in greater detail: how they were clarified to me, both indirectly and directly, and why I came to regard them as the twin pillars supporting the whole complex of beliefs, rituals and roles that I observed in traditional society. It concludes with a brief case study of a modern *svikiro*, whose anomalous position in tribal society demonstrates both the dilemma of any medium who fails to secure public recognition and, in a thought-provoking way, the crisis of traditional belief in historical context.

Chapter 5 deals with tribes and tribalism as the antithesis to the modern centralised state. I focus on two major tribes in southern Shona history: the Rozvi and, more especially, the Duma, who dominated the area in which I worked for over a century. Here I try to integrate information drawn from secondary historical sources with my own findings among the chiefs and other people that I interviewed. I also deal briefly with the two main rain cults in the area, those of Matonjeni and Musikavanhu.

Chapter 6 has to do with the relationship between chiefs, who embody traditional authority, and the modern state, both colonial and post-Independence. Most of the chapter is devoted to a case study of the (non-Duma) Charumbira chieftaincy in Masvingo district. Because of the historical background and modern complications bedeviling the succession dispute in

this chiefdom, as well as the remarkable personalities involved, it vividly depicts the dynamics of the forces analysed in the previous chapters. It also illustrates the complex succession system of the Shona which, while it serves to perpetuate an African style of democracy within a system of hereditary rule, can give rise to bitter disputes and rivalry. In conclusion I deal, very cursorily, with some cardinal areas of conflict between chiefs and modern government.

My final chapter reiterates many of the points raised in chapter 1, amplified with allusions to the ground covered in the intervening chapters. The conclusion is that it is imperative that certain considered choices be made and that the emerging symbiosis of the two cultures coexisting in Zimbabwe be subjected to conscious reflection. Only thus will strategies be devised to deal creatively with flux.

2.4 CONCLUSION

My picture, I know, is incomplete. Stringent positivists could well call it flimsy and fanciful. Black and white Africans, academic or otherwise, will criticise it from other angles, I trust. The point is that not many people have attempted to compile such a picture at all: it was the paucity of written sources on the subject that prompted my study in the first place. I am grateful for the books I did find and the painstaking work of scholars who have spent far more time in the field than I have. Yet without my own experience in situ I would not feel even the limited satisfaction I feel today: that of understanding the heart and soul of my evolving subcontinent a bit better than before.

CHAPTER 3

Of spirits and spirit possession

Let's say I want to go to Masvingo. When I reach the Mutare turn-off, I find the road to Masvingo is blocked. That means I will come back. This is the same as those who come out after death. They find their way blocked so they cannot pass. They simply come back to earth ... When a mother gives birth to a child, I am sure the uterus thinks the baby has died. The baby will never come back. This is the same as our relatives who died and never came back... (Theol.01R)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

All religious systems offer a hypothesis, linked to their moral and ethical codes, about what happens to human beings when they die: personal immortality in some form of heaven, possibly hell; reincarnation with the hope of ultimate union with the infinite; or, in the case of the African world-view, ancestorhood. The nature of this hypothesis — in effect a bold conceptual leap in the dark, sustained by faith — greatly influences both the overall tone and the minutiae of that system, as well as the lives of its adherents.

Soyinka (1990: 97) cites a statement made by one Lothrop Stoddard in 1920 in which, lauding "the success of missionary efforts in Africa", he concludes that "the degrading fetishism and demonology which sum up the native pagan cults cannot stand, and all Negroes will some day be either christians or moslems". Soyinka comments:

Africa minus the Sahara North is still a very large continent, populated by myriad races and cultures. With its millions of inhabitants it must be the largest metaphysical vacuum ever conjured up for the purpose of racist propaganda.

Stoddard's phraseology may no longer be fashionable, but his assumption survives (indeed, some black Africans have come to share it!) and Soyinka's comment remains valid. At a Christian conference on dialogue with African traditional religions held in Kenya in 1974

the African speakers felt that "there is no doubt that ATRs have an important contribution to make to Christianity in Africa" (Ter Haar et al 1992: 37). Black Africans, of whatever religious persuasion, do not often envision an inversion of this traffic: the tacit assumption is usually the demise of their traditions as full-fledged religious systems; at most the assimilation of selected elements into local Christian liturgies, such as the *runyaradzo* which some churches in Zimbabwe offer as a Christianised version of the traditional home-bringing of the spirit (*kugadzira*) (Daneel 1987: 236f).

In this chapter I propose looking unapologetically at the ancestor cult as one of many hypotheses about life after death. The pertinacity of this religious hypothesis in the face of foreign competition suggests that it is existentially satisfying to the vast majority of Shona people (to limit myself to but one of Africa's "myriad cultures"), including many who have abandoned most other tenets of their traditional world-view. In addition the ancestors have a powerful channel for asserting their continuing vitality and involvement with the living, one that they continue to use dauntlessly in the face of Western scepticism. I am referring to spirit possession, which is a fact of life in Zimbabwe.

By way of conclusion I shall consider, very briefly, the traditional spirits' relation to their principal rival in modern Zimbabwe, the holy spirit of Christianity.

3.2 A SPIRIT NETWORK

In the Shona traditional world-view no two beings are equal: "Equality in status is a root of evil', they say" (Aschwanden 1989: 122; see also Holleman 1969: 94). The commonly accepted differences in status are intrinsic to social harmony and continue into the next world. The spirit network is unquestionably superior to the network of the living and itself operates hierarchically, just as human society does on earth, with God at the apex of the entire extended hierarchy. This has interesting implications for Western democracy in Zimbabwe, conceivably in other African countries as well.

I cannot hope to reproduce the whole schema of the spirit world here, not even as much of it as I know about. So I shall merely refer to a few major categories within this network, starting at the very top, and try to reflect how important each is to the living in Zimbabwe today.

3.2.1 Nyadenga, Musikavanhu

Nyadenga means "owner of the sky"; Musikavanhu, "creator of people". These are but two of the many names of God, chosen arbitrarily from a long list. Others are Dzivaguru (Great Pool), Sororezhou (Head of the Elephant), Mutangakugara (the one who sat/existed first), Wokumusoro (the One above), Chirazamauya (Giver of Blessings) and Mwari (see below), each highlighting a specific aspect of God. Daneel (1971: 82) classifies these aspects into "male" and "female", thus adding to the complexity of a highly differentiated God-concept. The complexity implies consideration of the particularity of God's relevance to diverse facets of existence, notably two that are crucial to rural community life: rain and fertility.

Today the most widely used God-name is probably "Mwari". Its derivation is explained thus by Aschwanden (1989: 206):

The word *Mwari* is a contraction of *mu-hari*, i.e. to be in the jar. The cave with the pool ..., from where God's voice is heard, is compared with a jar filled with water. ... In the same way as the uterus (jar) of the woman is a giver of life so God is himself too, and in the jar of the woman (*muhari*) there is the amniotic fluid (pool) where the embryo (also called *Mwari*) lives. If we include the mythological interpretation of the tree whose branches touch the sky (p.38)⁶ — which symbolises the "presence" of God in the woman's body — we have a comprehensive interpretation of the word *Mwari* by the Karanga. *Mwari* is the God of fertility.

The analogy made by Dr Aschwanden's informant(s) is perhaps a trifle too neat. The association of Mwari Matonjeni with a pool, water or rain is not in question — apart from the divine title Dzivaguru, Mabweadziva (rocks of the pool) is a common name for the shrines in the Matopos. There is, however, no evidence of a pool *inside* the cave from which Mwari's oracle speaks.

⁶ This is a myth about a tree like an *axis mundi*, used by God and humans as both a direct link and a channel of fertility (symbolised by a snake living in the top of the tree): "God himself intervenes in the creative process and, therefore, in the woman's uterus the 'miracle' occurs in which the branches indeed touch the sky."

While the prevalence of this God-name is indisputable, its antiquity has been contested. Mtetwa (1976: 130) argues that the Mwari cult represents a fairly modern development of the traditional Shona God concept. (Here Mtetwa partly disagrees with Beach [1980: 247ff], who concedes the existence of a "hypothetical" Mwari religion among the Changamire Rozvi, as opposed to the later Mwari *cave-cult*, which he claims to be of Venda origin.) According to Mtetwa (1976: 96) the traditional God, known by all the various names cited above *except* Mwari, could be approached only via family and tribal ancestors and was primarily a rain giver. The new God Mwari is directly accessible and is prepared, moreover, to deal with personal problems, which the traditional Shona God regarded as "the responsibility of the individual's ancestors". Irrespective of Mwari's antiquity or otherwise, this latter attribute could be a major reason for the spread of the cult even before the arrival of the missionaries, and certainly explains their adoption of the name to convey the Christian God concept.⁷

With regard to Professor Daneel's study, Mtetwa (1976: 93) maintains that "Daneel simply swallowed the hypothesis of Blake-Thompson, Summers and Abraham" and that, in his *The God of the Matopo Hills*, he "put forward a new concept of the God of the Shona", which Holleman confidently endorses in his foreword to the book as "the true Shona concept of God" (Mtetwa 1976: 98f). Mtetwa's dismissal of Daneel's careful study of the Mwari cult is extremely arbitrary and indicates, as far as I can see, that he too "simply swallowed" a counter hypothesis — that of Cobbing, who argues for a Venda origin of the Mwari cave-cult, which was transplanted to the Matopos from 1830 onwards. (Beach [1980: 251ff] also supports this theory.) Daneel (1994) points out that both the present functionaries of the cult and oral tradition support a Rozvi connection. The fact that Venda cultists fulfil "a fairly minor function ... in the Matopo shrine complex" suggests "an early Zimbabwean origin through Rozvi-Venda contact, rather than a recent introduction of the cult from the south". At all events, Daneel (1970: 19f) is considerably more cautious and modest in his claims than Mtetwa in his.

Whatever the outcome of this debate, the one point on which there is consensus is that Mwari is indeed a fertility god (Daneel 1971: 81; Mtetwa 1976: 96; Aschwanden 1989: 206).

⁷ Mtetwa (1970: 108f) mentions that not all missionaries used this God-name from the outset - the DRC, for instance, only started using it after 1941.

And if biological fertility — dependent above all on rain — is seen as the continuation of cosmic creativity on the earthly plane, the analogy with the uterus implies no reduction. In fact, it helps one to understand the very earthy, if circumspect, way in which the Shona relate to God in their ritual and personal practice. Let me explain.

In chapter 1 I postulated that blood and soil are the two key symbols in the Shona traditional system (to be worked out in ch 4). I arrived at this conclusion independently of Aschwanden, and only afterwards noticed the parallel with his two key symbols of *the person*: blood and fertility. I suggest that if these symbols are traced hierarchically, Karanga-style, they reflect a continuum — continuity being implicit in the traditional concept of well-being — from the fertility of the earth and animals to the sexual fertility of human individuals aspiring to ancestorhood, which represents personal immortality/continuity. Via the ancestral hierarchy one can pursue the same symbols to the apex of the Shona traditional system, where they become identified with divine creativity (as Aschwanden points out — eg 1989: 38, 83, 206) and the supreme continuity of God: Mutangakugara, the one who was there first — hence the eldest and most revered of all.

There is a satisfying integrity in this. Surely the most direct and poignant experience ordinary humans can have of the mystery of creation is the conception, gestation and birth of a baby. As Aschwanden (1989: 46) puts it, “When a child is begotten, God’s original concept of creation becomes real again to the Karanga: the purely biological aspect is joined by the sacramental one which gives to man his immortality through the God-given shadow.”⁸

My own informants gave me conceptions of God such as the following:

- (1) God is just a belief within people that makes them say there is God ... We do not know where he comes from or whose son he is. Neither do we know his

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the Karanga notion which identifies the white shadow with the (immortal) soul, see Aschwanden (1982: 10ff; 310ff). Although I tried to check this myth with my own informants, I drew a complete blank. Sr Mary Aquina also refers to it, albeit in a slightly different form, in an article entitled “Spirit beliefs among the Karanga” (NADA X (5) 1973).

totem or the place where we can find him. Maybe he lives in the south, west, north or east.⁹ But people just say God is in heaven. (Theol.01T)

- (2) Our God in heaven does not talk to anyone. *Mhondoro*, ancestors, *mashave*¹⁰ talk to God's go-betweens, not to him. God is like a chief. We people under a certain chief cannot go with our requests straight to the chief. We go stage by stage. We first go to the kraalhead. He forwards it to the headman, then lastly to the chief. (Theol.01R)
- (3) God will say, "You cannot believe in me if you do not do what your father wants you to. You have seen your father and grew up in his hands, but you are not believing him. How can you believe in me, the one you have only heard of? I can't help you if your father doesn't want to help you." (Theol.05R)
- (4) People of the past said that God is the biggest ancestor. People in the past respected God, this big ancestor, and the small ancestors. That means they knew both of them. Before the Bible, our forefathers were talking about Nyadenga Musikavanhu. (Theol.13R)
- (5) "God created a person in his image." Do you think this statement is true? This is wrong. Our forefathers were using a different Bible from this one... People say Adam was seen in a pitiful state [ie without a wife]. Who saw him in that state? That is a lie. People were created in pairs and nothing else. (Theol.10R)

The first two interviewees describe an unknown, sublime God — what some scholars like to call, to my mind far too arbitrarily, *deus otiosus* (eg Taylor 1963: 85; Mtetwa 1976: 96; but see Daneel 1970: 18; 1971: 177). God's locality and totem are known only to his go-betweens and he therefore has to be approached "stage by stage" via closer, more familiar

⁹ Language is used intuitively: this speaker is finding his way around a physical horizon. An abstract modern mind would work antithetically: north-south, west-east.

¹⁰ Again the three are, quite intuitively, listed according to the hierarchy.

spirits; but he is no less involved with his physical creatures than a chief — who is also not directly accessible — is with his children.

The third and fourth informants stress more particularly God's relation to the family lineage that leads up to him. Number three poignantly insists that disrespect for living and dead parents is inimical to faith in the supreme God of the universe, thus corroborating Aschwanden's association of biological procreation with divine creation.¹¹ Number four draws attention to the Shona people's familiarity with this divine super-ancestor before the arrival of the whites. And number five, with a militancy reminiscent of Black Theology, insists that the traditional image of God is more accurate than that propagated by Christianity — and places the divine accent squarely on biological fertility! Since his view of the origin of females conflicts with the Karanga creation myths reproduced by Aschwanden (1989), it probably reflects his individual theologising, which makes it all the more interesting.

Some of my interviewees related Mwari directly to the cave-cult of the Matopos; many more of Aschwanden's "old Karanga" appear to have done so. Twenty-five years later, my informants — of all age groups but, like Aschwanden's, southern Shona people — were more inclined to link the *mhondoro* with the Matopos (see 3.2.2). This suggests a shift from one generation to the next, possibly influenced by liberation war experience. It could be that, because of the *mhondoro*'s role as military strategists and protectors against the hazards of war, they feature more prominently in the minds of postwar southern Shona than they did in earlier years, when the need for rain and fertility — Mwari's unquestioned province — was paramount. (This would make an interesting comparative study in itself.)

Be that as it may, the shrines in the Matopos are undoubtedly deeply revered and the oracle speaking in "the cave of the pool" has great authority.

11 A delightful inversion of this association was the following exchange between my assistant and a youth she interviewed. When he stressed the importance of celibacy in ritual officiants, she asked him whether this meant that God disapproved of sexuality. He replied: "God loves sexual intercourse... God said what is forbidden here is also forbidden in heaven. Sexual intercourse is allowed here, it is also allowed in heaven. So if people say do not have sex until this *bira* is over, God will second this" - one assumes by forbidding the angels sex until after the *bira*! [Povo.09T]

The ordinary people I spoke to, however, knew of it only by hearsay. It must be remembered that the cave-cult is highly formalised and the annual pilgrimage to the Matopos by official rain messengers (*manyusa*, *vanyai*) are in the nature of state visits authorised by the chief (see Daneel 1970: 40ff). The only *nyusa* that I heard about — unfortunately I did not meet her personally — was one who visited certain Masvingo chiefdoms at the height of the drought. However, she was an emissary from Matonjeni to the chiefs, not the other way round. The fact that none of the chiefs I worked with had a *nyusa* making annual pilgrimages to the shrines could indicate that the cultic network is beginning to break down; but it is by no means a foregone conclusion. Professor Daneel pointed out to me that there is usually an interval of some years after the death of a *nyusa* before a new one is appointed, during which period formal participation in the cave-cult would be in abeyance. The Duma chiefs with whom I worked, moreover, have their own rain-making tradition and a more direct link with the Musikavanhu cult in Chipinge. Thus any association they have with the Matopos is a fairly recent development.

At all events, only one of my "commoner" interviewees, the *n'anga* referred to in chapter 2, had actually been there:

I spent a night there. Early in the morning we climbed the hill. We sat down near a cave. We heard a voice on top of the stones. I looked and looked. To my surprise I saw no one speaking. I only heard the voice and whistles from the stones. ... I wanted to see the miracles done there and follow my forefathers' ways. I also wanted to make sure that I was clean to my ancestors. ... I was given water from the pool down at that place. I used it to wash my body whenever I wanted to heal or use *hakata*. (Povo.06R)

Daneel (1970), as well as scholars like Schoffeleers and Mwanza (1979), Gelfand (1966) and Ranger (1967), have written extensively about the Mwari cave-cult and I need not elaborate on it.¹²

¹² For a comparison of this cult with the Musikavanhu rain cult in eastern Zimbabwe, see 5.3.

3.2.2 Mhondoro

These great tribal, even supertribal, spirits of dead chiefs are said to possess benign lions known as *mhondoro*, as distinct from ordinary lions called *shumba*, until they find a human medium. They differ from ordinary *vadzimu* because they were the ones who originally secured the land for their people and have ruled it ever since: they are its true custodians or "owners". The *mhondoro* mediums (known as *masvikiro*) are par excellence the historians of the tribe, with a considerable say in tribal politics and ritual life, particularly rain ceremonies.

The *mhondoro* feature more prominently in northern and north-eastern Zimbabwe (cf Bourdillon 1987: 254) than in the south. Lan (1985), writing about northern Zimbabwe, gives a detailed description of spirit provinces that do not necessarily coincide with the existing chieftaincies and might actually pertain to a much earlier indigenous map, before successive migrations carved up and redistributed the domains of the autochthons. That seems to be the implication of what a Korekore chief whom I met in Harare told me:

When people first came to Zimbabwe they got a place to stay. ... Now these people — the chiefs — died. After they died, other people might stay in that place. The old men that died became *mhondoro* and they are different, like Mbuya Nehanda. When my father died he was a chief, but he is not the *mhondoro* for our area. Only the owners who started Zimbabwe, that is the one who is a *mhondoro*. Chaminuka, Mbuya Nehanda, Kaguwi — those spirits that came to those people, they came from Guruuswa, they were living in Tanzania, somewhere like that... Those spirits who came from there, their sons in Zimbabwe have more power than the ones who died there before them. (Chiefs.01K)

Beach (1980: 57) considers such an East African origin unlikely: "The name *tanganyika* means 'beginning country', and before 1900 it probably did not refer to either the lake or the German-ruled territory." While his point is worth noting and invites further study, the theory of the Tanganyikan/Tanzanian origin of the modern Shona is widely accepted (see Daneel 1970: 15-16).

In the same interview this chief maintained that the common Guruuswa origin united Zimbabweans spiritually, in a very literal sense, with Malawians. David Lan (1985: 76f) makes a fascinating case for Guruuswa as a mythical place of origin. The chief's explanation corresponds roughly with Lan's analysis, and only partly contradicts Beach (1980: 63f), the arch-demythologiser, who concedes the greater antiquity of the Guruuswa dynasties:

[I]n most northern areas the dynasties that are generally recognized to have been the longest established are those that have a 'Guruuswa' point of origin, and those claiming other points of origin are mutually recognized to have arrived in the area at some later time. ... This suggests that the 'Guruuswa' point of origin is not simply a random feature of the traditions, but represents a real aspect of the past of these groups. Since these groups do not usually claim any [other] common links, it seems most likely that their tradition of having come from 'Guruuswa' means more or less what it says, and that at some time in the fairly distant past they really did move to their present areas from 'Guruuswa', even if this was not any one region but rather a point farther up the river valleys nearer the centre of the Plateau.

It would be interesting to learn how the complex tripartite relationship between mediums, chiefs and government is working out in northern Zimbabwe in the less revolutionary climate of the 1990s. Lan (1985: 220ff) mentions that in 1982 some Dande mediums were complaining about neglect as the new government's civil democracy — closely modelled on that of the ousted regime but, initially at any rate, less inclined to patronise traditional leaders — moved into operation. Lan speculates that the mediums' loss might well have been the chiefs' gain, assuming their lackeyship to government. But then, Lan (1985: 138) somewhat arbitrarily dismisses the pre-Independence chiefs as "minor civil servants with the powers of constables... subject to the wishes of their masters, the native commissioners, and no longer to those of their ancestors, the *mhondoro*, or of their people". This, I was assured by both Professor Daneel and Professor Bourdillon, is an exaggeration of the situation even at that time (cf also Holleman 1968: 348ff).

In my own interviews some chiefs expressed approval of "Smith's government" for honouring their status, however calculating the motives may have been, more than the present government is doing:

In the rural areas he [Smith] gave the chiefs powers to rule their motherland. He was clever. Privately he wanted the chiefs to be happy. This was advantageous to his government. He would be told everything from the pockets of chiefs [private information] and all the secrets in their areas. His government was functioning well. He was very intelligent in his doings.
(Chiefs.01M)

There is implicit criticism of the ZANU-PF government in this statement; and although there is no doubt some self-importance involved, my general impression was that the chiefs claimed respect for what they represented — the *mhondoro*, the soil — rather than for their persons.

In the south the position of the *mhondoro* is rather different from their role in the north. Contrary to what Beach (1980: 314) says, they are by no means unknown or disregarded, although the picture I was given was sometimes vague, even confused. On the whole the emphasis was on the Matopos. It would almost seem as if the centralised cave-cult with its extensive southern network (see Daneel 1970: 40ff) fulfils the same organisational and legitimising functions as the hierarchical *mhondoro* network does in the north. Daneel (1994) explains it thus:

Ranger ... distinguishes two distinct religious systems: the spirit mediums associated with the Mutapa kings, and the Mwari cult associated with the Rozvi kings. Abraham's theory of one coherent belief system is tenable if one accepts that the main components of both systems were complementary in an integrated religious whole that developed along different historical lines. In the north the prominence of the *mhondoro* spirit mediums dwarfed the high-God cult, while in the south the Voice of Mwari, though not silencing those of the tribal spirits, came to dominate them.

The following are among the more explicit comments I was given:

- (1) I think *mhondoro* are ancestors who were our God before the whites came. People were going to the Matopos with their requests. Any problems they had they handed to the Matopos and they were solved. Rain problems, illness, etc were also sent to the Matopos. There are some people who still go there even today. (Theol.03R)
- (2) *Mhondoro* are of two different kinds: those of the chiefdom and those of the *zhame* [here, Matopos]. The *mhondoro* of the chiefdom are spirits of chiefs who have died. This kind of spirit possesses animals. The *mhondoro* of the *zhame* are spirits of the founders. These are spirits which must be given big requests. For example, when the soil is angry¹³ we go to *zhame* to tell the founder ancestors that we have wronged our forefathers. Then they'll go and ask forgiveness for us. (Theol.08R)
- (3) Those *mhondoro* work hand in hand with God. I have never seen anything bad from them. They do not deal with herbs and magic. They only give help to people. Even if you see a *mhondoro*, that animal will never eat anyone. There are also *mhondoro* in water. These are the spirits which take people underground and stay with them but they will never kill them. ... People go and ask rain from Mabweamwari [Matonjeni] where these *mhondoro* stay. (Theol.13T)

The first interviewee explicitly identifies the *mhondoro* with God, reminiscent of the myths which claim divine fatherhood for the original Chaminuka (Daneel 1970: 24).

The second does not mention Mwari in relation to the Matopos at all. Instead, in a very lucid analysis that accords with stray references I picked up elsewhere in the south, he makes a clear distinction between tribal ancestors and "*zhame*" or national ancestors (illustrative of the point made above concerning the parallel functions of the northern *mhondoro* system and the southern Matonjeni cult). The word *zhame* is interesting. It seems to mean different things to different people. In some instances it refers to a special hut at the chief's homestead serving as a kind of sanctuary in which all sorts of items sacred to

13 See chapter 4.

tribal life are stored. One chief conducted me to his *zhame*, but I was not allowed to enter it. An interviewee (Povo.02T) described it in some detail as a house (used only by the chief's first wife) with two doors, one of which is used only when carrying out the body of a deceased chief. Other people use the word to refer to a very special shrine; some, as in this interview, identify it with Matonjeni. Mtetwa (1976: 18) defines it as "a Karanga word for God", but elsewhere (Mtetwa 1976: 104) he also associates it with Matonjeni, adding: "It is interesting to note that the Duma hut in which they worshipped their ancestors at Mandara was known as Zami."

The third informant underscores the benign character of the *mhondoro* and reiterates their link with Matonjeni. The fluid identification of dead human being, possessed living medium and spirit-hosting animal presents a fascinating glimpse into the mythic integration of Shona tradition — the kind of identificatory symbolisation which Aschwanden (1982: 11ff) considers basic to Karanga thinking.

Another factor to be considered by post-*chimurenga* scholars is the following. During the liberation war these lion spirits were deliberately invoked by ZANLA to unite, mobilise and inspire the people, capitalising on the role the *mhondoro* mediums had played during the abortive early rebellions of 1896-1897, when two of them were martyred. It is therefore hard to tell to what extent the current status of these spirits is influenced by more recent history. In some instances my impression was that the *mhondoro* mediums of the 1890s were totally identified with the original spirits whom they had hosted (cf also Bourdillon 1987: 268; Beach 1980: 315):

All our ancestors and those of the comrades were all there, but the biggest ancestors [ie the *mhondoro* — or rather, their mediums] were strong because these people had died with anger for *the whites who killed them* when they fought for their country. So their anger was still there. They were happy to help the comrades because they supported their idea of fighting for their country. The anger of these spirits possessed all the comrades so they fought hard and succeeded. (Theol.15T; my emphasis)

Mediums are commonly called by the names of their possessing spirits, implying that their identities are fused; but the assumption is that the original spirit dominates. However, the mediums of Kaguvi and Nehanda, who were executed by the new white regime in 1898, appear to have acquired *mhondoro* status in their own right (see also the novel *Chaminuka* [Mutswairo 1987] and Bourdillon 1987: 268). Or were these national martyrs in fact identical with their possessing spirits? Mudenge (1988: 41, 104ff) identifies Nehanda as Nyamhita, sister-wife of Nyabedza, the first ruler of the Munhumutapa kingdom dating back to the 15th century. All subsequent Mutapas had a second wife (usually a sister or close relative) of that name, who was a political functionary of the empire. Yet many people trace Mbuya Nehanda, whose medium played such a prominent role in the recent liberation war, no further back than her predecessor who died in 1898. One could treat such shifting identities simply as a feature of oral history. To my mind it is also an authentic quality of myth, which is the matrix of faith.

Here is another angle on the same question:

I think the comrades' own ancestors helped Zimbabwe, because how did people know it was Chaminuka's spirit that possessed them? If anyone is possessed by a spirit from another tribe, that means it is a *shave*. I think these were only beliefs of the people that the spirits of Chaminuka and Nehanda helped Zimbabwe. ... When the comrades said that the spirits of Chaminuka, Kaguvi and Nehanda were guiding them, they wanted to gain more popularity and confidence, because if someone thinks he is protected and guided he will never waver. This was only a way of strengthening their hearts. (Theol.18T)

This informant, his scepticism expressed with exquisite Shona courtesy, discriminates between wartime propaganda and genuine possession. At the same time his comment on a possessing spirit from another tribe being a *shave* rather than a *mhondoro* illustrates two points.

The first is that one person's *shave*¹⁴ may well be someone else's ancestor, if not an actual *mhondoro* (just as your *ngozi* could be my *mudzimu* — see below). Despite the

14 Unless the *shave* is that of an animal or an inanimate object (see below).

fundamentally hierarchical character of the Shona system, this implies a kind of organic egalitarianism which recognises the ancestrally guaranteed status and rights of all people within their own tribal domains, and moreover permits aliens to earn similar rights in another area if they show due respect for its guardian ancestors. In my view, this is basic to the built-in democracy of Shona culture.

The second is a cardinal difference between southern Shona (especially Duma) tradition and the northern *mhondoro* cult. In the north senior chiefly mediums (*masvikiro*) have to come from a different area and lineage (Bourdillon 1987: 264) to ensure their neutrality in tribal politics. In the south patrilineal kinship is mandatory for mediumship — so much so that, when I accidentally learned that one *svikiro* was an affine rather than an agnate, my informant was severely rebuked for divulging this jealously guarded secret and I was repeatedly instructed by the chief not to publish the details.¹⁵

This confirms my impression that the *mhondoro* system in the south developed in a way that gave the chiefs greater autonomy vis-à-vis the autochthons, who retained some of their original (primarily rain-giving) authority mainly via the centralised Matopos cave-cult. This accords with the trend described by Rennie (1973: 73): "The historical process of accretion of immigrant ruling and client groups resulted apparently in a series of layers of authority, with the earlier layers developing ritual responsibilities for the relations between the new inhabitants and the 'earth' (which includes earlier generations of inhabitants) [ie *vhuru*, soil — MM]. Later layers of immigrants wielded political power based on military or economic supremacy. This pattern of layering is not infrequent elsewhere."¹⁶ I was told by several chiefs that, in the southern succession system, *masvikiro* merely ratify the choice of a new chief, which is effectively made by the *magwehe*, a council of tribal elders not in line for succession to the chieftaincy; in the north the mediums have a direct say in the matter. Hence in the south the chieftaincy is decided by blood relatives and then ratified by the *svikiro*, who is in any case a relative too. It is tempting to speculate that this was a "political

¹⁵ I stumbled on other "secrets" in the course of my study, and am obediently not reproducing the particulars. It made me realise that the readily forthcoming material is fairly standardised and superficial and that a really deep study (eg of totems or ritual sister-wives - for an instance of the latter, see Mtetwa 1970: 75f) would require enormous persistence, ingenuity and delicacy even from an indigenous scholar, and would probably not be feasible for an outsider at all.

¹⁶ See also 5.4.

victory" over the autochthonous *mhondoro*, members of earlier, superseded blood lineages — possibly gained by the great Rozvi *mambos* in their heyday, on which the leaders of the later Duma confederacy capitalised. (See ch 5 for historical background.) Of course, the Duma may equally well have had a different system, imported from their Mozambican place of origin, which assimilated local elements after they settled in Zimbabwe.

My contact with chief Musikavanhu and the Ndondo people in eastern Zimbabwe confirms this view. The Ndondo are of the Dziva totem, but the chief said they were originally Mbire. This suggests a link with pre-Rozvi autochthonous rain-making powers, similar to those of the pre-Munhumutapa Tavara people in the north — who, intriguingly, are reputed to be descended from Dzivaguru, a northern high God whose name is invoked by the Matonjeni priests! (See Lan 1985: 107, note 4; also Bourdillon, in Schoffeleers 1978: 242ff.) The very fact that Mbire-Shoko priests, credited with a Guruswa origin (Daneel 1970: 22), were in command of rain under the Moyo Rozvi, and have remained so ever since, confirms the hypothesis that autochthons retain a monopoly over this crucial facet of traditional faith, despite subsequent political jiggery-pokery. Like Rennie, Schoffeleers (1978: 24) sees this as a development in which "religious power came to be explicitly contrasted with political power, particularly in conquest situations where religious power came to be associated with the autochthonous populations and political power with chiefly invaders". I would be more inclined to argue that new dynasties, however strong their temporal hegemony, could at most maintain a courteous, ritually observed balance of power: they had to accept the fundamental superiority of spirits more directly linked with the soil that sustained them and, therefore, better able to bring rain.

I shall return to *mhondoro* in the present-day southern Shona context when I deal with a highly unusual Chaminuka medium in chapter 4.

3.2.3 Mashave

Shave is a generic name for all spirits from an alien group — including, according to Bourdillon (1987: 242), "the spirits of neighbouring peoples, of white people, of certain animals (especially baboons) and occasionally of other objects such as aeroplanes". *Mashave* of human origin are often unhappy spirits, since they have not been brought home by their

own kin in a *kugadzira* ceremony and therefore wander around looking for a host. In that capacity they are feared.

But *shave* mediums are also noted for their inspired dancing. What intrigued me particularly was that *mashave* are credited to be the source of all remarkable talents, from hunting to healing. It is something that the highly corporate, conformist Shona tradition needs to accommodate such exceptional, often individualistic gifted people. The only other alternative would be to brand the deviant person a witch, with all that such a verdict would entail; and in the case of nonmalignant individuals the Shona do not resort to this diagnosis. Aschwanden (1989: 169) writes:

The world of the spirits and of the accompanying ideology is not an individual achievement but part of a people's cultural creation. One can thus argue that the society with such an ideology makes it possible for a creative, ambitious individual, who no longer wants to conform to its norms, to develop and yet remain part of that society. So instead of letting the individual disintegrate, its creative abilities are used in a way which serves the higher good.

If one considers the poverty and social stigmatisation of many innovative artists in the Western world (Vincent van Gogh, Dostoevsky, Edgar Allan Poe come to mind), one cannot but marvel at such wisdom. In so-called primitive societies these eccentrics, provided they do not threaten social harmony, are accepted for what they are: people with insight from "another world". Most traditional healers and diviners are possessed by *shave* spirits, who command the same deference and obedience as any other spirit.

To Western students *njuzu* are perhaps the most intriguing of all *mashave* because of their amazing resemblance to the mermaids of European folklore. I was even told (Theol.14T) that, apart from having fish tails, they are white-skinned and have the same kind of hair as Europeans, although my informant insisted they were not *varungu*. Most of my interviewees were somewhat vague about where *njuzu* come from, although the consensus was that they are mortal creatures of God.¹⁷ The informant quoted in 3.2.2 (Theol.13T) — who was of the

¹⁷ The question of how they procreate, considering their physiological peculiarities, was not asked! When I did ask chief Murinye whether *jukwa* spirits had human forebears, he replied jocularly, "We might say he was
(continued...)"

Mbire-Shoko totem, associated with the Matonjeni cave-cult — described them as underwater *mhondoro*. He said they belonged to the *jukwa* group of spirits (which, according to Aschwanden [1989: 236], always come from the Matopos and in fact empower the rain priests there).

Be that as it may, *njuzu* are water creatures. Their wells and springs never dry up and they have the ability to pull humans of their choice into the water. The person will disappear for months, even years, living underwater and eating mud while receiving instruction from their basically benign abductors. If their relatives cry for them, they will never return. Presumably mourning would indicate mistrust of these spirits. If the family carries on normally and brews beer for the *njuzu*, the person will eventually return as a great healer, equipped with knowledge of the powerful underwater herbs (see Aschwanden 1989: 169ff). An interesting sidelight is an item I read in the *Weekly Mail & Guardian* (16 July 1993): "A veld fire in Soweto last week burnt away tall bushes that had concealed an old house no one in the area had ever seen before... [A] belief is now taking hold that the house could have been used by student sangomas who consistently told people that they stayed under water for months before they qualified as traditional healers..."

Nowadays *njuzu* are rarely seen and their sacred springs are said to be drying up:

What makes us think that there is no help from these spirits is that we do not obey their rules. Let's say you bought eggs. If you mishandle those eggs, they will break. Do you then say eggs are useless things or do you admit that you mishandled them? People mishandle these spirits, that is why they have become useless to people. If I know I am a prostitute, why do I carry on going to a holy well? What is forbidden by God is also forbidden by these spirits. (Theol.13T)

Do you know that hill near Super Hotel? That was the *njuzu* spirits' hill. The new government dug a reservoir in that hill, so the spirits moved away. The owner of the land [chief] is now complaining. (Theol.01R)

17 (...continued)

a living creature once, because when he comes out he asks for beer!"

Thus *njuzu*, like mermaids, are being ousted by irreverence and the forces of rationalistic "progress". But, unlike mermaids, they are vividly real and alive in the minds of many, many Zimbabweans and their mediums are among the most sought-after healers in the country.

3.2.4 Midzimu

While black scholars are increasingly and quite rightly objecting to the generalised use of the term "African" to refer to all the many peoples on this continent and their diverse belief systems, one could posit one common feature: virtually all of them assume the nearness and benign concern of dead forebears. Ter Haar et al (1992: 75) cite Hammond-Tooke's distinction between the ancestor cult and what are known as cults of the dead, which "do not typically involve the idea that the dead support and assist the living: rather it is the living that are concerned with the well-being of their dead. It is a one-way traffic — whereas the relationship of living and dead in ancestor cults is two-way."

Ter Haar et al (1992: 76) cite the anthropologist Meyer Fortes's finding that "ancestors are believed to intervene only, and strictly only, in the lives of their descendants, however these are culturally defined". They comment as follows on Fortes's approach, and that of anthropologists generally: "This emphasis on the socio-structural framework of ancestor beliefs and practices has since become generally accepted among anthropologists, even, as some feel, *to the detriment of the religious focus*" (Ter Haar et al 1992: 77; my italics).

The ancestors undeniably function as part of the Shona sociostructural framework, but to argue that this detracts from their religious significance is to subject that framework to a typically positivist reduction. Its integrated nature permits no division into "sacred" and "profane". In chapter 1 I quoted Kwame Appiah's observation (1992: 203; see also 3.2.1 above) that "the traditional world celebrates continuity"; I would go so far as to say that the "sacred" or religious character of Shona tradition (as articulated in traditional politics and economics, no less than in symbol and ritual) hinges on continuity. It is celebrated in nature, culture and individual human lives alike: the cycle of seasons, sowing and harvesting, the

succession of chiefs, kinship and social harmony, the phases of life from birth to marriage, through adulthood to old age and death.¹⁸

But it does not end there. The rituals for the dead are themselves *rites de passage* (see Aschwanden 1987, ch 4), culminating in the home-bringing of the spirit (variously known as *kugadzira*, *kurova guva*, *kutora mudzimu*) which then takes its proper place as a *mudzimu*, a link in the unbroken chain of creation — or rather, in view of the hierarchical structure of the Shona cosmos, a rung in the ladder. Skipping or damaging a rung in whatever sphere of life marks a calamitous breach of the continuity with God's order, of which the Shona's earthly life is meant to be a microcosmic continuation. The ancestors are the rungs of the ladder as it ascends through metaphysical space.

That was how Aschwanden (1982: 22) came to identify blood as one of the two prime symbols of the person:

Blood is the bond that ensures a state of continuity between the ancestral spirits and the living, between forebears and individual. It is something sacred to the Karanga because it connects him directly to the dead.

Inasmuch as kinship is the very fabric of Shona society, the ancestors are indeed part of the sociocultural structure. But inasmuch as their blood is thus hallowed through the process of symbolic identification, they "sacralise" human society, which is seen as continuous with divine creation.

In practice this leads to an odd mixture of reverence and familiarity in people's approach to the ancestors. As links with the divine they are honoured and treated deferentially; as kinsfolk they can be spoken about familiarly, addressed freely — implored, cajoled, reproached, even scolded (cf Daneel 1971: 179). The following excerpts from interviews illustrate this:

18 In Shona tradition, marriage and the birth of a child largely take the place of the ritual "graduation" to adulthood, among boys usually accompanied by circumcision, found in many African cultures. Sex education and other preparation for adulthood are provided after puberty but there is no formal initiation. I have not come across any explanation of this phenomenon

Our ancestors [unlike God] mention their names. We talk to them whenever we want something from them... We really know that the ancestors were our forefathers... (Theol.01T)

Let's say wild dogs come and kill my livestock. I talk to my ancestors, asking what causes this. My ancestors cannot stop this but they go to the chief's ancestors and forward my request. The chief's ancestors will say, "Your child is putting excrement all over, that's why we brought that dirt [ie misfortune] to his place." My ancestors will then come and tell me. All ancestors are important because they have power. They can see even in darkness. They use their wisdom, because their eyes have already decayed. (Theol.01R)

Ancestors are like birds. They fly from one place to another. Ancestors have their *dare* meetings in the air. They move from one place to another, guiding their children. ... At their *dare* meetings they can be called to different tribes by other ancestors for beer or for anything. For example, if I brew beer for my ancestors, they may call your ancestors to drink the beer with them. Tomorrow when you brew beer for your ancestors, they will call my ancestors also. (Povo.06R)

I won't talk to God before my father and mother. They are my nearest relatives. When I want to go to find a job or if my child wants to find work, I talk to my ancestors. (Theol.12R)

Thus the ancestors are close as parents; they consult their superiors as people do; they have to contend with the loss of their physical senses. Nonetheless they have greater freedom of movement than humans; they share their descendants' offerings at ethereal beer parties. And they are intimately concerned with their living kinsfolk, helping them in their everyday lives — also protecting them against harm (especially witchcraft).

But they can also punish their children, usually through sickness, for neglect of their memory or their wishes. When the ancestors punish their descendants, this is done by "opening the door" to witches and other evil spirits — hence an act of omission rather than

commission, since the latter would be irreconcilable with their benevolence (see Daneel 1971: 95). While virtually all my interviewees agreed that the *midzimu* are there, and the vast majority admitted that they had power over their lives, not everybody welcomed that power:

The ancestors are like logs. A log never laughs or talks. They are different from God. God can come into a person's dreams and give advice for further happiness or inform a person about bad deeds they are doing.¹⁹ God doesn't make a person sick. The bad side of ancestors is that, even if you do good things to them they never appreciate it. A child can become sick even if you have given them what they want. The ancestors' wants are never satisfied... (Theol.01R)

They punish and they are able to punish but not to help... What wrong have I done them? If this punishment is for my father's sins, that is nonsense. God knows and can judge that this person has no fault. So he punishes the person who wronged him. If the ancestors punish me because of my father's sins they are doing bad things. How can I respect a bad father like that?²⁰ (Theol.04T)

The ancestors' needs never end. Today it might say, I want you to wear beads, black bangles, skins. Now you become a madman. People will see you eating food from rubbish bins, yet you are an educated person. These spirits are dangerous. (Theol.04T)

But whether loved, feared or a mixture of the two, the *midzimu* are implicit in the Shona world-view. The extent to which this belief is being affected by the modern dispensation will be considered below.

¹⁹ I have, however, heard and read about many cases where ancestors were said to do the same!

²⁰ This angry young man, a Roman Catholic who has obtained O-levels but is unemployed, is clearly not familiar with Exodus 20:5 or the doctrine of original sin in Judaeo-Christian culture!

3.2.5 Varoyi and ngozi

All the spiritual beings discussed so far are benevolent. But evil befalls the Shona, like all other people, and this section deals with the spirits most commonly identified as the sources of it: vengeful spirits (*ngozi*) and witches or sorcerers (*varoyi*).

Ngozi are the spirits of people who were wronged in their lifetime — murder victims, the defrauded, the abused — and are now intent on redressing their wrongs by wreaking havoc in the families of the offenders. Daneel (1971: 133f) makes two interesting points. The first is that such a spirit is not morally wicked since it “has a just cause and is somehow allowed by Mwari to claim its dues from the living”. The second is that a *ngozi* “is never a member of the afflicted person’s patrilineage. It is always a *mutorwa*, a ‘foreigner’ in the sense of belonging to another (including the matri-)lineage”. *Ngozi* are appeased by compensating them and exorcising the afflicted. Attempts may even be made to fool them (see Aschwanden 1987: 51ff). One way or another, the justice of their claims is not denied.

One of the *dare* cases that I recorded after these traditional courts had been reinstated in mid-1993 concerned an aunt, a well-dressed woman living in Masvingo town, who was being possessed by the *ngozi* of a man killed by her nephew in a fight over a woman: “The deceased person possesses me. When he comes out he says, ‘I want you to pay money. You killed me, you people of Musuku.’” (Dare.01Y) Her husband, equally well-dressed in dark suit and tie (they were clearly a modern, middle-class couple and relatively well-to-do), confirmed their plight:

Oh my chief, I am saying my fathers-in-law are not the ones who have the problem. I am the one having problems. I have not slept day or night for four years. Sometimes — even today — as soon as I get home the problem starts. This woman always gets possessed, telling me I should go to my in-laws with this case before it becomes a disaster... The spirit says, “I am Naison. I was killed by Alfred Masara. He killed me for my wife. He took my wife.”

The nephew had, I was told, been convicted and sentenced by a government court at the time of the crime. But payment of the official penalty imposed by a modern court did not

satisfy the dead man's spirit. While the nephew's father was clearly prevaricating, neither he nor anybody else at the *dare* made any attempt to deny the justice of the dead man's claim or the reality of the aunt's affliction. Chief Murinye eventually settled the case as follows:

[To the aunt:] You have revealed the truth of this case. Your brother is not refusing to pay the money. No one can say your brother is refusing to pay. He is saying he will pay after he knows whom to give the money to or where to go. ... [To her brother:] You go to your child and tell him that his aunt says, "Let's go, she will show us the relatives of the person you have killed." So you will see there whether it is true or false. You will also go to the *n'anga* there. ... Go and see whether this one [the aunt] knows the place, through her possession. Come back and tell us the result. I do not think that you will spend many days if you go there. ... Go out of the *dare*, think about the journey. We want to know the day.

Witchcraft is another matter:

Even if someone is caught practising witchcraft or a *n'anga* points out that a person is a *muroyi*, he will never believe it or stop bewitching people. That is why there is a proverb that says, What is easy to get rid of is something that is in your hand, but not a thing in the blood. You may have to kill the person, because he cannot stop bewitching others. (Theol.12R)

Daneel (1971: 173ff) points out that witchcraft accusations, even when unfounded, gravely stigmatise the party concerned (cf also Bourdillon 1987: 182ff). He cites various traditional ways of exorcising witches. (Elsewhere [eg Daneel 1987: 110, 240f] he points out that the Independent Churches attempt to some extent to reconcile their members with witches who have been exorcised by baptism and readmit them to their communities.) One example I came across is this description of a witch who cured her own victim by admitting, with the help of the ancestors, to her possessed state and then taking remedial action:

In our family there was a woman who said outright that she was a witch. She said, "I am the one who bewitched this person." She also said she had *zvidhoma* [Aschwanden 1982:134ff]. To make this woman confess this, there was help from the ancestors... She mentioned that she'd had several dreams in which she found herself at a grave holding the hand or the leg of a dead person. She said her grandmother used to go into the bush and collect medicine to heal such patients [bewitched persons]. She herself went into the bush and came back with medicine and cooked porridge. She gave her victim that porridge and he recovered. (Theol.07R)

Witchcraft, with its macabre associations with necrophagy, remains a much feared reality. Among 35 interviewees, 12 had had personal experience of it, 15 knew of it by hearsay and only one said there was no such thing. Seven were noncommittal. I suspect that the 20 percent "noncommittal" category — possibly the hearsay cases and the one rejection as well — is attributable to the Witchcraft Suppression Act (Chapter 73), which has been retained on the statute books since its promulgation in 1899 with only one amendment: whipping (the original Act imposed up to 36 lashes) was removed from the list of penalties when corporal punishment was ruled out of order by the Supreme Court. Offences in terms of this Act include not just practising or promoting witchcraft in whatever form, either personally or by proxy, but also imputing such practices to anybody. Hence witch-finders (often *n'anga*, but Independent Church prophets as well) are as guilty as the witches themselves. (See also Lan 1985: 142.)

The Zimbabwean *Sunday Mail* (13 June 1993) printed an interesting article by Lovemore Madhuku, who maintains that the Act is untenable, explicable only as "part and parcel of mindless suppression of what colonial administrators considered repugnant to their sense of culture or morality". Its continued enforcement, particularly in rural communities, he says, has "disastrous consequences for those affected". He writes:

Today, more than 90 years after the Act has been in operation, millions of people, including highly educated politicians, still believe in the power of witchcraft. It is clear that the Act has not achieved its stated objective [that of eradicating such a "primitive superstition" — MM]. On the contrary, it

continues to be a monument of punishment for punishment's sake, with no success for its objectives in sight.

Madhuku then proceeds to argue that, since the existence of witchcraft cannot be either proved or disproved, culpability, a touchstone of European law, cannot be finally established. This belief falls in the same category as other beliefs in supernatural powers (he mentions "God and Vadzimu") and is therefore protected by the bill of rights in the Zimbabwean constitution. He points out that any crimes arising from the belief in or practice of witchcraft are punishable in terms of common law and advocates that the Act be repealed in toto — an interesting proposal for a possible reconciliation of traditional belief with modern practice.

His views are confirmed and partially echoed by two of my own interviewees:

Today if I say, "You are a witch", or "There is a witch in this area", I'll be arrested for it. Witches just kill because they have a defender [the aforementioned Act]. If you say, "*Mbuya*, you are a witch", they will go and report you. It's an offence, you will be jailed for that... We are living in a modern world. The world is now free, no traditional law binds us. We are doing as we please. (Theol.05R)

It's a hidden thing. We are not permitted to say anything about *uroyi*. We know many in this area, but we cannot mention them. (Theol.09R)

Of the eleven *dare* cases I recorded, three related directly to witchcraft imputations and two others involved witchcraft indirectly. One wonders how such cases were dealt with during the period that the *dare* was suspended. (I was told that the guerrillas put a stop to *dare* proceedings during the 1970s because the UDI regime had coopted the chiefs and the traditional system. After Independence the Primary Courts Act [Act 6 of 1981] formalised this position. Gradually the chiefs regained their status and the *dare* was eventually reinstated in 1993.)

One must consider Daneel's point that witchcraft accusations can be just as malicious and damaging as the actual doings imputed to *varoyi*. In South Africa the atrocities committed by witch-hunters in the Northern Transvaal in May 1994 tragically highlighted this point (*Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 10-16 June 1994). At the same time the pertinacity of the belief in witchcraft strongly suggests that it is a fundamental explanation of evil in the Shona world-view and Madhuku's argument should not be ignored.

3.3 POSSESSION

Ter Haar et al (1992: 119f) write:

The most striking aspect of possession beliefs in the Western world is that possession is generally seen as an involuntary and undesirable event, a harmful experience and something to be rid of... Unlike in Western societies, [in Africa] there is usually no negative connotation attached to it. On the contrary, the state of possession is often seen as desirable and may even be intentionally induced.

These authors cite the research of Bourguignon (1973) who, in a sample of 488 societies world-wide, found that 90 percent had "some sort of institutionalized, culturally patterned form of what is scientifically termed *altered states of consciousness* (ASC)". Of these, 52 percent associated ASC with spirit possession – that is, interpreted the experience in a religious way.

A M Ludwig, director of education and research at an American hospital, defines ASC as "those mental states that deviate notably from the state of alert attention. They are marked by a greater preoccupation with internal sensations and mental processes, by changes in the formal characteristics of thought, and by the *impairment of reality-testing* in various degrees..." (Ter Haar et al 1992: 123; my italics). Ludwig's assumption that only physically perceptible, preferably measurable phenomena are "real" makes this definition incongruous, if not actually simplistic, in the present context. As Wole Soyinka (1990: 137) puts it:

The European intellectual temperament appears to be historically conducive to the infiltration of ... mono-criteria. It is the responsibility of today's African intellectual not only to question these criteria, but to avoid the conditioning of the social being by the mono-criterion methodology of Europe.

By the same token Ludwig's list of the five main ways of inducing trance is not particularly helpful or illuminating either. More to the point is the one mentioned by Ter Haar et al (1992: 125):

Ludwig fails to mention in this context one important mechanism for the production of trance, that of the *cultural expectation*. In a culture or society where possession trance is *a normal and accepted phenomenon*, and where possession behaviour is *part of someone's social role*, trance is easily induced.

[Last two sets of italics mine.]

Whatever causes the onset of trance (rhythmic music, dancing, snuff, fasting) and whatever level of reality the medium enters, this comment by Field (in Beattie & Middleton 1969: 13) strikes me as a sound rule of thumb:

Most mental phenomena are capable of both healthy and morbid use. There is no more reason to label all dissociation as "hysterical" than there is so to label all laughter and weeping. "By their fruits you shall know them." And the fruits of most spirit possession in Ghana [and, as far as I could judge, in Zimbabwe as well — MM] are wholesome and sustaining.

So much for the Western approach — which has, however, had the effect of making many modern educated Shona fight shy of possession. Nonetheless I was told (I could not confirm it personally) that a leading Shona businessman in Harare is a *svikiro*; and the deputy headmaster of a secondary school told me rather diffidently that his brother, a science graduate, is being possessed by their grandfather. One of chief Mabika's *masvikiro* was a teacher until he became possessed. For over a year, to his great embarrassment, the spirit insisted that he wear nothing but animal skins, whereafter he was allowed to resume

ordinary dress. I never probed this issue specifically, but these chance bits of information make me suspect that there must be other educated modern mediums.

I shall be dealing with *masvikiro* in the next chapter. This section is confined to the possession of private individuals as opposed to public ritual officiants. One occasion that I actually witnessed (apart from the episode described in ch 2) was at a thanksgiving *bira* held at Chief Murinye's homestead. There were well over a hundred people present. One man in our group was pointed out to me as the medium of a female *shave* spirit. He was shy, slightly nervous but perfectly friendly; he did not join in the beer drinking. I lost track of him for a while, but later, when the dancing was well under way, he entered that hut of throbbing drums and pounding feet. He was dressed in a white chemise and sang in a shrill female voice. Head thrown back, eyes half-shut, he twirled in a world of his own on the crowded floor, isolated and somehow sad in that vibrant company: I thought of Ophelia. The other people, including his wife, took it in their stride. What impressed my companion, an unusually open-minded Independent Church minister and a Unisa theology student, was what he termed the "ecumenism" of the gathering: the fact that an alien spirit, albeit hosted by a tribesman, was accepted into the heart of tribal life. I confess it had not struck me until he mentioned it, but he certainly had a point. The parochial traditional world, with tribal and family ancestors guarding the door against evil intruders, can afford to be hospitable.

Nonetheless mediumship is sometimes resisted even by staunchly traditional people. One woman said: "A person cannot stay with that spirit in him and remain normal. He may become mad because he'll be having two minds, the mind of the dead person, a spiritual mind; and his own personal mind." (Theol.05R) Possession is usually prefaced by severe illness which responds to no treatment, either modern or traditional. Often it is only when a *n'anga* declares the spirit's ultimatum that the person will submit. It is commonly said that the spirits select their hosts as they desire: *Moyo muti unomera paunoda* (lit. "The heart of the tree [ie the ancestor] germinates where it likes"). (See also Bourdillon 1987: 238f.) If this is indeed so, and if a person selected for mediumship has no "defence" against a possessing spirit, then one could argue that traditional religion has nothing to fear from modernity — bar sophisticated scorn and, who knows, even psychiatric treatment of mediums in the future, as opposed to the more or less accepting attitude that I observed in the early 1990s.

Of course, not all spirits "come out". One person made the point that, if they did, Zimbabwe would face problems: "If all the people were possessed, the country would become complicated"! (Theol.08R) According to the man quoted at the beginning of the chapter, spirits that have no uncompleted business on earth do not return — reminiscent of Hindu and Buddhist *samsara*. Interestingly, I was told by several informants that the spirits of young children are reincarnated. In an African traditional context this makes sense: since these young people have not had the opportunity to beget descendants in their short lifetime, they cannot achieve ancestorhood and therefore need a second chance. Such parallels should not blind one to a fundamental distinction between spirit possession and Eastern (and other) forms of mysticism. The latter is essentially an outcome of contemplation, in which the person "progressively leaves behind analytical, discursive thought and, in the deeper stages, the entire realm of perception, until eventually consciousness ceases" (Krüger 1995: 107). Shona mediums have a similar loss of personal consciousness, but that space is taken over by the consciousness of a departed spirit, which is perfectly capable of "analytical, discursive thought" and in fact seeks a human host for the specific purpose of communicating its thoughts (see Krüger 1995: 109, fn 1).

Pursuing these fascinating analogies falls beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the following comment seems pertinent. Personal continuity is not just an African dream; neither is its termination just an African eschatology. "East" and "West" (like "First" and "Third" World) are European concepts that evolved when Europeans thought of the world as flat, with themselves at the centre — a highly subjective "mono-criterion"! In fact the seeds of what the West calls its civilisation spring from Middle and Far Eastern soil: writing, the wheel, the Zoroastrian notion of polarised good and evil. We know that the Chinese had used the substance the West knows as gunpowder from a much earlier date, for purely aesthetic purposes. Any coincidence of Shona belief with (some) Eastern thinking about life and death should surely be viewed in such a context.

What sort of person does a spirit choose? The following was a fairly typical response:

A person must look like a madman for the spirit to be able to possess him. If an ancestor possesses someone, first the person has to roar. Roaring is a way of giving the spirit entrance to the stomach. ... The ancestor may choose

a person whom it regards as a strong person and whose character suits the spirit's special talents. (Theol.01R)

Another interviewee explained the ancestors' preferences thus — incidentally pointing out the spiritual hazards, from a traditional point of view, of Zionism (Zionists being, with few exceptions, the most adamantly opposed to ancestral beliefs of all the Christian churches):

There are many who are Zionists. In that tribe, if there is no one who follows the tradition, they face difficulties. But if there are others in that tribe who follow the tradition, *those Zionists are saved*... The ancestors do not want evil people. They want innocent ones. People who use [magical] herbs are not the ancestors' favourites. Those people who beat their chests because they are full of their own knowledge, the ancestors never possess them. A person who respects others and is merciful is the ancestors' favourite. (Theol.12R; emphasis mine)

In addition to their chosen human mediums, ancestors also lodge in a ritually dedicated bull (*gono guru*), just as chiefly spirits possess both a *mhondoro* and a human medium. This tradition struck me, coming from my background, as archaic and I rather expected to find that it would be dying out. But when I checked my interviews (also the minisurvey of attendance of traditional ceremonies), I discovered I was wrong: only two respondents — whose comments had stirred my curiosity initially — were completely sceptical. One of them had said:

The thing which makes me disbelieve the *gono* tradition is, how can a bull be a person? I do not like this. Yesterday I saw a *gono* with sores all over its body. Does that mean the owner of the spirit stored in this *gono* had leprosy in his lifetime? (Theol.01R)

But of the 38 other informants (half of them town-dwellers), 19 considered it essential to have "a *gono* at home"; 12 felt it was necessary only if the spirit requested it; and 7 said it was just a tradition. From my minisurvey of the pertinacity of selected rituals and practices it appeared that 62 members of my sample of 115 had actually attended the ceremony at

which the bull is ritually dedicated. Of these ceremonies, 24 had occurred since 1990 (ie during a drought that decimated cattle herds), and a further 33 since 1980.

The need for a *gono guru* was explained on the following lines:

A dead person's spirit cannot stay on the shoulders of a living person who is possessed, because it is painful. The spirit stays with the bull, using it as a horse to ride. (Povo.03R)

The bull is important because it was also used to pay the bride-price to start most families. The *gono* must be there because it is the head and the root of all the families. (Theol.14R)

In this last excerpt the link with fertility is evident — the *gono* is often the only uncastrated male in the herd. One of the chiefs showed me the two bulls dedicated to his father and grandfather respectively. The latter was pure black, but the former was — and the chief seemed genuinely unhappy about this — mixed black and white. Aschwanden (1989, eg p 44, 150) cites several explanations of the symbolism of this colour, fertility being one of them.

Pseudo-possession occurs, of course:

It is hard to know who is possessed and who is not. Nowadays people are pretending... There are some people whom you might think are possessed by all the ancestors of the world. They will be pretending. (Theol.05T)

I was told (Povo.07R; 08T) of a test of the genuineness of a new family medium in which a goat is sprinkled with either snuff or water. If after several administrations the goat did not shake its body to rid itself of the substance, it meant that the candidate was rejected by the spirit. The earthy common sense of this test is appealing: the goat's atypical unconcern must indicate that something is amiss — either in the spirit world or, of course, with the goat itself!

3.4 RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

Although I do not propose to deal with this highly relevant but extremely complex sociohistorical and theological issue in any depth, Christianity is a powerful modernising force in Shona society and as such it cannot be disregarded. For one thing, the mission churches led the way in providing modern medical and educational facilities for rural people, which meant that Christianity brought Western culture into the heartlands of the ancestors before the secular administration did. Furthermore, the prophets of the indigenous Christian churches rival traditional *n'anga* as much as, if not more strongly than, Western trained doctors.

How deep an impact the Christian message itself has had is not easy to assess. I came across some fervent Christians – notably Apostles and Zionists – who adamantly rejected the power of the ancestors, even when they did not demonise them. This is an excerpt from an interview with a Zionist minister:

All the dead people's spirits are to come out on the last day when God comes to destroy this earth. Nothing will be heard about them nowadays if they are real Christians. If their spirits come out, those are demons using their names, not their spirits. ... I have already buried my father. He cannot come and organise my family... If the spirit comes to my place and says, "I have come to see my grandchildren", I do not like this. These are demon spirits.
(Povo.10R)

In his doctoral thesis Daneel (1971) made a searching analysis of a vast mass of data, which he has amplified in subsequent publications (eg Daneel 1974; 1987; 1988). What emerges from his work is that there are three broad styles of Christianity at work in Shona society.

The first is marked by relatively open and flexible accommodation, adaptation, even assimilation, of indigenous beliefs and rituals, as represented by the Roman Catholic Church. This is an on-going policy. The Johannesburg *Sunday Times* (29 May 1994) reported that 14 cardinals and 122 African bishops had just met at a synod in Rome, which "called for more 'inculturation' through the Africanisation of liturgy and church values ... The synod

suggested ancestor worship should be reinterpreted and viewed along lines similar to veneration of saints ... [A]mong the other issues discussed was how to reconcile the African process of marriage with the Western church concept." Apparently the thorny issue of polygamy was not raised!

The second approach is more rigidly dogmatic, even intransigent, as represented by the Calvinist Zimbabwean (originally Dutch) Reformed Church. While this description undoubtedly applies to the clergy, many of my own interviewees who gave their denomination as DRC maintained firm links with their ancestors.

Thirdly, there is a wide spectrum of Independent Churches which have selectively rejected, retained or Christianised various traditional tenets (eg polygamy, beer drinking, *n'anga* practices) but which, by and large, solidly confront and oppose ancestor veneration. (According to Daneel this applies more to what he terms the Spirit-type or prophetic churches than to the Ethiopian-type churches.) Daneel (1971: 462f) comments as follows on the remarkable success of the indigenous churches in this confrontation, in contrast to the mission churches where it has resulted in loss of members:

[T]here is a great difference between the rejection of something so intimately woven into the fabric of African society as ancestor "worship" by *outsiders*, who do so on doctrinal grounds and often deprecatingly, and the criticism which comes from within that society — not halfheartedly, because the missionary suggested it, but from an inner conviction based on personal experience. Psychologically the Independent Church leader's attack has the advantage of being more convincing because he himself sets the example of rejecting, in the name of a stronger Power, the beneficial powers attributed to the ancestors, while it is sensed by Africans that the missionary is not confronted with a similar existential choice. On the other hand, there are staunch traditionalists ... who react even more sharply to the prophetic movements than to the Mission Churches, because in their eyes the prophets ... pose a greater threat to traditional religion than the Mission Churches do.

My own findings must be seen against this background. I have deliberately selected, from my much smaller sample, instances where ancestral belief strongly colours the Christian faith

(if any) of the interviewees. My main reason for so doing is the assumption expressed by Stoddard in 3.1 above: most scholars, explicitly or implicitly, take it for granted that African tradition is bound to succumb in the end. While this may well turn out to be the case, it certainly has not happened yet. Although virtually all my interviewees claimed some form of church allegiance when giving their personal particulars, they usually revealed close familiarity with (and often strong faith in) the traditional belief system. As one man put it, "I know they [the ancestors] are of great importance. I go to church on Sundays just because I don't have anything to do. It is a way of whiling away my time." (Theol.14T) Others make a working compromise, abstaining from actual participation but upholding traditional safeguards through non-Christian kinsfolk:

I only go to Zaka to show respect to my ancestors but the elders do everything that has to be done, because I'm a Christian. I give them everything that is wanted but I do not use those things [beer, snuff]. I ... listen to the *svikiro*, what he is saying, and learn what is being arranged by our ancestors. I won't touch anything in that hut, but if they ask anything from me I give it to them. (Vatorwa.05R)

It is not my intention to deny or belittle the very genuine faith of many Zimbabwean Christians. I do, however, want to give greater prominence to the frequently belittled indigenous faith, which is very much alive and potently influences the lives of millions of people — often coexisting quite happily with perfectly sincere Christian belief. What this demonstrates, to my mind, is that different religions are not necessarily inimical in existential terms. They become so mainly in the minds of dogmatists of whatever persuasion (including the traditional Shona one — see excerpt 13 below). One staunchly traditionalist chief paid generous tribute to the newcomers:

What I really thank these priests of the churches for is that they are in line with our culture [*tsika*; lit. "custom"]. Our culture does not like theft, prostitution and anything that is bad. The churches also prohibit these things. It's just the same as we used to do, no difference between the Karanga Mwari and the missionaries' God... What I do thank these churches for is that they keep on reminding people every Sunday about these laws. ... The difference

is that we do rituals once or twice a year and talk to people about these bad dreams after a long time. But the priests do it frequently. They use our rules, that's why I thank them. They encourage kindness in a person. (Chiefs.03Y)

When I pressed him about differences between the two traditions, he questioned the authenticity of black Christian priests' new allegiance and showed some resentment of Christian intolerance. He said:

People think the priests do not have ancestral cloths and *gono guru* at their places. But it is not true. They have these things. They do it secretly, afraid of being dismissed from their jobs. What I really heard from these churches is that they stop people from attending rituals and consider our forefathers dirty. They want all the people not to do *bira* rituals and to castrate their *gono guru* to become oxen. How would our unborn children get to know our traditional culture if we were to believe what the priests say? We old people know our culture. (Chiefs.03Y)

The excerpts below focus on the differences that these interviewees — selected according to the criterion outlined above — perceived between the two sets of beliefs or, as it was experienced in many instances, merely two styles of worship. The majority of my informants saw the Christian holy spirit (often referred to in the plural — "spirits") as fairly similar to ancestral spirits, with certain more or less important differences.

- (1) [Holy] spirits are like *mashave*. A person must pray hard to get them. They come from other tribes which we do not know... The ancestors' spirits are permanent ones that will stay with you. (Theol.01R)
- (2) Some are possessed by bad spirits even though they are church people. These church people can be possessed by *vatorwa's* spirits, but the ancestors are spirits from our tribe. (Theol.07T)
- (3) They are similar because they do the same job. An ancestor can give advice and the holy spirit also gives advice. They only differ in name. (Theol.02T)

- (4) The spirits worshipped in church can come out easily without troubling people. For an ancestor's spirit to come out people will first have to sweat and sweat, playing drums. Then, if people ignore it, it will start fighting. (Theol.04T)
- (5) The holy spirit is from heaven and the ancestors' spirits are from earth. The other difference is that ancestors are assisted with snuff. The holy spirit is assisted with the Bible. (Theol.14T)
- (6) They are just the same, because before the whites came there were no holy spirits. (Theol.011T)
- (7) The spirits worshipped in church, when talking to a person, say: God is saying so-and-so to you. The ancestors' spirits say, I am saying that-and-that. The spirits worshipped in church never roar when coming out. Even their languages differ. The ancestors talk in Shona and the church spirits talk in different languages. The languages cannot be understood by anyone except the person who is possessed. After the possession ancestral spirits [mediums] cannot say what they were saying in the possessed state. A person who was possessed is told what he was saying. The ancestors' spirits need to be venerated. Prophets do not need veneration. (Theol.02R)
- (8) Some people use the ancestors to prophesy when they are in church. Others just pretend... They call holy spirit the spirit which comes straight from God. Ancestors are spirits which are also from God but they go a long way: from God to possess a person, then the possessed person will talk to living people. (Theol.09T)

At an "empirical" level some basic differences are identified. Traditional spirits are kinsfolk, implicitly trusted in a way no *shave*, however holy, can ever be, and demand to be venerated (*kupira*), much like living elders. Traditional spirits respond to familiar elements like snuff (and, of course, beer) rather than a modern printed text, however old its origin. The "God of the Bible" (excerpts 7 and 8) sends his spirit directly, by-passing the human generations

of the worshippers. He does not translate it into their ordinary human processes or even their language. Ancestral spirits are rough diamonds; "holy" spirits are soft-spoken and polite, in keeping with the more subdued atmosphere of churches whose historical European mission origins influence even the indigenous Christian movements.

From my own observation (see Daneel 1987, ch 6 for a more detailed analysis) these latter certainly come much closer to the traditional style of worship than the mainline churches. Traditional ceremonies are held out of doors, under a tree considered sacred to the ancestors (often a *muchakata*, ie wild cork tree), with a circular area demarcated around it. In the old days, I was told, palings were planted in the soil around the periphery. On the occasions that I attended the trunk was simply girdled with black and white cloth, the ancestral colours; but the surrounding area remained holy and everyone removed their shoes before entering it. Such Independent Church ceremonies as I attended observed much the same protocol. But the behaviour of possessed prophets, the style of dancing and singing are more restrained than the impassioned stamping and hoarse-voiced addresses of the traditional mediums whom I saw in action.

Another difference that struck me was the strict segregation of the sexes at Independent Church services. While traditional women normally sit to one side on reed mats at *bira* ceremonies, in the fervour of the dance and especially in a possessed state men and women mix freely; also, as exemplified by the *shave* medium in 3.2.3 above, possession by a spirit of the opposite gender is not unusual. And the frankly sexual traditional rituals, one instance of which I witnessed (see ch 5), are clearly inspired by a God who gave humans procreative powers analogous to his/her own creativity. In this regard Soyinka (1990: 4) writes: "A profound transformation has ... taken place within the human psyche if, to hypothesise, the same homo sapiens mythologises at one period that an adventurous deity has penetrated earth, rocks and underground streams with his phallus, and, at another period, that a new god walks on water without getting his feet wet."

- (9) If I am possessed by an ancestral spirit and go to church, that spirit will change into a holy spirit. (Theol.08T)
- (10) Those holy spirits which possess people in church are our ancestors. The only thing is that the spirit comes out in a polite way, because if it comes out

violently it can easily be discovered. So it copies everything that is done in church so that it will not be separated from its choice of a relative. It then becomes a healer, using the water of the church. (Theol.15T)

- (11) The spirits which are prophesying are not from God. These spirits worshipped in church are our ancestors who come in a gentle manner. Matthew 24 and Mark 13 say there is no prophet on earth. That is the traditional way of us black people. We believe these spirits help us. (Theol.06R)

I was often told, with reference to their mobility, that the ancestors are like wind or like birds. From these excerpts I gather that they are also like chameleons, blending into a different milieu without changing their known character. Informant 9 indicates that this is because they do not want to sever links with their chosen mediums and therefore follow them into the alien new environment, flexibly adopting its *mores* and means of healing. The scriptural reference in excerpt 11 (Jesus' warning against false prophets in the last days) is interesting. This elderly man, of the Zimbabwean Reformed Church, freely adapted the text to clarify his position — an extremely ambivalent one! In the course of the same interview he actually stated, "I am serving two masters." And in a further excerpt (no 15 below) his personal dilemma emerges as something close to despair.

- (12) If there were real prophets in church like those of the past of whom we hear in the Bible, why don't they do miracles to stop this drought? ... *Masvikiro* are saying, "You wronged us in such and such a way." People have bowed their heads for their mistakes and now there is a slight change [some rain], which shows our ancestors are sympathising with us. The prophets spend weeks and weeks on mountains, but nothing happens. (Theol.05R)
- (13) The holy spirit can tell lies but the ancestors' spirits never lie. What is said by the ancestor is followed by action... Three quarters of the ancestors tell the truth, one quarter of the holy spirits tell the truth. If a person is a real medium he never lies. The people who pretend tell lies. (Theol.07R)

- (14) In the Bible there is a verse which says, Respect your father and mother. Today we call our fathers and mothers devils. How can the devil help us? But who is the first God? My father is the first God who gave birth to me. I knew God already when I was born. Christianity is troubling us. We are lost. (Theol.08R)
- (15) The white God is different from our black God. Our black God permitted us to do rituals. Our tradition was chased away by the God of the whites. There is no help now. I think the ancestors have forgotten about us... Now it's a shameful thing. People don't know which side they are on. They don't belong to the church nor to the ancestors. (Theol.06R)
- (16) In our country of the past which was lived in by our grandfathers, if they gathered together and said, "Our fathers, we bow down our heads to you, what wrong have we done you?", their hands would be laid on *rapoko*. Before two days rain would come... Today the ancestors have been made ashamed, they are being scolded time and again by you youngsters who call yourselves educated people... Today we are punished because of you educated people, who think elders are nothing because they are not educated. We are now in a cesspit. Who is going to pull us out? (Theol.05T)

This last set of excerpts I selected because of their outspoken criticism of the new faith. With one exception — the 75-year-old man quoted elsewhere as well — they are aged between 40 and 53, with at least some education (except no 16). Three are qualified Master Farmers. In their daily lives they make free use of such modern amenities as are accessible. They all claim allegiance to some church (3 Roman Catholic, 1 Zimbabwe Reformed and 1 Zionist). I cite these particulars to illustrate that it is not only the very old, the illiterate, the ultraconservative or the "unconverted" who are nostalgic, even militant about the traditional faith. These statements by a few individuals straddling the divide between the old world and the new reveal scepticism, if not outright hostility, towards the new. The obvious explanation would be to call it resistance to change, but such a glib diagnosis does not alter the traumatic nature of the experience. Nor does it "prove" the often unquestioned assumption in favour of the new.

What about the generation that has been growing up since Independence? A questionnaire that I gave to 59 pupils at two high schools (the one an elitist boarding school with pupils from all over the country; the other in Mucheke township, attended by financially less privileged but academically able young people) included this item: "Do you think the traditional culture is very different from Christianity? Explain your answer." I shall quantify the responses for the sake of brevity. Thirty respondents saw the two as more or less similar; 26 believed they were very different (there were 3 nonresponses). Sixteen ascribed the dissimilarity to the nature of the mediator(s) between humans and God — which some rated a radical difference, others a minor one. Only five indicated outright rejection of the traditional culture. I quote four responses — two from each main category — to indicate their tone and quality:

- (1) No marked difference as I see it myself, because in Christianity you worship the unknown and in traditional culture we also worship the unknown as most of the figures are forgotten by name. The only difference is that Christianity is followed by the world at large whilst a traditional culture is restricted to a small sector or community of a population.
- (2) No, because both ideologies feel there is someone who is the king of all, who provides us with rains and other natural things. Christians feel there is life after death and that's the same as traditional culture.
- (3) Very different, because in traditional culture if something happens like death, accidents, illness, etc. they always tend to think that something evil caused it like witchcraft or something. But in Christianity they believe that God will have caused it and they pray for the person, while in traditional culture they go to the *n'anga* and try to find the person who caused it.
- (4) Very different: tradition talks about life after death in the form of spirit mediums, Christianity talks only about hell or heaven.

These young people on the whole identified traditional culture with good manners, deference to elders and marriage customs, but in many cases it clearly went deeper than that. A few fervent Christians were bold in their denunciation; a somewhat larger minority

were emphatic in their defence of tradition, some on nationalist grounds; and a large middle group were merely tolerant, again often on nationalist grounds. I quote an example from each category:

- Our family does not attend ceremonies and we don't even talk to the *vadzimu*. According to my own observation this is right because those who attend *vadzimu* ceremonies will only be talking to air. How come that someone who died ten years ago can help a living person? That is what we call lies. A dead person cannot help at all because he is dead. My family believes in God because we are church-goers and we believe God is the only one who can help any living thing.
- Burying our culture is the same as burying our lives. How would a person feel if we say, "Let's kill all wildlife because they are of the past and let's make metal wildlife because it is modern"? I know it's impossible, as it is for us to bury our past. We have to be proud of our past. You can't change your skin colour. If you were born black, you die black.
- Every healthy society must have an old culture, although some cultural practices have to be modified with time.

3.5 CONCLUSION

My overwhelming impression is of a society in flux, marked by fierce pulls in both directions and diverse responses. What makes an assessment even more problematic is that neither the traditional culture nor the modern one (here specifically Christianity) is static. The backdrop is a situation in which a predominantly impoverished but socioculturally fairly stable rural population is dominated, politically and economically, by a largely urban, relatively wealthy but socioculturally destabilised elite. The variables are many, the processes at work diversified, and my study is a limited one. But this much is plain: more than a century of interaction, interpretation (both existential and cognitive), reaction and acceptance has brought about a complex, potentially creative mix.

How will the spirits respond? For that we must look to the mediums of the future — if any. They may yet rise to the challenge, harnessing and assimilating new technologies and ideologies as their forebears have done over the ages. Or, in an ironic inversion of the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, they may find their way blocked when they seek to return — in which case, like the baby leaving the uterus, they will never come back.

CHAPTER 4

Of blood and soil²¹

Mapanzure was just a wanderer in the beginning. He and his group had a wife. She was pregnant. She was about to give birth. Long back a mutorwa was not allowed to give birth in someone's chiefdom. The blood was not allowed to flow on that chiefdom. Mapanzure took his wife to a river called Musugwizi so that the blood would be washed away by the water and not sink into the soil. This happened after Mapanzure had already sent messengers to the chief to say that he was in his area. He saw footmarks, so he knew the area was already occupied... The chief said to the messengers, "Go ask your chief, how did he reach this area?" They answered that they had a svikiro who directed them wherever they went. The chief told them to bring that svikiro to him. This person was Maneta, who was then married to chief Mashura. When the messengers went back to report to Mapanzure that the chief had taken Maneta to be his wife, Mapanzure's wife had already given birth to a son in the water. Mapanzure told the messengers to go and tell the chief that he was happy, but he wanted help from him because he was just sitting in water. He was afraid of the mutorwa's blood entering the chief's soil. Chikwanda named the child Madzirire [protector]. So they were told to build their home that side... This was how Mapanzure got an area to stay. The boundary of Mapanzure's chiefdom was from where Shumba's chiefdom starts to Masuka, up to Bati. (Hist.01)

This story about the settlement of the Hera of Mapanzure in Duma territory was told to me by a brother of the Duma chief Chikwanda. His chronicle differs considerably from the one given to me by the current chief Mapanzure in another interview (Chiefs.01Q). In this latter version the wandering vaHera ambushed the ruling Duma at a communal work party (*nhimbe*) and so obtained their chiefdom by force. What struck me about the Chikwanda legend, however, was its poignant use of the blood and soil symbolism, which was

21 Some of the contents of this chapter is adapted from a seminar paper read at the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Religious Studies in September 1993, subsequently published in the *Journal for Religious Studies* (March 1995).

increasingly intriguing me, so I decided to try it on the chiefs. I got an opportunity at a seminar which I convened, at Prof Daneel's suggestion, on 8 May 1993. It was attended by five Duma chiefs, including chief Chikwanda himself. When I presented this version for their comments, there was immediate protest: this is not Duma custom, two or three chiefs exclaimed simultaneously. (Chief Chikwanda, I noticed, kept silent.) I refrained from pointing out that it might well have been muHera custom, and listened instead to an account of the *ndongamabwe* ritual, an animal sacrifice performed to secure *vatorwa* the right to be buried in the soil of a foreign chieftom. The chiefs felt that this illustrated the same principle.

I have quoted the contested legend all the same, and will analyse it below. For one thing, I am not a historian; my concern is with symbol and myth, which are among the many sources and movers of history. From such an angle this story is no more or less apocryphal than any of the other histories told to me in the course of my study. Besides, the chiefs' objection was to a breach of tribal orthodoxy: they in no way refuted the actual principle that foreign blood in tribal soil is a potentially dangerous intrusion.

4.1 THE SOIL (vhu)

When a chief is installed, part of the ceremony entails placing a little of the soil of his new domain in his hand and enjoining him to take good care of it. That soil does not symbolise, as I initially thought, just the material base of the subsistence economy of his people. It represents the very essence of the chieftaincy:

Chief means soil... These people follow traditional ways. It doesn't matter how young or old he is, how educated or how ignorant,²² the soil will help him to lead. The chief is not the leader. He just carries information from the owners [*varidzi*, lit. custodians], that is, the forefathers. (Theol.18T)

The identification of the tribal *mhondoro* with the soil is so complete that the terms are used interchangeably, which is why it took me some time to appreciate its significance:

22 A spokesman of the Chieftaincy Section of the Ministry of Local Government, when asked about the impact of a Western educated chieftaincy, answered: "It is a question of qualities. You can have a lot of education but still - education is there to sort of polish what actually exists within you."

Chiefs are for the soil. They send our requests, for example rain problems, to their ancestors... (Theol.17T)

A headman is for the soil and a councillor is for the party [ZANU-PF]. (Theol.01R)

The chiefs are soil leaders, the ones you deny are for the soil... (Theol.10R)

I cannot say the chiefs should be abolished because the soil would be angry. (Povo.07R)

It was this expression — “The soil would be angry” — that first alerted me to the symbolic meaning of the word *vhu*. Metaphors are being used increasingly by scholars as a key to the thought of preliterate Africa. Kwame Gyekye (1987, Section II), for instance, attempts to get to the roots of Ghanaian sage philosophy by analysing Akan proverbs. To substantiate this form of philosophising Gyekye (1987: 23) cites the case of Heraclitus who, in effect, left later philosophers no more than “a collection of sayings ... [which] because of their philosophical content or relevance, ... were utilized by later thinkers engaged in the reconstruction and resurrection of Greek philosophy”.

In my study the metaphor of angry soil cropped up regularly in many interviews and contexts. Always it referred to the collective ancestry of the chiefly line whose anger transcends and manipulates the physical laws of nature, as the drought-stricken land around us testified. The only way to avert this anger is to placate the soil ritually, humbly making amends for whatever offence has been committed.

Without the power of the soil the chief is no different from anybody else: “The chief’s work needs a leader to ... forward complaints to the big fathers of the tribe. Chiefs have flesh. This flesh is not the chief; the spirit of the *svikiro* is the chief.” (Povo.06R) This quotation makes at least two telling points.

Firstly, it explains how a hereditary chieftaincy persists in a modern democratic state — and to many Zimbabweans the chiefs are not, or should not be, just figureheads. Comrade

Mavhaire, while revealing a somewhat patronising attitude towards the chieftaincy, was emphatic on this point:

We have learnt that unless we protect the institution of our ancestral spirits, it will be destroyed by development. Go to other countries, go to Britain. At the end of the day they made a ceremonial king. They made a ceremonial king in the Netherlands. So we must make sure that as development pitches up we protect our institution. (Government.01)

Indeed, to some older people chiefly descent invalidates the very premiss of Western democracy:

Councillors are elected by people but they are not recommended by the soil... Today people just say, We want this one or that one. What sort of thing is that? Do you think the soil will be happy? Forget it. You won't get good fortune. A person who comes from a different tribe cannot lead the owner of the land. (Theol.10R)

Others are more pragmatic:

The problem is, my chief cannot write and record events. But a councillor is a chief's modern child. He is the chief's office boy or secretary... A chief cannot take the councillor's position because this position needs education. (Theol.01R)

An analysis of 33 interviews in which informants (18 in the communal lands, 15 in Masvingo town) were asked whether chiefs are more important or less important than councillors showed the following results: more important, 19; less important, 8; similar, 6.

From this flows the second point: to traditionalists the chief's power is superior to that of modern functionaries because it does not reside in his human flesh — which, as indicated above, may well be deficient in wisdom or education. It is a spiritual power communicated by the soil via its mouthpieces, the *masvikiro* or tribal spirit mediums. I shall have more to say about *masvikiro* in due course. For now I merely want to make the point that the power

of the chiefs is spiritual and derives from the soil — their dead forebears, whose collective wisdom guides them in their every action.

That is why the *mapa*, the ancestral burial place of past chiefs, is forbidden to all but the prescribed grave-keepers and the officiants at major rituals. Usually it is a wooded hill²³ with a cave containing the bodies of deceased chiefs (in the case of the Duma they are mummified) seated in their appointed places. The cave is kept clean by a family of grave-keepers (*gadzingo*) who, although of the chiefly lineage, are not in the line of succession. No woman of child-bearing age is allowed on that ground and desecration of the *mapa* is sure to incur the dire wrath of the soil. In a very real sense it is the power-house of the tribe:

The *mapa* is our strongest weapon. People who were buried there do not like sins. The *gadzingo* were called the dead ones... If they did anything wrong it meant the whole tribe or our forefathers who were buried in the *mapa* were shamed. ... It is impossible for living people to stay without a *mapa*.
(Hist.01B)

But, in keeping with the hierarchical continuity of Shona traditional belief, the line does not end with the *mhondoro*:

There are spirits that are from people who are allowed to rule on earth. These are the only spirits which can forward complaints to God and God will respond. ... These are the spirits of the chiefs. That is why chiefs are not allowed to be removed by anyone. Their powers are from God. (Hist.01)

One senior Duma chief confirmed this: "My powers are not political — my powers are from God." (Chiefs.01M)

This is not the place for a thoroughgoing comparison of the European and African conceptions of the divine right of kings. The parallel is obvious, and appears quite fundamental when one reads the words of Bossuet, chaplain to Louis XIV of France and arch-exponent of royal absolutism: "The respect which we pay the prince therefore has

23 The holy grove surrounding the cave in which the bodies are kept is known as *maramba(ku)temwa*.

within it something of religion. The service of God and respect for kings are things united..." (Rowen 1963: 33-34). But the conceptual and historical disparities are great and the two notions can certainly not be identified. The disparities in scale and material sophistication are self-evident: even in the heyday of Munhumutapa and the great Rozvi *mambos* their realms were not comparable to those of, say, the Austrian Habsburgs. But I want to briefly consider two other differences, more pertinent to my theme.

The first is conceptual: in the eyes of the chief's people — who are his children, not his subjects — he rules as an embodiment, a mere amanuensis, of the complex spirit network which directs him via living mouthpieces, the *masvikiro*. These spirits have greater immediacy and a more direct, dramatic impact than the intellectualised, dogmatic authority of the Renaissance church(es), for all the sociopolitical power Rome still wielded and the Protestants negotiated. In Shona tradition, spirit presence and power are organically part of the practical functioning of the chieftom.

One example is *chisi*, the day when, by ancestral decree, nobody is allowed to work the soil. Nowadays this is mostly one day per week, but Bourdillon (1976: 70) mentions that *chisi* was originally associated with the phases of the moon. This is still the case in some chiefdoms: chief Mazungunye requested me to give him a calendar indicating the phases of the moon because, in overcast weather, he had difficulty determining the date of his monthly *chisi*. Anybody violating this traditional sabbath pays a fine because, as one chief put it, "he has touched the soil on a *chisi* day — the soil does not allow that". The moral rules governing life are issued by the soil and breaches of these rules incur not merely material penalties, but in extreme cases also drought, disease, sterility and death. This is the very ground of chiefly authority, even in these times of rapid change.

The second difference I want to mention is historical. Zimbabwe was colonised by Britain in 1890. Since then the chieftaincy has been manipulated, exploited and tailored in various ways by an alien political power to suit its ends. Experimentation to achieve a balance of power acceptable to both modernity and tradition continued after Independence and remains a factor in local government policy-making today. But, as Holleman (1969: 71) put it in the 1960s, "It [referring specifically the Council Act of 1957] is at best an uneasy marriage between old and new, because in a time of rapid change, traditional conservatism

would appear to be clearly at a disadvantage.” Thirty years later, this statement still applies, despite a growing number of educated chiefs and government’s apparent acceptance that the chieftaincy is a sociopolitical force that cannot be ignored.

So when a chief tells me that his powers are from God he is speaking from a very different position than that once occupied by the Sun King; and the fate of the chieftaincy, whatever it may be, is unlikely to resemble that of Louis Capet.

4.2 THE BLOOD (ropa)

Long back, when the Madzviti [Ndebele] came, these people [Shona chiefs] fought very hard to get the right to lead a chiefdom. They won. They passed away but they left their children who must rule this chiefdom. I call them blood areas because their blood was shed there. I can’t just go to any chiefdom and call myself a chief there. The spirits of that tribe who fought to get that chiefdom will also fight me... A *mutorwa* will never know how to make these spirits feel happy. They are the owners of the soil. When I say “owners of the soil” I mean that their tribal blood was shed in that chiefdom and sank into the soil, which then became their soil. They cannot leave these chiefdoms because their blood is still flowing there. If one tries to disturb that blood, it will boil. The whole chiefdom then becomes hot. (Theol.09T)

This expression, “the blood boils”, cropped up in interviews with the same regularity as, “the soil is angry”. It puzzled me greatly. The anger of the soil and the boiling of the blood — which clearly means much more than the English expression “my blood boils” — seemed to be the same thing, yet I was assured they were not. Blood, soil, anger are linked somehow; but how? Although I do not profess to understand all the ramifications, it did become clearer as I went along. Let me try to explain.

Blood is an important symbol in many religious and cultural contexts, from Mithraism and Christianity to the Mafia. In Shona traditional culture one could almost call it a supreme unifying symbol. Aschwanden (1982: 23) writes:

The symbol of the blood ... is the strongest of all the lineal ties. It not only lends a religious aspect to the tribe, it also puts the individual under an obligation towards his consanguines. How could he ever seriously oppose a member of his own tribe? It would mean opposing his *vadzimu*.

I have mentioned the *ndongamabwe* ritual which the Duma perform when burying an alien so that the blood of the sacrificed beast may cleanse their soil of this foreign blood. In effect, since cattle was traditional wealth, it meant that a heavy duty was payable if you died on foreign soil — a duty exacted by and paid with blood, the universal unifying symbol.

What about the *vatorwa* women who bear the children of the tribe? Their blood too presents a problem. Aschwanden (1982: 266-277) points out that when a man and a woman of different totems have a child, there is a mixing of blood which is almost a necessary evil. Incest is taboo, but in a patrilinear system the admission of foreign blood puts you in close contact with *vatorwa* ancestors and, as in the case of a dead *mutorwa*, certain safeguards are necessary.

Until the placenta is expelled the child remains attached to it... After the child is born, the Karanga want to break this connection. It is, according to their "Weltbild" something strange and undesirable. The placenta embodies the close connection between mother and child at its height because it is nearest to the alien blood. The child, on the other hand, has its own blood and world of ancestors; it must finally be separated from the mother's blood so that this almost unnatural connection ceases to exist. Of course, the Karanga mean only the physical proximity of alien blood, not the physical connection between mother and child (Aschwanden 1982: 266).

The burying of the placenta is fundamentally a *rite de passage*: it marks an important transition from the mother's womb, where her ancestors and their blood dominate, to the child's real home among its father's relatives and his ancestors. "Long back," I was told, "if you moved from one chiefdom to another, before you eat anything in the new chiefdom you had to kneel down, clap hands and take a little soil from that chiefdom and eat it so as to get together with the soil of that chiefdom, as you had left your own soil — so the soil of

this chiefdom wouldn't hurt you. If you didn't do this you might fall ill because your umbilical cord is not in that soil." (Hist.01B) This established a connection with Dr Aschwanden's observations — and, in the process, explained how the soil, with its enduring, steadfast qualities, is linked to the more dynamic, equally potent symbol of the blood.

The soil is both the founding ancestors who conquered it and the rules they laid down for that chiefdom — rules which those who occupy that land today, *vatorwa* and children of the chiefdom alike, must obey, otherwise they violate their relationship with the blood. When that happens, the blood may boil. It is like a fever: women are barren, humans and animals sicken and die, the earth dries out and there is drought...

4.3 THE MYTH

Given the meaning of the blood and soil symbolism, the myth of Mapanzure's arrival in Duma territory is clear. Apocryphal or not, its logic within this symbolic framework is flawless. The vaHera knew the area to be occupied, so in any case they had to approach whoever represented that soil to seek permission to live there. Forcible occupation (such as chief Mapanzure reported) would bring them into confrontation with the owners of the soil, a much graver risk than military confrontation with their living successors. But there was an even more pressing problem, because in their group was a woman about to give birth. Her blood — doubly alien, since she was not of Mapanzure's tribe either — sinking into Duma soil would be a fatal presumption which, Mapanzure might have reasoned, could well sabotage their negotiations for domicile completely. So she gave birth in a river, which duly washed away the contaminating blood. Meanwhile Mapanzure had dispatched his messengers to chief Mashura.

Acceding to Mashura's demand to have the Hera *svikiro* as his wife was another safeguard — also from Mashura's point of view. Political alliances by marriage are common enough, but this one has an unusual twist: it effected a spiritual alliance with Mapanzure's whole ancestral lineage whom Maneta represented. In a sense Mashura was marrying Mapanzure's soil, coopting its potentially hostile blood. To my mind this explicit acknowledgment of spirit agency in political matters is what distinguishes Shona tribal politics from its post-Enlightenment European counterpart. It is also apparent in the custom (see ch 3) of leaving

conquered autochthons in charge of rain-making shrines after they have lost their political power. Mudenge (1988: 127) maintains that this custom reflects "a deliberate and successful attempt to separate the spiritual and temporal powers from the control of one man". My argument is that the notions of "spiritual" and "temporal" are integrated in the traditional concept of power. The deference to mediums — who, in their turn, articulate mainly the consensus of society (Mudenge 1988: 125) — does not necessarily invalidate my case. What Dr Mudenge explains in Western terms as a "separation" could be interpreted, without any fundamental contradiction, in terms of traditional symbolism as *continuity* between past and present rulers, with due regard to the views and interests of their common "children" — the social consensus or democratic principle that Mudenge is emphasising.

Thus there is no absolute sacred/profane dichotomy in the post-Enlightenment Western sense. To my mind the historian Beach's repudiation of this aspect of Shona tradition betrays a lack of sensitivity to the "nature of the state" as experienced by its rulers, subjects and their neighbours. Thus he writes (Beach 1980: 221): "The overall view of the Changamire state from the Portuguese position was essentially realistic, at least as far as the nature of the state was concerned... they had no illusions about any special spiritual powers being held by the Changamire or his relatives." After all, the Portuguese were more or, often, less trusted outsiders who would hardly be admitted to the inner motivations and cultic secrets of tribal leaders, even had they taken a more than passing interest in these. Of course the Shona have a keen sense of the sacred — one merely has to consider the sacrosanctness of the *mapa* and the removal of shoes before entering the holy ground under the *muchakata*. But the sacred is not a separate dimension in the sense that Mircea Eliade or Rudolf Otto would have it. It is simply a fluid extension of ordinary day-to-day reality into spirit territory, revered and even feared because it is, as yet, unknown to the living except through direct communication with the spirits. Since these spirits freely enter and indeed permeate the material world (their blood is sunk into the soil), that world is itself "sacralised": *nothing is profane*.

This postulate has two corollaries. One: if nothing is profane, then everything may be regarded as — more or less — sacred, from clay pots frothing to the brim with beer and snuff, to tilled fields and ordinary marriage beds. Two: sacred/profane is an artificial distinction, which allows greater latitude for egotistical desires and greed of whatever kind.

Such "sins" (and my informants referred to them as such) then occur, more or less sanctioned and controlled, without reference to primitive supernatural agencies. This leaves the profane sphere immune to all but material cause and effect, and the supernatural — purged of "sin" — quite unreal.

Avoiding this dichotomy, traditional Shona thinking introduces another: either you observe the rules of the soil — OR ELSE! (In keeping with the reciprocity of the relationship with the ancestors, of course, the living will object strenuously if they feel that their *vadzimu* are neglecting or punishing them unfairly.) It is a familiar choice for anyone who has ever been exposed to hell-fire preaching. From my study it would seem that Shona tradition, in the face of formidable odds, still offers sufficient assurance and solace to make most rural (and some urban) people settle, by and large, for the rules. Thus a young bank teller in search of a wife, a Seventh Day Adventist, told me that he was disillusioned with modern Christian girls. He was conducting his own research into the traditional culture — he had ruined his car on communal land dirt roads in the process — to find out why it is better at preserving sexual morality. When I last saw him in May 1994 he had not yet arrived at any conclusions. Comrade Mavhaire, too, considered this a major reason for preserving traditional ways, commenting: "It's better to teach people morals than to police them." The "policing" function is, implicitly, left to the *vadzimu*!

Thus the soil and the blood signify sacralised economics, politics, community life, kinship, the entire ecology and all fertility. These two symbols are the cardinal links between "sacred" and "profane", unknown and known. They organically amalgamate the fabric of society with the spirit world and maintain the vital continuity with God, the origin and giver of life. As such I submit that they are the twin pillars of Shona traditional belief.

In practice there are two hierarchies, operating in tandem: that of the chiefs and the *mhondoro*, and that of ordinary families and their ancestors. Both derive from and lead up to Mwari, the *mhondoro* outranking commoners' *vadzimu* and thus functioning as the top rungs of their ladder to God. The rules are fundamentally the same — those for chiefs are merely more elaborate. The chiefs are kept informed of the wishes of the soil by their

masvikiro, family ancestors communicate via a chosen relative.²⁴ The superordination of the chiefly hierarchy has to do with rain and fertility. Rain in particular is a crucial barometer of the state of human relations with God, and at this level the soil — via the chiefs, the *masvikiro* and the great power centres of the *mhondoro* (eg Matonjeni) — is crucial. If the soil is angered, the blood boils.

4.4 A MODERN SVIKIRO

4.4.1 Background

The spirit of Chaminuka (see 3.2.2) is widely recognised as one of the most ancient in Zimbabwean tradition, although Beach (1980: 314-315), predictably, is dismissive of its antiquity: "Firstly, the original Chaminuka does not appear to have been the ancestor of any modern dynasty, and, secondly, there is no reliable evidence of a specific medium before Kachinda ... or Pasamiri... Nearly all of the traditions concerning 'Chaminuka' actually refer to this latter medium." He does not consider, however, how the two mediums he mentions gained legitimacy at all. More moderately, Mtetwa (1970: 112f) maintains that Musikavanhu, Dzivaguru and Chaminuka should be regarded as territorial spirits on an equal footing "under God". And Daneel (1970: 24) writes:

The principal *mhondoro* at [Great] Zimbabwe was Chaminuka's and although this Shona hero-spirit originally had no connection with Mwari, it somehow became the spiritual "Son of Mwari" or at any rate was regarded as having directly emanated from God. Chaminuka's medium, according to Abraham's informants, used to reside within the "Eastern Enclosure" of the Acropolis where he communicated the messages of his close associate Mwari to the outside world...

Analysing the parallel apotheosis of the Tavara spirit Karuva — who became identified with Dzivaguru (also known as Chikara or Murungu), the supreme God of the north — Mudenge (1988: 129) writes:

24 Professor Daneel tells me that these mediums are also sometimes called *masvikiro*.

Perhaps through a slow process, and by stages, Karuva changed, from being a mere *mudzimu* interceding with *Dzivaguru* on behalf of the people to being the son of *Dzivaguru*, and in time the difference between "father" and "son" almost vanished. In the minds of mere mortals it became a matter of theological hair-splitting to emphasize the distinction between the two, for *Dzivaguru/Chikara* the "father" and Karuva the "son" had such an identity of "mind" that to treat them as two entities was merely an academic exercise. This process need not have been deliberately or consciously initiated by anyone to mislead the people, it may just have been allowed to grow, for it hurt nobody but clearly benefited the *Nhari Unendoro* clan, who therefore felt no urge to clarify the position.

While Mudenge's hypothesis could well be an extrapolation from Christian theology, the status of Chaminuka is certainly interesting. As a national — as opposed to a tribal — spirit, along with Nehanda and Kaguvi, it has been greatly enhanced by more recent developments. Bourdillon (1987: 268; see also Woollacott 1975) recounts the legendary death of Pasipamire, a famous Chaminuka medium, at the hands of Lobengula's soldiers in the late 19th century. The Ndebele spears were unable to penetrate his frail old body. In the end he handed one of these weapons to a little boy, instructing him to do what the warriors had failed to do. The child struck the blow, whereupon he died. This tale has become part of Shona folklore and, in the resurgence of black nationalism after World War II, Chaminuka, like Nehanda and Kaguvi, became symbolic of the increasingly militant resistance to foreign oppression (see Lan 1985).

In a sense this was a far more revolutionary aspect of the liberation war than the professed Marxism of ZANU, which had little impact at the grassroots. Comrade Mavhaire put it thus:

African nationalism in this country, if you go back to 1959 — there was no socialism, there was no communism. It was simply the people's grievances against the oppressor and against colonialism. ... And if you look for our national grievance no. 1 in the war of liberation, you'll see that it was the question of land. ... There were two plays in our war: the play to the international gallery, where we got arms and our friends as leaders; and at

grassroots, the play of our people's grievances, without talk about [Marxist] ideology.²⁵

Traditionally the *svikiro* spoke for the soil. The message was addressed primarily to the chief and its purport was, as Beattie and Middleton put it, "essentially conservative". They go on to explain the phenomenon of the revolutionary role of mediums thus:

Almost always traditional mediumistic cults are essentially conservative, for they express and help to sustain the traditional standards and values of the society. Yet we have noted that mediumship plays an important role in situations of radical and disturbing social change. The paradox is resolved if we accept that in most traditional societies change is regarded as something unwanted, even as dangerous and evil. And, like other external and uncontrollable forces, it is often regarded as a consequence of the activity of Spirit... Thus the forces of radical change may be spiritualized in order that they can be accommodated and thus in some way controlled ... First, it provides a means by which the people concerned can comprehend the agents of change, and can incorporate these ... into their system of mythological beliefs. Secondly it can provide a basis for the legitimization of new patterns of power and authority where they have come into being (Beattie & Middleton 1969: xxviii-xxix).

The ordinary tribal *svikiro*, then, advises and admonishes the chief, the son of the soil. But the supratribal spirits, among whom Chaminuka features prominently, are there for the nation. In tribal societies the notion of "for the nation" is probably equivalent to the modern concept of universal humanity, which could explain the apotheosis of the Chaminuka spirit.²⁶ Liberation war songs (Pongweni [sa]: 52, 152) invoke his name, and he was invariably mentioned in response to the following question, which all my interviewees interpreted in a *chimurenga* context: "Do you think there are ancestors who helped Zimbabwe? Which ancestors helped Zimbabwe?" (Questionnaire II). To ordinary Shona traditionalists —

²⁵ See also Mandaza (1987: 4f; 29).

²⁶ A tantalising hypothesis for generalisation to other religions!

whatever the motivation of their political and military leaders may have been²⁷ — spirit guidance during the war was very real:

Few guerrillas died in Zimbabwe. Most of those who died, died in other countries because the guerrillas did not know how to talk to the ancestors of those countries. The ancestors of that country did not know how to help our children. Thousands and thousands were killed in the battle at Chimoio [in Mozambique]. I think Chaminuka was helping the guerrillas. The land-owners were always phoning to the ancestors of other chiefdoms, using that transistor which I told you about.²⁸ (Theol.01R)

4.4.2 The speech

Most of the information recorded above I had gleaned from my preliminary reading before I arrived in Zimbabwe. My curiosity was aroused by the “indigenous Christ”, Chaminuka, but my early inquiries led nowhere. When I asked about “big spirits” I was told, in staunch Duma fashion, about Pfupajena and his mute bride Mhepo (see ch 5). Chaminuka, being a spirit from foreign parts, did not feature in day to day tribal life. Only when I learned to gear my questions to the wider political scene did I start getting the picture outlined above. I did, however, pick up stray references to a strange Chaminuka medium living somewhere in Zaka district in the south. I got the impression that his authenticity was doubtful and did not think it was worth pursuing.

Then, in July 1993, I met him, in unusual circumstances. He arrived at an ecological conference attended by both Independent Church bishops and chiefs with their *masvikiro*. His costume was an elaborate collage of symbols and he carried a carved wooden bird like the soapstone originals at Great Zimbabwe, replicas of which are now sold at roadside stalls all over the country. He caused quite a commotion, going into trance and triggering a spate of possession among the other *masvikiro*. It perplexed the white conference delegates and outraged the bishops, who had considerable misgivings about mixing with traditionalists at

27 While there must have been some political pragmatism, there undoubtedly was genuine involvement as well - see eg Lan (1985: xvii) for a spirit-guided escape by no less a person than Robert Mugabe himself.

28 He had described a sort of a megaphone used by spirits to communicate across vast distances.

all. This is not the place to describe that unique occasion of previously unheard of interfaith dialogue across a broad religious divide.²⁹ What is pertinent is that on the last day of the conference, during discussion time, vaChaminuka put up his hand and, when given an opportunity to speak, burst into an impassioned speech which rambled on for a good fifteen minutes. My interpreter gave up after the first minute or two, promising to translate the tape-recorded speech for me after the conference. The translation took three full days and a great deal of consultation among Shona speakers, and the resultant text was still, in some respects, baffling. The main points that emerged were the following:

- The fact that the conference was being run on European lines showed the decline into which tradition had fallen.
- The chiefs refused stubbornly to listen to a *svikiro* who is not of their own blood (Duma fashion). This was analogous to people's refusal to listen to Jesus, who was also a "wanderer".
- Chaminuka's business is not confined to one tribe but extends to the whole nation.
- The soil of Zimbabwe is red with the angry blood of the freedom fighters who have not been welcomed back ritually (see 3.2.4 for the *kugadzira* ceremony).
- There is a place in Masvingo Province called *Chitarara guvi remhondoro* where the *bango* has been planted. (My translators rendered this word as "pole of the country". Traditionally a *bango* is a stick planted in the soil which has to strike root before a young man can leave his father's house to start his own home and family. This would accord with vaChaminuka's interpretation of it as the spiritual centre of the new post-Independence generation, supplanting Great Zimbabwe.)

²⁹ The conference was convened by ZIRRCO. See footnote 1, ch 1.

- President Mugabe, his government and all chiefs should be informed that the *kugadzira* for the dead heroes is to be held at this *bango*. An official ceremony should be conducted for the whole nation, whereafter a visit may be paid to Great Zimbabwe.
- The government is guilty of dereliction of duty towards the fallen comrades.
- Mugabe's government had not stripped the chiefs of their powers, as they claimed, but had merely "removed the jacket Rhodes gave you... so that you can be refreshed by air". The colonial chieftaincy was not authentic and had to be abolished before the traditional chieftaincy can be restored. The present chiefs were not observing the *tsika*.
- The Zionists too were at fault for maligning the ancestors and the fallen guerrillas.
- The national *kugadzira* should be held at the *bango* in August — presumably on Heroes' Day, a public holiday on 11 August to commemorate the fallen war heroes. He repeated this invitation/command several times.

The rebukes to government, chiefs and Zionists are fairly standard among postwar *masvikiro*. Some of them are resentful about losing the considerable status they had enjoyed as ancestral mobilisers of the *povo* during the war (see Daneel 1995; Lan 1985), and have joined forces with equally disgruntled excombatants in anathemising those who fail to honour the *tsika* sufficiently: the new government for its modern ways; the chiefs for their submission to the Rhodesian government; and Zionists for their rejection of ancestral spirits as demonic. The reproach about not welcoming back the spirits of the fallen heroes after Independence is equally common. A farmer in a resettlement area said:

When Zimbabwe became independent no one thanked the ancestors for their help. Even the fighters forgot to thank the ancestors. ... [Independence Day ceremonies] are celebrations, not for notification. Ancestral ceremonies could have been like this: the comrades would have gathered and talked to their

fathers telling them that they are back for this ceremony. Chiefs could have led all the people. If you want to, ask any comrade. He will tell you there was a big mistake made after the war. (Vat.06R)

Throughout my study period the *masvikiro* were agitating for government to permit the holding of such a ceremony at Great Zimbabwe. Initially permission was refused (Great Zimbabwe is, after all, a lucrative tourist attraction!). Eventually it was granted, but then a dispute broke out between chiefs Mugabe, Nemanwa and Charumbira³⁰ about the “ownership” of the land on which the monuments are situated, and hence the correct person to preside over the ceremony. When I left Zimbabwe the ceremony was still pending.

The one really novel point made by vaChaminuka was the venue of the proposed ceremony: the *bango* at *Chitarara guvi remhondoro*. Professor Daneel and some of his research team had visited the place and described the *bango* as an extraordinary structure, like a house but not built in conventional Karanga style. I was intrigued and asked vaChaminuka if my research assistant and I could pay him a visit. The soil was no longer red, he said cryptically — we could come.

4.4.3 Chitarara guvi remhondoro

In mid-July we travelled down to Zaka. We had considerable difficulty locating our man. Many people did not recognise vaChaminuka (the only name we knew him by) from our description. Some had seen the man who always walks around with a carved bird in his arms but knew no more about him. Finally a kraalhead's wife identified him as vaTovera.³¹ She directed us and we travelled about 30 kilometres, the last 20 on badly rutted road into the hills. If he's not there after all this, I told my assistant, I'll send my own ancestors to him as *ngozi*. But he was there.

The homestead was tumble-down: just two very scruffy huts, occupied by vaChaminuka (who is unmarried, although he told us he was born in 1948) and his brother with his wife and children. After welcoming us, vaChaminuka conducted us to the *guvi remhondoro* behind

30 For the background to this dispute, see 6.2.1 (“The Charumbira saga”).

31 The name, of Venda origin, is one of the praise names of Mwari, often used at the Matonjeni shrines.

the huts. It was the most amazing stormwater drain I have ever seen. It looked like it was constructed by a bulldozer, but he said he had built it alone with his own hands. The trench was nearly three metres deep, dug geometrically — a long narrow rectangle sliced into the soil across a slope, a natural water course when it rains. The lower end was barricaded with a high earth wall, solidly packed and perfectly finished as if by machine. Neither my assistant nor I had ever seen anything quite like it. He said the spirits told him this was the way they had always conserved the land. It is like a placenta, he said, with many veins to conduct the spirits underground. The same “veins” drained the water away. The work was still under way, but he pointed to the eroded valley below us and said that all those gullies would be filled within two seasons.

Standing in clear winter sun beside the earthen rampart I wondered, not for the first time, whether he was sane. Everyone who had spoken to me about him seemed to share my ambivalence. Yet my assistant's sister, an agricultural extension worker, had told me that morning that her department was holding up his conservation works as a model to surrounding villages. The way the ancestors had always conserved the land? Maybe.

He left us in order to change out of his working clothes so he could conduct us to his previous abode — there we would see the *bango*. He had been evicted from there at popular insistence because people felt his claims were preposterous, coming from a *muranda* from Chivi district more than a hundred kilometres to the west; and of the *shumba* totem to boot. Among the Duma great spirits possess only their own blood (see ch 3). But what was the original Chaminuka's totem anyway? VaChaminuka himself made the point: “Chaminuka is not of the *shoko* totem, or the *gumbo* totem. He is the greatest *mhondoro* of Zimbabwe, with no totem.”

We travelled back to the tar road, where we left my bakkie. We continued on foot, up hill and down dale, till we reached a homestead shaded by huge mutondo and msasa trees. We were welcomed by his sister, who was overjoyed to see him. Children and old women came to greet us. On the opposite side of the clearing stood the *bango*. It looked like a log cabin: a low rectangular structure built of upright poles, the gaps filled in with horizontals. These were composed of bundles of thin branches, wrapped in dried bark that had been treated with what appeared to be some sort of indigenous creosote. A completely unorthodox

building technique, I thought — certainly not Karanga. The roof was uncompleted and in one place the front wall had partially collapsed. Sticking out above it was a slanted flagpole, at the top of which dangled a few shreds of white cloth — the remains of a flag which, he said, had stood for “unity, peace and development”.

He told us that he had started building in 1987 and had abandoned the project, uncompleted, a year later. I gathered that what we were looking at was a skeleton, to be encased in some sort of plaster. His sister explained: “The house was built when people were not aware of what was taking place. We were the only ones who knew what was happening. When people found out ... there was a terrible fight here. We just missed being killed. We were very lucky, we were supposed to have been killed. They didn’t hide anything from us. They said openly, ‘We do not want that in our area. Even that home’ — referring to this place where the *bango* is — ‘must be destroyed.’ When they discovered the meaning of *bango*, they thought that their own children should have been possessed by that spirit, not one to whom they have given a place to stay [ie a *muranda*].” VaChaminuka himself defined the *bango* as “the *dare* of the people [dead comrades] who went to war, where they discuss the bloodshed, how the blood should be cooled, the rain problems”. I was struck by this novel application of the “boiling blood” metaphor: this is not tribal blood, but guerrilla blood which, whatever their totems, was shed to liberate the whole of Zimbabwe.

Sitting down under a tree, vaChaminuka showed us a copy of *Parade* magazine containing a photograph of him. (I merely glimpsed the caption, and never managed to obtain a copy of the magazine.) “When this photograph was taken it should have been a photograph of the *bango*, not of me,” he said. “It was arranged that the ZBC [Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation] would come and take a photograph of the *bango*. This did not materialise...” He hinted that the Duma *svikiro* vaZarira may have been responsible for the omission. Throughout the interview that followed — and he talked for more than two hours — he kept asserting the need for recognition, not of his person, but of what he represented. And, above all, of the *bango* — not this one, but a new one to be constructed at the place we had visited earlier. “We³² represent national spirits. The work we are doing is for the whole of

32 He frequently referred to himself in the first person plural, presumably because of his multiple spirit possession.

Zimbabwe... This is not work to be done by rural people but by people who have degrees in planning houses. I have a degree in soil. So if a person says, 'Stop doing that work in this area, we want this and that', that person must be seen to by the state."

As in his speech at the conference, he was adamant about the postwar protocol that had to be observed before Zimbabwe's independence would be truly accomplished in the eyes of the spirit realm. The *bango* was where the national *kugadzira* must be conducted, led by the head of state, Robert Mugabe himself. If not, he predicted a hurricane which would claim the lives of many people.

He referred to himself as a *homwe*,³³ literally a pouch but, according to his explanation, a container of many spirits: "The big problem is that when we [ie his spirits] are there, they think we are just one. There are many ancestors who are coming, following the headquarters of the country which have moved down here... The thanksgiving beer and hand-clapping because Zimbabwe has been won is not supposed to be brewed at Great Zimbabwe. The *mhondoro* said where that beer should be brewed and where the foundation would be laid. So the rising bones — which it was said would rise and fight³⁴ — said where the *homwe* was and what work he would do..."

His flesh, we learned, contained not only the spirits of many ancestors but also those of three great ZANLA leaders: "When Chaminuka possesses me, Tongogara, Chitepo and Takawira are also there. These are spirits who have Chaminuka's spirit." These were all ZANU leaders killed during the war: Leopold Takawira died in detention in 1970; Herbert Chitepo was killed in a bomb blast in Zambia in 1975; and Josiah Tongogara died in a car accident in 1980, on the eve of Independence (Martin & Johnson 1981).

We asked when his complex possession first became manifest, and he told us about a prophetic dream he had in 1981 about the return of his younger brother from the war. (He himself had only been a *mujiba*, not a guerrilla.) Soon after that ZANLA-ZIPRA factional

33 Bourdillon (1987:237) mentions that this is a common designation for a medium when not in a state of possession. I did not come across it elsewhere in Masvingo Province and my assistant was quite unfamiliar with the term.

34 A famous prophecy by the martyred Nehanda medium of the 1890s rebellion (see ch 3).

skirmishes broke out in Zaka. While trying to reconcile the parties he was arrested along with them. In the courtroom he started talking "deep things". The magistrate decided he was mentally disturbed and referred him to a (white) psychologist, who said that she could not certify him: he was normal. After some referrals it was decided he was sane but had a "traditional problem". He was sent to Zinhata headquarters³⁵ in Masvingo. They said he was not a *n'anga*. The tribal spirits, in their turn, said he was not their *svikiro*. So he was in limbo and has been there ever since, proclaiming his message to what audiences he can find.

From what I could learn, these were few and far between. Apparently the Zaka District Administration gave him some recognition. His sister said that he was given a letter permitting him to build the *bango*, some traditional baskets and pots to put in it, and the carved bird. Subsequently there was an official inspection. My own inquiries confirmed that the local chief, Ndanga, had supported the decision to give him the original site for the *bango*. According to vaChaminuka the chief, who believed that his people were related to (the original) Chaminuka, had dreamt about such a structure and had taken him to the District Administrator to plead his cause.³⁶ (In the course of our interview vaChaminuka himself mentioned that his — or his spirit's? — umbilical cord was buried in that soil.)

Subsequently chief Ndanga must have yielded to popular pressure, leading to vaChaminuka's banishment to the new site where he is starting afresh. VaChaminuka told me that this move was sanctioned by the provincial governor, Josiah Hungwe. When I spoke to two senior Duma chiefs, Mazungunye and Mabika, they expressed polite interest but did not know about him. A few nearby chiefs have been to see the unorthodox shrine; so have Professor Daneel and his party. But my assistant and I were only the seventh group to visit what vaChaminuka firmly believes is the new national religious centre, superseding Matonjeni and Great Zimbabwe in the postwar dispensation.

35 Zinhata is the official association of traditional healers, founded by Dr Gordon Chavunduka, a sociologist who is at present vice chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe.

36 I was unable to check on this information. Chief Ndanga himself is very old now and his son deputises for him. The District Administrator in question had died before my arrival on the scene and his successor was dismissive about the whole matter.

4.4.4 What to think?

The obvious question — and the most unanswerable — is that of authenticity. Bourdillon (1987: 265-269) dwells at some length on the tests that a medium is subjected to before being accepted. These are many and varied, but they are not necessarily conclusive nor vitally important. The ultimate guarantee is public opinion, and in order to secure his or her status a *svikiro* “must say and do what is expected of him. To try to push unpopular ideas would incur the risk of being rejected” (Bourdillon 1987: 269).

VaChaminuka fails this crucial test on two counts. Firstly, among the Duma his alien status makes his claims ridiculous. And secondly, the notion that his *bango* — with neither antiquity nor tradition to sanctify it — must supersede the time-honoured shrines of Great Zimbabwe and Matonjeni is sufficiently sacrilegious to trigger the kind of public outrage that his sister described.

The opposition of conservative Duma *masvikiro*, who have their own more or less precarious status and tribal-political power to consider, is not surprising. In VaZarira’s case she, like other tribal *masvikiro*, had played a role during the war. She told me how she had nursed wounded guerrillas in their hideouts at night (she was a trainee nurse at the time). She had her first semitrance experiences while dressing their wounds, which the comrades interpreted as intimations of impending mediumship. The spirits that eventually possessed her were those of the original Murinye and his sister Zarira, who had herself been a *svikiro*. The present vaZarira was vague about the spirit possessing her predecessor, but a relative of chief Shumba told me that it was an ancient spirit of unknown origin; the name meant “protector of the tribe” and she stood for peaceful, ethical living. (Charumbira.08) Whether the spirit possessing the present vaZarira is this ancient spirit or simply that of her great-aunt is not clear — perhaps the latter since, according to Duma tradition, vaZarira has to be a blood relative of her possessing spirits. When I met her she was, as mentioned before, actively involved in ecological work on behalf of these spirits and had attained some prominence as president of AZTREC, thus extending her role as Duma tribal *svikiro*. Yet, while she is undoubtedly intelligent and not unambitious, it would not cross her mind to transcend the blood-soil circumscription of that role. VaChaminuka’s claims must have

struck her as either fraudulent or heterodox to the point of sacrilege. If vindicated, however, he would pose a real threat to her own status and that of her fellow tribal *masvikiro*.

In a *chimurenga* context, on the other hand, his case is very plausible. The liberation war was conducted under the tutelage of the *mhondoro* spirits and their mediums, particularly the supratribal ones. The war to liberate the land demanded transtribal allegiance, national unity; war propaganda was couched on these lines. When I tried to establish whether vaChaminuka had not perhaps been indoctrinated during the war years, he denied this: "When I was a *mujiba* I knew nothing about ancestors. What I knew was, people of the same tribe were talking to ancestors and doing ceremonies together. But when this spirit [Chaminuka's] arrived it called for all people of the whole nation, not those of one tribe only, because all the people are one." His childhood experience had been nontraditional: "I never attended a *bira* at home. I only saw it at other families' homes." It is possible, of course, that the powerful emotional appeal addressed to patriotic black Zimbabweans during the war shaped the mind of this sensitive and gifted young man so that his psyche became dominated by these spirits. At any rate, his quite unprecedented (to my knowledge) claim to hosting the spirits of war heroes of the stature of Chitepo, Takawira and Tongogara is, in terms of religious innovation, inspired — whether by native creativity or by the spirits themselves being the moot point.

Another consideration is the concrete form in which his spirits lead him to express their guidance — specifically the soil conservation works³⁷ rather than the *bango*. Here the post-Independence emphasis on development as a national effort is couched (physically!) in traditional metaphor: a placenta whose underground capillaries conduct both the spirits of the dead and the storm water that would otherwise destroy the land. The engineering and architectural aspects of both the "placenta" and the *bango* are so innovative, and the work involved so arduous, that I am personally convinced, if not of the authenticity of his possession, then at any rate of his passionate devotion to his cause.

I have no reason to doubt the truth of his account that Western psychologists diagnosed him as sane. But if not megalomaniac, his adamant insistence — in the face of antagonism,

37 VaChinovuriri, one of Professor Daneel's team, told me that on the hillside behind the original *bango* there is a storm water drain identical to the one my assistant and I saw at the new site.

ridicule and indifference — on national recognition at the highest level could still be interpreted as vainglorious and self-seeking. Yet here too there is a certain logic: to have the same impact on independent Zimbabwe as the successfully adapted traditionalism of the war years, there would have to be a national commitment, which is what he ceaselessly propagates. The new country cannot flourish without the blessing of the great spirits who have preserved and guided its people throughout their history, including the most recent and telling history of *chimurenga*. And if that war was a struggle for the land, as is widely acknowledged, then soil conservation is a poignantly apposite expression, both practically and symbolically, of the spirits' concern for their newly liberated descendants.

I was also impressed by the self-effacement of his chosen title — *homwe*, an empty pouch, insignificant without its spirit contents — and his comment that the photograph in the magazine should have depicted the all-important *bango* rather than his person. His obsession with the *bango* is in fact quite inexplicable in any terms but his own: that modern Zimbabwe needs a modern shrine for this new phase of its history — and that its guiding spirits, both ancient and recent, are demanding it through their unorthodox modern medium. Whether his contemporaries want to hear him or not, his spirits' message is a clarion call to staunch devoutness in times of radical change:

We come from north, south, east, west — the whole of Zimbabwe. We do not have any skin colour discrimination or care which person belongs to which tribe. Neither do we care what language he speaks. What we want is the skin and the foot which steps on [the soil of] Zimbabwe... The important message is about the spirits that came down from the mountains where they climbed because of the war — mountains like Matonjeni at Bulawayo. "We have come down after the war so that we can start building homes. This home must be similar to Great Zimbabwe. The home will be shown to the living people of today, saying, "This is the home that was built after the war and this home should be seen by the children who are to be born."

The irony is that this prophet of tradition, speaking to a modernising society, is being rejected by the obduracy of that very tradition which spurns the claims of a "*muranda* child".

4.5 CONCLUSION

Does this vignette of a modern *svikiro* mean that modernity puts the soil and the blood at loggerheads? In what sense is this putative Chaminuka medium "modern"?

Describing the common-sense reality of modern Western people, Berger and Luckmann (1971: 47-48) write:

The social reality of everyday life is ... apprehended in a continuum of typifications, which are progressively anonymous as they are removed from the "here and now" of the face-to-face situation. At one pole of the continuum are those with whom I frequently and intensively interact in face-to-face situations — my "inner circle", as it were. At the other pole are highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available in face-to-face interaction.

They go on to say that, whereas relations with others are not confined to contemporaries accessible in the here and now, any relations with predecessors (eg ancestors) and successors (eg descendants) are even more anonymous than those with the "abstractions" (eg "typical reader of *The Times*", "British public opinion") of daily social reality.

To Shona traditionalists (and, I suspect, all adherents of ancestor cults) their predecessors and successors are the *blood*: the vital and intimate body fluid circulating in their veins. Hence the continuum does not stretch from face-to-face encounter to anonymous abstraction. Rather, it is a mingling of physical and metaphysical realities in the very bodies of people living here and now. When projected, it becomes the *tsika* — the customs that constitute the moral fabric of traditional society, metaphorically embodied in the *soil*. The strictly hierarchical structure of a society that recognises no equals does lend a certain anonymity to remote superiors like Mwari and the original Chaminuka, neither of whom have totems. But even ancestors no longer known by name are addressed in both private and ceremonial prayer: their efficacy *here and now* is fully recognised. Through possessed *n'anga* and *masvikiro* they, too, intervene and interact with the living. To most of the Shona

people I spoke to in 1992 and 1993 they are certainly not "substantive empty projections" (Berger & Luckmann 1971: 48).

I chose vaChaminuka as an example because, in contrast to the orthodox Duma *masvikiro* around him, he operates — to the extent that he operates at all — in a detribalised, posttraditional context: a modernity that he wants desperately to shape in congruence with the essential *tsika* of the autochthons. The fact that, by and large, he is either repudiated or ignored by conservative traditionalists and modern Shona alike is indicative of the crisis of the blood and the soil in the present time.

CHAPTER 5

Of tribes and tribalism

Do you understand what I am saying? The thing is, this Rozvi tribe was not Rozvi. They split off from the vaDuma because the earlier Murinye used magic to chase them out. Then Murinye remained with Nemanwa ... The Rozvi were not the owners of the land; they were only sharing the land with Nemanwa. The Murinye people were the owners of the land and they were the owners of Great Zimbabwe and they were the ones who built it ... The Rozvi and the Duma were of the same tribe and decided to split, and the one tribe called themselves vaDuma and the other group called themselves Rozvi. But we are of the same totem. That is why we say Munhumutapa belongs to the Duma tribe. Our totem is just the same; we have the same taboo in regard to the hippopotamus... [Chiefs.01Y]

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Masvingo Province, where I conducted most of my study, lies in the south of Zimbabwe. It is a landscape of forest, of granite peaks and domes which, in misty weather, breathe spirit presence. It is occupied by people of many tribes, all with their own totems, their own histories, their own ancestral claims to fame. In this chapter I shall be concentrating on the Duma and, to a lesser extent, the Rozvi, because both lay historical claim to paramountcy which they once wielded over parts of this province. Although their histories and geographical areas overlap rather than coincide, their respective claims reflect the kind of disunity and rivalry which may be said to contradict the national aspirations of a modern sovereign state. The cited outburst by the current chief Murinye, who heads one of the Duma subdynasties, is an extreme example of tribal chauvinism. More laid back but no less assertive was the comment of an urbane Rozvi whom I met in Harare. Tinkling ice cubes in a tall glass, he said: "The Duma? What are the Duma? Rabble trying for royalty."³⁸

38 See also Beach's assessment (1980: 336).

A major focus of Duma-Rozvi rivalry is the *dzimba dzemabwe*, the original name of the stone-walled complex situated among the hills that gird the Mitirikwe valley around Lake Kyle, some 30 kilometres outside Masvingo town. Much despoiled in the past, it is now a carefully maintained national monument. Its towering walls, mossy passages, arcane phallic tower, altar drenched with age-old cattle blood defy the inquisitiveness of sightseers and scholars intent on proving some or other point.

Beach advances an elaborate thesis, based on "archaeological, documentary, traditional and linguistic evidence" (Beach 1980: 21), to the effect that a Shona-speaking, Later Iron Age people migrated to this vicinity from the Drakensberg area in the south. Thus they represented a "gigantic reflex movement" (Beach 1980: 20), since their forebears had originally traversed present-day Zimbabwe on their southward way. According to Beach they returned circa 1100, by which time their numbers and those of their livestock had come to exceed the capacity of their southern territory. Once resettled north of the Limpopo with their large herds of cattle, they established the Gumanye culture. From this grew the early Zimbabwe state (c 1300-1500), which came to dominate the southern half of the central plateau, notably the routes of the lucrative gold trade with the east coast. The revenue derived from this, in addition to their cattle wealth, enabled the rulers to finance the building of the massive dressed-stone edifice: "These walls ... were the outer signs of the wealth of the rulers who lived in the huts behind them, screened ... from the gaze of ordinary people" (Beach 1980: 43).

Dismissing the widely held theories of the Mbire and/or Mutapa links of the early occupants, Beach (1980: 45) also refutes the popular notion that Great Zimbabwe had ever been a major Mwari shrine — or any other kind of religious centre, for that matter. To finish off his demythologising exercise, he gives this description of the Great Zimbabwe precincts as they "must have been" at the time:

[T]his was urban living ... A great deal of the valley, now green, must have been trampled bare by the passage of feet. From cockcrow to evening the noise must have been tremendous. In certain weather conditions the smoke from hundreds if not thousands of cooking fires would have created conditions approaching that of smog. And, since so far there is no evidence

for more elaborate arrangements, the people cannot³⁹ have gone very far to defecate, with the result that disease may have been as much a factor at Zimbabwe as in some of its European counterparts. Zimbabwe has often been viewed through an aura of romance, but perhaps a cloud of smoke and flies would be more appropriate from a standpoint of archaeological accuracy (Beach 1980: 46).

Thus inference, based on the limited "facts" available and the author's all too human bias, construes one perfectly plausible version of history. But there are others. Mtetwa (1970: 114), while concurring with Beach in some respects, concedes that Great Zimbabwe might have been "a spiritual centre during its occupation period, 1000-1500", but it ceased to be one after it was abandoned. When it was reoccupied by the Manwa people in the 18th century (Mtetwa 1970: 44), it became their ancestral shrine, to the extent that they claimed autochthon status: "When the world was created and still soft, we the people of Nemanwa were created here" (Mtetwa 1970: 92). When wrested from them by the Duma subchief Mugabe in the late 19th century some of its enclosures were used as cattle pens and smithies (Mtetwa 1970: 106). Daneel, on the other hand, cites Abraham's more generally accepted theory, based on oral tradition and linguistic evidence, that the (originally East African) Mbire arrived at Great Zimbabwe early in the 14th century. He also decisively opts for its preeminently religious function: "Some were undoubtedly royal buildings, others administrative buildings or even trading places, but they crowded round the sacred area as King, Parliament, Government, trade and commerce all crowd round the royal church at Westminster Abbey" (Thompson & Summers, in Daneel 1970: 23; see also quotation in 4.4.1).

While the religious aspect will be considered in more detail below, it should be clear that much of the history of Great Zimbabwe remains speculative and debatable. In Beach's (and Mtetwa's) version, the Zimbabwe state had fallen into decline by 1500 and its rulers had vacated their capital. The centre of this culture moved westward to Khami and developed into the Torwa state (the "Batua" of early Portuguese documents). In the late 17th century its rulers were conquered and the people assimilated by the incoming Rozvi (Beach 1980:

39 Why not?

198; 233f). By that time the capital had moved further east to Danangombe, which became the seat of the Rozvi rulers, the Changamire or Mambos (Beach 1980: 234). Beach (1980: 193f) admits that the presence of Rozvi prestige pottery at all levels in the Khami culture buildings poses a problem to his theory, but he merely notes it as a conflict between traditional/documentary and archaeological evidence.

I have already commented (see 4.3) on Beach's, to my mind positivist, superordination of foreign written sources and inevitably limited archaeological evidence over indigenous oral traditions. To my mind neither type of evidence is conclusive. They represent impressions, interpretations — what people expect or want to be the "truth", for their respective purposes. I cannot see why the truth of self-interested Portuguese migrants or immigrants should be considered more reliable than that of no less self-interested folk historians. Within his own framework, however, Beach is a meticulous scholar and I cite him in some detail below, merely indicating where his findings strike me as inconsistent with the Shona religious reality I observed.

Beach, iconoclastically, is bent on demolishing the theory⁴⁰ that Great Zimbabwe was once the religiopolitical stronghold of the Rozvi Changamire, who held sway over a large part of the central plateau from the late 17th century (15th, according to earlier sources — see below) until the arrival of the Nguni from the south after 1830. This claim is also repudiated by Mtetwa (1970: 16), who maintains that "there is no evidence to suggest that the stone buildings in the area including Great Zimbabwe were re-occupied". At grassroots level, too, this theory is passionately rejected, on manifestly chauvinist grounds, by some Duma I spoke to (see introductory quotation). Meanwhile the majority of Zimbabweans accept the account given in most textbooks, represented here by citations from Daneel.

Maybe the spirits that still dwell there have the answer. I stood outside the newly restored museum one Thursday afternoon, overlooking the Valley Enclosures. From the woody slopes below echoed a voice declaiming a message, interspersed with the hoarse cries that characterise spirit possession. I asked the man behind the desk whether it was a *svikiro*. Yes, he said, he comes every Thursday. But when I asked him to which tribe the medium belonged, he could not tell me. To a modern museum employee it was not relevant. Among

40 See Beach (1980: 220ff) for his views in this regard.

the chiefs and tribes that still live in the surrounding communal lands it is a different matter.⁴¹

5.2 VAROZVI AND VADUMA

5.2.1 The Rozvi

According to Beach the much vaunted Rozvi "empire" was a vastly inflated product of enthusiastic and credulous writers, starting with Posselt in the early 1920s: "Essentially it was F.W.T. Posselt who founded the Rozvi 'empire'... [H]is was a creditable attempt to depict the Shona past in a respectable manner to a basically prejudiced Rhodesian public. What is to be criticized is the failure of later workers to question Posselt's generalizations" (Beach 1980: 222). These "generalizations" culminated in the earlier historians' version, which Beach (1980: 226) seeks to debunk: "[T]he Rozvi even more than the rest of the Shona have acquired a historiography without a history."

Since this "myth" is reproduced in most school and university textbooks and thus influences the minds of millions of modern Zimbabweans, I quote Daneel's version of it, specifically as it relates to the Mwari cave-cult (1970: 22f):

Chief NeMbire is believed to have migrated from the vicinity of Lake Tanganyika with his own and several subordinate Karanga clans early in the fourteenth century. Linguistic and material evidence also confirms early contact with Central and Western African tribes. ... [W]hen the Rozvi made their first attempt in the fifteenth century to unify these tribes, the [Mwari] cult's headquarters were frequently visited by messengers ... from the distant chiefs. These headquarters were then conveniently situated at Great Zimbabwe, the seat of the Rozvi monarchs. Mwari himself is believed to have called the Rozvi monarchy into being. According to Abraham, the present spirit-medium of Chaminuka (one of the widely recognized Shona ancestral heroes) stated that Dlembewu, the first Rozvi Mambo (King), was the son of

41 See 4.4.2.

the chief NeMbire's grand-daughter, who some believed to have been impregnated by Mwari himself. ... While the kings of the Rozvi — the recognized "Prussians" of the Shona tribes — administratively controlled their loosely affiliated vassal states, they relied on the Mbire priests to conduct cult ceremonies at the "Temple". Like the Israelite tribes depending on the Levites for their priestly functions, so the Mbire, although political vassals of the royal Rozvi, became the acknowledged guardians of the Mwari shrines and ritual functionaries of the Shona tribes belonging to the Rozvi confederacy.

The contradictions between Beach's account, which I paraphrase below, and those of Von Sicard (1944) and Abraham (1959, 1966, etc), from whom Daneel drew his historical information, are flagrant.

Beach (1980: 65) traces the origins of the Rozvi to what he calls "the central *moyo* nuclear area", being the highest part of the plateau between the Mazoe and Nyadiri rivers. For lack of positive evidence he does not attempt to pursue their antecedents any further than the 17th century, although Portuguese sources do mention an eastern Changamire dynasty that rebelled against the Mutapa in the late 15th and 16th centuries (Beach 1980: 228). The name "Rozvi",⁴² which is applied to various groups that eventually settled in different parts of the country, came to refer primarily to the Changamire dynasty (totem *moyo/ndizvo*), which was moved by environmental and other forces to migrate southwards. In the southwest they encountered the Torwa, successors to the Zimbabwe state, whom they defeated and assimilated without much difficulty (Beach 1980: 233).

Once established at Danangombe, the Changamire rose to military eminence and Beach concedes that "[h]is successes against the Torwa, against the Mutapa Mukombwe, and especially against themselves inspired the Portuguese with a profound respect for the Changamire and his Rozvi followers" (Beach 1980: 220). The economic base of the Rozvi state was diversified (Beach 1980: 245f), but it was "noticeably poorer than its predecessors" (Beach 1980: 226), the Zimbabwe, Munhumutapa and Torwa states. Politically it was beset

42 Beach (1980: 227) says the name "probably comes from the verb *kurozva*, to destroy" and attributes its origin to the Portuguese. My own latterday Karanga informants indicated that it came from "Barotse" in Zambia (Hist.01; Chiefs.01Z). A moot point: Were there people calling *themselves* Rozvi before the arrival of the Portuguese? Is the Barotse link a postcolonial conjecture?

by the endemic Shona succession struggles. Because of its military strength it controlled, during the 18th century, an extensive area between the Bembesi and the infertile sandveld in the north and north-west to "an indeterminate line that ran from the upper Tokwe round to the southern edges of the great plateau" (Beach 1980: 244). From this large, tightly controlled core area it was able to send military expeditions and exert influence as far afield as Zumbo in the north and Manyika in the east. Thus, although Beach (1980: 276) is confident that his historiography has reduced "the inflated image of the Rozvi ... to its proper size", he still acknowledges that in its heyday the Changamire state was a force to be reckoned with.

Even after the arrival of the Nguni the Rozvi Changamire managed to maintain some vestiges of control. But many Rozvi became either identified with the Ndebele or tributaries to them. Some groups — notably the Jiri dynasty — took refuge with the Duma. After colonisation, Jiri, despite his refugee status, was given preferential treatment by the pro-Rozvi Native Commissioner (Beach 1980: 269), which no doubt aroused Duma antagonism. He and his people were eventually evicted and resettled at Gokwe in the north after a fierce boundary dispute in 1965 (Mtetwa 1970: 567ff).⁴³

The tenability of Beach's theory is a matter of debate for scholars in other disciplines. From my point of view I simply question his dismissal of the religious basis of the Changamire state. Religion informs all facets of Shona tribal life — including politics. Writing about the mummification of Duma chiefs, Mtetwa (1970: 78f), an indigenous historian, writes:

It became a very effective psychological factor in the political assimilation of alien groups who believed that, because the Duma were doing this awful and special thing to their chiefs, their ancestors should have been more liable to succeed in making rain. They therefore sought to participate in the religion of the Duma, thus enhancing political unity.

The integral nature of public life in tribal society is very evident here. To a large extent it hinges on the crucial agro-economic need for rain, but it permeates the very fabric of society and the inner workings of people's minds. As Mtetwa (1970: 128) puts it: "Generally

⁴³ Daneel (1987: 124ff) gives an interesting sidelight on the role of the Rozvi-led ZCC in this modern drama.

religions have been seen as collections of myths or legends but the fundamental and profound fact is that the histories and actual lives of people have been based on [and shaped by — MM] these beliefs or so-called myths." Beach, while acknowledging that religion plays a role, denigrates its regulatory impact on tribal politics (see eg Beach 1980: 103f; 144; 161; 221; 223; 245; 248). Nobody would deny that there were economic, commercial and other forces at work. But the mental grid into which these were fitted could hardly have been less spirit-dominated than that of my postcolonial, more or less "westernised" informants, chiefs and commoners alike. To dismiss it as mere "nostalgia for a pre-Nguni, pre-European past" (Beach 1980: 226) is a presumption that I choose not to make.

Whatever the "true facts" of early Zimbabwean history (and that of the Shona generally) may be, the belief system was a driving force. A post-Enlightenment dichotomy between religion and politics, or any other neat categorisation, distorts the human reality of it.

5.2.2 The Duma

Mtetwa (1970) wrote a carefully researched thesis on the Duma, which provides a fascinating sounding-board for the traditions recounted to me by present-day chiefs and folk historians. I shall attempt to collate the versions by giving a paraphrase of Mtetwa's history, interspersed with illustrations from my first-hand sources. Besides providing some historical background and a mythic depth dimension to the world I encountered in the communal lands in the 1990s, it shows how contemporary attitudes and interests continually reshape oral tradition.

After a succession dispute in the mid-17th century the original Duma migrated westward from Uteve in Mozambique, where their ancestor Chikosha was the son of the powerful ruler, the Sachiteve. Although they share the *moyo* totem with the Rozvi, there is no evidence of any relationship between the two tribes (Mtetwa 1970: 27).

The oral tradition I encountered broadly concurs with this. The present Chief Mazungunye told me (Chiefs.01Z): "We came from Tete and the Rozvi came from a place called Rozi in Zambia, I think it is what they call Barotseland. They crossed the Zambezi. When they

reached the river they used magic to stop the water from flowing and crossed. After that the river was in flood again. When their enemies came they could not cross because the river was in flood." An elder who was present at the same interview added: "We are separate ... They are of the *moyo* totem but not of the Duma tribe... They arrived when the Duma were already here. They took the Duma totem so they could get land to stay on ... When they realised that we were of different totems they said they were of the *moyo/ndizvo*."⁴⁴ Several other informants, including chief Murinye (see introductory quotation), insisted that the Duma preceded the Rozvi. I suspect this is a conflation — prompted by natural Duma chauvinism — of early tradition with late 19th century history when, as noted above, some Rozvi came as refugees to Duma territory.⁴⁵

Over the next half century the Duma slowly moved south-westward, reaching the Nyarungwe range towards 1690. There the leaders of the expedition sheltered in a cave and the tribe derives its name from the expression "We are covered" (*tadumaidzwa*). By this time Chikosha had died and the party was led by his sons. The eldest two, Zimutswi and Rukweza, joined forces. The death of Zimutswi (c 1715) led to a succession struggle between his brother, Rukweza, and his two sons, Mutindi and Pfupajena (Mtetwa 1970: 28-31). In the version I got from chief Murinye and a member of the Chiwara subdynasty (Chiefs.01Y), Rukweza is identified with Pfupajena, whose father is said to be Mangazva (according to Mtetwa's genealogy, a son of Rukweza and thus Pfupajena's cousin). While Mtetwa's historical research was obviously much more extensive and searching than mine, and his findings therefore more reliable, the discrepancies make one realise yet again the precariousness of even the most meticulous scholarship.

44 The Duma totem is *moyo n'ombe*. I was told (Chiefs.01Y), that the Duma taboo, the hippopotamus, originated when the head of Rukweza, in this interview the alleged founder of the tribe, fell off his decomposing body which was being carried across a river on a stretcher and was eaten by a hippopotamus. In the same interview I was told that the Rozvi have the same taboo - but not how *they* came by it...

45 Beach (1980: 57) writes: "In many cases the totem of the ruling groups at both the point of origin and the territory eventually settled are the same, and although in a few cases this may have been the result of the second group claiming a fictitious relationship with the first because of the frequent linkage of the latter with that totem, in most cases the second group can recall enough details either of the point of origin or of its ruling dynasty to support their claim ... Thus, while it will be argued that some claimed origins in Shona traditions are false or at least unproven, such claims can frequently be accepted with varying degrees of certainty." In view of this, Beach's scholarly scruples about tracing the Changamire Rozvi back to the days of Munhumutapa seem a pity. After all, the Duma home territory of Teve was not that far away from the Munhumutapa state. The coincidence of the Duma-Rozvi totem *and* taboo remains tantalising. (A brother of acting chief Shumba told me, however, that the Rozvi taboo is the heart - presumably of cattle. [Charumbira.08])

While Mutindi lay low in the east, Pfupajena scoured the country for allies and finally secured the support of the reigning Rozvi *mambo* through his rain-making powers. (Some of my informants stressed that Pfupajena's rain-making powers antedated his marriage alliance with the Musikavanhu dynasty; others, like the one quoted in 5.3 below, denied it.) The combined force under Pfupajena and a Rozvi commander defeated, captured and killed Rukweza. The Rozvi commander then departed *without* installing Mutindi as chief — this was done by the Duma themselves, so that there was no question of tributary status or any other form of allegiance. Indeed, there is no evidence of any further contact between the Duma paramount and the Changamire Rozvi until the late 19th century (Mtetwa 1970: 32-34).

This left Mutindi and Pfupajena in command of the area south of the Devure to the west bank of the Sabi. It appears to have been thinly populated and the Duma had little trouble establishing their paramountcy: "Both the original occupants and the non-Duma dynasties which later settled in Duma recognize the country as belonging to the Duma. That is why the Duma regard themselves as the rulers ... and all non-Duma as their subjects..." In some cases assimilation included changing to the Duma totem (Mtetwa 1970: 37, 47). One case in point was the Mbire-Shoko group of Ziki, who had joined the Duma in the course of their southward migration and who had thus been assimilated over several decades. Indeed, by the time the Confederacy was established the "adopted" Ziki subdynasty outranked the Mabika subdynasty which was directly related to Mutindi and Pfupajena (Mtetwa 1970: 28, 38). Mabika Zangure, a son of the ousted Rukweza, is said, moreover, to have been married to the sister of vaMhepo, Pfupajena's famous first wife (Mtetwa 1970: 87).⁴⁶

The present situation regarding the erstwhile heads of the confederacy is not clear to me. According to Mtetwa (1970: 54) there were four thrones on Mandara, Mukanganwi/Mutindi occupying the principal one, followed by Pfupajena/Mazungunye, Ziki and Mabika in that order. Yet chief Mazungunye and his elders told me that there were only three seats on Mandara, the principal (centre) one being Pfupajena/Mazungunye's: "The first seat was for Mukanganwi, the next one for Mabika, and in the middle Pfupajena ... It is just like

46 With regard to totems, Mtetwa (1970: 68f) points out that the fact that the Ziki people changed their totem to the Duma *moyo* is not openly acknowledged (although I picked up several more or less discreet references to it). The gravity of changing one's totem was reflected in many of my interviews, on the lines of "I cannot change my totem because I will become a *mutorwa* to my ancestors." (Theol.03R)

Parliament: the president has his seat, Nkomo has his seat, Muzenda has his seat. There are only three seats, the rest have ordinary seating" (Chiefs.01Z). ("The rest" were presumably the territorial chiefs.) When I asked about the fourth seat, an elder asserted firmly: "There was no fourth seat." Thus the Ziki dynasty appears to have fallen from grace (or at any rate from Mandara hill); and Mutindi/Mukanganwi has been superseded by Pfupajena/Mazungunye (see below).

My only encounter with the Ziki people was intriguing. At the installation of the new chief Ziki, to which chief Mabika took me in July 1993, one tribal elder was stark naked, to the embarrassment of the government and other dignitaries on the podium. The police eventually forced him to put on trousers, but he was clearly possessed and kept pulling them down. (Ritual nudity before a chief's installation is not uncommon, but is not practised publicly. In this man's case, I was told, it is confined to the annual rain ceremony and chiefly installations: for the rest of the time he is an ordinary, respected and respectable member of the community.) The incident drew derisive comment in the press.⁴⁷ When I mentioned it to chief Mazungunye, he was equally contemptuous, maintaining that the Ziki people were "very primitive" and not Duma anyway — this despite the fact that he had personally installed the new chief, concluding his speech with the words: "I am Mazungunye, your father, chief of all the chiefs, who has given you this chieftainship." (Chiefs.ZIK) He may simply have been embarrassed that I should have witnessed the scene (he is a former police inspector, his wife a high school teacher). But his attitude could have been prompted partly by whatever had caused him, in our earlier interview, to keep silent about the fourth throne on Mandara hill...

In the course of Pfupajena's lifetime his name became legendary because of his military exploits (his name means "white [bleached] bones") and his rain-making powers, which latter were greatly strengthened by his marriage to the Ndondo woman, vaMhepo. It was after this marriage that he established his court on Mandara hill and his name changed to Mazungunye — "the one who shook the heavens for rain and the world with his sword" (Mtetwa 1970: 53). (Mutindi's line apparently became known by its modern name of

⁴⁷ I wrote a letter to "The Herald", expressing surprise at such ridiculing of time-honoured religious custom. Although I did not follow the ensuing correspondence in this paper's columns, I was told that there were other letters in support of my views, including one from the governor of Masvingo Province.

Mukanganwi, "one who forgets", in the late 18th century because the incumbent at the time was unable to identify all the many territorial chiefs who came to pay him homage [Mtetwa 1970: 62].)

Pfupajena secured Duma primacy over "a very large and unwieldy area" (Mtetwa 1970: 43), whose scattered tribes, with a few exceptions such as Mabwazhe's Rufura, were no match for the Duma. The Manwa people, who occupied Great Zimbabwe and the surrounding area "not earlier than 1700" (Mtetwa 1970: 44), were probably under Duma control throughout the 18th century, even before their defeat by the Duma chief Mugabe and his allies in 1860.

Despite Pfupajena's high profile, both on the contemporary scene and in Duma tradition, Mtetwa is at pains to demonstrate that he was in fact subordinate to Mutindi. Whereas the extensive Duma territory was carved up and distributed among the numerous subdynasties and other territorial chieftaincies, Mutindi alone "did not have a particular chiefdom of his own like Pfupajena because it was considered, quite rightly, that the whole Confederacy belonged to him" (Mtetwa 1970: 50). As will be seen below, this was to have unfortunate consequences for the Mutindi-Mukanganwi dynasty after colonisation.

At the cultic headquarters of the Confederacy on Mandara hill, with its four (or three?) thrones, an elaborate religious ceremony was held annually to commemorate the initial ceremony when vaMhepo was first welcomed to the tribe. In addition there was a quarterly meeting of all confederate chiefs. Mtetwa (1970: 55) writes:

Mutindi was the Confederate paramount (*ishe*) and Pfupajena his right-hand man and advisor, the Confederate *svikiro* and commander of the army⁴⁸ ... [T]he procedure ... was that ... [Pfupajena's son] was approached first and he carried the message to Pfupajena who in turn took it to Mutindi. These two discussed with Mutindi's counsellors who formed the Confederate court (*dare*) and made up their minds and the answer was conveyed in the same manner in the descending order ... The political meeting of all chiefs had to take place

48 This threefold role vividly illustrates the integration of political and religious power in tribal life. It also explains how Pfupajena came to eclipse his linear senior in Duma tradition.

at Mandara every three months at which each of the chiefs would report on the political situation in his chiefdom.

Whilst the quarterly meetings reflected the central authority of the Confederacy, there was a great deal of decentralisation and territorial chiefs were semi-autonomous, contributing only some of the tusks of elephants killed and men to serve in the confederal army. Territorial chiefs were confirmed (but not appointed or installed) by Pfupajena in his capacity as "'eye' of Mutindi" (Mtetwa 1970: 57). Naturally this function further enhanced his status in the eyes of the populace.

The succession system in major subdynasties (notably Mukanganwi and Mazungunye) was primogeniture, as opposed to the much more elaborate, typically Shona adelphic collateral system. According to Mtetwa (1970: 79), the only chieftaincies which retained primogeniture until the early 20th century were Mukanganwi, Mazungunye and Makaure. He considers the progressive adoption of the collateral system, with its built-in propensity for succession disputes and wars, to have been one of the causes of the decline of the Confederacy in the 19th century.

The hierarchy of the Duma chiefs that I encountered in the 1990s is a relic from the heyday of the Confederacy. For example: The grandsons of Munguwi, a descendant of the Rukweza who was defeated in the war between the founding fathers, included Murinye, Chibwe and, most junior, Chikwanda. They were the ones who settled in the region of Great Zimbabwe. Murinye's court was at Boroma (the present chief still mournfully recalls it as his *mapa*), a stone's throw from Great Zimbabwe which was then already occupied by the Manwa. Murinye's eldest son duly married a daughter of Nemanwa's. The second and third sons were the founders of the present Shumba and Mugabe chieftaincies, which are therefore sub-subdynasties. And the present Uzeze, whom I was unable to "place" in the Duma framework, were a *shumba* totem group encountered by Murinye's youngest sons at a hill called Uzeze, which name they then adopted as their own (Mtetwa 1970: 68f).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ I was told a different legend about the Uzeze, but was pledged to secrecy by my non-Duma informant. Mtetwa's account actually complements the story I was told, in the sense that it might represent the "official" Duma account of the connection between the Duma and the Uzeze - that is to say, if the version I was given is Duma canon at all.

In my dealings with these chiefs during my research period I had some difficulty grasping their relations of super- and subordination. Thus, when the new chief Shumba was installed in September 1993, Chief Mazungunye told me that he was supposed to officiate in the traditional part of the ceremony,⁵⁰ but that he had not been informed of the date. He was puzzled and asked me to try and ascertain at the District Administration office what had gone wrong. When I attended the ceremony, I sat with the government officials on the shaded podium. I was told that chief Murinye would do the traditional honours, but in the end he never arrived and his role was played by chief Mugabe. Chief Mugabe, in addressing the new chief prior to installing him, reiterated several times that he was doing it on behalf of his "father", Murinye. His actual expression was: "I AM Murinye." While I suspected that the absence of both Mazungunye and Murinye might be attributable to present-day politics⁵¹ (my inquiries drew a blank), Mugabe's insistence on his vicarious role indicates that to the populace at any rate the ceremony was not valid unless the historical seniority principle was observed: how can a younger brother instal his *mukoma*?

By 1820 the area of the Confederacy consisted of clearly defined, contiguous chiefdoms. On the periphery various strong tribes such as Chivi, Charumbira and Gutu encroached and settled from 1750 onwards, but the land between the Sabi, Devure, Mushagashe, Mtirikwe, Tokwe and Lundi rivers was effectively under Duma rule (Mtetwa 1970: 71f).

Despite occasional feuds and conflict within and between the territorial chieftaincies, the Confederacy as such remained politically stable until the advent of the Nguni. Mtetwa (1970: 73) attributes this to "the esteemed position of the paramount, the rain cult, the separation of the executive powers between Mukanganwi and Mazungunye, political and economic decentralization, the succession system and ... military power". From 1830 onwards, however, successive waves of Nguni invaders from both east and west, followed by economic exploitation of the indigenous population, weakened and destabilised the Confederacy and

50 Strictly speaking, of course, the officiant should have been Mukanganwi. But the Mukanganwi/Mazungunye issue appears to have been settled by now in favour of Mazungunye - see below.

51 Either intratribal, or even local government contrivance: chief Mugabe had been an elected member of the Rural Council and had failed to be re-elected shortly before the installation; he had personal connections in local government and this could have been a way of raising his status in the eyes of his rural constituency. (Of course, this is pure conjecture on my part; but even if not true in this instance, machinations of this nature are quite conceivable.)

caused disunity among the chiefs (Mtetwa 1970: 147ff). But the Nguni merely caused the decline; they did not bring about the actual fall.

This was the work of a new force — the BSA Company and the white settlers who came in its wake. As early as 1898 the creation of reserves for black people was authorised by a British Order-in-Council, and the process was carried out by Native Commissioners who were unfamiliar with the boundaries of existing chiefdoms (Mtetwa 1970: 298ff; cf Holleman 1968: 13ff). The best agricultural land was taken by whites; what was left, which was totally inadequate, was carved up among the chiefs. Thus Chikwanda ultimately lost all his land and even his chiefly medal, which was not regained until after Independence (Mtetwa 1970: 304ff; also Hist.01); chief Bere suffered a similar fate (Mtetwa 1970: 317; also Vatorwa.09R); Murinye lost most of his and had to move his court from his *mapa* at Boroma (Mtetwa 1970: 319; also Chiefs.05Y).

In addition the chiefs became paid tax collectors of the new administration, their status depending on the amount of tax collected. As a result Mukanganwi, with his traditionally small chiefdom, became a subchief under Mazungunye (Mtetwa 1970: 201) and ranked below several other of his erstwhile territorial chiefs. His former powers were usurped by the new Native Commissioners, who were not even aware of the existence of the Confederacy and the hierarchical relations that they were destroying: the administration was "saturated with the misconception that the whole of Southern Rhodesia had been under the rule of the Rozvi and, since the Rozvi power and state had collapsed at the hands of the Nguni, it was believed that the Shona were disunited" (Mtetwa 1970: 203).

By 1900 the Mutindi/Mukanganwi hegemony had been effectively eclipsed. All that remained of Duma unity and the confederate paramountcy was the rain cult, headed by Mazungunye, which, although officially banned, survived into the 20th century. Thus the spiritual forces that had sustained the Confederacy outlived their counterparts, or extensions, in the temporal realm.

5.3 RAIN CULTS

We came from Chipinge and our ancestor is Pfupajena. In Chipinge there was a woman known as a *mbonga* because she was not married. The law which

bound her was that anyone who could make her talk would marry her. Many men went there, trying to make her speak while she was weeding her father's field, but failed to marry her. Our grandfather Pfupajena went there and went with the *mbonga* into her father's field to work. Instead of working, Pfupajena uprooted the sorghum stalks and planted them upside down. The girl was angry about the uprooting of the crop and shouted at him, "Why are you destroying my father's crop?" The people who were hiding in the vicinity came out and said, "Take her, she is your wife." Pfupajena married the *mbonga*. After marrying her he told her that they were going together to [the present] Mazungunye chiefdom in Bikita. The woman's name was vaMhepo. VaMhepo said, "As we travel, if we reach a place from where we can see my father's homestead, that will be the right place for us to stay and build our home." When they reached Mandara hill they climbed it and saw her father's homestead down there in the Eastern Highlands, and she agreed to build their home there. (Bystander, Chiefs.01Y)

This myth was told to me in much the same form by several informants (cf also Mtetwa 1976: 51). While not a founding myth in the true sense, it marks an important landmark in Duma history: the alliance by marriage with the powerful eastern rain cult of Musikavanhu in Donde, on the Mozambican border.

It also indicates the stature of Pfupajena in the popular "hagiography" of the Duma. As indicated above, Pfupajena was subordinate to Mukanganwi but featured more prominently in the public eye. His rain-making powers had secured Rozvi support in the early war against Rukweza, which established Mutindi/Mukanganwi as paramount of what was to become the Duma Confederacy. And his subsequent marriage to vaMhepo entrenched his religious status beyond dispute. Indeed, Mtetwa (1976: 127) claims that although as a woman she was her husband's social inferior, "her ritual position was superior to that of Mazungunye", evidenced by the fact that her chosen home became the capital and central shrine of the Confederacy. An elder at chief Mazungunye's court told me in 1993: "Pfupajena had no rain-making powers — it was his wife who had these powers." (Chiefs.01Z)

Mtewa (1976: 87) states that "the raincult was the greatest factor which fostered unity, peace and stability in the Confederacy". This is tantamount to saying that the unity of the Confederacy hinged on a religious institution. Here one should consider the analogy pointed out by Schoffeleers (1978: 6f; my italics):

One can go further and state that territorial cults are by nature political since they are the religious representation of what are basically and primarily territorial and political groups, and because *the boundaries between religion and politics are notoriously difficult to demarcate*. ... It is this relationship between territorial cults and secular authority which provides the closest analogy to the church-state relationship in literate cultures. It is, however, *strictly an analogy*, because there exist significant differences between these two situations. Territorial cults, unlike churches, recognize no distinctions which set the community of believers apart from the rest of society, nor do they have an explicit creed on which this could be argued. The analogy derives its validity rather from the fact that in territorial cult organizations ritual and secular authority are thought of as distinguishable and separable.

I have argued that such a separation of powers is in fact a "Western" imposition on the integral tribal system. To the extent that such a distinction can be made *ex post facto*, however, it applies to the Duma Confederacy as described by Mtewa.

It applies equally to the other major rain cult in southern Zimbabwe, that of Mwari with its shrines in the Matopos, widely associated with the Rozvi Changamire state and Great Zimbabwe.⁵² As I have pointed out above, this theory has come under fire. Mtewa (1976: 90ff), like Beach (see 5.1), rejects the notion that Great Zimbabwe had been either a Rozvi stronghold or their major religious centre. He also denies that the Mwari cult was known in Zimbabwe until fairly recent times. His grounds for so doing are "the nature of the religion of the Shona in general and of the Duma in particular; the existence of ... [other] territorial cults; the complete lack of evidence in Duma suggesting that the Mwari Cult was the religion of the Duma before the twentieth century; and Cobbing's recent theory that the Mwari Cult is a new and recent religion in Rhodesia established in the Matopo hills not

52 For a detailed analysis of this cult, see Daneel (1970).

earlier than the 1830s" (Mtetwa 1976: 95). Thus Mtetwa (1976: 108) believes that "two brands of religion, Christianity and the Mwari Cult" invaded Southern Shona territory in the latter half of the 19th century and eventually superseded both the dominant Musikavanhu cult and its Duma branch at Mandara. As pointed out in 3.2.1, this hypothesis relies heavily on Cobbing and there is substantial evidence indicating a considerably earlier date of origin for the Mwari cult.

Another relevant point not mentioned by Mtetwa is the following. When I visited the Mhungura shrine in Chipinge and interviewed the present chief Musikavanhu and his elders, they told me that the rain charm which gave rise to the Musikavanhu rain cult was stolen by their founding mother Chapo from her lover, a Rozvi chief "of the Mbire group", which was the Dondo totem too. The vaDondo then fled eastward and changed their totem from Mbire to Dziva (Musikavan.02), presumably to delude their pursuers.⁵³ When evaluating Mtetwa's argument about rivalry between the Musikavanhu/Mandara cult and the Mwari cave-cult one should at least consider the Musikavanhu dynasty's claim that they were Mbire originally and that their rain-making powers initially derived from the Rozvi.

The traditional procedure when there is widespread drought was typically hierarchical: family heads sent delegations with gifts to the chief, who approached the supreme dynastic ancestor on their behalf. If this appeal failed, "the chief sent messengers to appeal to the supra-dynastic ancestral spirit" (Chaminuka, Dzivaguru, etc) (Mtetwa 1976: 114). Among the Duma, this final court of appeal was Musikavanhu, father of vaMhepo. Pfupajena was the medium of his — and Mutindi's — father Zimutswi, the dynastic spirit who was the primary Duma rain-giver. After Pfupajena's death, however, Zimutswi's spirit was superseded by that of the first Mazungunye (ie Pfupajena himself). This has led to an anomaly: "Zimutswi and Mutindi remain genealogically superior ... but as far as the lives of their descendants are concerned, Mazungunye is most important because he was most successful as a rain-maker" (Mtetwa 1976: 116). Thus all Duma chiefs (including Mutindi and Pfupajena) held their own annual *mikwerere* to appeal for rain to their respective founders, followed by the grand confederate ceremony at Mandara in the same month. The various subdynasties (including assimilated aliens) all sent gifts to Mandara, channelling these through their successive

53 According to Daneel (1970) the Mbire group is associated with the Matonjeni cave cult and the Rozvi. Beach (1980: 286ff) refutes this connection.

seniors in the tribal hierarchy until they reached Makaure, the most senior *nyusa*, who took the collective offerings to Mandara (Mtetwa 1976: 118f). Mtetwa maintains that the Mandara cult was renowned and respected, also by non-Duma as far afield as Matabeleland and Buhera (Mtetwa 1976: 125f). In extremis a delegation would be sent to Musikavanhu. According to Mtetwa (1970: 86), the hereditary *nyusa* in such a case was Ziki — whose "eclipse" in modern times may relate to the decline of the Musikavanhu/Duma link. During the devastating drought in the early 1990s, however, chiefs Mazungunye and Mabika both visited Musikavanhu (I accompanied the latter on one occasion).

Chief Mabika told me that there were four chiefs (himself, Mukanganwi, Mazungunye and Ziki) who had links with Musikavanhu's rain-cult. Yet when I interviewed chief Mukanganwi in 1992, only a few months before his death, he insisted that his only shrine was Matonjeni. This denial of the traditional cult, effectively controlled by Mazungunye, might be a side-effect of the postcolonial rivalry between the two houses — yet another illustration of the fusion of religion and tribal politics. On the other hand it fits the general pattern of Mwari cultic expansionism which, according to Mtetwa (1976: 129), had been encroaching steadily into the periphery of the Confederacy since the late 19th century and eventually penetrated the core Duma territory after 1920.

Mtetwa (1976: 130) ascribes the spread of the Mwari cult to its human appeal. For one thing, supplications for rain *directly* to the supreme God obviated the need for non-Duma chiefs to approach him via Duma ancestors, which could well have been a factor at a time when the Confederacy was weakening and secession was rife. Also, Mwari assisted with personal problems, whereas the "Shona God", according to Mtetwa, left such matters to the individual's own ancestors. The picture I got from my own interviews was that personal problems were first taken to family ancestors. If they proved recalcitrant, they were taken to the chief, who consulted his ancestors. If this failed, the logical court of final appeal would be the apex of the hierarchy, the supreme God. Thus, even if Mwari's involvement with personal matters is a late (possibly post-Christian) development, it is perfectly consistent with the traditional world-view. In fact, it would attest the dynamic evolution of that belief system (cf Daneel 1994).

The cult also acquired distinctly nationalist overtones during the 1896-97 rebellions (Ranger 1960; Daneel 1970: 30ff). But in the heartland of the — by then weakening — Duma Confederacy this "new God" was resisted. Mtetwa (1976: 133) maintains that in 1903 the ruling chief Mazungunye "would not even kill a goat" for a visiting Mwari emissary, who was subsequently arrested by the colonial administration for his subversive political errand. Mtetwa is in a sense arguing for Duma traditional "orthodoxy" in the face of a "modern heresy". In part this heresy was a forerunner of black nationalism — the colonial government's repression of the Mwari cult (Mtetwa 1976: 131ff) is ample evidence of this. The Duma Mandara cult had also been banned after the 1896-97 rebellions (Mtetwa 1976: 143), but Mazungunye's personal fame remained intact until his chiefdom was divided by the administration in 1915. Following the death of the last great rain-making chief in 1919, the spirit of Pfupajena moved to the new Nhema chiefdom, where the rain ceremonies were then held. One by one the Duma chiefs turned to Mwari, although "most of the chiefs in Bikita particularly Mukanganwi and Mazungunye ... maintained their old ties with Musikavanhu" (Mtetwa 1976: 145). But even this powerful cult was in a decline by then. Christianity, both African Independent and mainline, was claiming its toll. As Schoffeleers (1978: 24) puts it:

The real challenge came when the territorial cults were confronted by the combined forces of world religions, modern technology, and the bureaucratic state. The result of the confrontation has been the collapse of some cults and the decline of many others.

In Zimbabwe the Mwari cult, and traditional belief generally, received a great latterday boost during the liberation war. The shrines in the Matopos are still much frequented. On the one occasion that I was privileged to visit the Dzilo shrine with Professor Daneel, three of his research workers and two Duma chiefs, the other pilgrims were numerous despite heavy rain, swollen rivers and slippery mountain roads. They came from all walks of life: city businessmen, a group of village women, a busload of people who were just arriving as we left in pouring rain round 9 pm. This popularity could lead to flagrant commercialisation of the shrine — yet another battlefield where the forces of modernity confront indigenous faith.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Schoffeleers (1978: 2) writes:

The prevalent idiom used by Central African societies for the articulation and application of their earth philosophies is religion. This establishes an obvious contrast with modern industrial societies which conceive of ecosystems as fully explicable in terms of natural causes. ... At base we are confronted with the same dilemma noticed by Durkheim and others before and after him; how to preserve in modern industrial societies particularly useful values which in pre-industrial societies are preserved by religion.

It is not just a matter of how such values are to be preserved. A more penetrative question would be: can individual values be extricated from the integral fabric of the traditional world-view and survive in isolation qua *values*? And even if this were possible, what criteria may be applied, from the point of view of modern Zimbabwe, to determine which of the values of preindustrial times are "particularly useful" today?

In looking for an answer to these questions one must ask, furthermore, whether there is room for tribal allegiance, tribal rivalry and tribal hegemony over other tribes within a modern, sovereign nation-state, which insists on its own (party-) political allegiances. This question will be considered in chapter 6. The point made in this chapter is that, at bottom, tribalism in Zimbabwe is integral to an all-encompassing cosmogony and, in that sense, religious. This has important implications.

For one thing, it means that the divisions between tribes — manifest in such things as distinctive totems, ancestors, myths, rituals and territorial cults — operate centrifugally as well as centripetally. I have already mentioned the tendency towards a division of powers between conquerors and defeated autochthons. Bourdillon (in Schoffeleers 1978: 242) cites Mitchell, who "suggests that ritual and political functions became separated: fertility, rain and all things related to the soil are assigned to the original owners of the land who are believed to maintain their ritual power over it; government of the people is assigned to the invading conquerors". Yet, as Schoffeleers (1978: 24; my italics) himself points out:

The rise of state systems ... did not destroy the idiom of territorial cults. On the contrary, the process of state formation developed *within this idiom* and was *partly dependent* on it.

This idiom, I submit, is not confined to territorial cults but comprehends the phenomenon of tribalism and the concomitant traditional belief system as a whole. Tribes have to do with kinship; kinship has to do with blood; blood derives its meaning from the soil. And, in my view, blood and soil are the twin pillars of the Shona traditional world-view.

The accommodation of *vatorwa* — even if they are white-skinned or Nguni — is feasible within the flexible traditional system (see 4.2). Thus tribal unity, and the possibility of intertribal unions through symbiosis with another tribe in a deferential balance of political and spiritual power, might be a more organic kind of unity than that superimposed by a sovereign, tribally unaligned nation-state in the European sense. It certainly was efficacious during the liberation war, when the masses had to be mobilised. In fact, the spirit-guided solidarity of the populace, in the face of heavy reprisals from the Rhodesian army, contrasts favourably with the factional squabbling of modern leaders. (A telling example is the disputes that divided the nationalist leadership in the heat of *chimurenga* [see Martin & Johnson 1981].)

This does not detract from the centripetal potential of tribalism, evidenced by the many alliances, counter-alliances, secessions, wars and the like that make up Shona history. As Beach (1980: 79) points out, "Shona history is built up of the individual histories of hundreds of ... dynasties, and any attempt to make sense of Shona history as a whole must take these into account." This chapter contains sufficient evidence of this.

The centrifugal potential relies on spiritual solidarity with and among the *mhondoro* and their common allegiance to the creator God. In the long run these custodians of the land may not be able to hold their own in a cosmopolitan society. Banished to the rural fringes of the new state, where impoverished peasants and chiefs are crying out for modern development, they appear powerless to contain the forces of "progress". An inmate of a Roman Catholic old age home in Mucheke township said:

We made a debt with our ancestors, so we must pay for it. Since I have grown up I have not seen all these problems we are facing today: drought, ESAP, AIDS all at the same time. The problems are caused by us. We deny our tribal culture. It would have been better to let Christianity work hand in hand with tradition. (Povo.06T)

A successful modern businessman, in his middle thirties, expressed similar nostalgia:

When I was growing up, these things were bringing positive results. So what has gone wrong today? The elders we have today, are they no longer capable of doing that? I grew up in a society that was so culture-bound and it used to work to the extent that I have never doubted in our traditional way of living. OK, we have come to here where it is urbanised, but we have to observe all these things. ... It's like yesterday when we were in the bush, we were observing spirits. You know I have come from where I was in the bush, and I am now in my office and I am driving a vehicle — do you hear people here talking about Chaminuka? (Modern.01)

When Schoffeleers refers to “particularly useful values” to be preserved, he tacitly assumes the validity of the modern culture which could benefit from an injection of selected tribal ethics and morals. I questioned the validity of this culture in chapter 2. Here I question the feasibility of such a tissue transplant from the integral body of tribal life if that body decomposes. The nostalgic businessman, when pressed about his apparent fatalism, responded:

We need to rid ourselves of obeying this inferiority complex. There is a book written by an Algerian guy, some sort of psychiatrist, one of the people who took part in the Algerian revolution. *Black skin, white masks*.⁵⁴ Can you check that, there is a lot of politics in that. Black skin, but in a white mask. What I am trying to say is, my skin is not good — please, white man, can I have yours?

54 By Frantz Fanon, first published in French in 1952. Fanon was from Martinique, studied and practised psychiatry in Paris, and ended up in war-torn Algeria in the 1950s, where he joined the revolutionary cause. He died there of leukaemia at the age of 36.

This attitude suggests a starting point for possible solutions to the conundrum — solutions which have yet to emerge from the creative ferment of postcolonial Africa.

CHAPTER 6

Of sovereignty and symbiosis

This chiefdom is Charumbira's and the soil is Charumbira's. It is still in our minds, even though the area was taken by the powerful ones. ... Today we say this country is now in black hands, but European laws are ruling it. The blacks also say the resettlement areas are government areas, but we still have it in our minds that the soil has got owners. (Vatorwa.10R)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This statement was made in 1993 by a farmer in a resettlement area near Masvingo town. The land had been seized by whites, assertively resettling themselves a hundred years before. After Independence the new black government acquired it, created some infrastructure (this particular scheme actually has irrigation) and allocated plots to suitable full-time farmers.⁵⁵ The scheme is run by an elected committee and falls under various ministries — the “powerful ones”. “Local Government said we must have Field Days because we have been given these lands by them,” I was told by another farmer, “but the ancestors of this area ... must be notified that there are some new children.” (Vatorwa.06R)

The Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Appiah (1992: 259) speaks of a distinction between law, “enforceable, in theory, by the ... power of the state”, and custom, now “no longer entitled to coerce in spheres where the law ... [holds] technical sovereignty”. I believe that was the distinction made by the two farmers, poignantly recognising the reality of both worlds: the “black” world of familiar ancestral rules and sanctions, and the “European” world of alien laws made and enforced by a sovereign state. Whereas the traditional law-givers may strike modern people as irrational and ghostly, sovereign states too, as Stoessinger (1969: 8) points out, are “in many ways only abstractions, figments of the human imagination”.

⁵⁵ This was the theory, at least. In practice it was often sacrificed to political expediency and economic realities (see eg Mandasa 1987: 192f, 212f; Herbst 1990, chs 4, 5). Unlike the colonists, the Zimbabwean government, in terms of the Lancaster House constitution, had to pay market prices for resettlement land.

The territory of Zimbabwe is divided into urban and industrial areas, national parks, commercial farmland (still predominantly white-owned), resettlement areas and what tribal land the chiefs retained after the colonial era. In the first three categories state sovereignty is not disputed. The position in the resettlement areas is ambivalent, as indicated above. In the chiefdoms — overcrowded and impoverished as they are — government's overall control is accepted de facto, as it was under colonial rule; but there are tacit reservations about centralised authority, based on an assumption of vested ancestral rights, to which a black government could be expected to be more sensitive than a white one.

This does not always happen, however — and it rankles. When I quoted some of Comrade Mavhaire's sharper comments about the chieftaincy to chief Mangwende, he responded with manifest irritation: "I don't understand these people. It seems they are like borrowed people, these who make such comments. They were born under the chiefs, they grew up under the chiefs, they should be in a better position to know how the chief functions." (Chiefs.02G)

The ZANU-PF government that assumed power in 1980 was caught in a cleft stick. On the one hand it was united, as were the people at the time, by a powerful nationalism forged by the struggle against the oppression, dispossession, disempowerment suffered under white rule.⁵⁶ But, unschooled as it was in the operation of the inherited administrative machinery and the intricacies of a modern economy, and hamstrung by the tenor and terms of the Lancaster House settlement, it modelled itself on the ousted regime. The strings attached to foreign aid, notably by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, imposed further constraints. Julius Nyerere (Mandasa 1987: 9) speaks from bitter experience:

The reality of neo-colonialism quickly becomes obvious to a new African Government which tries to act in economic matters in the interest of national development and for the betterment of its own masses. For such a Government immediately discovers that it inherited the power to make laws, to direct the civil service, to treat with foreign Governments and so on but it did not inherit effective power over economic developments in its own

⁵⁶ Politically fuelled, partly by the RSA, Ndebele-Shona friction continued and escalated in the mid-1980s until ZANU-ZAPU unity was achieved in 1987.

country. Indeed it often discovers that there is no such thing as a national economy. Neo-colonialism is real.

The most immediate problem after Independence was land. The liberation struggle had been, in the first instance, a struggle to regain the lost land. However politicised this issue became, both during the struggle and in the post-Independence era, its emotive character and intensity relate directly to the spiritual denotation of the soil. This has been amply demonstrated in earlier chapters. To the peasants in the communal areas (41% of the national territory, on which 57% of the country's population still live — Mandasa 1987: 168,187), and to many urbanites as well, land means the soil: subsistence, a way of life, physical and spiritual continuity.

In a modern setup, on the other hand, the value of land is measured in cash. "The Herald" (11 Oct 1993) quotes First Merchant Bank's chief economist John Robertson as saying: "Most African cultures tended to treat land as a social and political resource rather than an economic resource." Robertson urged the granting of title deeds in the communal areas so that peasant farmers could use their land — the ancestral soil — as collateral for loans. In terms of the traditional canon, I submit, this is arrant heresy.

Heresies tend to become assimilated to the mainstream of people's beliefs within a very few generations. A European example would be evolution theory, which seriously rocked the Christian boat for several decades before it became part of most modern Christians' view of life. The case study below shows this tug-of-war between traditional orthodoxy and modern heterodoxy in operation. It is an interplay of myth and counter myth — the myths of the Shona past and those shaped by the hybrid society in which the present actors live their lives. The tale reflects their shifting levels of consciousness as they manipulate both sets of myths in the process of working out their destiny.

6.2 A CASE STUDY

6.2.1 The Charumbira saga.⁵⁷

The story starts over 200 years ago, at Wedza in Mbire territory, where there was a tribe of famed hunters of the *shoko* totem. But evil befell them and they had to flee, changing their totem for the sake of anonymity. A kinsman of theirs whom we found in a resettlement area in 1993 told us: "They changed and became *shumba jichidza*.⁵⁸ I have never changed my totem, I am still *shoko*. These people abandoned us because they killed our relative. They killed their own brother." (Vatorwa.03R)

The fugitives, led by Sinamano, ended up in the area around Great Zimbabwe, where the Manwa were already established. Elephants were causing havoc in the vicinity and the newcomers, desperate for domicile, undertook to get rid of them. When they did, Nemanwa was so impressed by their prowess that he expelled some Dziva people living on his land to make room for them, on the pretext that the Dziva were "like married women in a home who do not bear anything" (Charumbira.012).

They settled at Nini hill and their war leader married a Manwa wife. They proliferated and prospered, but maintained their allegiance to Nemanwa who had given them refuge and was in any case their father-in-law. The tribe took the name of Nini, their sacred mountain. Today Sinamano's name appears to be forgotten; the only Nini chief I heard mentioned was Chaenda. The first chief to be known as Charumbira ("the one who became famous") was Mudavanhu, who is generally honoured as the founder of the tribe.

Mudavanhu acquired the name that launched his dynasty in the 1850s, when he helped Nemanwa to retrieve part of his land that had been seized by the Duma chief Mugabe at the beginning of the century. This feud turned into a ferocious war that continued

57 This section is based on Mtetwa (1976: 184ff), the District Commissioner's "Report on Charumbira chieftainship and community: Victoria Tribal Trust Land" (1965), and my own interviews. Since I have drawn the "facts" eclectically from all these sources, I do not give specific references except for direct quotations. I reiterate: I make no absolute truth claims; I am merely capturing the many truths that people profess to believe - and, in the process, my own subjective interpretation performs a role.

58 In fact the *shumba jichidza* people were the group that moved on from Masvingo district to Zaka, where my informant came from. The ones who remained became *shumba sipambi*.

intermittently until 1892, by which time both the Ndebele and white missionaries, traders and settlers had arrived on the scene and were actively or passively supporting one side or the other. The situation became so critical that the BSA police eventually intervened and decisively defeated Mugabe. The land that the struggle had been about — including Great Zimbabwe itself — went to the colonial government and the Dutch Reformed missionaries, who emerged as the only winners. The luckless tribes of Mugabe and Nemanwa were resettled. The latter, much weakened by the protracted war which had started in the 1820s, was assigned a small portion of the land that their forebears had once bestowed on Sinamano when he sought a home for his people. The wheel had come full circle.

Mudavanhu had 32 sons (30, according to the official Rhodesian genealogy — Report 1965: 83), eight of whom became chiefs in turn according to adelphic collateral succession. On the principle that "if your father was never a chief, you cannot qualify to be a chief" (Charumbira.06), these were the eight houses competing in the bitter succession struggle that ensued after the death of the youngest of that second generation. It has continued, gaining in intensity and complexity, into by now the fifth generation since Mudavanhu. It is a tale of rancour, strife, double-dealing and recrimination — possibly more sinister things as well, if one were to credit hints dropped by a kinswoman whom we encountered quite by chance while doing our routine interviews:

The people of Charumbira are killing one another because of the chieftaincy. Some say they are possessed by Chaenda, others say they are possessed by Mudavanhu. They are telling lies, there is no Mudavanhu *svikiro*. ... People poisoned his food, so anyone who is possessed by him will eventually die because of the poison he was given. Who has spent any length of time as a Charumbira chief? No-one. Anyone who becomes a chief dies before ruling for a long time. (Povo.07T)

This may be just tribal gossip; but the arguments of all the factions that I interviewed were marked by keen intelligence and, above all, ambition. I never met a Charumbira who was not both intelligent and, in one way or another, ambitious.

When Mudavanhu died, his wives according to Shona custom had to be inherited by his sons or brothers. The inheritance of the one who had mothered Madyira, Mudavanhu's 25th son,

was disputed by Mapingure, the second son, and Mutimbanga, a younger brother. Mutimbanga won the woman, but was driven off with his prize and her little boy to Chivi, where they were captured by the Ndebele. They came back with the impis and attacked Mapingure, who had succeeded his older brother Mututuari by then. Mapingure managed to beat them off and Mutimbanga retired to Samaguru near Bulawayo. Thus Madyira grew up in Ndebele territory, speaking that language and observing around him the Nguni custom of succession by primogeniture. This could well have influenced his thinking — one of my informants suggested as much.

In due course, after seven older brothers who had succeeded to the chieftaincy back home had all died, Madyira was next in line. Although he was still living in Bulawayo, his candidature was honoured: "Our fathers were upright. ... They went to Bulawayo and told Madyira that it was his turn to inherit his father's chieftaincy. They showed true love. Our fathers gave the chieftaincy in turns." (Charumbira.09)

When Madyira — the first Charumbira chief to wear the white government's badge, the *nyembe*⁵⁹ — died in 1943, true love no longer prevailed. For a brief while it seemed that, after the customary mourning period (*chema*), when a son of the deceased chief normally acted, the *nyembe* would go to Chiwawa of the house of Mataruse, the oldest member of the third generation living at that time. But Chiwawa died before the Rhodesian administration had confirmed his appointment. This was when the struggle erupted. Nyaku of Mapingure house was a strong candidate. His claim was opposed by Mazha, son of the previous chief Madyira, on grounds of alleged seniority. Since neither party had birth certificates, there was ample scope for argument, manoeuvring and power play.

The Charumbira succession is traditionally determined by the *magwehe* — a panel of elders of the chiefly lineage but not in the line of succession — in consultation with their *masvikiro*. In the dispute between Nyaku and Mazha they appointed Nyaku the legitimate successor:

59 Mr B B Charumbira (of Mapingure house), to whom I submitted this chapter for comment, mentioned that there were two earlier chiefs, Magura and Mudhege, who wore the *nyembe*. (They were not mentioned by the late Mano Charumbira, who gave me the information recorded above [Charumbira.01].) B B Charumbira also denies that the Charumbiras ever were of the *shoko* totem.

The *magwehe* gathered all the Charumbiras at Mutage dip tank. The *magwehe* at that time were Jerimani Nemazuwa, Bika Chingwere, Nezvigano. ... They then said, "Today the chieftaincy is in Mapingure house. Where is Mapingure's son? Stand up!" Nyaku stood up and they poured *mangaushe* on his head [ritually affirming the nomination]. They then adjourned the meeting. ... The following Monday Mapingure and his sons went to the DA's office. The DA⁶⁰ asked what they had come for and he answered, "I am the person who was given the chieftaincy." The DA said, "I am sorry, Madyira house has been here. The *magwehe* are wrong. They have chosen the wrong house. ... Go home, I will write a letter after consulting people in Harare." We left the office and went home. 5 January 1962,⁶¹ the kraalheads, headmen, we all gathered at Charumbira school. The speaker stood up and said, "We have called you here to choose a chief. The *magwehe* have chosen the wrong house and the people are not satisfied. So let us vote for a chief now." Mapingure said, "I don't want to vote because that is not traditional." The DA said, "Yes, it's not the traditional way but you have failed to choose a person, someone who is the chieftain's choice. So if you don't want to vote, give us a person who is the people's choice." Mapingure was overruled and decided to vote. (Charumbira.12)

In this election, imposed by the District Commissioner under the influence of Madyira house, Nyaku won with 37 votes. Mazha got 35 and a candidate from Mataruse house obtained 2. Thus both according to tribal custom and modern democratic election Nyaku was due to succeed. But the house of Mataruse made a private deal with Mazha and gave him its two votes, resulting in a deadlock. This conflict continued for some years. Eventually it was decided to get senior chiefs from other areas — chiefs Mukanganwi, Ndanga and Nhema — to arbitrate. They decided in favour of Mazha on the grounds that Mazha had

60 Like "Harare" (Salisbury at that time) below, this is an anachronism: District Administrator (DA) is the post-Independence title; the colonial title was District Commissioner (DC).

61 This date - at any rate the year - is puzzling. I think Dick Mafuba, the speaker and a vivid raconteur, was telescoping events spread over a decade. Mazha was appointed headman by the Rhodesian government on 1 May 1950. He became chief when the Charumbira chieftaincy was reinstated in 1964. The DC's Report (1965: 75) says that the Nyaku-Mazha "wrangle continued for years" until the arbitration by the chiefs referred to below.

been the one who had got the Charumbira chieftaincy restored after it had been downgraded to a headmanship under the Duma chieftaincy of Shumba.

Here I must digress to explain this further twist. In 1950, as part of a "rationalisation" exercise, the Rhodesian administration reduced many existing chieftaincies to headmanships. Charumbira (officially *shumba* totem) anomalously became a headman under Shumba (*moyo* totem), an indignity that the Charumbira people fiercely resented. When these chieftaincies were restored in the 1960s, Mazha — in his capacity as headman — secured the reinstatement of Charumbira as full-fledged chief and so got rid of the odious subservience to an alien dynasty. In recognition of this, the arbiters felt, the tribe owed him a debt of gratitude: he should continue as chief until his death. However, it was agreed that when Mazha died the chieftaincy would go to Mapingure.

Mazha had trouble controlling his aggrieved kinsmen. Dick Mafuba, headman over nine villages and widely popular, nursed his anger and assumed considerable autonomy in his ward. According to the DC's Report (1965: 80), his support gradually waned: "Dick Mafuba alleges his supporters have left him because they themselves 'were promised sadunhu-ships by Chief Charumbira, who cannot now keep his promises because he realises they are too many'." Certainly the tone of this Report suggests at least irritation, if not outright dislike of Mafuba. The latter, in defiance of Mazha, engaged a lawyer to claim recognition of his headmanship directly from the DC's office, by-passing the official chief. This could have struck the administration as naked rebellion — ominous at a time when African nationalism was becoming a force to be reckoned with. From Mafuba's point of view, his comment on Mazha's appointment speaks volumes: "Mazha's house ululated; we of Mapingure were nearly dying with anger. We then went home and kept quiet." (Charumbira.12)

When Mazha grew too old, his son Simon deputised for him for some years, but fell foul of the people because of misconduct. He was removed from office and his younger brother Zephaniah was summoned to become the new *zvimbo* (lit. "walking-stick", ie deputy).

In the early 1960s, under the federation of the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland, Zephaniah Charumbira was a civil servant in what was then Northern Rhodesia, where he had married a local woman and fathered a son. The latter told me that his father was then already

involved in the underground nationalist movement that eventually became ZANU. However, when the summons came he returned to Southern Rhodesia, acting for his father until the latter's death.

There is no doubt that Zephaniah Charumbira (widely known as "Zed") was an exceptional person. A blown up photograph of him in the family home shows a big, imperious man with shrewd, humorous eyes. Everybody I interviewed — from chief Mangwende, his successor as president of the Chief's Council, to his enemies, the Mapingures — spoke of him with at least admiration. Friends of his whom I met as far afield as Gutu and Harare showed undisguised affection. One of these, Mr Mubako, who was the first post-Independence administrator of Masvingo district, stressed Zed's involvement in traditional rituals and his closeness to his people.

At the same time there is no doubt about his political astuteness. During the 1960s, faced with growing political unrest, and especially after UDI in 1965, the Rhodesian government was courting the chiefs (see Holleman 1968, ch 9). Zephaniah, who was acting for his father, capitalised on this and became known in official circles as a "cooperative chief", a master farmer, progressive, eager to develop his chieftom. If he was indeed involved in subversive politics, or even sympathetic to the nationalist cause, he certainly put on a convincing act. In tribal politics he shrewdly surrounded himself with equally "cooperative" headmen and, through force of personality and official status, managed to bring his troubled, divided chieftom to order.

But beneath the surface the old resentments were still smouldering and when Mazha died in 1969 they erupted with undiminished fury. Nyaku Mapingure went to the DC's office and claimed the chieftaincy that he had been promised by the arbiters.

The DA said, "Mapingure, you will rule when the comrades are in office, because your children are supporting the comrades who stay in Chigarangwe mountain." This was during the war. I said to my uncle and my relatives, "Let us keep quiet, because what the DA is saying is very true. In the evenings we give the comrades *sadza*. The soldiers are staying at Charumbira school, this

boer [the DC] can be dangerous to us." So we all kept quiet and came back home. (Charumbira.12)

In giving this account Dick Mafuba was again telescoping events, for to my knowledge the comrades did not operate in Masvingo district until the mid-1970s. During the war years, however, the Mapingures were known sympathisers and suffered some harassment at the hands of the RAR, so I do not doubt the substance of the story.

Zephaniah continued as acting chief during the *chema* period. *Chimurenga* was a difficult time for the chiefs and I was told by non-Charumbira informants that the reason why the *chema* period was allowed to drag on was that nobody actually wanted the hot seat (except Dick Mafuba). By then Zephaniah was a public figure — a regional minister in Smith's cabinet, no less.⁶² In 1976, against all the rules of succession, he was installed as substantive chief. For one reason or another everyone acquiesced, although the Mapingures stayed away: "We never went to the installation, the installation was so military-like. We stayed at our homes." (Charumbira.11)

I saw photographs of the ceremony — a *svikiro* anointing Zephaniah's shaven head and, in the background, white dignitaries (I recognised Piet van der Bijl) and soldiers. The headmen duly contributed the requisite head of cattle apiece for the feast. All this was cited to me by his supporters as evidence that he was the rightful chief. Many informants, including one of the *magwehe*, maintain that although he was not actually in line for the chieftaincy, his installation was valid and he was a proper chief. An elder from Mapingure house, however, said:

The government did not instal him but they appointed him in a clever way. No one in the tribe complained. It was an officially organised thing that Zed was going to become chief Charumbira. It was announced that each headman must pay a beast for the feast. I paid a head of cattle. But we did not appoint Zed. The government appointed him. (Charumbira.09)

⁶² After Zephaniah's death the new government made a rule that no acting chief can serve on the Chiefs' Council. This was probably prompted by the difficulties created by this precedent.

Be that as it may, it is generally recognised that Zephaniah was a good chief and greatly boosted the family prestige. During the war years, some informants said, he played a double role: his official Mercedes, which was never searched, was used to distribute subversive literature and other supplies to comrades operating in his chieftom, who were also kept informed of imminent raids by the soldiers. One informant explicitly denied this, maintaining that Zephaniah did not switch allegiance until 1978. According to his son, however, his ostensible collaboration with the Smith regime was under orders from ZANU leadership, who wanted a foot in the enemy camp, but when the transitional government, which included Bishop Abel Muzorewa, was formed in 1978, he resigned his position. Muzorewa was considered a turncoat by black nationalists, and "whilst he could still have participated in the Smith government, he could not assist Muzorewa". (Charumbira.06)

After Independence Zephaniah became ZANU party chairman for Masvingo district. At first he was a senator, then a member of both the provincial and central Chiefs' Council, and ultimately its president. He was also a rural councillor and member of the District Council's education committee. Despite his eminence in public life, Mapingure house made yet another bid for the chieftaincy, but were told to bide their time until his death: his position had been ratified by the new government and this was irreversible.

In 1989, before his 60th birthday, Zephaniah Charumbira died. At his funeral president Mugabe delivered an oration, praising him as a great Zimbabwean citizen and a true chief. He had used his position to fight for the rights of the chieftaincy, notably the restoration of the chiefs' judicial powers, which they had effectively lost during the war years under pressure from the comrades.'

Zephaniah's son Fortune, a university graduate, became acting chief for the *chema* period, which in other chieftaincies lasts from three months to a year. Yet three years later, when I arrived in Zimbabwe, Fortune Charumbira was still acting. Zephaniah's death predictably unleashed a fresh round of bids and counter bids and the chieftom was seething with contention.

The obvious candidate is surely, at long last, a member of Mapingure house. But there is a further, quite incredible twist to the story. Within Madyira house, Mazha's two surviving

brothers (one of whom died during my study period) came forward after Independence to claim that they had been wronged at the time of Zephaniah's installation. They have been pressing their claims even more assiduously since his death. They told me that they were forced "at gunpoint" (Charumbira.03) to agree to the installation, which was orchestrated by Ian Smith and as such invalid. They say that Zephaniah himself acknowledged this to them and that they agreed to let him continue as nominal chief because of his high public profile and status. They have approached both the Chiefs' Council in Parliament and the Minister of Local Government (although my informant at that Ministry disclaimed any knowledge of the dispute) and have engaged a lawyer to prosecute their case in the Supreme Court. Everybody else I spoke to, however, scorned their claim and maintained that if there had been a mistake, they should have spoken out at the time: it would be absurd to have Zephaniah succeeded by yet another Madyira, since that house has monopolised the chieftaincy for close on 70 years by now.

The original eight houses had been whittled down to either three or four — Madyira, Mataruse and Mapingure (some informants include Mututuari) — over the years. I was told that this was because it was discovered that some of Mudavanhu's wives were sisters, so that the houses descended from them were amalgamated with that of the senior wife of the same family. But in the latest negotiations with the DA's office not only all of the original eight houses but several others that had been disqualified for many generations are staking their claims.

When I left Zimbabwe early in 1994 the DA's office had set a deadline: the matter had to be settled once and for all by the end of February. I returned for follow-up work in May of that year and was told by B B Charumbira of Mapingure house, a primary school teacher and rural councillor, that they had been victorious and that he himself was to be the new chief. We had a celebratory lunch at a restaurant and I asked him to notify me when the installation was to be so that I could come up and attend it.

I have learnt since that there have been fresh complications and the decision is again pending. At some point the Ministry of Local Government will surely intervene... From my point of view, I have seen enough, heard enough and learnt enough to permit me to make some observations, even tentative inferences.

6.2.2 Comments

Given the Shona succession system, disputes are not infrequent. The Charumbira struggle, however, is widely acknowledged to be uncommonly protracted, unremitting and rancorous. There are many sides to this saga and the lines are by no means clear-cut. Shona tradition and modernity intersect, conflict and interact in dynamic flux. I merely highlight a few points: an overall picture is not possible in mid-process.

A first and obvious observation: the Charumbiras have a reputation for belligerence, toughness, even ruthlessness — two members of the family pointed this out to me with something like pride. The circumstances in which they left Wedza (even if not murder, as my one informant claimed) were sufficiently incriminating to necessitate changing their totem. This is never done lightly and is usually a closely guarded secret — the Charumbiras' frankness on the subject is in itself telling. They earned their domicile among the Manwa by their hunting prowess, and at the expense of the Dziva people. We do not know what happened when Mudavanhu died — the legend about poisoning suggests at least bad blood.

I was told that Mututuari was disqualified from the chieftaincy by Mudavanhu because he had angered the old man. "He said, 'My hair is as white as yours. You, father, when am I going to rule?' Mudavanhu said, 'What! You want me to die? You are not going to be chief.'" (Charumbira.11)⁶³ The fact is, Mututuari took it for granted that he, and not his father's younger brother, would succeed to the chieftaincy. This corroborates a point made by Fortune Charumbira (Charumbira.06): primogeniture was practised at that time already, long before Madyira house took over. This was likely to have been disputed; and unless the character of the family has changed greatly since that time, the dispute would have been hot and rancorous.

Despite their pugnacity they showed due respect for the two pillars of Shona belief, evidenced by their loyalty to Nemanwa — both "owner" of the soil on which they still live and their father-in-law, whose blood flows in their children's veins. They not only supported him in war against a rival chief but also, ironically, had to give him domicile when the

63 This contradicts the DC's Report (1965: 83), which lists Mututuari as the second chief Charumbira. My informant claimed that a brother ruled on his behalf in deference to his father's curse.

whites took his land. There is a parallel between the displacement of the Dziva to make room for Sinamano's people, and the dispossession of both Nemanwa's and Mugabe's people by the whites. The contrast lies in the manner in which it was done. Sinamano and his descendants observed the protocol, duly establishing links with both the blood and the soil of their new abode. The white invaders had different notions of land ownership and little or no sense of kinship even with the living guardians of the land, let alone their forebears. So they trampled roughshod over time-honoured shrines and sanctions, convinced that theirs was a superior culture and their faith the only true one.

Once resettled in Charumbira chiefdom, the Manwa fiercely resisted the inversion of the status hierarchy, as Charumbira did later when the same regime subordinated him to chief Shumba. The DC's Report (1965: 81, 82) notes that Nemanwa did not regard himself as Charumbira's headman, maintaining that this status had been imposed on him by government; and that Manwa disputes were referred directly to the DC rather than to Charumbira's *dare*. Thus in a situation where custom was being violated by modern government arrangements, Nemanwa preferred to disregard the traditional judicial system altogether rather than compromise his ancestral right.

Whatever irregularities had caused Mudavanhu's sons to succeed their father, the first generation after his death meticulously observed the Shona system — to the extent that Madyira, who had grown old in foreign parts, was summoned back to take his turn. This rule (*ushe madzoro unoravanwa*) was frequently cited to me as the cornerstone of the traditional succession system, in deference to the even more sacred principle of seniority: a younger brother cannot rule over an older one — let alone a son over a father. After all, taken to its logical conclusion, such hubris could culminate in humans ruling over God.⁶⁴

Despite all the bitterness and manipulations that followed Madyira's death, Zephaniah too was recalled from as far afield as Lusaka to act for his aged father — and resigned a civil service post in order to do so. A chief's stipend (£1 to £5 a month at that time — less than a truck driver's wages [Holleman 1968: 340]) would not have been sufficient to tempt him. The powers of the chiefs had been steadily whittled down since 1890 — Lan (1985: 138) may

⁶⁴ In view of this, it is intriguing that the Duma originally observed the rule of primogeniture and only changed to the Shona system in the course of the 19th century (see ch 5).

be exaggerating, but there is some truth in his assertion that "the chiefs had become minor civil servants with the powers of constables". Of course, Zed may have acted under orders from the underground nationalist movement, as his son claimed — there is no way of telling at this stage. Apart from that possibility, his motivation must have been simply the status of the Shona chieftaincy, a status explicable only in terms of blood and soil.

Nyaku Mapingure's futile protest against a government-imposed "election" is an outcry against desecration of this institution. Human persons cannot choose a chief. Their will may influence the appointment via *masvikiro* and *magwehe*, who are members of ordinary society; but the decision lies with the *mhondoro* and, ultimately, with God: "When the earth began, this was when the word 'chief' started." (Theol.10R)

Whatever the delegates of Madyira house told the DC after Nyaku's appointment by the *magwehe*, it is difficult to understand the high-handed way in which he dismissed the validity of their choice and imposed the totally foreign method of election. No doubt his patience had been sorely tried by the endless wrangling and he was determined to settle the matter once and for all. The Report (1965: 82), written while Mazha's son Simon was acting for his father, states:

Hatred between the chiefly houses is great and is not easily forgotten. And until a popular leader, one who is popular with all, is found, the position will continue. ... Regarding succession to the chieftainship itself, my impressions are that the people will sooner do without a chief altogether than allow somebody other than their particular choice to succeed.

I may be underestimating the author, but to my mind he failed to appreciate the delicate balance between "popular choice" and spirit guidance that lies at the heart of Shona democracy. The *magwehe* were perfectly aware of the people's divided views and had the authority of their *masvikiro* to impose their decision. Arguably, had the DC not chosen to override it, the feud may have been terminated at that point. If Madyira house had not had the DC to fall back on, they would have had only one choice: either knuckle down or move away. The chances are they would have submitted to the will of the spirits.

The deal by which the house of Mataruse gave Madyira house its two votes in the election suggests a level of modern political sophistication that I find hard to credit. The election as such was a travesty of custom, as the DC is said to have admitted. The trading of votes smells of yet further machinations by white officialdom.

The invocation of senior chiefs from other tribes to solve the deadlock created by the election, on the other hand, was an authentic Shona strategy. After all, the *mhondoro* associate with one another and the spirits of Mudavanhu, Chaenda and even older ones would be able to communicate with those of Mukanganwi, Ndanga and Nhema. The decision of the arbiters not to disrupt the continuity but to promise Mapingure restitution after Mazha's death likewise reflects Shona tribal wisdom. Holleman (1968: 349) writes:

It was part of a truly democratic process of decision making, which should not be obscured by the ultimate and deliberately [sic] desired result of these often exhaustive discussions; namely, unanimity. Just as final unanimity was "proof" of the unbroken fundamental unity of the community ... so lack of consensus at the end of serious deliberation often spelled the imminent breaking up of this unity by the secession of the dissenting minority from the community ... The most strenuous efforts, as well as the most heated and protracted debates, would then serve to avoid the dreaded risk of final schism, and be directed towards finding some generally acceptable formula.

Nonetheless, the feud between Mapingure and Madyira made Charumbira chiefdom all but ungovernable. The DC's Report (1965: 75ff) reflects this all too clearly: Mazha refused to recognise Dick Mafuba of Mapingure house as a headman. Mafuba engaged a lawyer to press his claim directly with the DC's office, by-passing the official chief. Mafuba assumed considerable autonomy in his ward — there were prosecutions when he allocated land without reference to Mazha. Government honoured Mazha's chiefly prerogatives, "however unpopular he might be" (it is not clear whether this refers to Mazha himself or his son Simon), but the people refused to participate in community projects and the DC saw "little chance of any project promoted by the chief succeeding". All this substantiates a point made by chief Mangwende in 1992: "If they can prove to me that it is only the politicians that can make development go forward, then I will go on my way and prove to them that from 1969

to the date when they took our powers, this is what I did. And then I will ask a question to them: What have *you* done from 1980 to 1992? Show me something on the ground." (Chiefs.02G) What this practical, progressive chief is saying is that no amount of government from Harare or Masvingo town will secure the cooperation of the people.

It is hard to tell why the DC's office favoured the Madyira candidate. Dick Mafuba, leader of the Mapingure faction, must have been even more assertively outspoken and incisive at that time than when I met him 30 years later, and most likely outraged the racist white officials. This, and possible knowledge of the Mapingures' nationalist sentiments, could well have weighted the scales in Madyira's favour.

Certainly by this time modern politics, specifically black nationalism, was beginning to play an increasing role in the chiefdoms. During the war years, when Zephaniah Charumbira was acting chief, many chiefs were "hiding in town", as my informants put it, protected by government soldiers against reprisals from the comrades. (Zephaniah himself, I was told by one of the *magwehe*, moved to his house in town.) After all, they were paid servants of the enemy, collecting taxes for the hated regime. Nonetheless most chiefs tried to remain at least neutral and many were well disposed towards the fighters, who appreciated their ambivalent situation. As chief Mangwende put it: "If Mugabe is defeated and loses power, automatically we will change to the ruling party that is in power then. We did not make our own way during the Smith regime, we had to go with the rules of the government of the day. Really the chief had no choice, because it was hot everywhere. ... We kept the land, this is why when they came back they saw the country there." (Chiefs.02G)

Zephaniah's succession was against all tribal custom and I cannot help suspecting that there was government interference — I have quoted one informant who said so outright. Holleman (1968: 359) cautiously comments that government theoretically had the right to appoint a chief, and that "this had, in fact, happened in some cases". Fortune Charumbira, not surprisingly, was adamant that it had not happened in his father's case. It must be considered, however, that Zephaniah was appointed chief during the UDI period. Before taking that drastic step, Ian Smith, rather than hold a referendum, had consulted the traditional leaders at a massive *indaba* in 1964, at which some apples were dangled in front of the chiefs' noses. Holleman (1968: 344ff) argues that they were in fact being forged into

a political tool to bolster the Rhodesian Front's beleaguered minority government. A shrewd, powerful personality like Zephaniah Charumbira might well have suited Smith's purposes, provided he played his cards right — and the prominent positions he held indicate that, whatever his motives may have been, he did.

At all events, once he was installed the people did not question his legitimacy. The installation of chiefs is solemn and binding, a consecration to the soil of which they are the sons. It is not so much a matter of official insignia and the presence of government dignitaries. More important are the simple ritual elements — beer brewed by postmenopausal women, anointment by a *svikiro*, placing soil in the new chief's hand. That is also why people scoff at the Madyira elders who pressed their claims subsequently: whatever they might say now, they had attended that ceremony, had registered no protest and must therefore accept its validity. Their use of lawyers, I was told, was no less anomalous than the DC's election had been. To a lesser degree this applies to Dick Mafuba as well, but in his case it was simply a matter of getting officialdom to ratify a headmanship that he effectively held in tribal society. The fact is, however, that by now aspirants to traditional positions — which are considered to be above modern institutions (see 4.1) — were using modern strategies to achieve their aims. I suppose this was inevitable. After all, if Smith could use the chiefs as political cats' paws, why should they not return the compliment?

Zephaniah's political affiliation cannot be determined at this stage. Was he a clandestine member of ZANU and hence a double agent, as his son maintains, or just an intelligent leader capitalising on a volatile political situation to secure maximum benefit for his people and the chieftaincy? Maybe both. Certainly his career after Independence was no less distinguished than it had been under Smith, which might be seen as corroborating his son's information. The interesting point is that the chieftaincy and the modern state had interpenetrated to quite a considerable extent for such questions to arise at all.

Although Zephaniah Charumbira's right to succeed was highly questionable in terms of custom, when Mugabe's government assumed power he (and other chiefly incumbents) were confirmed in their positions. When Mapingure asked for a review of the case it was refused: the document had been signed by the president and could not be retracted unless the chief

committed a criminal offence. Infringement of tribal custom — even in connivance with the ousted regime — was no concern of modern government.

This is an example of the kind of mixed feelings towards the chieftaincy that I noticed on the part of most government spokespersons. Thirty years ago Holleman (1968: 340) wrote: "Even the Administration itself, by the grace of which (so it seemed) chieftainship was artificially kept alive and utilized, had serious doubts about its functional value in modern times — in spite of the homage paid to chiefs on suitable occasions." This is not all that different from what Comrade Mavhaire told me in 1992: "No, we want our chieftainship. It is an institution that we admire, that we want. But what we are saying is that we must make sure that we protect the institution as the revolution of development moves ... The things the country now demands and what we are supposed to address are far above the level of some of the chiefs. And the chiefs must accept that." (Government.01)

Stoessinger (1969: 8) maintains that "Bodin's definition of sovereignty as 'the state's supreme authority over citizens and subjects,' set forth in his *De La République* in 1576, is still largely valid today". For all their representation in Parliament and newly restored (if strictly circumscribed) judicial powers, the chiefs remain subjects of the sovereign modern state. President Mugabe in effect made this point in his funeral oration when he hailed Zephaniah Charumbira as a great Zimbabwean citizen. To the people of his chiefdom, on the other hand, he is a new *mhondoro*. One cannot but wonder whether the old *mhondoro* find this newcomer to their ranks as awkward to accommodate as a modern government finds the chieftaincy.

Zephaniah Charumbira died before I arrived in Zimbabwe, but I was given an overwhelming impression of his genuineness by informants from all walks of life. I am prepared to believe that his concern was with his people and with the survival of Shona custom in changing times, and that his shrewdness in both national and tribal politics was directed to these ends. I have often wondered about the "prominent and intelligent" chief described by Holleman (1968: 370) who, on the eve of *chimurenga*, insisted that he saw no reason, in practice, to oppose Smith's approach to the chieftaincy. When pressed by Holleman, he remained silent for a while, then said quietly: "If we shall really have to choose between the government and our people we must, of course, choose our people." This description would fit what I have

heard about chief Zephaniah Charumbira: a man who straddled the two worlds mentioned in my introduction and, with native canniness, was able to assess the worth of both in his own context.

I do not quite know what to make of the most recent developments in this saga, subsequent to my departure. The re-entry into the dispute of houses that have been effectively out of the running for several generations could be sheer opportunism. One of the *magwehe* told me: "Nowadays everyone in the tribe is saying, 'Me — me — me!' ... If they keep on quarrelling about this we can take the badge and keep it till they have organised themselves." (Charumbira.05) Whether they still have that power under the new dispensation is another matter, but the point is clear: what had been a long and bitter but basically dignified feud may well be deteriorating into an unsavoury rat-race. While it bears out my earlier point that the chieftaincy is still considered a prize worth fighting for, it certainly raises questions about the *mhondoro*'s ability to control their offspring. Conversely, do these children still defer to the *mhondoro* to ascertain their will?

This brings me to my final point. The representatives of the chiefly houses that I spoke to were Christians. While this does not necessarily preclude deference to ancestors, one branch of the family belongs to the Seventh Day Adventist Church and told me emphatically that they dissociated themselves from the spirits and *masvikiro*. Another, a Mappingure elder, is a Maranke Apostle and in his interview, although not explicitly renouncing the spirits, he stressed that God was the arbiter and that the choice of a chief should not be attended by greed, selfishness and political wrangling: it should simply follow the time-honoured rule and the promises made to his house should be kept. On the other hand, B B Charumbira, also of Mappingure house and a school teacher, told me that he had compiled a family history in consultation with *masvikiro* (unfortunately it was lost in a domestic crisis, so I could not read it). And the *magwehe* said that they did consult the *masvikiro* when making their choice. But the *magwehe*, by their own admission, are no longer being heeded; and I was told by others that they are taking sides and quarrelling among themselves.

Whereas no one would blame Christianity for all the dissension, it is failing to come up with the answer that, traditionally, the *mhondoro* had provided. One must ask whether the chieftaincy (whatever its relationship to government) can survive at all as a legitimate social

authority unless the *mhondoro* are taken at least as seriously as their modern counterparts: the state and the churches.

It remains to be seen if the Ministry of Local Government's Chieftaincy Section will intervene if the dispute drags on. One of its senior officials in Harare told me that this was not policy — although they are statutorily entitled to do so if the occasion ever arises. Maybe this time it has... The official I spoke to at the Masvingo DA's office was clearly exasperated and indicated that the acting chieftainship would be terminated soon. Personally I wonder why the case is not referred to the provincial — or even national — Council of Chiefs, which could then arbitrate as chiefs Mukanganwi et al did in the 1960s. This would be a logical corollary of customary Shona procedure in a modern context.

6.3 GOVERNMENT AND THE CHIEFS

The official of the Ministry of Local Government's Chieftaincy Section whom I interviewed did not pretend that this institution was free from either flaws or problems. He maintained, however, that the pros far outweighed the cons. He cited the example of countries like Tanzania and Malawi who had abolished the chieftaincy after Independence. Compared with these countries, Zimbabwean local government was relatively trouble-free because it had the benefit of chiefs acting as "the eyes and the ears of *both* the government *and* their ancestors". (Government.02) The chiefs were, he said, cooperating well with government and recognise the paramountcy of the state, as their precolonial predecessors had recognised that of, for instance, Munhumutapa.

This would be a sound argument if government's claim to legitimacy rested on the leadership of the *mhondoro* during the liberation war. But, as has been pointed out already, many people feel that the government has betrayed the *mhondoro* by adopting European ways. Reading between the lines of my interviews with different chiefs, I am not so sure that they would accept the analogy. I think they are more inclined to see central government as a *fait accompli*, a continuation of the colonial era and something which, they have to accept, will not go away. As one chief put it: "Some of the people in the government — *some* of them — are all right. But some of them say there are no spirits in the world, when people

die they just die. ... If there are no chiefs there are no spirits. Where will you go for the spirits, to the government?" (Chiefs.01K)

The problems that the chiefs raised in interviews were, first and foremost, the loss of "their powers", primarily land allocation and the *dare*. Although initially overjoyed by the reinstatement of the *dare*, which was gazetted in March 1993, the chiefs I spoke to were disillusioned when they discovered what limited jurisdiction had been accorded them. I suspect that they will be pressing for more extensive powers via the Chiefs' Council. Comrade Mavhaire's comment in this regard was brusque: "They will continue to want more power. If overnight they were to be told, You are now kings, they will like it. Like everybody else, they want power. But unfortunately they will not get it." (Government.01)

With regard to land allocation, government officials assured me that kraalheads and, where necessary, chiefs were fully involved in identifying people in need of land but that actual allocation was done by agricultural experts. Chiefs were ex officio members of rural councils, but only in an advisory capacity: to share in decision making they have to be elected. Some of them (including Zephaniah Charumbira) took this option. Others felt it undignified to have to compete with "their children" for popular votes. There were many complaints about strained relations with elected councillors. This resentment, where it exists, is mutual and understandable: the councillors were given preeminence over the chiefs in the immediately postwar period and were reluctant to cede this position as government gradually came to recognise the usefulness of the chiefs in maintaining order in the communal lands.

Another sore point is the resettlement areas mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. The chiefs, not unreasonably, expected this land to be returned to them, its original owners, and are disgruntled that this has not happened. Here there may be some developments in the offing. In November 1993 a 12-member Land Commission was sworn in to assess and make recommendations on such matters as the appropriateness of the various land tenure systems operative in the country, hectareage per household and, significantly, "what land rights, if any, people in full-time employment in industrial, mining and urban areas should have in communal areas" ("The Herald", 2 Nov 1993). Four of the commissioners are chiefs, chief Mangwende (president of the Chiefs' Council in Parliament) among them. When I spoke to him in Harare in May 1994 he expressed satisfaction about the progress made so far. He

told me that one of the gains for the chieftaincy that he hoped to secure from the process was jurisdiction over resettlement areas.

This will not solve the chronic land shortage in the communal areas, which is largely a colonial legacy but also an inevitable consequence of population increase. It is noteworthy that no chief I spoke to questioned government supremacy in urban areas and growth centres. Indeed, the committee chairman at the resettlement scheme mentioned at the beginning of this chapter had been chief Bere until all his land was claimed for mining, a game reserve and a dam. He said he did not mind this, but would wish to be given a small piece of his ancestral land and some recognition of his status. But, as the resettlement farmer who shared this interview pointed out, "These chiefdoms were taken by force from the owners and the owners have no power to take them back. It is now complicated to return these areas to the blacks." (Vatorwa.10R)

Thus, slowly but surely, a new picture is taking shape and in the process new issues are emerging. In the nature of my study I have focused predominantly on the chieftaincy and the land — the blood and the soil. There are many others, however, and one of them I must touch on, however briefly. It concerns the chiefs' approach to their female children and the position of women in Zimbabwe generally.

While I met some ardent, outspoken feminists in Zimbabwe, Shona women on the whole are as submissive as the most chauvinistic male could desire. Since Independence the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (appropriately headed by a woman) has managed to have several acts passed to ameliorate their position in a heavily patriarchal society in which they were regarded and treated as "minors from the cradle to the grave and therefore under the guardianship of men" (MCDWA 1985: 16). Post-Independence statutes include the Sex Disqualification Act entitling women to hold public office, equal pay regulations, the Electoral Act giving all citizens the franchise, new legislation on the division of household property and custody in divorce cases, and — by far the most controversial — the Legal Age of Majority Act.

In terms of this act young people over the age of 18 are legally majors, also in customary law cases. One implication is that couples over the age of 18 can now marry or enter into relationships without parental consent. This caused a furore and is still widely condemned:

Parents saw the LAMA ushering in all sorts of immoral behaviour on the part of their children, particularly girls, and a general erosion of parental [sic — filial] respect. There was also the intolerable idea that daughters could marry without *roora* transactions (Mandaza 1987: 391).

In my survey of high school pupils, 47 out of 59 respondents thought the Act was a bad thing, 3 thought it was both good and bad and only 9 approved of it. If school boys and girls — the intended beneficiaries of this new freedom — feel this way, the reaction among older people, let alone conservative chiefs, can well be imagined.

Yet the chiefs are not uncritical of customary law. Chief Murinye, a staunchly traditional chief of the old school, pointed out that customary inheritance law, specifically the inheritance of wives, is unfair because in the case of widows who exercise their right to decline to be inherited, the joint household property — which, he pointed out, both spouses worked for — can be retained by the husband's family, leaving the woman destitute. When I asked him if a government amendment of this customary law tenet would not amount to introducing European law into the traditional system, he said: "It is not European law but it is a way of putting things right. Our culture is not fair about inheritance." (Chiefs.05Y)

6.4 CONCLUSION

Chief Murinye's assessment augurs well for the evolution of some kind of fruitful symbiosis. The chiefs have the hearts and the minds of a large proportion of the population. Government, on the other hand, holds the purse strings and so dictates the pace and, by and large, the terms of modern development. Yet it cannot but be aware, as its white predecessor was, of the existence of what David Lan (1985: 222) calls "two distinct Zimbabwes":

There is the nation/spirit province [in my context, the chiefdom — MM] owned by the ancestors of the Shona people in which the Shona have the perpetual, inextinguishable right of autochthons to live and govern forever. And there is the territory that was Rhodesia, the borders of which were drawn by politicians in Britain and Portugal with no regard for the peoples who lived within them.

In working out a fruitful symbiosis both chiefs and government would have to bear in mind the caveat addressed to sociologists by Richard Harvey Brown (1989: 72f):

Intellectual and institutional arrangements, which initially may have served the creative spirit, instead tend to calcify and oppose it. The critical use of inherited concepts thus requires a redefinition of present reality with new terms and, in so doing, a distancing from the web of interest in which dominant paradigms tend to become entangled. In such a project of paradigm renewal sociologists must bracket their own world along with everything else. For only from such a transcendental point of view can sociologists examine ... the degree to which their own paradigms have stagnated, and whether their habitual perspective has become that of powers that be.

The (arguably calcified) inherited concepts in the present case are those of both Western capitalist democracy and Shona custom. The "powers that be" are the government and the *mhondoro*/chiefs. *Both* paradigms should be subjected to the same critical scrutiny and self-reflection.

Something of the sort is no doubt happening in the hurly-burly of Zimbabwean politics, although the scales appear to be weighted in favour of the modern state. To achieve a balance and act creatively, the uneasy status quo needs to be analysed explicitly according to mutually agreed criteria of actual value. That is how symbiosis can come about.

CHAPTER 7

Of choice and continuity

It is, of course, of immense consequence to the citizens of African states generally that their ruling elites are advised by and in many cases constituted of europhone intellectuals. But a concern with the relations of 'traditional' and 'modern' worlds, with the integration of inherited modes of understanding and newly acquired theories, concepts and beliefs, is bound to be of especial importance in the lives of those of us who think and write about the future of Africa in terms that are largely borrowed from elsewhere. We may acknowledge that the truth is the property of no culture, that we should take the truths we need wherever we find them; but for truths to become the basis of national policy and, more widely, of national life, they must be believed; and whether or not whatever new truths we take from the West will be believed depends in large measure on how we are able to manage the relations between our conceptual heritage and the ideas that rush at us from worlds elsewhere (Appiah 1992: 4; first emphasis mine).

7.1 INTRODUCTION

At least part of the management of these relations surely entails translation into a commonly understood frame of reference if any worthwhile, mutually fructifying communication between the African "conceptual heritage" and modernity is to be possible. This I have attempted to do for modern readers, albeit not systematically or comprehensively enough. The translation of modern concepts into Shona idiom is being done pragmatically, day by day — again not systematically or comprehensively, and sometimes with hidden agendas.

In this final chapter I attempt to crystallise some of the issues raised in previous chapters. They could be starting points for a dialogue between Shona intellectuals (including politicians) more or less proficient in the "borrowed" terminology referred to by Appiah, and their counterparts — the tribal sages and chiefs more or less versed in the symbols and myths that articulate and sustain the indigenous world-view.

A necessary preliminary is to underscore yet again a very basic conceptual discrepancy between the two cultures under discussion in this dissertation. Soyinka (1990: 122) writes:

In contrast to what would be called strictly religious processes in other societies, the harmonisation of human functions, external phenomena and supernatural suppositions within individual consciousness emerges as a normal self-adjusting process in the African temper of mind. Where, for instance, the mediation of ritual is required, it is performed as a human (communal) activity, not as a space-directed act of worship. This is what leads to a preference for a 'world-view', a cosmic totalism, rather than 'religion'.

Throughout this dissertation (and despite its title) I have been consciously sparing in the use of the word "religion", in deference to the point made by Soyinka. The Shona world-view includes belief in metaphysical beings of many kinds, from mermaids to a supreme creator God, all collaborating in a rationally cohesive, "normal self-adjusting process" to regulate a society and a life world. In the face of what he calls "the abysmal angst of low achievement" in postcolonial Africa, Soyinka (1990: 108f) recognises a need for a "race-retrieving" search for African identity, "the matrix of society that preceded the violent distortions" of Eurocentric colonialism. He insists that this society, as well as the deities and spirits that populated it alongside human beings, was essentially "secular", organically incorporating into its cosmogonic continuity (this may be a more apposite term than Soyinka's "totalism") any technological knowledge and devices that it either generated or inherited. Commenting on George Steiner's verdict that European dramatic vision has declined in correlation with the decline of such an organic world-view, Soyinka (1990:48f; *my italics*) writes:

The implication of this [verdict], a strange one to the African world-view, is that ... the world in which lightning was a cornice in the cosmic architecture of man collapsed at that moment when Benjamin Franklin tapped its power with a kite. The assimilative wisdom of African metaphysics recognises no difference in essence between the mere means of tapping the power of lightning — whether it is by ritual sacrifice ... or through the agency of Franklin's revolutionary gadget. What George Steiner effectively summarises

is that at some stage of intellectual hypothesis, at some phase of scientific exploration, ... that architectonic unity which is the basis of man's regulating consciousness (of which the most personalised expression is art) suffers the same fate of redundancy as the assumptions and theories themselves. For cultures which pay more than lip-service to the protean complexity of the universe of which man is himself a reflection, *this European habit of world re-definition appears both wasteful and truth-defeating.*

This claim on behalf of "African assimilative wisdom" is similar to that made by Richard Harvey Brown's (1989: 2) cognitive aesthetics, which purports to provide "a framework within which the pioneering artist and the pioneering scientist are both seen as involved in essentially the same activity: making paradigms through which experience becomes intelligible". If Soyinka's and Brown's claims are both valid, it means that latterday Euro-American thought is beginning to retrieve the wisdom of the ancestors (whether African or European ones is not the point here).

Soyinka (1990: 126ff) insists on the rational (or "secular") adequacy of the African world-view: Ogun, the Yoruba god of creativity, "manifests a temperament for artistic creativity matched by technological proficiency" (Soyinka 1990: 28). This world-view is not amenable to European binary oppositions ("Manicheisms") such as secular versus sacred, technological/scientific versus intuitive/aesthetic. In a superb satirical vignette he lampoons the way the exponents of *négritude* swallowed this reductionism:

Let us respond, very simply, as I imagine our mythical brother innocent would respond in his virginal village, pursuing his innocent sports, suddenly confronted by the figure of Descartes in his pith-helmet, engaged in the mission of piercing the jungle of the black pre-logical mentality with his intellectual canoe. As our Cartesian ghost introduces himself by scribbling on our black brother's — naturally — *tabula rasa* the famous proposition, 'I think, therefore I am', we should not respond as the Negritudinists did, with 'I feel, therefore I am', for that is to accept the arrogance of a philosophical certitude that has no foundation in the provable, one which *reduces the cosmic logic of being to a functional particularism of being.* I could not imagine that our

'authentic black innocent' would ever have permitted himself to be manipulated into the false position of countering one pernicious Manicheism with another. He would sooner, I suspect, reduce our white explorer to syntactical proportions by responding: 'You think, therefore you are a thinker. You are one-who-thinks, white-creature-in-pith-helmet-in-African-jungle-who-thinks and, finally, white-man-who-has-problems-believing-in-his-own-existence.' And I cannot believe that he would arrive at that observation solely by intuition (Soyinka 1990: 138f; my italics).

Of course, Soyinka himself could be accused of using the very binary logic that he is attacking by setting up African "totalism" in stark opposition to European "Manicheism". The confrontation depicted above is between common-sense rationality and the rationalism that has afflicted the modern consciousness since Descartes's forlorn cry for belief elicited its reductionist response — which became so inflated that the existential dilemma that gave birth to it was all but lost sight of. It is perhaps significant that debunking Descartes has become a popular sport among African philosophers (see eg Wiredu's and Appiah's essays in Floistad [1987]; Anyanwu in Ruch & Anyanwu [1981]; Van Niekerk [1995]).

The fact that modern people have to face is that rationalism has exacted ounce for ounce, reminiscent of Prometheus's liver, a price: loss of the ability to believe. The capacity to believe the unproven is not irrational superstition. It is the surrender of rationalist hubris. We have no access to knowledge except belief, even if only in the evidence of our senses or, in Descartes's case, our rational faculty.

Human belief, of which religion is one facet, takes seriously both the evidence of all our faculties — emotional, sensory, ethical, the lot — and our rational interpretation of that evidence, which constitutes our particular world-view. To the extent that such a world-view is shared and applied to social activity and organisation it represents a culture. Cultures are creative in modifying and reinterpreting their shared understanding to accommodate new evidence. If this creativity fizzles out or is crushed by extraneous forces, there is what Kuhn calls a paradigm shift — in Soyinka's (1990: 86) terms, "When gods die — that is, fall to pieces, the carver is summoned and new gods come to life."

On this premiss the old Shona world-view, as I came to understand it, offers a rational explanation of preindustrial, rural reality. Humans need power to coexist with nature, of which they are part. Because they are part of nature, they cannot, Promethean-style, rape its resources — which include spiritual power. Instead they gain access to these resources via their intelligence and goal-directed activities, from ploughing, mining and midwifery to rain rituals and spirit possession. Harmony with nature organically includes invocation of the unseen forces believed to direct it. People's understanding of this integrated cosmos is expressed in many symbols and culminates in a hierarchically structured society. Fundamentally Shona society is governed by the historically distilled rules of the soil and the continuity of blood, which unites it with the circulatory system of the metaphysical realm.

Can this continuity be maintained in the face of revolutionary change?

7.2 CONFRONTATION AND CHOICE

A basic feature of the modern binary mindset is the distinction, dating back to Plato, between matter and spirit. Its implications and ramifications have profoundly influenced European cultural history and, since the colonial era, has brought it into confrontation with the "totalism" of Africa. The confrontation, essentially one between intellectual discontinuity and cosmic continuity, is apparent in almost every sphere of life in Zimbabwe where the white colonists sought to impose their superior civilisation on a backward people. To the extent that Zimbabweans have embraced the new culture, they subscribe to the redefinition of their own in imperialist terms. I have indicated in this dissertation that the process is by no means complete. Neither is its outcome a foregone conclusion: the citations from Soyinka and Appiah, and the writings of many other African thinkers, attest this.

Assimilation of elements of European culture is not the same as assimilation to that culture, and in the process the emphasis should be on selectiveness. I want to identify a few areas where choice, however flexibly exercised, seems unavoidable.

7.2.1 A cash and commodity society

The upheaval of precolonial Zimbabwean society has resulted in the impoverishment of the indigenous people, most obviously by alienating the land from which they drew their livelihood. Even so the peasantry still clung fiercely to their agrarian independence (see Ranger 1985, ch 1), even after the imposition of taxes designed to force them into the money economy so as to secure labour for white enterprise (Achterhuis 1988: 321; cf Holleman 1969: 17f). Secondly, and ironically, Western medicine has compounded the problem by reducing mortality rates and prolonging life but failing to curb birth rates. All this, entrenched over a century of colonial rule, has lent substance and clout to the twin assumptions of a "superior civilisation" and "backward people".

My general impression was that in Shona society the most sought-after benefits of modernity were its communication technology (transport, telephone, radio, television) and medical services — although the latter were often seen as merely complementary to traditional healing. Money is a necessary means to obtain these things and some of my informants regarded gainful employment as a supreme good:

Earning is life. There is no better way a person can live. Your own produce cannot make life pleasant. If we have produce that can bring in money each month, I think I'd choose that. But as we can't get products like that, I prefer earning. If a person is earning he is sure that he's getting money every month, whether a lot or a little. He knows that his money is there. Selling products may be at a profit or a loss. (BTF.03)

This contrasts sharply with the view of an early 19th century Tonga chief quoted by Achterhuis (1988: 328) who, upon having the use of money explained to him, declined to participate in such an economy: because money, unlike food surpluses, is not perishable, it can be hoarded and will lead to egotism. What the chief was speaking of is the perennial problem of human greed, which raises the intractable economic question: *what is enough?*

Be that as it may, the money economy, with all its unanswerables, is patently here to stay. As far as I can see modern Shona people's aims are not intrinsically inimical to the old world-view, in which a good life means close association between the living, enjoyment of

the fruits of the earth and longevity. Such a life, however, is earned through observance of the rules of the soil. Modernity offers its good things, unequivocally, for cash. Earning money means joining the modern system and subscribing, even if only partially and nominally, to its codes.

Bourdillon (1987: 86) describes the sociocultural effects of Purchase Land farms that were made accessible to such black farmers as could afford them by the Land Apportionment Act (1930):

This alternative stresses individualism and privacy, in contrast with the more open community of a tribal village. Land is privately owned; family relationships are removed from public scrutiny and traditional norms of behaviour are dropped; wealth is usually a matter for proud display. Education and professional employment are emphasized ... Local government emphasizes elected representation and administrative competence, rather than traditional authority. The model for purchase land society is the white, urban lifestyle. Even the residues of traditional behaviour that remain are often distorted... Where tradition [eg polygamy — MM] can serve increased productivity, it is retained and modified; other customs are subject to widespread evasion or outright rejection.

Urban employees and purchase land farmers constitute only a small minority of Zimbabwe's population. Nonetheless wealth is becoming a dominant ambition and the result has been a social stratification very different from the old, spirit-sanctioned hierarchy with its emphasis on social harmony and cohesion. Nostalgically, Kenneth Kaunda (quoted in Ruch & Anyanwu 1981: 119) asks: "Is there any way that my people can have the blessing of technology without being eaten away by materialism and losing the spiritual dimension from their life?"

An interesting view in this regard is that expressed by Henry Zivamatongo in an article advocating government investment in the development of the communal lands ("The Financial Gazette", 30 July 1992). He first describes the plain reality, namely that a great many Zimbabweans spend part of their lives as urban wage-earners, with a rural base to provide social security for the (extended) family and some subsistence needs, as well as

ensure “the reproduction of entrenched cultural norms and values”. He then continues with supreme pragmatism:

[F]or the very same reasons we criticised the labour migration set-up in the 1960s I would now argue that it has its merits. Whether or not it is the result of colonial exploitation is not really the point any more. The fact is that it is here with us and can be turned to good effect at a time when most would agree that we have to look around for policies that build on that which is real and not pies in the sky. ... I am not suggesting that such a solution would be the best of all possible worlds. But it is a *possible* and *reasonable* course of action in the Zimbabwean context for the simple reason that it is based upon existing and, therefore, familiar patterns of life and thought.

Theoretically such a compromise could be criticised as sheer *laissez-faire* — simply allowing an anomaly to perpetuate itself. More concretely, it may represent a way of bridging the alien discontinuity wrought by colonisation, a selective assimilation of new influences like that which had characterised precolonial African history as well. What Zivamatongo proposes is that, through a conscious choice to develop these backward areas, something that — for better or for worse — “just happened” should be turned into a positive good.

Obviously there are other options, more or less realistic. And new ones may emerge if flexible, creative dialogue between old and new ever gets under way.

7.2.2 Sex roles and sexuality

Aschwanden’s identification of fertility as a key symbol in the Shona world-view, and the predominantly sexual interpretations of symbols by his interviewees, struck a theology student whom I met at the University of Zimbabwe as both offensive and misleading. Personally I do not find it offensive and, from my own observations, it is not inaccurate. In chapter 3 I argued that in the Shona world-view human fertility is a logical extension of divine creativity in earthly life.

In such a world-view, however, the female is precariously placed because of her alien blood:

The wife lives in one circle with people of different blood, and since she is the one whose blood is different from everybody else's, she remains a stranger. Her own children remain strangers to her in this respect, for they have their father's blood. This explains the relatively great insecurity of the woman's social position. The personal sacrifice which her role imposes upon her is considerable. But when we weigh it against the tributes and duties her husband's family have to "pay" to hers, then the balance is restored. It is the children, i.e. her fertility, that eventually make a wife feel safe and respected in a family of strangers (Aschwanden 1982: 29).

In Zimbabwe, I was told, traditional birth control consisted in female abstention from sexual relations during prolonged periods (up to five years) of breast feeding. Males were accommodated by accepting some measure of infidelity (Bourdillon 1987: 48) and by allowing them to marry as many females as they could afford, both in terms of *roora* and maintenance. All these women had to "earn" their place in the home by bearing children.

The contradiction between such a notion of the female sex role and sexuality and that of educated, economically independent women — and I never met one who did not resent polygamy — clearly calls for thought, also by males who are naturally inclined to hang on to their historical prerogatives. When I asked an adamantly pro-"modern" businessman whether he would be in favour of the total eclipse of the old culture by European-style modernity, he said he would — with one telling reservation: "As I say, some of the culture, like the culture of respect whereby — I may say it is because of this Western civilisation coming in — women tend not to actually respect their husbands in the way our forefathers' wives were doing to their husbands..." (Modern.08)

Most modern Shona agree that the paying of bride price (*roora*) is a custom that must be preserved because it strengthens social cohesion and makes for stable marriages. Bourdillon (1987: 41f) writes:

The fact that the principal payment used to be in cattle gives bride price religious and symbolic associations. Although it is true that cattle were traditionally the most important form of permanent wealth, to the traditional

Shona this wealth was primarily a means of reproducing one's own blood, and a prosperous man was a man with a large and growing family. Further, the bride-price cattle were traditionally paid not simply to the head of the family of the girl, but to the family as a group ... The cattle maintain some association with their original owners and have the effect of tying the two groups together...

Bourdillon (1987: 45f) points out, however, that in urban areas today "bride-price payments have inflated to a degree that disturbs many". *Roora* is paid in cash by the prospective son-in-law, rather than by his family, to the bride's father personally rather than to his entire family. Parents will actually delay the marriage of a wage-earning daughter by heavy *roora* demands so as to retain her income for as long as possible. Thus, although *roora* remains a valued custom, and even a "Church or state marriage without the customary payment of bride-price is considered 'cheap'" (Bourdillon 1987: 45), its original religious meaning is being eclipsed by mercenary and individualistic considerations.

Nonetheless, at this stage fertility is still the cardinal factor in Shona marriages. Family planning, to which educated women in particular are increasingly resorting — often in the face of male opposition — cannot but affect attitudes in this regard. With population growth a major threat to the country and the planet, this is clearly a matter for serious reflection — and one on which the *vadzimu* and some of their modern descendants may be expected to differ greatly. Yet, as during the liberation war, the *vadzimu* may well come up with surprising adaptive responses. After all, their primary consideration has always been the land and the quality of life of its inhabitants. It remains to be seen if they will — if and when they are ever consulted on the subject.

7.2.3 Education

One of the first steps of the new government after Independence was to remove racial inequity from the educational system. Between 1980 and 1982 enrolment at primary schools increased by 232%, at secondary level by 330% and in teacher training and the university respectively by 254% and 145% (Mandaza 1987: 338). The curve has no doubt levelled off,

but the postwar generation of Zimbabweans certainly has educational opportunities that are perceived as a key to privilege formerly reserved for whites.

Unfortunately job creation did not keep pace with this process. During my study period the official unemployment rate was well over 50 percent. The disillusionment of school leavers with O- and even A-levels who were unable to get jobs was often expressed in criticism of the ruling party. In fact, such grievances, coupled with the soaring cost of living caused by drought and the introduction of ESAP, meant that ZANU-PF's popularity was probably at its lowest ebb since it took power in 1980. Significantly, their loss was the ancestors' gain: many informants interpreted the hardships as ancestral punishment for government's remissness in not honouring the spirits that had led the country to freedom and put it in power. I have tried to take this into account in interpreting my information.

But even allowing for these factors, I was often surprised by the staunchness of even highly educated Shona people's adherence to their world-view. When I asked a businessman with postgraduate qualifications whether his Western education conflicted with his avowed ancestral beliefs, he replied:

No, it doesn't conflict. I think there is truth in both worlds. Because geography has taught us that rain — whether it is convectional rain, whether it be relief rain, whatever — people say it is caused by atmospheric pressure, and all that kind of stuff. But a classic example is what happened last year [at the height of the drought — MM], and over the years. When people go and do their *mikwerere*, that same day, before you even leave that place ... the rains would come. What I want to say is: who is controlling the air? One way I would want to believe that it is geography; the other way — what I am trying to say is: I think, in times of distress our spirits normally come forward to take care of us. (Modern.01)

Another businessman I spoke to was far more sceptical. At the outset he told me that he personally did not believe in the *vadzimu* at all, explaining, "The more educated somebody is — actually at times, not always — the more he believes that the *vadzimu* don't help." (Modern.08) The slight ambivalence in this statement became more pronounced as we

continued. When I asked him about the desirability of maintaining African cultural identity in a modernising country, he replied:

Culture can be maintained, but we are saying we have to look at culture seriously. Is it helpful to the nation or the nation to come? Because culture can't be kept at times if it is a culture that cannot really bring any benefit to the nation. Therefore we are saying that culture should be scrutinised — which culture should be kept and which not. (Modern 08)

This is much the same qualification as that made by Schoffeleers (1978: 2 — see 5.4): one has to determine which values and customs are “useful” and incorporate these into the modernising culture. (The Seventh Day Adventist bank clerk in search of a wife [see 4.3] was doing something similar.) My question is: what happens to a value when it is detached from the belief system that gives rise to it?

The new religious instruction syllabus in Zimbabwean schools is supposed to contain a traditional component. The book by Ter Haar et al (1992) is actually a manual for teachers of this subject. When I asked Professor Moyo, one of the authors, whether the syllabus had in fact been drawn up and the manual was being used, he did not know. From conversations with teachers I gathered that it was up to individuals how much traditional material they included in their lessons. Chief Mabika, a former primary school teacher, told me proudly that at his school the children were fortunate because they could learn the truth about their culture straight from the horse's mouth. From two graduation ceremonies at teacher training colleges that I attended I discovered that at that stage training for teachers of religious instruction was confined to the Christian faith.

Formal instruction can neither resuscitate nor keep alive a dead or dying religion. But it can help to raise its status so that those adults and pupils (see 3.4) who still have strong ties with the *vadzimu* can acknowledge their belief without embarrassment.

7.2.4 Democracy

In the previous chapter (6.2.2) I quoted Holleman's analysis of traditional Shona democracy. My own observation of *dare* procedure was that infinite time and patience were exercised

to make sure that all parties to a dispute had a chance to state their case. The chief merely reflected the claims and assertions of the litigants and witnesses. The final decision was not so much a judgment as a consensus arrived at by the kraalheads and headmen on the basis of customary law — the time-honoured rules of the soil.

I am inclined to believe that to function organically in Zimbabwe (conceivably elsewhere in Africa as well), democracy would have to take these rules into consideration, if not as its point of departure. Local government in the communal lands seems to realise this to some extent, but a thorough-going synthesis is nowhere in sight. In urban areas I do not think it has ever been contemplated by the authorities. Central government, operating from its urban base, legislates from an alien frame of reference for a predominantly rural electorate, whom they represent in purely technical terms. In this sense the fundamental principle of Western democracy itself is distorted. That of traditional tribal democracy — consensus — is largely ignored.

Liberation war history may offer some guidelines. According to Lan (1985: 166ff) the comrades, sanctioned by the mediums, took over the traditional authority vacuum left by the chiefs' defection to the colonial side. This is a questionably extreme judgment, but to the extent that it contains some truth it suggests that the post-Independence government's legitimacy rests on this ancestral *chimurenga* sanction as much as, if not more than, on democratic election. It may be significant that most senior members of ZANU-PF are still the wartime leaders and activists of the pre-Independence resistance movement.

The popular reversion to tribal chiefs in the postwar period may be attributable to government's failure to fulfil the people's expectations; but it could also be that the wartime status of *vatorwa* children came to be seen as simply an interruption of the older tradition, necessitated by crisis. Supertribal spirits like Nehanda, Chaminuka and Kaguvi appear to have retreated to their precrisis remoteness and, when cited at all, feature as *chimurenga* figures. The response to the Chaminuka medium described in chapter 4 confirms this. It would seem that the wartime conduit for spirit-guided national unity has been closed again.

The fusion of tribal codes with broad national needs and interests is further complicated by the presence of a small but economically powerful community of white Zimbabweans,

coupled with daunting pressures from the international community. In chapter 6 I quoted Nyerere's experience of neocolonialism. Economic realities are harsh and obtrusive.

One businessman I spoke to identified the problem:

Unfortunately we have two parallel systems. Let us talk about modern-day government and the *vadzimu* issues. A lot is happening, whilst a lot is also happening within the *vadzimu* world. When these two things meet there is a lot of reconciliation. When they fight, there has to be a compromise.
(Modern.07)

Thus the end of *chimurenga* was not the dawn of peace. Until Zimbabweans' splintered world-views are reintegrated in a self-adjusting "cosmic totalism" or continuity the same ambivalence I observed in the minds of many of my informants is likely to afflict the national polity as a whole. Ambivalence is not a bad thing — indeed, it may be a condition for creativity. But the manner of its resolution is crucial. "The state" is not an abstraction and, unless completely totalitarian, it does not exist autonomously. It is the crucible in which the aspirations of its citizens must crystallise and be realised as fully as possible. Conversely, the chiefs cannot be complacently inward-looking. The world out there — alien, even threatening as it may seem — must be confronted if their inherited authority is to remain relevant to their children's modern lives. Otherwise chiefs will become museum pieces, cultural curios, no more.

To my mind this calls for a kind of democracy very different from the model inherited in 1980. Speaking of one of Africa's many insurrections, Soyinka (1990: 109) writes: "Missing always is that temper of comprehension which recognises in the various adaptive modes of expression aspects of the same crucial struggle for a re-statement of self and society." Whether such a "re-statement" is any different from the "world re-definition" of Europe which Soyinka deplores in another quotation above, remains to be seen. If continuity between old and new breaks down completely, then adaptation, growth, evolution may well turn into the kind of wholesale psychic and social transformation which Soyinka considers to be the death of creative (dramatic or other) vision.

7.3 CONCLUSION

Can continuity, so fundamental to the old Shona world-view, span all these (and many other) divisions between the old world and the new?

The answer lies with Zimbabweans today, a nation living in two worlds: the chiefs upholding the old but reaching out more or less enthusiastically towards the new; the government beset by pressing problems on all sides but by and large looking to modernity for solutions. The fact that modern solutions have created increasingly complex problems in the industrialised world — ecological, psychological, social — is not properly taken into account. And the loss of values that are believed and lived by, which Appiah insists on, is not taken seriously by the intellectual and political elite.

I maintain that all these things will have to be dealt with in soul-searching, considered dialogue between people, chiefs, experts in different fields and government before Zimbabweans will make the concerted creative effort needed to accomplish the next stage on the road to proper African independence.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE I (Interviews filed under POVO.xxx)

- (01) Who are the ancestors?
- (02) How do the *midzimu* help living people? Can they punish us if we do not obey their rules?
- (03) Is it possible for *midzimu* to give rain?
- (04) Do you have a *gono guru*?
- (05) What is meant by *gura ukama*?
- (06) What is *imbwa zukuru*?
- (07) What is a *mbonga*?
- (08) Is it possible for ancestors to give a barren woman a child?
- (09) Is there anything we have to do to please the ancestors?
- (10) What do you know about Matonjeni? Is it important?
- (11) What is a *n'anga*? How does a *n'anga* help people? Have you ever gone to a *n'anga*?
Can a *n'anga* give a barren woman a child?
- (12) How is a *nyota* ceremony done?
- (13) What is meant by *kugadzira*? What is done at a *kugadzira* ritual?
- (14) What is done at a *mukwerere*?
- (15) Are there other rituals you have attended? When did you last attend these ceremonies? Who are the important people in the performance of each of these ceremonies?
- (16) What is the difference between a *n'anga* and a *svikiro*?
- (17) Is the *svikiro* related to your chief?
- (18) Does a *svikiro* help people who are not chiefs?
- (19) Is it true that in the past people used to go and ask the *svikiro* for rain? Can a *svikiro* give a child to a barren woman?
- (20) What is meant by *uroyi*?
- (21) What is the role of a chief? What kinds of problems would you take to your chief?
- (22) Does your chief have a *zhame*?
- (23) What is the work of VIDCO, WADCO and councillors in the area?
- (24) Do you know about the Mbire and Rozvi chiefs?
- (25) Have you ever heard about Guruuswa?

QUESTIONNAIRE II (Interviews filed under IHEOL.xxx)

- (01) Are the ancestors more like God or more like people?
- (02) Have the ancestors ever helped you? How? When?
- (03) Have they ever punished you? Why? How?
- (04) What is the difference between the Christian holy spirit and ancestors' spirits?
- (05) Where does God get all the spirits from that he uses when creating new babies?
What happens to young babies' spirits when they die?
- (06) Do you think there are ancestors who helped Zimbabwe? Which ancestors helped Zimbabwe? Can they punish Zimbabwe?
- (07) What is the relationship between the *mhondoro* and Mwari?
- (08) What are *njuzu* spirits? Where do they come from? Are they related to Mwari or are they related to people? What do they do?
- (09) Do all ancestors "come out" in someone? If not, why not? What happens to a spirit that does not come out in someone?
- (10) Why do families have both a *gono guru* and a possessed person for the same spirit? Explain how it works that sometimes an ancestor has a *gono* and still possesses someone.
- (11) What makes a chief different from other people? In what ways is he different? What will happen if you ignore your chief? And your kraalhead, is he just like the chief?
- (12) Are chiefs' ancestors different from ordinary people's ancestors? In what way?
- (13) Are chiefs still important today? In what ways?
- (14) To whom do you direct your family requests, to your own family ancestors or the chiefs' ancestors? Explain.
- (15) Tell us what you have experienced about *uroyi*.
- (16) Do you vote at every election for councillors? For members of parliament? Why/why not?
- (17) Are the people you vote for different from chiefs? In what way? Are they more or less important than chiefs?
- (18) What is your totem? How did you get that totem? Did your forefathers have the same totem as you? If you change your totem, do you have new ancestors?
- (19) Have you ever heard about Guruuswa?

QUESTIONNAIRE: RESETTLEMENT AREAS (Interviews filed under VATORWA.xxx)

- (01) How long have you been living in this area? (Year)
- (02) Why did you move? How was it arranged?
- (03) Where was your original home? Is that where your ancestors have always lived? How do you feel about the *mhondoro* of your tribe?
- (04) Which area do you prefer, your new area or X [original area]? Do you feel welcome here? Do you have any friends or connections among the people of this area?
- (05) Do you think this resettlement area has anything to do with the traditional system (*mutoro, chisi, dare*, etc.)? Do you have any connection with the chief of this area?
- (06) Who was the chief in your original area?
- (07) Did you attend traditional *bira* in X? What kind of *bira* did you attend? Was there any *bira* to notify the ancestors that you were leaving?
- (08) Did you brew beer to notify the ancestors of this area that you have arrived? If not, why not?
- (09) Do you respect the soil of your new area as much as the soil of X? Do you brew *mutoro* beer with the people of this area?
- (10) Do you perform any *bira* for the ancestors in this area? To whom do you take your problems?
- (11) Do you believe your ancestors are with you here in your new area?
- (12) What was the *chisi* day in X? What is the *chisi* day here? Which one do you observe?
- (13) Do you go to a chief if you have a problem? Which chief do you go to?
- (14) Is your original chief still your father or not?
- (15) Have you heard that the government is going to restore the chief's *dare*? [If they don't know, tell them about it.] Is this a good thing? Do you prefer to have the chief's *dare* or the government court?
- (16) Do you think your children will still visit their ancestors' graves in X? Is it important that they should visit these graves?
- (17) If your ancestors in X demand that you come back home for any reason (give examples), would you go back there? Would you be glad or sorry to leave here?

QUESTIONNAIRE: BACK TO FRONT (Interviews filed under BTF.xxx)

- (01) What are your favourite kinds of entertainment? [Dig around and find out what they like, and why]
- (02) To married people: are you married formally? [Try and get background.] What do you think is the ideal size for a family? [If possible, also how many wives!]
- (03) Are you employed? What are your career ambitions? What future would you like your children to have?
- (04) Where do you enjoy living most, in town or in a rural [communal] area? Why?
- (05) What do you think about living from money you have earned, if you compare it to living from your own products?
- (06) Do you attend church regularly? Why? [Establish how important religion is to them.]
- (07) How often do you visit your home? Only when invited?
- (08) What do you think of the way your parents brought you up? How will you bring up your own children? What do you think of the kind of education they are getting?
- (09) What is better, to own a farm by title deed or to obtain land as our fathers did?
- (10) What is the importance of our culture nowadays?

QUESTIONNAIRE: MODERN-TRADITIONAL INTERPLAY (Interviews filed under MODERN.xxx)

Do you believe the *vadzimu* still influence your life?

A: IF YES:

- (01) How do they influence your life?
- (02) Do you think it is still worth doing traditional ceremonies nowadays? Which ones? (If they don't mention it, what about the church?)
- (03) When you were looking for a job, were your ancestors consulted? (If yes:) Was there any result? Did you thank them afterwards? How?
- (04) In case of illness, what do you do? (Check on whether *n'anga*, if used, is used only if doctors fail.) Have *n'anga* still got a role in modern life?
- (05) Do you believe that the chiefs play a role in the lives of their modern children? (If yes: What role?)

- (06) Do you believe that the *masvikiro* play a role in the lives of modern people? (If yes: What role?)
- (07) What caused the bad drought last year?
- (08) The *vadzimu* played an important role in *chimurenga*. Do they still have any influence on the government of independent Zimbabwe? (If so, how?)
- (09) Are *mapa* still important today? Or are cemeteries OK?
- (10) When you think about your own death one day, would you like your family to have a *kugadzira* for you?
- (11) Do you teach your children anything about the traditional *beliefs* (not just good manners)?
- (12) Do you think the *vadzimu* have any role to play in modern development and business? (Compare modern business to rain — both bring prosperity.)

B: IF NO:

Omit question (01) above, adapt the others. Replace ((08)) with:

(08)The government of independent Zimbabwe is in power today because of *chimurenga* fighters who believed in the ancestors. Does the government still believe the ancestors have anything to do with their work?

Last question: Do you think it is OK if the traditional beliefs just die out?

QUESTIONNAIRE: SCHOOLS

Since the responses here were in writing, I did not file them electronically. The handwritten responses are available for scrutiny.

- (01) Do you think the old Karanga culture is still important to modern people? Explain why you say that.
- (02) Does your family still talk to the *vadzimu*? Do you attend ceremonies where they talk to the *vadzimu*? Which ones (name them)? What do you think about it?
- (03) Do the *vadzimu* still influence your life? If so, in what ways?
- (04) Are you taught any traditional things at home? If so, what things?

- (05) What do you know about the history of your family? And about the history of your clan/tribe?
- (06) Do you ever discuss traditional things with your friends?
- (07) Do you think the traditional culture is very different from Christianity? Explain your answer.
- (08) Do you think the chief still has a role to play in the modern world? If so, what role? And the *masvikiro*?
- (09) If you have a problem, would you consult a *n'anga*?
- (10) According to the Age of Majority Act you are an adult when you turn 18 and can do what you like without consulting your parents. Is this a good thing or not? Explain why you say that.
- (11) Do you think independent Zimbabwe is still traditional or not? Explain your answer.
- (12) Do you think it is OK if the traditional beliefs just die out? What about traditional music and dancing?
- (13) Do you know any old Karanga stories about long back? If you do, write it in 80-100 words.

GLOSSARY

The literal meanings of words are given only where they correspond to the usage in this dissertation. Otherwise the meaning given renders the word or expression as used in this text. I have indicated with an asterisk where the particular meaning appears to be specific to a particular tribe or tribes.

*bango**

A cutting planted in the ground when a son wants to get married and build his own home
— unless it takes root the time is not ripe

bira

A traditional ceremony in honour of the ancestors

*chema**

The traditional period of mourning after the death of a chief, during which time a son acts until the installation of the new chief

chimurenga

The Zimbabwean liberation war (1966-1980)

chisi

Traditional rest day on which no agricultural work may be done. The actual day varies from one chiefdom to another.

chitarara

A type of indigenous tree

dare

Tribal council and court presided over by the chief

dzimba dzemabwe

House of stones; original name of great Zimbabwe

*gadzingo**

Grave-keepers charged with maintaining chiefly burial places

gona

A container for traditional medicine

gono guru

A bull ritually dedicated to an ancestor and believed to represent him

gumbo

Leg; a tribal totem

gura ukama

Traditional religious ritual

guvi

A hollow in a rock used to germinate the millet seeds from which ritual beer is brewed

hakata

Divining blocks used by *n'anga*

homwe

Lit. a pouch; applied to spirit mediums when not in a state of possession

imbwa zukuru

Traditional religious ritual

jukwa

Dancing *shave* spirits associated with rain-making powers

kugadzira

Ritual home-bringing ceremony for a deceased relative to promote the departed to proper ancestorhood

kupira

To pay homage, worship

kurova guva

Another name for *kugadzira*

kutora mudzimu

Another name for *kugadzira*

machinda (sing. *jinda*)

Kraalheads and headmen to whom the chief delegates certain powers and who are members of the *dare*

*magwehe**

Panel of elders, of chiefly descent but not in the line of succession, who decide on succession issues in some tribes

*mangaushe, mangisi**

Sweet beer, used to designate (not instal) a new chief

mapa

Chiefly burial place, often a cave in a hillside

marambatemwa, marmbakutemwa

Holy groves surrounding chiefly graves in which no trees are allowed to be felled

mbira

Traditional musical instrument

mbonga

A woman ritually dedicated to celibacy in service of Mwari

mbuya

Grandmother; respectful form of address to older women

mhondoro

A special name for a lion believed to be possessed by the spirit of a dead chief

moyo

Heart; totem of both the Rozvi and the Duma tribe

muchakata

Wild cork tree, sacred to the ancestors

mudzimu (pl *vadzimu, midzimu*)

An ancestor

mujiba (pl *mijiba*)

Untrained youth volunteers who assisted the guerrillas during the liberation war

mukoma (pl *vakoma*)

Older brother or sister

mukomana (pl *vakomana*)

A young boy; the plural form was commonly used for the guerillas during the liberation war

mukwerere (pl *mikwerere*)

An annual ritual conducted by chiefs and their mediums to request tribal ancestors for rain

munyai (pl *vanyai*)

Messenger, go-between (eg in marriage negotiations). Sometimes applied to emissaries to the high-God cult in the Matopos (see *nyusa*)

muranda (pl *varanda*)

Alien belonging to another tribe, accommodated in a subservient position

muridzi (pl *varidzi*)

Custodian, guardian (often with reference to the land of a chiefdom)

muroyi (pl *varoyi*)

A wizard or witch

murungu (pl *varungu*)

A foreigner; commonly applied to a white person

mutoro (pl *mitoro*)

Another name for *mukwerere*

mutorwa (pl *vatorwa*)

Someone living in an alien chiefdom (without the subservient status of a *muranda*)

n'anga

A traditional healer

*ndongamabwe**

Duma ritual performed to permit the burial of an alien body in tribal ground

ngozi

An avenging spirit, much feared

nhimbe

A traditional work party when neighbouring farmers team up to help with an agricultural project and are given beer by their host

njuzu

Water spirits, similar to mermaids

nyembe

The bronze badge given by the colonial regime to chiefs, still used today

nyota

Ritual beer ceremony performed at some stage between the burial and the *kugadzira* ceremony

nyusa (pl *manyusa*)

A messenger of Mwari taking gifts to the territorial cult shrine on behalf of a tribe

povo

Of Portuguese origin, used during the war to refer to the populace

pungwe

Night meetings; during the war they were used to mobilise and inspire the people

rapoko

Finger millet; used to make ritual beer

roora

Bride price

ropa

Blood

runyaradzo

Christian consolation ritual some months after a burial; substitute for the *kugadzira* ceremony (Daneel 1987: 236)

sadza

Maize porridge, staple food of Zimbabwe

shave (pl *mashave*)

Spirit from an alien tribe, usually with expertise in some field

shoko

Baboon; a tribal totem

shumba

Lion; a tribal totem

svikiro (pl *masvikiro*)

Medium of a senior tribal spirit with considerable influence in tribal politics

tsika

Custom; commonly applied to the traditional culture

uroyi

Witchcraft

ushe madzoro unoravanwa

Proverb: the chieftaincy is given in turns

vhu

Soil

zvidhoma

Witch familiars

zvimba

Lit. walking-stick; a son who deputises for an aged chief

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