

Setting the stage

PART 1

Rise of an earthkeeping movement

Waiting for the rain

January 1992. Fleeces of white cloud in shimmering pale blue skies – that is all we have. Halfway into the so-called rainy season there is nothing else. Here in Masvingo those white rainless clouds, barren omens of death, shroud from a distance the mud puddle of Lake Kyle, all that remains of the jewel of our province. Have even the symbols switched in the lament of a dying land? Does the whiteness of cloud now evoke thoughts of death, not purity, and the blackness of rain cloud signify life? Or do black and white, the colours of African spirit mediums, still symbolise ancestral protection – a protection apparently lost as grass and leaves shrivel in the heat?

For ten years we in Masvingo Province have been waiting for a really good season to break the chronic drought. Not just scattered showers, as we have had, to fill a few farm dams and nurture only some of the maize crops in outlying districts. No! Torrential rains as we have last seen in the mid-seventies; rains that swell the rivers countrywide, fill the lakes, blot out the sun for two weeks on end, until the damp produces a green sheen on the shoes under your bed. Rains as we saw regularly as youngsters, when it was impossible to travel the red quagmire of the mountain road leading to Morgenster mission. When, coming from Fort Victoria, we had to walk for miles across the granite rocks of Mount Mugabe – vehicles left far behind at Wayside Farm – to reach home.

Rains in those years brought abundance: gushing fountains, mountain streams which spoke to giant ferns for months at a time in their secret valleys; trees laden with swelling yellow wild loquats, wild figs, plums and berries; trees hiding the delicious orange *mafirlifiti* mushrooms under rotting leaves and logs, while the bulbul, sunbirds, red-winged louries, birds of paradise and a host of the feathered flock played hide and seek among the branches. To our young minds it was a mountain

world of fantasy where fairies and trolls lived among the moss and ferns, drank from the clear dew beside rustling streams and danced at night on black granite slopes, cleansed and polished by the eternal seepage of crystal water released by healthy sponge.

Mount Mugabe was a world of magic beauty. The rain was as regular as the sun. Between them they ripened the fruit; and we, the black and white children, the animals and the birds, we harvested at leisure what was given to us so liberally. We also hunted birds, rock rabbits and small antelopes. But intuitively we felt that the mountain imposed restraints on us, that there was no honour in disrupting the balance of life around us. It was the mountain of God! Did our fathers, the white missionaries, not tell us that the granite needle jutting high into the sky was the Finger Rock pointing towards God in heaven? That it was the symbol of the good news which our pioneer, *sekuru* Louw, had carried here many years ago? And were we not told to respect the graves of black elders who lay buried in granite crevices along the mountain slopes, not to disturb the beads, pots and spears hugging the skeletal secrets of ancients behind piled rocks?

We regarded our holy mountain with awe. It was a natural *marambatemwa*, a holy grove of mile upon mile of dense forest protected against tree felling by time-honoured beliefs: those of my fellow Africans who heeded the timeless ecological laws of the ancestral guardians of the land, and those of my white friends who looked upon the wealth of trees as a kind of Christian paradise which evoked afresh God's primordial laws of human stewardship of all nature.

As children we took it all for granted: rain, trees, animals, birds. That idyllic setting in which a large community of industrious people – teachers, scholars, medics, carpenters, builders, farmers, administrators and a host of ordinary folk, old and young – lived their lives. The holy mountain had a serene strength of its own. It would remain the same ... always. No drought could destroy its rich vegetation. No Zimbabwean would dare desecrate the holy grove, risk the wrath of the spirit world. At least, so we, the young ones of Morgenster, thought. So we cherished our birthplace when we moved on to lead our lives elsewhere – saw it as a spiritual anchorage, a haven in the bosom of God's own country. Some of us travelled across the oceans. But our roots were firmly embedded at the centre of the universe, in ancient Africa, at the place

of protection right nextdoor to the citadel of Great Zimbabwe, the place which seldom if ever waited for the rain.

1.1 The wounded earth

Things change. Over many years of research in the communal lands I grew used to the sight of overgrazing, soil erosion and deforestation around African villages. Europeans tended to believe that these land problems could be solved through proper land husbandry, control of population growth and industrial development which would take the pressure off the land. Besides, the lush growth on commercial farms created the impression that overall the ecological situation in our country was reasonably good – at least not as critical as in some of the Sahel countries. One anticipated that after Zimbabwean Independence there would be a redistribution of land and that, if properly implemented, this would contribute towards greater equity and ecological balance. One assumed that there would be control and conservation in what had traditionally been regarded as sanctuaries. Surely the wonderful forested slopes of the Nyuni mountains at Glenlivet, the *marambatemwa* on Mount Mugabe and the catchment area of Lake Kyle would remain unscathed!

It was not to be. Soon after *chimurenga* a large number of squatters were allowed to settle in the catchment area of Lake Kyle near Great Zimbabwe. In no time large sections of the *msasa* and *mutondo* forests were gone, and the sandy soil lay bare in the sun, ready to be carried away by the ton to the watery depths of the lake where it would add to the problems of siltation and, as a side effect, bedevil the sugar cane industry in the lowveld. Where I used to hunt in dense forest as a child, the open veld now lay forlorn, lifeless tree stumps jutting hopelessly from the soil like beckoning fingers imploring someone to cover the wounded earth.

Lake Kyle's catchment area was being threatened from all sides. Further up, on the portion of Morgenster Farm given back to Chief Mugabe for village settlement, the Bingura forest was fast disappearing, making way for row upon row of homesteads and cultivated fields. Some callous profiteers had purchased sites in Glenlivet township and stripped the steep Nyuni slopes of their protective mountain acacias to earn a quick

buck from firewood, leaving the soil exposed to inevitable erosion and adding to the siltation of the lake. Along the upper reaches of the Popoteke and Mtirikwi rivers in Gutu district poorly controlled resettlement schemes led to river bank cultivation which, in times of flooding, could only further compound the problems of Lake Kyle.

Worst of all was the invasion of Mount Mugabe. Some mindless exploiters went in there with fifteen-ton trucks and started mowing down the *muchakata*, *mushuku* and other wild fruit trees in order to market fuelwood. Impervious to the laws of *marambatemwa*, which prohibits the felling of *muchakata* (the tree of rain rituals, symbolising ancestral protection) and *mushuku* (the wild loquat, which God has given to both the guardian ancestors and their living descendants to augment their food supplies), these greedy exploiters desecrated the holy grove. To make matters worse, squatters, ignoring threats of eviction, tore open the mountain side. They cleared the bush and started planting their maize and millet crops in places totally unsuitable for cultivation, triggering a process of erosion such as the mountain had never known before.

Soon the mountain was dying. Everybody knows that it is madness to chop down ancestral trees in the holy groves, the epitome of human hubris in the face of the ultimate forces of life. Even the gods must go crazy at such mindless assault. I felt deep hurt and growing anger as I observed the slow destruction of the green mountain fortress. It was also an invasion of the inner soul of those of us who had grown up on the mountain, whose perception of privacy was moulded by the endless murmur of mountain streams among mosses and ferns. Gone were the streams, the abundance of fruit, the mushrooms, and the wingflap of birds. Even though I understand the plight of landless peasants, the voices and laughter of the squatter-invaders could not compensate for all that lost beauty and peace, now replaced by the rutted surfaces of erosion gullies, rough tear streaks on the old mountain's distorted features.

Perhaps my anger related to the knowledge that destruction of the mountain's vegetation and ecosystem violated the feeling of ecological strength and indestructibility it had always radiated in the past. Now it was reduced to the same climatic vulnerability as the surrounding areas; it had lost its ability to 'draw rain', its capacity for abundance,

which it was known for even during distant seasons of drought. I knew that I might be overreacting, that had Mount Mugabe remained undisturbed it might still have battled to cope with the protracted drought in our country. Yet the remaining *mashuku* trees standing beside the mountain road – listless and grey, year after year not bearing fruit – seemed to be an indictment of the unmasked invasion and misuse of their territory. And the drying up of the mission dam reminded me that the drought had taxed the springs and underground sponge to the limit, irrespective of the mountain invaders' contribution to the general malaise. At last I had to concede that our mountain was as fallible and vulnerable as everything else in creation, that we human beings only make it more so. The community at Morgenster, I realised, was as desperately waiting for the rain as any other in the province!

One salutary thing that grew out of my regular pilgrimages to Morgenster, the emotional drain, the anger and emptiness I experienced each time I saw those ravaged, fruitless slopes, was a kind of ecological conversion. I recognised myself to be one of the invaders who, in earlier years, had helped deplete the mountain's bird and rock rabbit population. Did I not notice some time ago that not a single rock rabbit was to be seen on the granite kopjes around World's View where I used to hunt them?

The recognition of my own ecological guilt did not diminish my opposition to the squatters on the mountain. It did, however, sharpen my interest in ecological concerns, made me more alert to the land problems of my country – of which Morgenster's were but a symptom – and of our continent. My identification with the plight of the peasants and of nature itself in the communal lands grew. The Reformed missiologist could no longer focus his empirical research purely on religious beliefs and ceremonies; neither could he maintain the Western dualism of spiritual as opposed to physical reality. African holism became the hermeneutic for theological reorientation. Saving souls was important, I thought. But never at the expense of the salvation of all creation. In my situation conversion had little significance if it did not translate into full environmental stewardship. For the first time I really experienced myself as part of an abusing and abused creation which was reaching out for liberation, salvation. The biblical concept of a new heaven and a new earth no longer seemed merely a new dispensation to be ushered in by God, but a challenge to be realised in this existence. The

myth of my childhood mountain fortress had to turn into a new myth. A myth born of vulnerability, but emerging from the unknown recesses of our common African unconscious. A myth which recognises Mwari in his African guise as the true *muridzi venyika* (guardian of the land), calling all of us to heal the wounded land.

At that time, in the mid-eighties, I came to know a Danish couple, Christian and Vibeke Rasmussen. Their friendship and interest in Zimbabwe further stimulated my growing interest in ecology. Christian was supervising the sinking of boreholes in Chivi district on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation. Together we observed the plight of peasant communities in Chivi in the grip of drought. Together we studied and discussed Lloyd Timberlake's (1985) *Africa in crisis: the causes, the cures of environmental bankruptcy*. We felt helpless in the face of the agony, the uncertainty, the threat of starvation in Chivi, where drying boreholes had to be deepened because of a receding water table. In many places the barren, cropless earth stretched for miles, shrunken resignedly in the heat, with hardly a tree or a shrub to relieve the desolation. Here, too, I observed wind erosion for the first time. One afternoon the skies suddenly darkened as if heavy rainclouds had moved in. I got out of my car and was surprised by thick dust clouds as far as the eye could see, blanketing out the sun. They just hung there, a dark red omen, warning of worse things to come.

What we were observing in Chivi, I realised, were the symptoms of desertification. Timberlake (1985:60) states: 'Desertification is not about spreading deserts. It is a rash which breaks out in patches wherever the planet's skin is mistreated.' Indeed, desertification concerns the wounding of the earth, human mismanagement through overcultivation, overgrazing or deforestation, as a result of which productive dryland turns into wasteland. The rash had broken out all over Zimbabwe. To this the overcultivated and deforested areas in the Gutu and Chivi districts bear witness. Part of the cause of the malady, of course, is the land-apportionment practices of the colonial era. Yet one must ask whether enough is being done to rehabilitate the devastated communal lands. Harold Dregne, speaking on behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), for instance, writes (in Timberlake 1985:61):

Governments (in Africa) do not see desertification as a high priority

item. Rangeland deterioration, accelerated soil erosion, and salinisation and waterlogging do not command attention until they become crisis items. Lip-service is paid to combating desertification but the political will is directed elsewhere. There seems to be little appreciation that a major goal of many developing nations, that of food self-sufficiency, cannot be attained if soil and plant resources are allowed to deteriorate.

UNEP and FAO, moreover, came up with the disquieting findings that between 1978 and 1983 government spending on agriculture in Latin America and in the Far and Near East had risen substantially, in contrast to a large number of African countries where it had in fact dropped – although Africa is the continent most threatened by desertification. In no African country does the agricultural situation appear to be improving. 'Some 6.9 million sq km in sub-Saharan Africa – an area more than twice as big as India – are under direct threat of desertification' (Dregne, in Timberlake 1985:61).

I am not in a position to assess to what extent the above observations apply to the agricultural policies and programmes of the Zimbabwean government. Neither do I have the ecological expertise to predict the long-term implications of desertification for our country. What I have learnt, however, is that the ravages of deforestation which I have observed locally form part of a continent-wide, worldwide dilemma facing humanity. Locally we have no reason for complacency. I also suspect that global deforestation may be one of the prime reasons that we wait for the rain while others suffer floods. Let us briefly consider the wider perspective.

In Africa today forests are disappearing at a horrendous rate. The reasons are numerous: the lucrative timber trade, overpopulation, an ever-increasing need for firewood, the clearing of land for cash and subsistence crops, and so on. Large tracts of savannah, woodlands and tropical forest are being cleared annually in order to plant cash crops. So-called agro-economic progress is in fact killing the earth. Guinea Bissau loses 20 000 to 35 000 hectares of forest each year; Burkino Faso loses 85 000 hectares and Senegal 50 000 hectares, mainly to peanuts and other commercial crops. Said a UN officer laconically in response to a TV advertisement in New York ('Our peanuts are fresh from the jungle'): 'The joke is that peanuts don't come from the jungle; you have to cut

down trees to plant peanuts. Then you get the peanuts – and desertification' (Timberlake 1985:103).

In Tanzania 6 000 villages rely on tobacco crops cultivated on a biannual rotating basis. Thus, both for planting and curing tobacco, huge forests are consumed virtually without check. Kenya already suffers severe firewood deficits and only 3 per cent of the country is still under natural forest (Timberlake 1985:109,110). According to the latest surveys in Zimbabwe some 3 to 4 per cent of the country's total land surface is being deforested annually. In South Africa the erstwhile homelands and other rural areas with high population densities can well turn into moonscapes in the foreseeable future.

According to Timberlake (1985:111) the diminution of woodland throughout tropical Africa represents a bleak picture of an estimated overall loss of 2.3 million hectares of open forest annually. If one considers, moreover, that continent-wide only one tree is currently being planted for every eighteen chopped down, and that of those planted only a small percentage mature, then ecological bankruptcy appears inevitable. To complete a chilling scenario there are the shocking findings of the UN-appointed World Commission on Environment and Development (1987:2), namely that each year some 6 million hectares of productive dryland on our planet turn into worthless desert and more than 11 million hectares of forest are destroyed – an area which within three decades will equal the size of India. Considering the loss of rainforest in Brazil and the vital function of vegetation in the production of oxygen, one could say that humankind, in its greed and quest for 'progress', is ripping the lungs out of creation. The earth is mortally wounded.

It takes little imagination to realise that we are fast reaching a point where tree planting as a major earthkeeping activity must become the concern of all people of all the nations of the world. In postcolonial Africa the redistribution of land has not curbed ecological destruction. With due respect to national tree-planting days, which are at least a symbolic gesture of ecological awareness, billions of trees need to be planted annually and taken care of if deforestation is to be checked and controlled. Much stricter measures for forest conservation are required, as well as universal conscientisation through ecological education pro-

grammes. Sustained production of firewood should be made a condition for the use of this commodity in all rural areas.

1.2 Discussion and resolve

My ecological awareness and convictions grew from the Morgenster experience, from discussions with my Danish friends and from reading some of the *Earthscan* and similar publications. But the conclusive factor which eventually impelled me to ecological commitment was sharing my concern about our environment with rural people – traditionalists, ex-combatants and African Independent Church (AIC) members – amongst whom I was conducting research on the role of religion during the *chimurenga* struggle. The mounting crisis in which black peasants in Masvingo Province found themselves from the mid-eighties onwards is summed up by a research fellow, Cousins (1987:18):

The land question that fuelled the liberation struggle has not been resolved by means of a land redistribution. Within the Communal Lands pressure on natural resources has continued to mount as a result of population growth, the declining availability of formal sector employment and the recurrence of drought seasons. Peasant households have responded in various ways: one strategy is to intensify production using purchased inputs, another is to increase the area under cash crops such as cotton (resulting in increased deforestation and pressure on grazing areas), and a third is the attempt to gain access to new land resources. The latter has taken various forms: squatting, 'poaching' of the grazing of both commercial farms and resettlement schemes ... and migration to 'frontier' areas such as Gokwe, Kanyati and Dande.

The situation of the peasants on the land was further complicated by the introduction of Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) and Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) in 1984. These measures coincided with the curtailment of the judicial and land allocation powers of the chiefs – and, by implication, also some loss of status for senior spirit mediums. As these traditional leaders still enjoy widespread popular support, government restrictions led to confusion and some disillusionment in their ranks (Cousins 1987:19; *The Herald*, 17/12/85).

It was in these circumstances that I did my research into the *chimurenga* struggle. Wherever I conducted interviews in the communal lands of Masvingo Province the ravages of overcultivation, deforestation and recurrent drought were in evidence. You could not touch on any aspect of the struggle without the subject of the land cropping up. Sitting with ex-combatants and spirit mediums in the guerrilla *poshitos* up in the mountains discussing their war strategies and convoy attacks, visiting the Musukutwa caves where a fierce battle was fought during the war, or sitting under the trees talking to AIC prophets, we were forever looking out over dry fields, arid stretches of land, erosion gullies and undernourished cattle. Out there we were mere specks of creation, feeling the heat, yearning like all of life around us for the coolness and promise of rain. Together we waited ...

The mood was often ambivalent: although key figures of the struggle took pride in the political achievement of independence, they were despondent about the deterioration of the land they lived on and about the 'promised land' (the commercial farms) not being returned to them as they had expected once victory was secured. Women complained about the long distances they had to walk to collect fuelwood and the peasants generally felt bitter about crop failures which left them unable to pay for their children's schooling and to contend with the rising cost of living.

And the cause of the ongoing drought, or rural destitution? Was it human action or an act of God? Towards the mid-eighties a common belief in peasant society was that the numerous *chimurenga* deaths had caused a great upheaval in the spirit world. Far too many spirits of deceased people roamed the 'wilderness' in perpetual dissatisfaction because they had never been ritually elevated to the status of ancestorhood. The equilibrium between the living and the living dead had been disturbed to the extent that even the seasons were disrupted. The bones of some of the deceased lay about in the veld desecrated. Spirit dissatisfaction about such blasphemy blocked the rain. But then the wrong was gradually redressed by heroes' reburial ceremonies throughout Zimbabwe. The bones of the fighters were respectfully placed in the soil they had fought for. These ceremonies functioned as improvised *kugadzira* rituals (Daneel 1971:101f), a form of 'home bringing' of the deceased to the soil and nation of Zimbabwe (Daneel 1995, chapter 3), thus correcting the mystical imbalance and climatic disturbances.

More seriously, a second viewpoint, which gained currency as the drought persisted and the expected land distribution was delayed, was that the government of the day provoked mystical retaliation both from the national ancestors and the Supreme Being, Mwari. The drought would persist, it was believed, particularly by the traditional elders (chiefs and spirit mediums), until such time as the top politicians in Harare made their pilgrimage to Great Zimbabwe and to the Matopo hills in official recognition of the recovery of the lost lands through the mystical intervention during the war of the senior ancestral guardians of the land (*varidzi venyika*) and of Mwari, the creator God of Zimbabwe. The president of Zimbabwe, it was expected, should go and 'show the recaptured lands' to the mystical forces of Africa which made victory possible in the first place. Such recognition would also entail restoring the land-allocation and related politico-religious powers of the chiefs and the spirit mediums. Only then would there be abundant rains.

Year after year this theme has persisted in traditionalist circles. It surfaces during *mukwerere* rain rituals in our province, in the dream life of the tribal elders, and in the oracular sessions of Mwari, the rain-giver, at the cultic shrines in the Matopo hills. As a participant observer at many of these rain-requesting rituals, I was in a position to follow the hardening line of interpretation closely. The drought was indeed a punitive act of God and of the ancestors. Yet it was in no way an arbitrary intervention. God and the ancestors were simply responding to the way the country was being governed, the neglect of the guardian ancestors, the disregard of customary principles governing societal order and land distribution. While the persistent drought kept rousing the conscience of the nation, local and Matopo rain rituals became forums where grievances about land issues could be aired, as well as occasions for reconciliation between a wayward yet suffering humanity and the neglected powers of the spirit world.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the blame was put only on the government of the day. In our discussions there was also a pervasive sense of common guilt, references to all of humanity as *vatadzi* (sinners), a perverted people who have abused the environment. As we watched the cloudless skies and the withering maize stalks the mood was one of sadness and dejection. Resignedly someone would say:

'Mwari hwatirasha! God has thrown us away!' It reminded me of the lament in the cultic song to the Supreme Being sung in the Matopo hills after the 1896 rebellions had failed:

Ay, the unburnt pot (the white man) has spoilt the world ...
Yelete, the unburnt pot just handles the world, twisting it,
Yelete, we are troubled ...
Yelete, the God who is in heaven has given us his back;
The God who is at the roof has thrown us away like dogs,
Yelete, the Muali in heaven has given us his back.

(Ranger 1967:378; cultic song
collected by R Werbner in 1960)

Except that in this instance there was a growing realisation that, much as the 'unburnt pot' may have spoilt the world, the ever-increasing destruction was the responsibility of all Zimbabweans. We started sharing our sense of loss in observing the wounded earth. I spoke about the invaded mountain fortress at Mount Mugabe. My peasant friends in turn sighed about the lost woodlands and the spoilt fountains from which the *njuzu* water spirits had fled. And so we came to talk about our brothers and sisters, the trees. We acknowledged that maybe the denuded earth had something to do with God's anger and the persistent drought. Maybe we had to start remedying the situation on a massive scale, in the same way that the nation was mobilised during *chimurenga* to win back the lost lands. It was no longer good enough simply to sit around waiting for the rain, to propitiate the ancestors, to send delegations to the Matopo hills, or to fast and confess our sins to God on mountain tops as the Zionists and Apostles were doing.

It was in 1988 that our shared convictions hardened into resolve, and our resolve into action. We decided to become earthkeepers, tree planters, healers of the wounded land. So we declared another *chimurenga*! This time it would be the war of the trees - later to be extended to the protection of wildlife and water resources. The old *chimurenga* of the lost lands, which had been won militarily and politically, was now to become the liberation struggle of the ecologically still lost, still enslaved land.

We were to form associations which would empower the spirit mediums and tribal elders once again to mobilise entire communities into united action on behalf of Mwari and the guardian ancestors, new movements

of AIC solidarity which would enable prophets of the Holy Spirit to guide entire churches into the new warfare of ecological revolution. We resolved, too, that this would be a war based on racial reconciliation, extending as far as possible the spirit of mutuality and understanding which had characterised our initial discussions. Whereas this war was to draw its inspiration and impetus from diverse religious convictions, it was to be waged in a spirit of interreligious respect, tolerance and dialogue.

To the chiefs this was an opportunity to develop new land initiatives which would earn them national acclaim. To the spirit mediums it offered the prospect of creating a new myth, a new mission in the public eye, as opposed to the obscurity and inaction which had threatened to envelop them in the Marxist-socialist state after the excitement and heroics of *chimurenga*. To the Independent Churches it later gave an added dimension of altruism to their healing ministry, whereby they could blaze an ecological trail in practice, a trail which some JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) theologians in Europe had only talked and written about. As for myself, I had no illusions about the complications involved in founding, funding and to some extent guiding such a diversified grassroots movement. I had been in the battlefield before, on account of what I had earlier in life considered to be a vision of AIC ecumenism (the *Fambidzano* story; Daneel 1989). One vision, I decided, was enough for a lifetime ... But then, once you're engaged in constitution drafting, meetings, fund raising and project implementation, the war around you gathers a momentum of its own. And you salute with raised fist at the battle cry: Forward the war of the trees!

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15 January 1992. The drought worsens; the crops have failed; still no rain. The lead article in *The Herald* reads:

About 400,000 hungry people in the drought stricken Masvingo Province are now receiving food handouts at a cost of \$1.5 million a month ... The provincial administrator, Cde Alphonse Chikurira, said yesterday that more than a quarter of the province's 1.5 million people were eligible for food handouts this month as *the area goes into its worst drought in living memory* (my italics).

17 January. Concern deepens. The spirit mediums of AZTREC (Associa-

tion of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists), having received ancestral dream directives to visit the oracular shrines of Mwari in the Matopo hills, come into town with a delegation of chiefs. Together we set off for the distant shrines. That evening, 300 kilometres from Masvingo, in the granite world of the Matopos, our delegation sits listening to the voice of Mwari – an ancient female murmur in old chiRozvi addressing us from the mysterious cult cave: 'The world is spoilt. I shall give you only sparse rains ... Persevere with the planting of trees! I shall keep my hand over you ...'

There is consolation in the ancient words of African wisdom. There is lightness in the play of moonlight on black granite. The hardships ahead have become bearable ... Mwari has spoken.

'Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko!' The praise-names of Mwari ring out as we shuffle away from the oracle.

19 January. An hour before the commencement of the ecumenical prayer session for rain at Masvingo's civic centre, there is a slight drizzle. Out in the rural areas the tribal elders are shouting 'Toveral!' in acknowledgement of the oracular Mwari. They are saying that Mwari vaMatonjeni has sent the rain to blot out the footprints of the delegation which has been to the caves, a sign that the request has been granted. My Christian friends at the civic centre are thanking Mwari of the Bible for responding to prayer.

Perhaps Mwari, creator of us all, chuckles in the patter of raindrops.

The drought, however, is still with us as we near the month's end. Many of the trees we have planted are dying. People do not tend trees when they have hardly any drinking water left. We are still waiting for the rain. Only now there is a difference. Our waiting breathes hope. Some day our forests will once again draw rainclouds.

Liberation of the lost lands

Mwari, the oracular high-God of the Shona, has always been conceived of as an ecological deity, provider of life-giving rain and fertility in creation. Cult messengers (*vanya*) made regular annual pilgrimages on behalf of their districts throughout central and south-eastern Zimbabwe. They would present their gifts and pleas for rain at the shrines in the Matopo hills – commonly known as Matonjeni or Mabweadziva ('rocks of the pool') – where the oracle gave them messages about seasonal, agricultural and tribal-political issues, such as chieftaincy successions, to carry back home to their people. Individuals with ailments, especially barren women, were also allowed to confer with Mwari at the shrines. Thus an image emerged of a deity concerned with maintenance of both ecological and human wellbeing. A conservative deity, Mwari moreover became the mainstay of African religious and cultural values in the face of invasive and corroding Western influence.

During times of national crisis, however, Mwari emerged, albeit it secretly, in the role of liberator of the oppressed. This was noticeable, for instance, during the 1896 rebellions and the recent liberation struggle that led to Independence. Upheavals of this nature triggered intensified collaboration between oracular deity and senior tribal ancestors of outlying chiefdoms. This belief manifested at the time in cooperation between Mwari cultists and regional spirit mediums in mobilising widespread resistance against a common enemy.

Such religious management of sociopolitical problems is convincing evidence of the capacity of African religion to deal with political and land issues of national import. This is the key to an understanding of the religious motivation and drive of the traditionalist earthkeepers who joined forces in recent years to combat environmental deterioration.

When one sits in the deep of night listening to Mwari's voice speaking in ancient Rozvi dialect from the cave shrine, one cannot but sense the

significance of the cult in the history of the Zimbabwean people's struggle for liberation. I know that this experience was shared by my fellow earthkeepers, particularly those who had direct knowledge of the cult's influence during the liberation war. Inasmuch as they were interpreting their earthkeeping endeavours as an extension of the political struggle (*chimurenga*), they were bound to seek the blessing of the oracular deity at Matonjeni and in the process give ritual expression to the mystical interaction between Mwari and their regional 'guardians of the land' (*varidzi venyika*) in the interest of an afflicted earth.

In order to clarify the historic picture that underlies our entire earth-keeping movement, I shall outline the role of religion in the patterns of resistance to oppressive rule prior to and during the second *chimurenga*. This will reveal trends of both liberation, in the sense of expelling unwanted powers or influences, and healing, in the sense of restoring wellbeing, as they relate to the colonial era in Zimbabwe. A focal topic here is the (politically and ecologically) 'lost lands', as they were and remain the primary existential reality of peasant communities.

This outline includes the healing and liberationist activities of the AICs. Unlike Western-oriented mission churches, who could rely on foreign financial support and whose leadership was therefore largely independent of prevailing agro-economic conditions in rural areas, the AIC leaders – like those of traditionalist cults – were part of peasant society. As a result both of these groups suffered the same hardships as their fellow peasants, hardships caused by restrictive land apportionment, limited political power, dwindling forests and wildlife, and poor crops as a result of drought – hence their attempts to remedy these ills reflect a more characteristic grassroots African response, in both the traditionalist and the Christian context, than those of missions under foreign leadership.¹

2.1 Religious management of environmental and socio-political ills prior to *chimurenga* II (1890–1965)

2.1.1 Traditional resistance to oppressive rule

In the healing of physical illness, the traditional diviner and/or *nganga* plays a major role. However, since our primary concern is with com-

munal rather than individual ills, we concentrate on the Mwari cult as the territorially most wide-reaching religious institution, and on the senior spirit mediums at the top level of tribal politics in their respective districts.

2.1.1.1 *The Mwari cult*

The origin of the Mwari cult has been a subject of debate and speculation.² Although difficult to verify, oral tradition has it that Chief NeMbire, along with several subordinate Karanga clans, immigrated from the Tanzanian lake regions in the fourteenth century, where the African high-God is known as Muali (Abraham 1966:33; Daneel 1970:22). Linguistic and archaeological evidence seems to confirm early contact with Central and West African tribes. Apparently the Mwari cult of the Mbire priests was adopted by the Rozvi monarchs who, from their headquarters at Great Zimbabwe (the ruins of which are a popular tourist attraction near Masvingo town), tried to unite some of the Shona tribes. Several sources indicate that the cult was an important centralising religious force at Zimbabwe, and later in the Matopo hills, before the Nguni broke up the Rozvi confederacy in the 1830s.

At Zimbabwe the Mwari cult to some extent absorbed the *mhondoro* cult of senior lineage ancestors which had developed more fully in the northern territories of the Mwenemutapa dynasty (Abraham 1959; 1966:32). In the north tribal spirits were venerated through an officially recognised spirit medium (*svikiro*) who represented the guardians of their descendants' chiefdoms, demarcated by rivers into 'spirit provinces'. At one stage the principal *mhondoro* at Zimbabwe is said to have been Chaminuka. Although originally unconnected with Mwari, this hero-spirit was eventually seen as the spiritual 'son', or at least as a direct emanation, of Mwari (Von Sicard 1944:162).

Whatever the connection, spirit mediums featured prominently in both the Mwari and the *mhondoro* cults. The development of Mwari as an oracular deity, which was completed only after the main shrines had shifted to the Matopo hills, may in fact have been stimulated by the partial integration of the two cults. But this syncretisation never completely identified Mwari with Chaminuka or other tribal spirits. Mwari remained the creator of the earth on whom Chaminuka, the entire spirit world and all creation depended. Among the Southern Shona, espe-

cially the Karanga, the *mhondoro*-type cult never acquired the prestige that it had among northern tribes.

Although Ranger (1967:18) identifies two separate religious systems, Abraham's theory of two systems originating from one coherent religion seems tenable if one accepts that the main components of both systems were complementary in an integrated whole, developing along historically different lines. In the north the prominence of the 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.

When the Rozvi dynasty was at its zenith, the Mwari cult, then operating several major shrines in the Matopo hills, consolidated its wide influence. Its political significance, too, grew as it became increasingly important for affiliated Shona chiefs to demonstrate their loyalty to the Rozvi kings. One method was to regularly send messengers (*vanyai*) to Matonjeni with pleas for rain, to consult Mwari on chieftaincy successions and to dedicate *mbonga* women and praise-singers from remote chiefdoms to Mwari's service. Thus Mwari became the oracular deity of the chiefs and cultic priests.

After many disruptive Nguni raids the Ndebele invasion in the 1830s spelt the end of the Rozvi dynasty. The Rozvi were driven from their stronghold and scattered all over the territories they had once controlled. Nevertheless the authority of the Shona chiefs was not totally destroyed, and the Mwari shrines at Matonjeni were allowed to continue under close surveillance. The Ndebele Kings themselves honoured Mwari, whom they called Mlimo, with annual gifts and requests for rain. Under its new political masters the Mwari priesthood adopted a seemingly conciliatory attitude. The cult's political function was modified considerably during the Ndebele reign. In a highly centralised monarchic state the cult did not have to be a mechanism for political coordination, as it had been in the militarily weaker and more loosely federated state system of the vaRozvi. Only after the Ndebele monarchy had been defeated by European forces was the cult 'able to manifest its old vigour and its emissaries able to travel through the whole area of its influence' (Ranger 1966:104–105).

Yet it was under Ndebele rule that the oracular deity revealed him/herself as a liberator God who resists oppression. Shona resentment of Ndebele harassment surfaced in Mwari's oracular pronouncements.

When the pioneer settlers of the British South Africa Company started moving across the Limpopo in 1890, the Voice of Mwari reportedly said to Lobengula: 'You who are so busy killing people, you are a little man. Climb on top of a high hill and see these people who are coming up. See their dust rising in the south. My white sons whose ears are shining in the sun are coming up here' (Ranger 1967:144). To the Shona the arrival of Mwari's 'white sons' meant a radical curb on the oppressive power of the Ndebele invaders, and at first they welcomed the white settlers' arrival.

The picture soon changed, however. Mwari's 'white sons', initially regarded as liberators, turned out to be land-usurping rulers who posed a far more serious threat to Shona tradition than the Ndebele did. They became the common enemy, to be resisted by Shona and Ndebele alike. In the process the Mwari cult functioned as a central source of information and a means of coordinating resistance over a wide area. The BSAC administration completely underestimated this potential for united action. To them the militant Ndebele posed a real threat; but the scattered and apparently disunited Shona tribes seemed totally incapable of organised revolt. The rebellion of 1896–1897 – later known among Zimbabweans as the first *chimurenga* – proved how wrong they were. Within a relatively short period more than 400 whites (some 10 per cent of the white population of erstwhile Rhodesia) were wiped out (Martin & Johnson 1981:49).

The Mwari cult played a significant role in ritually approving, supporting and coordinating a large-scale liberation struggle. Ranger (1966:96) rightly points out that the cult officials '*set the seal of ritual approval on the decision of the community as a whole*'. Their general involvement in the risings was in itself an indication of the total commitment of most of the traditional society to them' (my italics). The cult blamed the white settlers for both the drought and the rinderpest then afflicting peasant society. At the outbreak of the rebellions, Mwari apparently issued the following directive from some of the shrines: 'These white men are your enemies. They killed your fathers, sent the locusts, caused this disease among the cattle and bewitched the clouds so that we have no rain. Now you will go and kill these white people and drive them out of our fathers' land and I (Mwari) will take away the cattle disease and the locusts and send you rain' (Ranger 1967:148; quoted from Fleming 1959:35).

The importance of the Mwari cult in providing religious sanction for the revolt and advice to the rebels in outlying districts is clearly illustrated by the roles played by some cult officials. Thus Mabwani, the most influential priest at Matonjeni at the time, was directly involved in the attempts of the Shona rebels in the district to drive white farmers off the land. Mkhati, in turn, appealed to the close allegiance between the Rozvi kings and Mwari cultists. He transmitted Mwari's oracular orders to the rebels through the existing network of cult messengers and thereby directly influenced military operations in the field (Ranger 1967:113; Malema's report, August 1896).

In western Mashonaland the messengers of Mwari played an active role in organising the risings after they had visited the caves in May 1896. The Native Commissioner at Hartley was warned about these visits but attached little importance to them. Two weeks later the Native Commissioner was killed near Mashiangombi's kraal in the first outbreak of rebellion in Mashonaland. In the ensuing struggle the Mwari messengers and the remarkably courageous spirit medium of Kaguwi coordinated their activities to organise the resistance of Mashiangombi's people. This was the last desperate attempt at concerted action, at a stage when many Shona chiefs were already considering peace talks. During these last-minute negotiations the bitter-enders invoked the Voice of Mwari as the final uncompromising authority, the African God of justice and liberation.

The interaction between Mwari cultists and senior spirit mediums is of great significance. In the central, northern and eastern parts of Mashonaland, where the *mhondoro* mediums dominated, the Nehanda spirit medium, a frail old woman, played a prominent role in organising Shona resistance. She and Kaguwi were eventually captured by the whites, convicted of murder and executed in 1898. They were subsequently proclaimed national heroes of the revolt.

Interaction between prominent ritual officiants in the late nineteenth century confirms the popular Shona belief that in national crises God and the tribal ancestors collaborate. This prefigures the pattern of the religious management of chimurenga II.

Historians disagree about the scope and effectiveness of the Mwari cult's involvement in mobilising black resistance during the revolt.³ However, considering the evidence adduced by Ranger and the tradi-

tion which I found firmly established at the Wirirani and Dzilo cult caves about Mwari's prominent role in the rebellions, there can be little doubt that the oracle's militant pronouncements at the time did provide all-important mystical legitimisation for the struggle, as well as powerful inspiration for coordinated and sustained action against the enemy over a wide area.

As regards the development of traditional concepts of Mwari, it appears as if there were historical mutations, reflecting crises and changing circumstances. The predominantly creator God of rain, crops and human fertility captured the imagination of his/her people during the rebellion as a militant deity: *the God of war and peace and the God of justice opposing oppressive rule*. Christian influence, as reflected in the fatherhood of Mwari and the absorption of the Christ figure as the white people's *mhondoro* spirit, is also apparent. The image of the liberator God may have receded into the background at times, but it persisted in the minds of the people until it re-emerged forcefully during *chimurenga* II. The failure of the first rebellion, while causing despondency among cult officials and the indigenous population generally, was rationalised: it was attributed to the black people's inability to unite against the whites rather than to any lack of power on the part of Mwari. After the rebellion the deity, who had previously emerged as liberator by condemning the cruelty of King Lobengula, continued providing oracular support for black resistance to colonial rule. Veiled in secrecy, the oracle continued to propagate resistance and the liberation of the lost lands.

How was this achieved? Though driven underground for a time after the rebellion, the wide-spread cult organisation was kept intact (Daneel 1970:36f) if increasingly secret.⁴ Mwari's rejection of white rule took the form of criticism of breaches of customary law, for instance when laws of inheritance were ignored or misapplied by white district commissioners in the appointment of new chiefs. Droughts and the concomitant suffering of peasant communities were attributed to the oppressor's discriminatory land legislation, specific incidents of maladministration in outlying districts, and also to the prophetic rain-making activities of opposing religious groups such as the Zion Christian Church of Bishop Mutendi.

But Mwari did not merely sanction black reaction against conquest.

He/she also insisted on reciprocity as a condition for social and ecological wellbeing. For the rains to fall regularly, Mwari required a show of right-mindedness, demonstrated annually by the gifts sent from each district to the Matonjeni shrines, along with requests for rain. In addition the traditional rest day of the ancestors (*chisi*), ancestral rituals and a host of customary marital and other laws had to be observed. Essentially, therefore, Mwari featured as a conservative force, preserving African values in the face of change and maintaining a close link between just rule, agro-economic progress and the wellbeing of the environment.

2.1.1.2 *The senior district spirit mediums*

At district level in the south the senior spirit medium represents the dominant tribe's founding ancestor or a related ancestor at the apex of the local spirit hierarchy. In peacetime the medium's link with the high-God may not be consistently apparent. Yet in those areas where the influence of the Mwari cult is strong, it is the senior *svikiro* who, with the local chief and the district's cult messenger, displays the high-God's gifts to the ancestors at the chief's court prior to the messenger's visit to the cult caves in the Matopo hills. By placing the seal of ritual approval on the community's plea for rain, the *svikiro* confirms the interaction of the local tribal spirit(s) with Mwari of Matonjeni. The same spirit interaction is reaffirmed in local *mukwerere* rain rituals, when the senior tribal ancestors are requested to approach Mwari/Dzivaguru directly for rain.

As a traditional ecologist the *svikiro* has important conservationist duties. On behalf of the local *varidzi venyika* (ancestral guardians of the land), who receive their mandate for environmental protection directly from Mwari, the *svikiro* is empowered to prohibit the cutting of certain trees; to take polluters of springs who disturb the water spirits (*njuzu*) to the chief's court; to enforce the boundaries of *marambatemwa* (holy groves where the ancestors dwell) by bringing tree-fellers to court; and to guard over certain species of game. The *svikiro*'s ecological duties are believed to be divinely inspired. It is not uncommon to hear *masvikiro* appealing to the creator God, in addition to the guardian ancestors, as the source of their authority for environmental protection. In this sense the *masvikiro* can be described as traditional 'healers of

the earth' who, prior to and in some respects also under white rule, maintained an equilibrium between human exploitation of nature and its conservation or recovery. The *masvikiro* exert great influence on tribal affairs: they are the historians of the tribe who have to recount ancestral history during seances; in a sense they are 'elder statesmen' at the chief's court; and they are tribal politicians par excellence, responsible for the mystical sanction and official approval of a new chief at a time of succession. Less compromised than the chief, who was salaried by the white administration and therefore suspected of having divided loyalties, and professionally steeped in the customary laws of the ancestors, the *svikiro* was pre-eminently the person to verbalise opposition and lobby against unpopular measures introduced by local government, as when district commissioners opposed or ignored ancestral directives concerning the installation of new chiefs, or in boundary disputes.

Although not always effective, the psychological release of expressing communal frustration and criticism against the oppressor in the name of the mystical guardians of the land should not be underrated. In their defiance of white rule the *masvikiro* were reinforcing the bonds between the living and the living dead, thereby encouraging peasant communities to bear oppression with dignity and to keep up the resolve to seek liberation. In this respect the *svikiro* was a key mobiliser of resistance, a mainstay of customary law and traditional culture, and a healer of the mental malady of subservience and serfdom inflicted by white political domination.

A brief assessment of the roles of senior *masvikiro* in historical perspective highlights the emergence of a tradition of revolt against alien rule in the name of the guardian ancestors of the land. As mentioned above, the Kaguwi and Nehanda mediums became famous during the rebellions for their leadership in the struggle. Both played strategic roles in urging the rebels to kill the white intruders. Their execution and the repression of the rebellions by the BSAC in erstwhile Rhodesia did not terminate all *svikiro* resistance. In Mozambique Shona-related tribes kept rebelling under spirit guidance in an attempt to dislodge Portuguese land barons from their large estates.⁵

After the rebellions the Ndebele adapted to the new political climate before the Shona did. In 1923, when the Shona still relied on the Mwari

cult to voice their protest, the Ndebele were already making use of written petitions to oppose the idea of responsible government for Rhodesia. It was only after the Second World War – as more white farmers settled on the land and the Land Apportionment Act, followed by the Land Husbandry Act, imposed increasing constraints on African land-holding – that African reaction became radicalised through trade unionism and the emergence of African nationalist movements.

Some authors have suggested that the repression of the nationalist movement promoted the revival of *svikiro* influence. Bourdillon (1982:265), for instance, writes:

After the suppression of African nationalist parties in 1964, spirit mediums remained on the whole unmolested, partly because they enjoyed the respect of black employees in government administration and in the police force, and partly because government policy respected the more traditional elements of Shona culture. Those mediums who took an interest in politics thus became the only force for national sentiments.

As black nationalism gained momentum in the rural areas and people started reaching back to their roots, spirit mediums increasingly promoted a grassroots re-evaluation and appreciation of a proud ancestral past. Obscure as it may have been at the time to the white administration, whose representatives invariably underestimated the political significance of traditional religion (Daneel 1970:34, 87; Ranger 1966:118), the combined influence of the senior *svikiro* and the messenger of the Mwari cult at the chief's court and elsewhere in their chiefdoms served to prepare the rural population for war. Mwari's oracular opposition to the injustice perpetrated by his *vazukuru* (sister's sons, that is the whites) against his black offspring (Daneel 1970:71f), combined with the opposition of the ancestral guardians to white exploitation of the lost lands, provided an unassailable sanction for revolt.

2.1.2 Healing and liberation in AICs

The AICs are not generally credited with having a liberation theology. Yet it is quite evident that ever since their inception in erstwhile Rhodesia early in the twentieth century, they spontaneously developed what one could call their own unique brand of *religio-cultural liberation*.

Their exodus from the religious white house of slavery was evidence of their emancipation from imperialist structures which the mission churches had maintained by means of funding and staffing. By ridding themselves of the trusteeship of Western churches, the Independents managed to shed austere, rational and dogmatically 'correct' forms of worship and find their own religious identity in dramatic, emotionally uninhibited religious practices. Organisational emancipation led to liturgical innovation and transformation.

At the core of this process was a *re-evaluation of indigenous culture and religion*, as a result of which numerous rites became informed by the traditional worldview. This entailed either straightforward accommodation (for example the integration of ancestor veneration in the Ethiopian-type churches; cf Daneel 1973:64f) or confrontation and Christianising transformation in the Spirit-type churches. In the latter case the gospel message was introduced at an existential level in order to cater for African needs in a new way, just as the high-God cult, ancestor veneration and magical rites had done in the traditional context. Prime examples of such transformation were the replacement of the high-God cult's rainmaking and related ecological functions with Zionist seed conferences (*ungano yembeu*) at the onset of the rainy season (Daneel 1974:104–109); the replacement of the key ancestral ritual of *kugadzira* (accommodating the deceased's spirit) by Spirit-type consolation (*runyaradzo*) ceremonies (Daneel 1974:116f); and prophetic concern for a Christianised and reconciliatory version of wizard eradication (Daneel 1974:278f).

Faith-healing practices, which featured so prominently as a recruitment factor during the period of rapid AIC growth from the 1930s to the 1960s, clearly reflect that religio-cultural liberation was not just a reaction against Western missionary control⁶ and medical science, accompanied by uncritical affirmation of indigenous customs. It also brought liberation from the besetting fear of evil powers and life-threatening wizardry inculcated by traditional religion. The creativity and originality of Zionist and Apostolic prophetic healers lay in the genuine pastoral and psychological liberation they offered to patients afflicted by destructive forces. Their diagnoses were couched in intelligible terms, being solidly based on the traditional worldview and understanding of physical affliction (Daneel 1974:214f; 1989(b):59–62). Prophetic therapy, in turn, demonstrated the protective and healing power of Christ and the

Holy Spirit in vividly enacted purificatory or exorcist rites. Thus the Christian God was convincingly and visibly incarnated as one directly involved in the joys and woes of African society.

The notion of a personal God, a caring God with a black face, hands and feet, was reinforced in the numerous prophetic healing colonies. Here the prophetic healers maintained close contact with their patients, giving them a sense of security and a new identity through regular laying on of hands, intercession and counselling. Healing in the holy cities (popularly called Zion City, Moriah – after the biblical Mount Moriah – or Jerusalem) was holistic, encompassing all of life. Salvation unfolded not as a remote, future state of wellbeing, but as concrete healing here and now: psychosomatic healing of human beings, stewardship of nature and even prophetic therapy for the stresses and strains of the conflict-laden interaction between tribal politics and white rule. In a very real way, therefore, the wide scope of prophetic activities at healing colonies implied healing of the earth, the *salvation of all creation* (Daneel 1991 *passim*).

The seeds of a Zionist theology of the environment were present all along in Mutendi's holy city. As founding leader of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Zimbabwe, the 'man of God' took a keen interest in agricultural progress. Himself a master farmer and conservationist, he taught his followers the benefits of proper farming methods, combating soil erosion through the upkeep of contour ridges and the protection of water resources. His earthkeeping measures, moreover, perpetuated – in a Christianised form – the agro-religious cycle of the traditional Mwari cult. ZCC delegations from the surrounding districts were required to bring gifts when they came to request rain at Moriah, as the traditional *vanyai* did at the Matonjeni shrines. Then, if it did not rain, the 'man of God' would travel to drought-stricken areas to intercede for rain. Through his mutual aid scheme of maize distribution from church headquarters to outlying congregations he could, moreover, act as benefactor to the unfed. Even though Bishop Mutendi's agricultural and environmental policies suggest pragmatic motives of fostering improved farming methods, economic progress and church growth through aid, Zionist steps towards more altruistic forms of nature conservation were taken even at that early stage, for instance through small-scale tree-planting projects.

Mutendi demonstrated that his church was not only concerned with religio-cultural liberation, was not just a prophetic 'hospital' for the physically afflicted; it also represented a formidable power for the *healing of socio-political ills*. At an early stage he entered the political arena by opposing the colonial administration's policy on education, land allocation and religious issues. For this he was detained by the police several times. To his followers he became a Spirit-led Moses figure, champion of the oppressed. Like Shembe of the Zulu Nazarites in South Africa, Mutendi drew many chiefs and headmen into his church. Through numerous discussions about local district government at Zion City's supreme court and the appointment of Zionist prophets as advisors to the courts of affiliated chiefs, the Zionist bishop managed to secure considerable influence in tribal political affairs. Zion City became an information centre, a kind of *religio-political* governing and broadcasting house with a geographically widespread network of interaction, similar to that of the Mwari cult. During the 1950s and 1960s many Zionist chiefs openly stated that the power of the Holy Spirit, represented by supportive Zionist prophets, enabled them to cope – that is, to maintain some form of just rule and balance amid the complex and conflicting demands of white rule and black nationalism.

As a descendant of the royal Rozvi tribe, Mutendi, in the context of his impressive 'Zion City', also appealed to the sentiments of tribal leaders who had not forgotten the glories of the once-powerful Rozvi dynasty. Mutendi, the modern Rozvi Mambo, represented the supratribal unity which had once been the backbone of a great people. In addition to Zionist religious connotations, his popular title ('man of God') had distinct political overtones to many of his followers. Zion City became a safe spiritual anchorage for tribal dignitaries, a place where they could discuss the pressing issues of boundary disputes, unruly tribesmen and even intimidation by extremist politicians. Here a message of liberation could be evolved. It was not a message which promised easy solutions or revolutionary change in the political realm, in the sense of instant freedom from bondage brought about by divine power. Basically it meant the presence of Mwari in his Spirit, which could liberate chiefs and headmen from fear and anxiety, enabling them to deal more effectively with the issues confronting them.

Just as Christ failed to introduce a messianic order which would satisfy Jewish nationalist aspirations, Mutendi did not promise another Rozvi

confederation or a Zionist empire which would overthrow white rule. But throughout his life he set an example to the chiefs of how one could realistically cooperate with the rulers of the day without loss of dignity and how one could fearlessly resist unjust legislation and action even if it did not always bring about the desired results. In a sense his Zion City became to the chiefs a halfway house between white local government and African nationalist factions, a refuge from where they could subtly resist foreign influence without entirely jeopardising their position in relation to the white administration on which they depended financially. Like Isaiah Shembe did for his 'Israelites' in South Africa, Bishop Mutendi did for his Zionist followers, presenting them not with an indifferent, remote deity, but with 'a God who walks on feet and who heals with hands, and who can be known by men, as a God who loves and has compassion' (Sundkler 1961:278).

Possibly the most dramatic episode of Spirit involvement in Mutendi's resistance to colonial rule was the Rozvi-Duma boundary dispute in Bikita, which came to a head in 1965. Mutendi's Zion City itself was situated in the disputed area and he organised the defence of the Rozvi chief's claim. Ultimately, when all else had failed, Mutendi sponsored and initiated legal action in the high court against such formidable colonial opponents as the Bikita District Commissioner, the Provincial Commissioner of the then Victoria Province and the Minister of Internal Affairs. The outcome was predictable. Mutendi had become too prominent an adversary to the administration, and the state machinery was set in motion to destroy the Rozvi bishop's power base.

During months of litigation and strife the ZCC bishop repeatedly proclaimed publicly that Zion City would not be destroyed. Yet, in the aftermath of bitter defeat, the Spirit he propagated liberated him from bitterness, indecision and even from his ties with the settlement in Bikita. His boldness in leading a large contingent of Rozvi kinsmen and Zionist followers to settle in a remote area in northern Gokwe, far away from his original sphere of influence, gave real meaning to his publicly declared conviction that Zion would not die because it belonged to God. Like Moses of old, the ageing bishop arranged the exodus of his people. In the course of only a few years another Zion City was erected in the far north of Zimbabwe and the Zion Christian Church, instead of fizzling out, grew faster than ever.

During the same period in the late sixties, the Apostles of Maranke (popularly known as the *vaPostori*, the largest AIC in Zimbabwe) voiced the mood of black nationalism in even more aggressive anti-white statements than the Zionists. Here the interjections during sermons were not 'Peace in Zion' or 'Joy be with you all' but, challengingly and stridently, 'Peace to us Africans!' and even, in some cases, 'Peace to Africans only!'. Feelings of naked resentment surfaced in repeated accusations that the white race had killed Jesus and that the whites, in their oppression of the blacks, had deliberately repressed the message and benefits of the Holy Spirit.

The following excerpt from a sermon preached at the Pentecostal festivities of the *vaPostori* near Mutare in April 1966, illustrates Apostolic sentiments at the time:

The true witnesses of Mwari were buried by the Europeans, until God gave them the task of witnessing to us, the Apostles of Africa. They killed Jesus and the early Apostles because they wanted to eliminate the church of the Holy Spirit. So God decided to send the church of the Holy Spirit to our race in Africa. Peace to Africa!

Racial bias and desire for a unique supernatural mandate for the church, free from white interference, were evident at the time in Apostolic sermons. They were delivered on the eve of *chimurenga*, when anxiety and uncertainty were rife and intimidation and detentions were becoming more frequent. Basically the Apostolic preachers aimed at reassuring their people. They were using the church as a place to vent their frustrations at white rule and were virtually claiming the work of the Holy Spirit exclusively for their liberationist cause.

It should be noted that the Zionist and Apostolic movements during the 1960s officially maintained a certain aloofness from politically organised violence and subversion. Bishop Mutendi even explicitly dissociated the ZCC from the then banned political parties, ZANU and ZAPU. Nevertheless, these churches gave full expression to African nationalist sentiments. They became propagators of equality between the races, the dignity of black Africans, and their ability to rule themselves. In doing so they sharpened the concept of a just God who sided with the oppressed and who, through his Spirit, could be counted upon to inspire the poor and the dispossessed in their struggle for the lost lands. At this stage, therefore, the prophetic contribution to political lib-

eration, particularly in the rural context, lay in providing what was considered to be a sound, *scripturally based legitimization and justification of the struggle*.

2.2 The role of religion during the liberation struggle (1965–1980)

2.2.1 Traditional religion

The escalating crisis of *chimurenga* from the mid-sixties onwards fanned the resurgence of traditional religion which had been triggered by the rise of African nationalism. As Shamuyarira (quoted in Ranger 1968:635; also Huizer 1991:25) puts it:

The past heritage was revived through prayers and traditional singing, ancestral spirits were invoked to guide and lead the new nation. Christianity and civilisation took a back seat and new forms of worship and new attitudes were thrust forward dramatically ... the spirit pervading the meetings was African and the desire was to put the twentieth century in an African context.

As resistance and political agitation turned into a full-scale liberation struggle, traditional religion inspired the guerrilla fighters, often informed and even directed strategic operations at the front, and did much to secure close cooperation between rural communities and fighters.

2.2.1.1 *The Mwari cult*

In 1965 armed conflict broke out in rural areas. Joshua Nkomo, then leader of the banned ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union), was confined to a camp for political prisoners at Gonakudzingwa. Mrs Nkomo then sought counsel at the shrine of Wirirani. Having presented Mlimo with a sacrificial black ox and beer, she was told by the voice: 'Do not fear for your husband. I will look after him. Things will be settled very soon. But go and speak to the white man peacefully' (Kazembe, in *Drum*, October 1965; Daneel 1970:72). Like Mrs Nkomo, many others travelled to Matonjeni at that time to attend cult ceremonies. The increasing popularity of the cult was demonstrated by the mass atten-

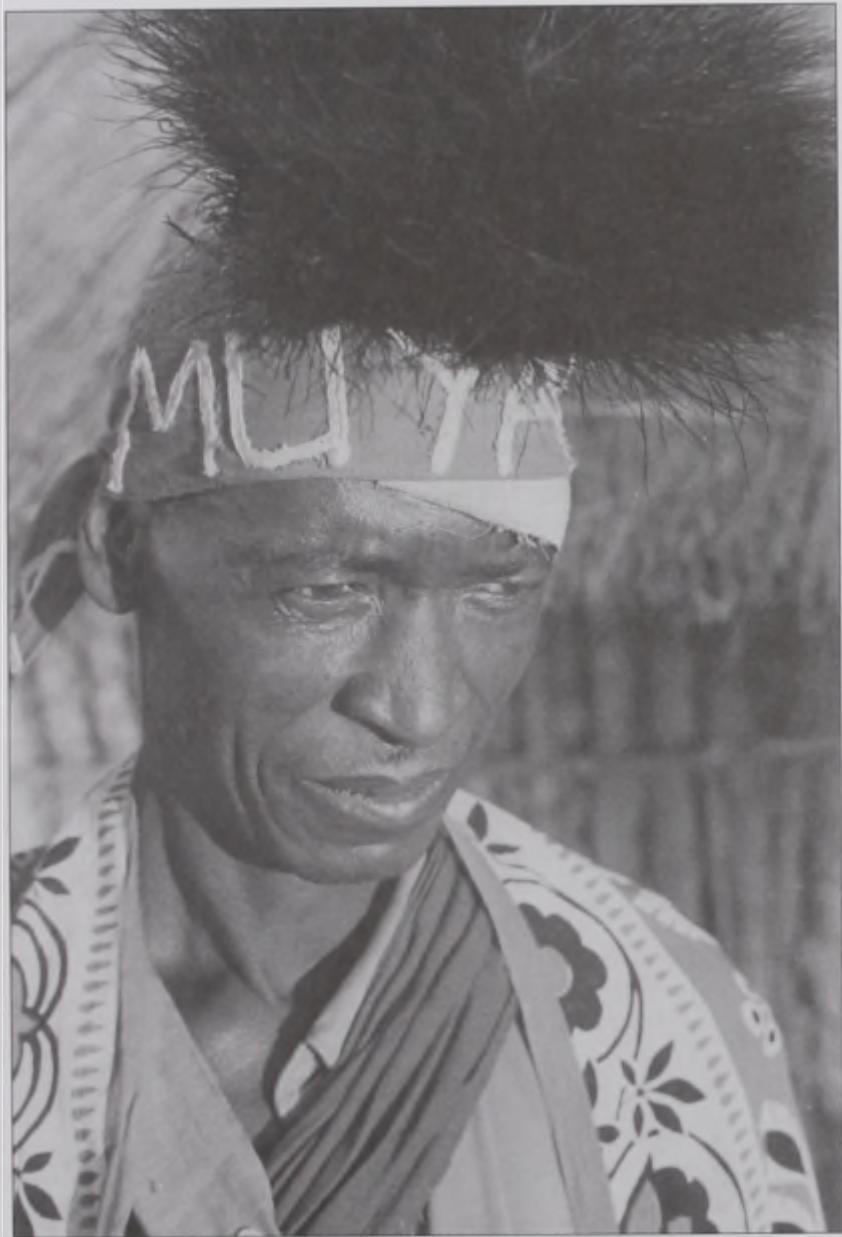


Plate 1 Vondo Mukozho, Mwari cult messenger of the Gutu district, who accompanied the author in 1967 to the Wirirani shrine in the Matopo hills



Plate 2 Mamoyo, the Rozvi *mbonga*, who acted as the 'Voice of Mwari' at the Wirirani shrine in 1967



Plate 3 The cave-shrine at Wirirani where Mwari's oracular sessions took place in the 1960s

dance of Africans at the October rain ceremony in 1967, on which occasion several black oxen were ritually slaughtered (*The Chronicle*, October 1967).

Mwari's propagation of peaceful negotiations in 1965 could have reflected the initial will of African nationalists to secure more rights for their people through political negotiation. The mood at Matonjeni, however, was changing. In 1967, when I personally attended a cult ceremony at the Wirirani shrine (plates 1-3), Mwari launched into a scathing attack on Westernisation at the expense of customary law and beliefs: 'These young ones [Africans] who have been educated disobey the Karanga laws! They change the Karanga customs because they mix our laws with European customs ... They ruin the country ... We cannot govern the country according to European ways! ... I (Mwari) do not want to speak to these Europeanised Africans. The Europeans are the children of my sister (*vazukuru*). I love them, but with regard to this law, I have no need of them. I do not want them to approach this place where I live, because they do not act properly. They always fight with the country' (Daneel 1970:78,79).

It was remarkable that at such a time Mwari should qualify black-white relations in terms of the *sekuru-muzukuru* (maternal uncle-sister's son) relationship, which in Shona kinship is the most cordial relationship, least dominated by the seniority principle. Possibly this metaphor was used because of the unusual circumstance of a white attending the oracle. On the other hand Mwari may have been revealing what he/she considered to be the ideal for black-white relations. Mwari even indicated a certain fondness for the 'white *vazukuru*', who were granted the customary privileges in the black uncle's house and yard. But the *vazukuru* did not observe the prescribed tribal code of proper conduct. They did not simply freely use their black uncle's (*sekuru's*) possessions, as they were entitled to do, but actually alienated large parts of the land which Mwari owned and which his/her black sons controlled by virtue of their common descent and inheritance. Worst of all, the white 'nephews' denied their black uncles the fundamental rights and dignity to which the latter are entitled according to age-old custom. In a profound manner, therefore, Mwari was urging his/her white 'nephews' on the eve of war to heed the laws of the land and thus to help create a situation of peaceful co-existence safeguarded by the stability of the Shona kinship structure. At the same time Mwari in no

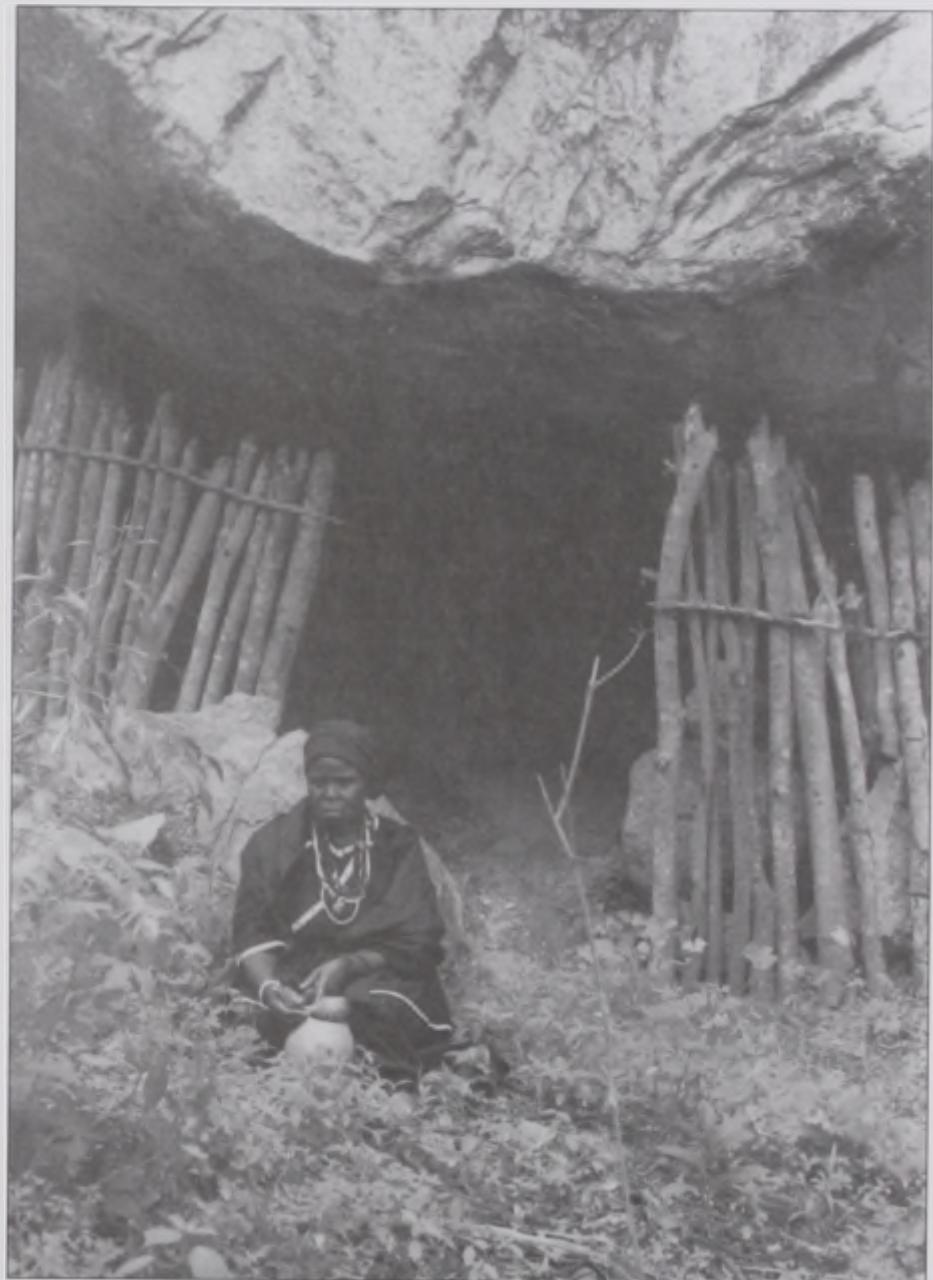


Plate 4 Priestess Gogo Intombiyamazulu with pot of ceremonial beer at the entrance of Vembe shrine

uncertain manner rebuked and warned his/her wayward nephews (Daneel 1970:84).

Because of the secret nature of cult messages, little accurate information is available about the exact contents of messages transmitted at the Mwari shrines during the *chimurenga* period. Cult messengers throughout Masvingo Province, the priestly colony at Dzilo, as well as the priestess Gogo Intombiyamazulu at the Vembe shrine confirm, however, that Mwari's message did eventually become a *full declaration of war*.⁷ Mwari is reported to have engaged in oracular intervention, the gist of his/her pronouncements being full condonation of militancy and support for the ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters in their struggle to regain the lost lands throughout the country; divine confirmation that this time *chimurenga* would succeed in replacing colonial rule with black majority rule; and a reminder to blacks generally that the successful outcome of the struggle hinged on honouring traditional customs, at the core of which lay the combined powers of Mwari and the ancestors.

According to priestess Gogo (plate 4), a cousin of the Chokoto priestly family, Mwari's main message at the Vembe shrine during the struggle concentrated on three issues: unity between Mugabe and Nkomo and their liberation armies as an absolute condition for a successful outcome to the war; consistent reassurance to both fighters and civilians that the lost lands would be won back; and encouragement to both ZIPRA and ZANLA fighters to persevere despite setbacks and casualties. Gogo herself was reported to the authorities by members of the surrounding community for her collaboration with the guerrillas (interview at Vembe shrine, 10 January 1989).

Jonas Chokoto, senior cult official at the Dzilo shrine, narrated:

The comrades came and said: 'We are hunting, father; please give us guidance.' I was deeply concerned about them, so I mediated between them and Mwari. I believe Mwari truly interacted with the ancestors in the (spirit) war council, which gave direction to the war ...

Both ZIPRA and ZANLA fighters were around all the time. One group had their base camp quite close to the Wirirani shrine. They used to come at night, without their uniforms and arms, as that was a requirement of Mwari. The comrades regularly requested Mwari's

power and guidance for the struggle. Mwari always told them: 'Keep your ancestors and *mashavi* spirits and heed the spirit mediums!' Mwari also taught them how to fight, where to move and how to avoid dangerous situations ...

The comrades once made a mistake by planting a landmine near the cave. They had failed to consult Mwari on the matter. So three head of cattle got killed in the explosion. They apologised when Mwari reprimanded them. But they advised me to move away from the *dombo* (rock, ie shrine) for a while, lest the soldiers retaliate and kill me...

No attempts were made to sell out the shrine, because people revere Mwari and the ancestors. The cult messengers continued to come regularly (interviews at Dzilo shrine, 10 January 1989; November 1989; January 1992).

From a cult point of view, one must distinguish between the different types of delegations that arrived there. Many of the regular messengers (*vanyai*) were stepping up the frequency of their visits, carrying supportive oracular messages back to their local constituencies; senior officials of the black nationalist parties either visited or sent delegations; ZIPRA and ZANLA fighters operating in the Matopo area regularly consulted Mwari (as confirmed by Gogo and Jonas Chokoto); and ZANLA emissaries from their operational headquarters at Chimoio in Mozambique reportedly visited the shrines to obtain mystical directives for the conduct of war. According to vaChinovuriri, who acted as go-between between spirit mediums and ZANLA high command at Chimoio, Mozambique, during the war, large ZANLA delegations were sent periodically to confer with ritual officiants at the holy places in Zimbabwe.

A network of interaction between *vanyai* and the guerrillas operating in their districts was also established. In Mberengwa, for instance, the fighters regularly sent two cult messengers to Matonjeni. Mwari's messages were then conveyed to high command at Chimoio through the guerrilla communication system.

As the war escalated, cult messengers established more regular contact between district communities, the fighters they harboured, and the Matopo priestly colonies (according to traditional informants in the Zimuto, Gutu, Zvishavane, Najena, Mwenezi and Chivi districts). The

following account by P. *munyai* of Chief Maranda in the Mwenezi district, gives an impression of the experiences of cult messengers in the outlying districts:

I kept going to Matonjeni regularly during the war. Chief Maranda sent me to ask for rain and to tell Mwari we are suffering in this war, when will the suffering stop? At the caves Mwari said: 'I also see the suffering. There is nothing we can do to prevent it. Venerate your ancestors! Tell Chief Maranda to venerate the ancestors and he will see the misery stop!' We obeyed and eventually the situation improved ... Mwari always protected me during my travels (on foot) to Matonjeni. During the war the shrines were both holy and dangerous: holy, because of Mwari's presence; dangerous because so many people of different tribes congregated there for advice ... When you go to Mantonjeni as a *munyai* you represent all of Zimbabwe, knowing that the message from the Rock is that of your great Mudzimu – the mediator between God and humans. Mwari's pronouncements are heard from the rocks both at Mantonjeni and at Great Zimbabwe. You can see it in the lightning crossing between the two places. (Interview at Dzilo shrine, 13 February 1989).

From this account it is clear that in outlying areas regular contact with the shrine served to encourage both the local population and the fighters during a protracted period of desperation and suffering. At the shrines Mwari kept telling his/her people that the war effort would be successful. The *vanyai*, moreover, were instrumental in upholding ancestral beliefs and thus bolstering the authority of the spirit mediums by providing them with divine sanction. It is also possible that during the war heightened awareness of Mwari's outreach to the whole nation caused some cultists to conceive of Mwari's oracular revelations as extending over a much wider geographical area than in peacetime. Hence P's intimation that the Voice was heard simultaneously at both holy places – the Matopos and Great Zimbabwe.

Territorially widespread as the cult network was, it could obviously not maintain the same close interaction as it had done in the 1896 rebellion. Guerrilla offensives, apart from ones launched close to the shrines, were therefore not directed or instigated directly by the oracle of Mwari. Nevertheless, the indications are that the close involvement and pervasive presence of Mwari – in his/her African guise – was

unquestioned in the minds of many of the fighters. The conception was that Mwari presided over the war council (*dare rechimurenga*) in the spirit world. Senior representatives on the council were, first of all, national hero ancestors like Chaminuka, Nehanda and Kaguwi. Then came the *mhondoro* or founder ancestors – the senior guardians of the land (*varidzi venyika*) of each area or spirit province. In the spirit world the final authority behind the ZANLA and ZIPRA high commands and their fighting forces was the *dare rechimurenga*.

Speaking about the ancestral war council, *vaChinovuriri* said:

The council of the *midzimu* and the one of Mwari at Matonjeni are one. Through the spirit mediums the ancestors on the war council stated at Chimoio that directives had come from Matonjeni, saying: 'The war must proceed according to African laws and full use must be made of all the *masvikiro* of Zimbabwe, because they are inspired by both Mwari and the ancestors ...' Behind the ancestors stood Mwari. So the war council formed part of the divinity of Mwari *vaMatonjeni* ...

Cult officiant Jonas Chokoto of the Dzilo shrine concurred with this view. 'The power to fight successfully,' he confirmed, 'came from the *mhondoro* spirits, together with Mwari. That is why we took the land. The people saw it was the truth!' (These two quotations are from discussions at Dzilo shrine, January 1989.)

The picture is one of a liberator God, a God of justice, who hesitated neither to declare war on behalf of his/her oppressed people, nor to intervene militantly and directly in a protracted struggle through a spirit war council. Thus, in a national crisis, the deity of rain and fertility turned into a warlord in order to recapture the lost lands of the dispossessed and re-establish peaceful co-existence and unity amongst all his/her subjects. In both the socio-political and the ecological context, then, Mwari manifested him/herself as the liberator and healer of the land.

2.2.1.2 *The spirit mediums*

The link between the spirit war council and the fighting cadres was the spirit mediums. The most striking features of the medium involvement which evolved during the struggle are the following:

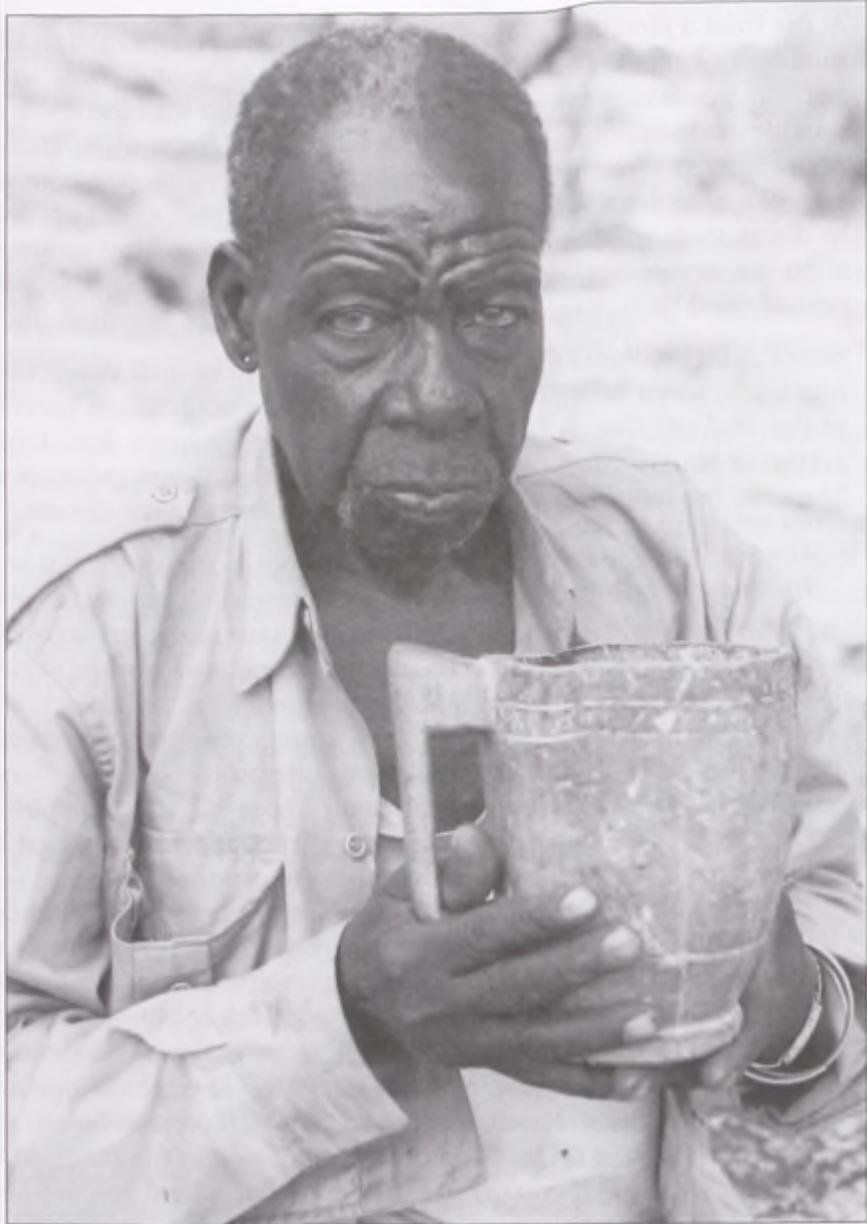


Plate 5 Spirit medium Tazivei, who acted as senior medium at Chief Gutu's court for many years. He provided guerrilla fighters with ancestral directives from his home-base and ritually endorsed the author's visit to Matonjeni at Chief Gutu's court in 1967

- At the front a kind of spontaneous war-mediumship emerged as large numbers of fighters became hosts to ancestral spirits. They would become possessed prior to or even during contact with the enemy to provide on-the-spot guidance for action in the form of revelations about enemy movements and strategic positions; mortar men and bazooka launchers would go into trance before they could accurately direct their missiles at enemy targets; and in critical situations such as ambushes guerrillas would become possessed spontaneously and then rescue the fighters from their predicament.
- Senior spirit mediums in each district operated from their village bases (plate 25), when liaising between the spirit war council and guerrillas in the district. One such medium was vaZarira, (plate 23), female *svikiro* of Murinye, founder of one of the leading Duma chieftaincies. She gave the following (abridged) account of her wartime duties:

The fighters required me to meet them out in the bush. But *sekuru* (literally 'grandfather', that is possessing spirit) Murinye revealed that all meetings with the *vakomana vesango* had to take place at my homestead. So they came, sometimes groups of twenty-five at a time ... We taught them about what lay ahead, what areas to avoid, where to go ... They would come back regularly to consult the *mudzimu*. As they seldom offered the spirit anything, I provided them with ancestral snuff (bute) ... I (the spirit of Murinye) disciplined those comrades who had transgressed the laws of war by sleeping with women. My *mudzimu* told the comrades not to kill innocent people, wrongly accused of witchcraft (that is, collaboration with the enemy), because the blood of the innocent would plague us, the mediums. It would also cause the angered ancestors to withdraw their protection from the fighters ... My *mudzimu* told the comrades that the *masvikiro* are cooperating with God because Musikavanhu, the creator, is one with Mwari of the Bible. Mwari, we (the mediums) said, was on our side as he was always on the side of the oppressed in the Bible. In the Bible it says that if you invade/take someone's land you are seeking your own death ...

This narrative clearly illustrates the ancestrally derived authority of the *svikiro* over the fighters. It is the ancestor who determines the venue for consultation, not the fighters. It is the ancestor(s) who

lay(s) down the laws of war, disciplines the unruly, urges moderation in dealing with suspect villagers and verbalises both the spiritual justification for war and the constraints.

- Many *masvikiro* were integrated with guerrilla detachments, either temporarily or on a regular basis. They moved around with the fighters in their own spirit provinces, throughout their districts and over even wider areas, providing them with ancestral directives for field operations whenever possible. Others were at the front, liaising between rural communities and guerrillas, arranging traditional rituals for the struggle, mobilising the populace and mediating ancestral directives and control during *pungwe* meetings.

Some of the outstanding *masvikiro* who operated in Masvingo Province were the following:

- *Mapfumo Pfupajena* (plate 6), medium to one of the most famous Duma warlords, operated mainly in the Bikita district. Sometimes he made use of his knowledge of the local mountains to keep fighters fed and hidden from enemy eyes, and to help them escape and go into hiding from the Rhodesian army. Once he was captured and kept in custody at the Bikita district police headquarters, but he managed to escape and join the guerrillas in Gutu south. After *chimurenga* Pfupajena kept functioning as a 'war medium' for several years, assisting Zimbabwean soldiers in Mozambique in their operations against MNR forces.
- *Lydia Chabata* (plate 7), also from the Bikita district, was only in her teens when she started operating with the guerrillas. Acting on behalf of her warrior ancestor, Chabata, she roamed far and wide with guerrilla units, helping them devise tactics in response to enemy movements. At times ancestral revelations compelled her to travel long distances on foot to warn fighters about ambushes or anticipated attacks.

At the same time Lydia also hosted the spirit of her maternal grandmother, Mandisiyeyi, a healer of repute in her day. She was therefore able to assist the guerrilla medical officers in tending sick and wounded fighters. It was widely believed that Lydia's close association with the aquatic world of the *njuzu* spirits enabled her to mediate heavy mists to provide cover for fighters



Plate 6 Spirit medium Mapfumo Pfupajena invites ancestral presence with drumbeat (above) before he becomes fully spirit-possessed and communicates in the voice of his ancestor (below)



Plate 7 Spirit medium Lydia Chabata using *bute* snuff (above) in preparation for a spell of spirit possession (below)

during attacks on enemy positions. Thus Lydia's water rituals in the Devure river prior to the attack on the army camp at Mupindimbi in the Gutu district were believed to have induced the mist and rain that actually occurred at the time of the attack. In this instance Lydia also engaged in spying to determine the machinegun placements in the enemy camp prior to the attack. This illustrates the wide range of responsibilities shouldered by the *masvikiro* at the front, over and above their focal task of mediating ancestral guidance.

- Patrick Chinowawa, a prominent *svikiro* of the Ngara people in the Zimuto district, assisted the freedom fighters throughout the spirit province of his great grandfather, *sekuru* Chivanhu. The following condensed account broadens our understanding of the mystical dimension to the struggle:

I was living in Muzvondiwa's village under chief Mutonhodzwa when the comrades arrived in 1977. We conducted a beer ritual, leaving a large pot full of beer under a *muchakata* tree. The next morning we found that the *mhondoro* ('lion spirit' of *sekuru* Chivanhu) had drunk all the beer. It was a sign that much blood was still to flow in our area.

But Chivanhu also revealed that the blood will soon stop flowing and the land will be taken. This the comrades doubted and they threatened to kill me if it proved untrue. Those who had threatened me actually returned to thank me for advising them (correctly) before they went to the assembly points towards the end of the war.

After the first encounter with the comrades the *mijiba* came to tell me that I was wanted at Gurajena. I was afraid that they might want to kill me because I was instructed to wear my full spirit medium's attire. Upon arrival I had to shout war slogans: *Pamberi nechimurengal!* After I had confirmed that I was the medium of Chivanhu, the comrades expressed satisfaction and asked me to stay at their base camp. At first I received food and ancestral snuff, without being consulted ...

Later they took me, together with other *masvikiro*, to a homestead. There they insisted on consultation with the ancestors.

Varaidzo, the medium of Gurajena, and I became possessed. The comrades were angry because some of their fellow fighters had been killed by the soldiers. They had also lost some weapons. But *sekuru* Chivanhu came out in a rage, shouting: 'Who gave you comrades the right to climb the holy mountain of Mazambara where we are resting, without my permission? Who led you up that mountain? And why did you take a goat up there, the meaning of which you don't even know? You are playing with blood! ... You are not supposed to go up that mountain with your weapons of war, but only with the old muskets of the ancestors.' The comrades then inquired: 'But don't you want the land, *sekuru*?' The *sekuru* said: 'We will make a pact. Early tomorrow morning you will meet enemy soldiers at the beer-hall. For that fight I shall also require a rifle.' ... (At that point the possessed Chinowawa was given an AK which he carried the following day during the skirmish at the beer-hall.) The next day several enemy soldiers fell in the ambush set for them at the beer-hall. The headman, Nikolas, who had wrongly led the fighters up Mount Mazambara (thereby provoking the anger of the ancestors buried there) was tortured and then killed by the comrades.

We conducted a council of spirit mediums on every important occasion. We did so, for example, at Chief Nemarundwi's village, when the comrades tried to force him to venerate the ancestors. He did not know the procedure because he had always been a committed Christian and a church minister. So the comrades became angry, tore up his Bibles and were on the point of killing him when the ancestors intervened. *Sekuru* Chivanhu came out strongly in opposition, saying: 'You comrades cannot kill people arbitrarily. We, the *midzimu*, forbid it!' Thereupon Chief Nemarundwi was pardoned.

It was the chiefs, aided by us *masvikiro*, who arranged all spiritual matters. They appeased the ancestors on the (holy) mountains and got their directives there for the comrades. The comrades, in their turn, took care of some of the land issues. They refuted Chief Gurajena's false claims to certain parts of the land and fined him for claiming to be the senior chief of Zimuto.

Our great task as *masvikiro* was to lay down the (ancestral) rules for the struggle. Rule one: the fighters were not allowed to sleep with women. Rule two: the fighters had to honour the chiefs and kraalheads, and collaborate with them. We, the mediums, mediated between chiefs and fighters. Rule three: the comrades had to consult us prior to any action, so that the ancestors could advise them. Rule four: unnecessary bloodshed had to be avoided. At each *pungwe* meeting the council of spirit mediums guarded against the killing of innocent people. Thus the comrades were bound by ancestral laws at all times and could not act indiscriminately.

Chinowawa's account illustrates the close interaction between fighters and spirit mediums during *chimurenga*. In a sense the struggle for the lost lands was experienced at regional level as 'the war of the ancestors', fought at the behest of the senior spirit guardians of the land. The spirit mediums were also under considerable pressure, for their status as representatives of the spirit world did not automatically ensure their personal safety. Much depended on the fighters' assessment of their authenticity and their proven loyalty to the cause.

On the other hand, once a spirit medium had established him/herself as a reliable partner in the struggle in the eyes of both fighters and populace, he/she could have considerable influence on civilian control and military operations. To many fighters ancestral authority was sacrosanct. Consequently criticism of their behaviour, even reprimands, was accepted whenever the *svikiro* was considered to be genuinely possessed. The fighters' acceptance of ancestral authority enabled the *masvikiro* to lay down the laws of war; to impose on the comrades the regional ritual requirements (for example the correct way of obtaining ancestral guidance on holy mountains); and, most significantly, to prevent arbitrary killing of innocent people.

The latter objective was apparently achieved by a 'council of spirit mediums', which operated at *pungwe* meetings and on other important occasions in the presence of chiefs, headmen and ordinary villagers, rather than by individual mediums acting in isolation. The spirit war council therefore operated via a kind

of spirit medium tribunal, which exercised judicial and mystical power over matters of life and death. At *pungwe* meetings the *masvikiro* played a decisive role in determining the guilt or innocence of enemy collaborators accused of wizardry. While the authority and idiosyncrasies of regional spirits determined the conduct of the struggle in their own territories, the harnessing of spirits from other areas underscored the national character of the envisaged liberation.

Chinowawa's mention of the guerrillas making the chief pay a fine for presumptuous claims to seniority and landholding in Zimuto indicates the guerrillas' desire to control land issues and to introduce a new order with a more equitable system of land apportionment. Theirs was not primarily a quarrel with the age-old institution of chieftaincy, but rather the introduction of a new order – already manifest during the struggle in the so-called 'liberated zones' – free from foreign intervention. The chiefs' relations with the guerrillas were determined not by their official position but by their attitudes towards the struggle and the envisaged new order. The revival of traditional religion (in which both chiefs and spirit mediums played a major role) and of old myths and history suggests that the new order was conceived of as both modern and rooted in the religio-cultural heritage of the Zimbabwean people.

- One should also note the role of spirit mediums in the ZANLA camps in Mozambique. Here, as on the *svikiro* councils in the *pungwe* context mentioned by Chinowawa, the mediums represented the concerted spirit war council. At Chimoio, for instance, groups of mediums resided at the four points of the compass, from where they regularly sent official go-betweens to convey ancestral directives from the spirit war council directly to ZANLA high command. Haurovi Chinovuriri, who was to become a leading figure in our traditionalist ecological movement, was one of these go-betweens at Chimoio. He kept a careful record of all the messages sent by the ancestral war council, through their mediums, to Mugabe's guerrilla commanders.

To mention but one example, it is widely claimed that the mediums correctly prophesied the date of the massive Rhodesian air raid on Chimoio (see MuDende, plate 8). In response the positions of anti-

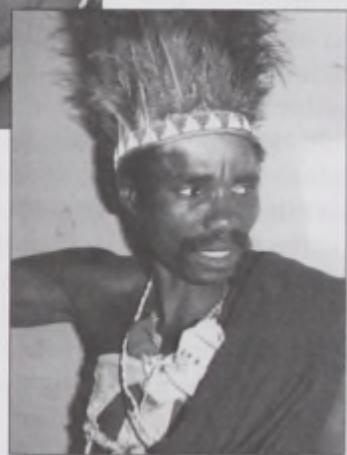


Plate 8 Spirit medium MuDende drinks beer (above) in preparation for spirit-possession (below). He was one of the mediums who warned the ZANLA high command of the Rhodesian air raid on Chimoio

aircraft weapons were changed, some women and children were evacuated and none of the senior members of ZANLA's high command were in the camp on the day of the attack. I have not been able to check fully the historical correctness of these facts, but they form an essential part of postwar mythology in traditional religious circles.

To sum up, the main functions of the spirit mediums in the rural districts where fighting was taking place were the following:

- establishing regular contact between the ancestral war council and guerrilla forces
 - providing the fighters with proper ancestral snuff (*bute*), which they had to offer regularly to the *midzimu* in return for mystical protection, inspiration and guidance. In this capacity the spirit mediums were the recognised agents of the revival of traditional religion
 - helping the fighters work out effective operational strategies based on their intimate knowledge of the terrain and their extraperception of enemy movements in their districts
 - laying down the ancestral laws for the struggle and teaching the fighters how to obtain advance information about enemy movements by observing the behaviour of certain birds and animals (tortoises, bateleur eagles, etc) considered to be emissaries of the ancestors. This, and the value of dense bush as cover, made the guerrillas particularly sensitive to ecology generally and, after the war, also to the conservation of wildlife
 - using their tribal political influence in their communities to ensure collaboration between the *povo* and the guerrillas. The indications are that it was only after 1972, when the guerrillas in rural districts deliberately started using allegiance to the *masvikiro* as a 'doorway' to the people, that they gained massive support at grassroots level – a factor which ultimately swung the struggle in favour of the bushfighters
- The *masvikiro* also played a significant role in secret *pungwe* meetings. There they proclaimed – often in a state of possession – the claims of the guardian ancestors to the lost lands. At the grassroots

of peasant society these claims apparently had greater mobilising and inspirational power than the socialist-Marxist ideology taught by the guerrilla political commissars on the same occasions.

Another important function of the *masvikiro* at *pungwe* meetings was to help identify, through ancestral intervention, the real traitors to the cause, the enemy collaborators. In this respect *pungwe* frequently served as religious cleansing operations, analogous to traditional wizardry eradication. The lives of many suspects were at stake. A trusted medium or group of *masvikiro* would pass judgment on behalf of the ancestors on the guilt or innocence of the suspected wizard (*muroyi*), resulting in execution, disciplinary measures or acquittal.

An accurate assessment of the roles played by local chiefs remains problematical. Some of them moved to the towns to avoid harassment. Others were suspected of collaboration with the white colonial administration.⁸ To my knowledge only two chiefs (Negovano and Mabika) in Masvingo Province were executed for alleged collaboration with the white administration against the liberation forces. Chinowawa's account of the situation in Zimuto, moreover, contains a number of cases of close collaboration among chiefs, spirit mediums and guerrillas, particularly in the field of traditional ritual. Besides opposition to and elimination of anti-*chimurenga* chiefs, there was therefore also an extension of the traditional joint responsibility for the land of both chiefs and *masvikiro*. The same type of responsibility is resurfacing in traditionalist earthkeeping programmes.

A surprising development was the explicit exclusion of *nganga* assistance at the battlefield. Most ex-guerrilla commanders I have spoken to claimed that *chimurenga* espoused a form of ancestor veneration which eschewed magical practice and precluded *nganga* participation. As it was not possible for them to identify *nganga* who engaged in secret wizardry practices, and as they were constantly under threat of being poisoned by villagers on whom they were dependent for food, they tended to avoid *nganga* at the front. The use of any form of magic by guerrillas was condemned. Wounded guerrillas could only be treated by trained medical officers in the field, in hospitals, or by receiving herbal medicine or symbolic snuff from recognised *masvikiro* and faith-healing from AIC healers.

The exclusion of *nganga* is a controversial issue, meriting further study. I am not sure, for instance, whether this was not a provincial rather than a universal *chimurenga* phenomenon. I mention it here mainly because earth-healing activities undertaken jointly by *masvikiro*, chiefs and ex-combatants in Masvingo Province after Independence perpetuated the *chimurenga* tradition of excluding *nganga* participation. Whatever the roles played by *nganga* during the struggle, there can be little doubt that the traditional spiritual agencies which were a driving force at the very core of *chimurenga* motivation and military offensives were the deity of Zimbabwe, Mwari – the liberator god of the oppressed – and the ancestral guardians of the land who directed and protected fighters and harassed communities. Thus the all-embracing purpose of healing the earth through reclamation of the lost lands was fulfilled.

2.2.2 The AICs

The role of the Independent Churches in the liberation history of Zimbabwe still has to be written. For members of both Mission and Independent Churches it was largely a matter of surviving between the Scylla of the Rhodesian forces and the Charybdis of the freedom fighters. Notwithstanding the pressures they were subjected to, the Independent Churches increasingly supported the liberation struggle. Bishop Mutendi's overt criticism of ZANU and ZAPU during the late sixties proved to be quite misleading in view of prophetic developments in the 1970s. His early public renunciations of radicalised politics, presumably for the benefit of the CID whom he knew to be monitoring his sermons, belied the direct assistance eventually given by ZCC congregations to the guerrilla fighters.

But the ZCC was not the only AIC which actively supported the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. *Ndaza* Zionist and Maranke's Apostolic prophets throughout Masvingo Province and further afield played an increasingly prominent role at the war front as *chimurenga* escalated countrywide into a full-blown bush war. Just as traditional spirit mediums were providing the guerrillas with mystical ancestral guidance, prophets were also moving around with the fighters at the front, prophesying to them in the name of the Holy Spirit about enemy movements and other security matters. Thus the diagnostic and revelatory services of the prophets helped to determine strategy as the guerrillas

improvised their tactics from one situation to the next. Like the traditional *varidzi venyika*, the Holy Spirit was considered to be a kind of 'guardian of the land' against the white intruders. It depended on the predilections of Christian and non-Christian guerrilla commanders whether they opted for traditionalist or Christian prophetic guidance. Some of them made use of both, cross-checking one against the other.

Apart from the 'fighter prophets' operating at the front, there were also those who stayed at their church headquarters or healing colonies, from where they provided the guerrillas with information, pastoral support and faith-healing services. Battle-fatigued or wounded fighters sometimes lived at healing colonies or in secret caves nearby in order to receive regular healing treatment. There are known instances of mentally disordered freedom fighters who were admitted to ZCC and other Zionist communities for protracted periods until they recovered.

Possibly the most important *chimurenga* function fulfilled by some AIC prophets – similar to that of their *svikiro* counterparts – was to assist in community-cleansing operations during *pungwe* meetings. They, too, had to help the guerrillas to determine who were the sell-outs, the traitors to the cause, and their work in this context was also expressed in the traditional idiom of tracing wizards. Ritual affirmation or repudiation of *uroyi* charges in this instance was ascribed to revelations of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit of the AIC prophets was publicly seen to act radically and judgementally against opponents of *chimurenga*.

The role of prophets in *pungwe* courts could raise critical questions about arbitrary judgements, executions and possible misrepresentation of the work of the Holy Spirit. In fairness, however, one should consider that it was in this very context that the Spirit usually revealed him/herself to suspect members of the community as a life-giving and protective force. I have established beyond doubt that prophets were often instrumental in preventing executions whenever it was apparent that villagers were using the *pungwe* to get rid of people they resented. In numerous cases suspect villagers were actually ordered to go and live in prophetic healing colonies, where the scrutinising, revelatory and disciplinary power of the Holy Spirit could, over a period of time, bring the culprits into line with the requirements of their society – hence, by appealing to the ultimate authority of the Holy Spirit, prophets managed

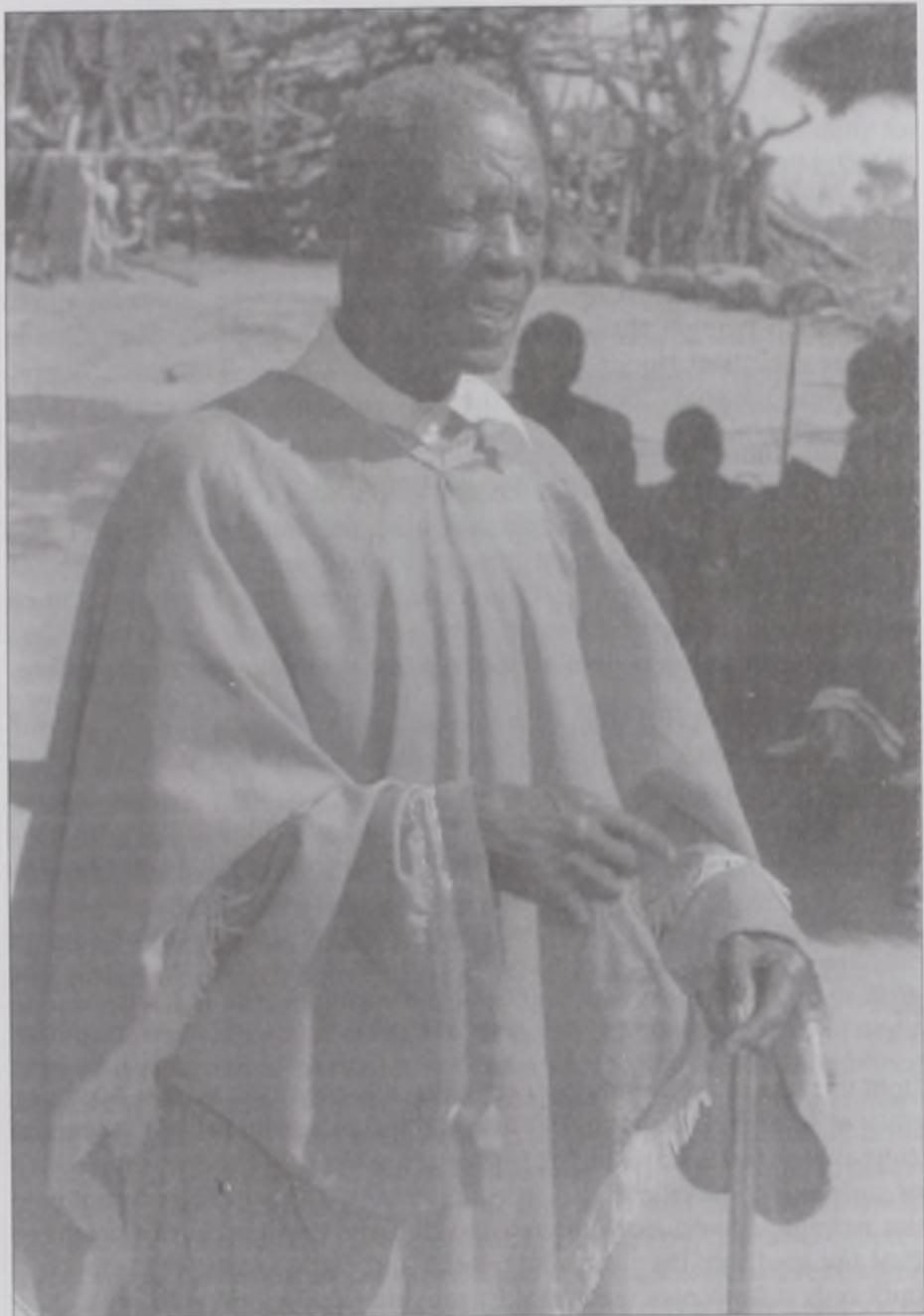


Plate 9 Bishop Prophet Musariri Dhliwayo of the Zion in Patmos Church

to introduce an element of moderation and sanity, often at grave personal risk, into *pungwe* situations where flaring emotions and the need for revenge in a war-torn society could easily claim innocent lives.

2.2.2.1 Case study

In Gutu South three *Ndaza* Zionist leaders rose to prominence through their active support of the guerrilla fighters. They were Peter Muponesi, a roving prophet operating in Gutu and Bikita; and Prophet Mashereketo and Bishop Prophet Musariri Dhliwayo (plate 9), both of whom lived in Vunjere, south of Mount Rasa, which the guerrillas declared a 'liberated zone'. Our study focuses on the third of these prophets.⁹

Musariri, an illiterate orphan, was chronically ill as a youngster. He only started experiencing deliverance and good health once he joined the Zion Apostolic Church, and established himself as a prophet and preacher after he had taught himself to read and write. Then he followed a secessionist leader, Chindoza, into the Zion Apostolic Church in Patmos and settled on a small farm near Zinhata township in Vunjere (Gutu South), where he ministered to a few small Zionist congregations.

During the years preceding *chimurenga* Zion in Patmos became a flourishing faith-healing colony. The sick and afflicted kept flocking to the popular bishop-prophet. The farm became a refuge for the needy, reflecting the compassion of Mwari. Harmony prevailed and the number of Zionist families grew. The Holy Spirit moved mightily in the healing miracles performed, in the rainclouds, the seed sown, the crops reaped. Growing herds of cattle, sheep and goats showed that Christ's salvation was not reserved for the distant heavens. Here was the Zionists' own place of milk and honey, a veritable little black Canaan in Vunjere ...

Until the fury of *chimurenga* struck, with the arrival of the first five guerrillas at Zion in Patmos in 1977. Soon the exacting price of liberating Zimbabwe's lost lands was felt in Zion. Musariri saw his own prophecies of suffering come true in the little settlement. The guerrillas camping in the neighbourhood made increasing demands on the farm's produce. First the fowl run, then the goat, sheep and cattle kraals were emptied, until only a few cows remained to provide the fighters with milk. Zion became destitute.

Nonetheless, Patmos kept functioning as a refuge for troubled members of the community, both guerrillas and *povo*. Sick and wounded comrades came to Musariri for prophetic diagnosis, prayer and laying on of hands. There was no rest for the man of God. He prayed daily for the safety of the fighters. He prophesied about enemy movements and how these could be countered. He warned the guerrillas of ambushes. He sprinkled their AKs with holy water, declaring their campaign a holy war against oppression. He preached that Mwari was on the side of the oppressed, that his 'whore son' Jesus (which was how many guerrillas referred to the alleged saviour of the white intruders) was the true liberator of all humankind. At night he sometimes prayed with Comrade Nyika for a speedy end to the suffering of the war. Patmos became a kind of operational base from where the liberation war was directed, guided and inspired by the powerful Holy Spirit of Zion.

Pungwe meetings were a combination of political instruction and kangaroo court judgement. Musariri had no option but to participate. He was cast in the role of judge on account of the divine power and illumination he stood for. Depending on what the Spirit revealed in each situation, he found himself prosecuting or defending. Altogether too much was expected of him. He had to fast and pray constantly to stay in touch with the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

In a precarious balance of interests between the *povo*, who desperately tried to avoid victimisation, and the guerrillas, who were determined to purge society of the wizardry of collaborating with the enemy, the prophet found himself under constant pressure. A serious mistake could be costly, if not fatal. He was in fact empowered to do what he had never aspired to: in the name of the Spirit to take or to save lives.

Two *pungwe* meetings stood out in Musariri's war career – one an occasion when life was preserved, the other culminating in death (Gumbo/Daneel: 1995, chapter 9). The first concerned Guymore, who had managed to escape from the Musukutwa battle scene with both his arms shattered. For months he received treatment in the Vunjere caves, where guerrilla medical officers, spirit mediums and Zionist faith-healers tried in vain to check the spreading gangrene. Musariri himself spent many hours in the caves with the wounded commander, urging him in vain to stop his heavy drinking so as to stand a better chance of recovery.

After the commander's death his fellow fighters cried out for revenge. The rumour was spread that members of the family which had tended the stricken hero towards the end had poisoned his tea. It was a nasty situation. When Musariri arrived at the *pungwe* the family had already been rounded up amidst vengeful shouts of 'Down with the wizards!' A family massacre appeared inevitable.

It was in this explosive situation that the Holy Spirit took hold of Musariri and revealed, first of all, that because of the sacrifices of fighters like Guymore the war would soon be won by black Zimbabwe; secondly, that no poison had been added to the deceased commander's food or drink and consequently there were to be no reprisals; and, in the third place, that the accused family were to reside for some time in Patmos so that they could receive instruction in the ways of Mwari. No question was raised about the authenticity of, and divine authority behind, the prophecy. The spectacle of glossolalia, prophetic gestures in a flurry of billowing vestments, preaching and prophecy served to subdue the angry and grief-stricken comrades. A family was saved. Zion in Patmos satisfied the comrades that even if there were a hidden threat to the cause, it would be neutralised by the penetrating cleansing activity of the Spirit of Zion.

The other *pungwe* was an even more serious situation. Four fighters had died of food poisoning after being fed by the *povo*. When Musariri arrived on the scene, one of the fighters was still thrashing about in poison-induced spasms. Shortly afterwards he died. An ugly mood prevailed as the remaining fighters rounded up township and village people. A punitive massacre was about to take place among the terrified people. Only at great risk to himself did the prophet intervene. He requested a *pungwe* for the next morning on the pretext of first having another *Ndaza* prophet summoned to help him identify the *varoyi* responsible for the poisoning. This was agreed to, thus averting a random gunning down of civilians.

There was, however, no way of avoiding or postponing prosecution. The next morning the two prophets, after a night of fasting and prayer, pointed out seven *varoyi*. They were the women who had prepared the poisoned eggs served to the fighters – at least, that was what the two prophets independently claimed the Spirit had revealed to them. All

seven were summarily executed by the fighters. Although Prophet Musariri was convinced that he was only the instrument of a divine verdict, and thankful as he was that the community had escaped an even worse fate, the faces of the seven witches have haunted his thoughts ever since.

During *chimurenga* Zion in Patmos evolved its own liberation theology – not detailed in books but a living reality, emanating directly from the Bible, to be danced and preached regularly in the midst of crisis. A central figure in this theology was the biblical liberator, Moses. Like many other black prophets, Musariri was considered by his subordinate clergy to be the Moses of the Zimbabwean black Israelites. Exodus 3 became the cornerstone of God's war message. As God had called Moses from the burning bush, so he summoned the black prophets of Zion. Only now *all* of Zion responded by taking off their shoes as Moses had done. This is still the practice today at all ceremonies of worship. Through this act Zionists express their total submission to the will and the war-call of Mwari. It is Mwari who creates, gives life and declares war. Mwari saw the plight of his black Israelites and he authorised and directed *chimurenga*, as he also directed Moses' every step. Through Mwari's inspiration Prophet Musariri, like Moses, laid down the laws of war.

The latter theme was worked out around Deuteronomy 20:2 and 3, which describes the role of an Israelite priest at the onset of war. Musariri and his preachers called on the men at arms to consult the man of God, to heed his divinely inspired laws prior to action. Focal in the biblical-cum-Zionist war laws was the message of Deuteronomy 20:10: 'When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it.' This text was contextualised to apply to the relations between guerrillas and villagers, with a built-in plea for moderation and tolerance. The spilling of innocent blood had to be prevented at all costs, as in Musariri's role as the preserver of innocent lives in the *pungwe* context.

The mandate of the black prophets lay in Christ's call to mission and discipleship (Mk 16:15–18). In Patmos the believers courageously proclaimed that Jesus was not really the son of a whore but the saviour of all people. In Africa he is the champion of the oppressed. He stands in the line of Moses and David. He led the oppressed black Israelites from

the white house of slavery. His Spirit is the true *Mweya Mutsvene*, the Spirit of Zion, who showed the fighters how to conduct Mwari's war.

Musariri's prophetic activities appear to be representative of those of many AIC war prophets. They lead one to surmise that the pneumatology evolved by the Spirit-type churches during the struggle presented a warring Spirit, deeply involved in a just cause, inspiring the fighting cadres to overthrow the oppressive rule of an alien enemy, as well as resisting the enemy within their own ranks which, if left unchecked, could destroy innocent lives. During the war AIC liberation theology led to a close identification of the concepts of salvation and political liberation. Yet the struggle for political and socio-economic liberation never obscured the vision of God's salvation in terms of eternal life. The perception and experience of the Spirit's direct involvement in providing peace and improved living conditions in this existence were certainly broadened and deepened, but this did not obscure the good news of future salvation. Many guerrilla fighters and people who sought refuge in the prophetic healing colonies were evangelised by the prophets whose assistance they sought. To such converts prophetic Spirit manifestations certainly meant both liberation from unjust rule and individual salvation, to be realised in the future.

Despite religious revival and church growth during the war years, there were also signs of retrogression. Paradoxically, greater concern for a liberating Spirit was often offset by a submerged or diminished Christology in both AICs and mainline churches. Not all church leaders had the courage or the standing among guerrilla fighters to publicly proclaim the saviourhood of Christ, as Musariri did, because the renaissance of traditional religion made many of the bush fighters oppose Christianity. Some of their units destroyed or closed down church buildings. They saw Jesus as the white man's god, the epitome of oppressive rule (Daneel 1989b:72f). Consequently they operated under the slogan, *Pasi na Jesu!* (down with Jesus!). Many church leaders and congregations who continued to profess their faith in Jesus Christ had their Bibles and vestments burnt publicly by the guerrillas. Some were martyred, others were forced underground. Many church leaders today frankly admit that during the war years they continued to preach Mwari the Father, the one God who was known in Africa long before Christianity came, and that they prophesied or acted in the Spirit, but

that they seldom spoke about Christ for fear of being branded traitors to the cause.

In view of all this it is clear that the Zimbabwean AICs made a significant contribution to the second *chimurenga*, and that many of them are justly proud of their share in the reconquest of the lost lands and the attainment of political independence. Their liberation theology, by virtue of its holistic nature, already contained the seeds of environmental engagement.

NOTES

- 1 This study does not deal with foreign missions and mission-related 'younger churches'. The omission does not imply that these churches have been inactive in the ecological field. They have undoubtedly dealt with socio-political and ecological issues in various ways. But this is subject matter for another study.
- 2 Beach (1980:222f) contests the cult's link with the Rozvi dynasty and argues in favour of a recent Venda origin in the south. Huizer (1991:18) apparently holds a similar view. He refers to an interview with the cult priest at the Njelele shrine which suggests that 'the main centre of the Mwari cult was moved after long residence in Venda country (in present-day Northern Province, RSA), from whence the name Njelele, meaning "sacred mountain", was taken' (see Ranger 1967:19–20). As often happens with oral traditions, conclusive proof cannot be provided and the speculative element in the arguments outweighs the alleged evidence. When Beach (1980:249) claims, for instance, that 'the traditions of the shrine priests themselves give Venda origins, except when they choose to claim a Karanga origin to a Karanga clientele', he seems to forget that many of the priests in fact belong to the Mbire Shoko tribe, and as Karanga they claim to have interacted closely with the Rozvi in administering the Mwari cult in the distant past. Such claims suggest a Rozvi-Mbire rather than a Venda origin. Considering, in addition, the minor function of Venda cultists in the Matopos shrine complex where they act as keepers (*vachengeti*) of the shrines, the Venda connection in Northern Province, RSA, may well indicate a Zimbabwean origin through Rozvi-Venda contact, rather than a recent introduction of the cult from the south. This argument, of course, does not rule out ethnic interaction and Venda influence on the cult.
- 3 Cobbing (1977:81f), for instance, considers Ranger's archivally based analysis distorted because it exaggerates white reaction in Rhodesia at the time. Beach (1979:392–420; 1986:119–148) correctly points out that not all chief-

taincies joined the rebellion and that some, particularly those who still resented the Ndebele raids, collaborated with the white administration.

- 4 A complex of shrines kept functioning in the Matonjeni area at Njelele, Dula, Wirirani, Dzilo, Vembe (in more recent years) and other places. Through a network of cult messengers (*vanya*), supportive chiefs throughout central and southern Mashonaland, Matabeleland and even as far afield as Botswana and the Venda areas in Northern Province, RSA, the cult maintained a geographically wide sphere of influence.
- 5 Huizer (1991:21) writes: 'The Zambezi river valley remained the scene of many rebellions against the Portuguese, in particular, who had introduced *prazos*, a system of large estates, in the nineteenth century. Between 1884 and 1904, five rebellions took place, all supported or guided by spirit mediums and chiefs, who acted as guardians of the health and wellbeing of local communities (reference to Isaacman 1979:129). Rebellion was endemic in many surrounding areas as well.'
- 6 Barrett (1968:116,156f), for example, posited the theory that African 'reaction to missions' is the root cause of the emergence and growth of these churches (cf Daneel 1987:97–101).
- 7 This information is based largely on my discussions with senior priest Jonas Chokoto at Dzilo during the late 1980s and early 1990s prior to his death, and with his brothers, the late Simon and Adamu Chokoto, who were operating the Wirirani shrine when I first visited Matonjeni in the 1960s and 1970s.
- 8 My impression from many interviews with ex-combatants is that Lan's sharp distinction (1985:166–170), in respect of the Dande district, between chiefs compromised by their financial dependence on the white administration and their – to the liberation forces – more trustworthy counterparts, the spirit mediums, who proved more loyal in the struggle, does not apply in equal measure to Masvingo Province. Ex-combatants indicated that they were aware at the time of the difficulties facing the chiefs and the inevitability of their playing virtually double roles in the war situation. They were satisfied that the majority of chiefs in the province supported the struggle. In a few cases detachment and section commanders even considered accompanying certain chiefs from the Bikita district to the relative safety of Mozambican camps because their overt support of the struggle was placing them in jeopardy.
- 9 This case study was compiled from several interviews with Bishop Musariri and some of his clergy, as well as from *chimurenga* sermons preached in postwar Zimbabwe in an attempt to recapture the Patmos message of liberation.