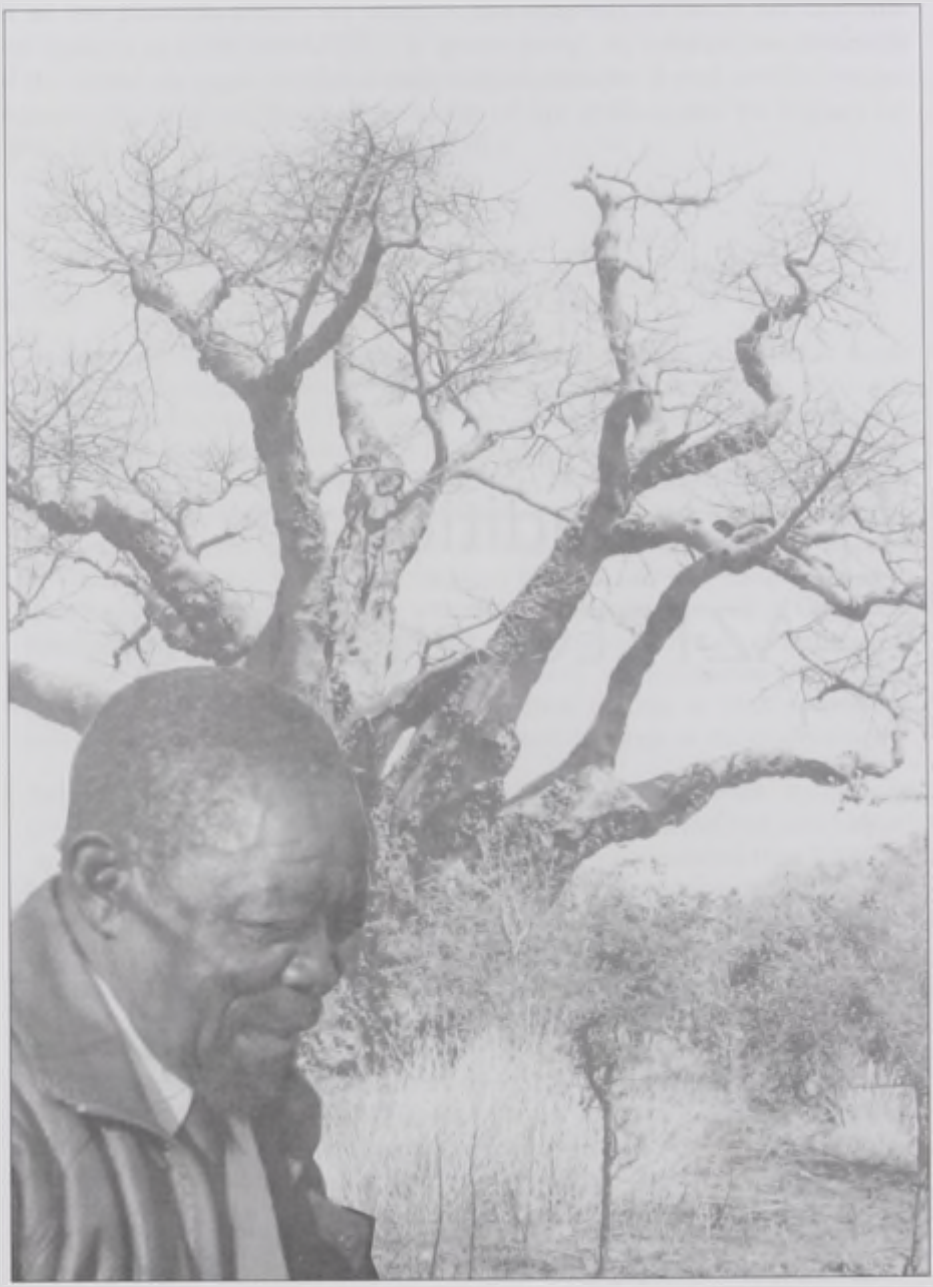
PART 2

Traditional (AZTREC) endeavour



Chief Muuyu (Baobab) Murinye – patron of AZTREC

CHAPTER 4

Traditional belief systems and *chimurenga* motives in ecology

In this chapter we examine the evolution of AZTREC's ecological liberation struggle since the inception of the movement in 1988. In its redefinition of the struggle the healing of the ecologically still lost lands is paramount. In its constitution, as we have seen, this finds expression in the goals of afforestation, wildlife conservation and the protection of water resources.

So far afforestation has been AZTREC's cardinal concern, and tree planting its main weapon in combating deforestation and other forms of soil degradation. This chapter focuses, therefore, on tree-planting ceremonies which channel traditional religious impulses into earth-healing activity.

The *chimurenga* background is still very much in evidence, partly because AZTREC decided to interpret its earth-healing programmes as an extended, diversified process of liberation, and partly because the modern revival of traditional religion and culture – which reaffirms the authority and influence of the traditional chiefs and mediums – is rooted in this anticolonial history. First, in every district where trees are planted and nurseries are established AZTREC conducts its offensive from the same traditional spiritual base as the guerrillas, chiefs, mediums and *povo*, namely the guidance of the *varidzi venyika*. It also sends regular delegations to the oracular shrines of Mwari vaMatonjeni to report on ecological progress and receive directives for the continuing struggle of *kufukidza nyika* (clothing the earth). Second, key positions on the AZTREC executive have been held by *chimurenga* veterans such as Chinovuriri, erstwhile liaison officer between mediums and ZANLA high command at Chimoio; Pfupajena, popular Duma medium on the Musikavanhu war front; vaZarira, the Duma medium who advised guer-

rillas in the Zvishavane area; MuDende, trained guerrilla fighter and medium; the guerrillas' consultant in Masvingo Province, Lydia Chabata, who became AZTREC's first nursery overseer; and Cosmas Gonese, former detachment commander Weeds Chakarakata of the ZANLA forces, who became the association's first general secretary.

Some of these *chimurenga* veterans have since joined Gonese's splinter group, AZTREC Trust. This is understandable in view of the emotional bonds forged between members of the schismatic group during the war years. This development has not prevented ZIRRCON-AZTREC from drawing on *chimurenga* history for inspiration in mobilising its green force. In traditionalist circles war heroes abound, whatever their status at the time. Consequently no single group in Shona society can lay exclusive claim to the inspirational legacy of the nation-wide struggle. Nevertheless, inasmuch as some of the Gonese defectors contributed significantly to AZTREC's initial ecological effort, particularly by harnessing traditional African forces for conservationist work, they are mentioned here for the sake of historical accuracy.

Chimurenga veterans like Chinovuriri, MuDende, Tovera Chaminuka and a large number of less prominent yet still active mediums, as well as the vast majority of chiefs in Masvingo Province, remained loyal to ZIRRCON-AZTREC. Hence the withdrawal of the Gonese defectors did not greatly affect the traditionalist contribution to the ecological drive of our movement.

4.1 Afforestation at the behest of guardian ancestors

AZTREC has proved beyond doubt its ability to mobilise peasant communities. Like other African peoples, the Shona live with their ancestors, whether they venerate them in traditional fashion or revere them Christian style. And when the ancestors call for the ravished land to be clad once more with trees, people in the rural areas respond. Senior members of Zimbabwe's Forestry Commission have admitted that they had never before witnessed such sweeping enthusiasm and commitment to ecological conservation in Masvingo's rural communities. To understand this enthusiasm for ecological reform we have to turn to the spirit beliefs and rituals which generated the vision and motivation for a better environment.

4.1.1 Ritual tree planting

ZIRRCON-AZTREC's executive and annual general meetings were described in the previous chapter as improvised *pungwe* meetings: meetings where ecological warfare is planned with due regard to customary law and ancestral sanction. In other words, in discussing the performance of nursery keepers, the types of trees to be planted in new woodlots, preparations, fencing, aftercare and the like, ancestral involvement is assumed. True to the traditional African worldview, the wellbeing of society is considered to require the participation of all its members, both the living and the living dead. In this case the performance of the living earthkeepers is subject to either the mystical approval or the retaliation of the guardian ancestors of the land, depending on the living role-players' dedication and consistency in observing the generally accepted ecological norms. The wartime *pungwe* involved a demonstration of right-mindedness in response to the ancestrally sanctioned propaganda and codes of behaviour. In this sense AZTREC's workshops, instruction sessions and conscientisation programmes are *pungwe* events based on a similar ethic, monitored on each occasion by the true representatives of the ancestors, the chiefs and the mediums.

Tree-planting ceremonies out in the rural areas are ritual events, modelled largely on the traditional *mukwerere* rain rituals (Daneel 1971:121-128). Like the *mukwerere*, AZTREC's *mafukidzanyika* (literally 'earth-clothing') ceremonies focus on the environment and the need for rain – in this instance for the newly planted seedlings to survive and grow. Accordingly they are held at the same stage of the seasonal cycle, the rainy season. Preparations for an AZTREC *mafukidzanyika* ceremony are very similar to those for a *mukwerere*, in that tribal elders expect villagers who participate in and benefit from the tree planting to contribute finger millet or sorghum for beer brewing. Elderly women, past child-bearing age, of the ruling lineage of the chief or headman in whose area the ceremony is held, are responsible for brewing the beer. The chief, or elders related to him, contributes one or more sacrificial beasts for the occasion and villagers are expected to make small donations to purchase additional food and drink. AZTREC sometimes raises funds to subsidise the larger tree-planting ceremonies, but encourages self-help by the communities. Thus the old custom of the entire com-

munity contributing to the ritual, thereby showing their respect to the guardian ancestors, is upheld.

Although tree-planting rituals are initiated by the ZIRRCON-AZTREC executive, in rural areas organisational control is exercised by tribal dignitaries – the chief, medium and senior headmen of the area.

In this respect the improvised *mukwerere* tree-planting ritual reflects a broader spectrum of tribal authority than orthodox *mikwerere*. Both emphasise lineage unity (Daneel 1971:127), that is, the involvement of the regional spirit hierarchy – particularly the tribal progenitor as mediator – in contrast to more limited family ancestral rituals, like the *kugadzira* (home-bringing ritual; cf Daneel 1971:101f), where senior lineage ancestors are rarely mentioned. But through the presence of the local chief, a contingent of headmen, and usually a number of visiting AZTREC chiefs from elsewhere in Masvingo Province, the actual ritual unit has a wider spiritual representation than present-day traditional *mikwerere*, organised on a more limited scale by individual ward or village headmen. If one considers, moreover, that participants in AZTREC rituals frequently include Cabinet Ministers, provincial government officials and representatives of Forestry, Natural Resources, Education and Agritex, then it is clear that the ritual ambit of the ceremony has expanded from the regional tribal level to a provincial multi-tribal, if not national, level. The more comprehensive ritual unit makes the participants aware of the interrelatedness and interaction of various regional spirit hierarchies in a common cause. Thus a kind of multi-tribal 'ecumenism' is established, reminiscent of the *chimurenga* war council of the spirit world, in which regional and more exclusively tribal concerns were transcended by provincial or national interests.

But the wider 'ecumenical' spirit unity in ecological warfare at no point obscures or diminishes the role of the guardian ancestors of the region where the ceremony takes place. In the ritual addresses to the ancestors cited below the senior regional spirits are mentioned by name and their mediation between their living descendants and the traditional creator God is relied upon, as is the case in all *mukwerere* supplications. After all, the local villagers, relating to AZTREC through their chief, medium and headmen, remain responsible to the local guardian spirits for faithfully fulfilling their duties in the newly planted woodlot, such as watering the seedlings, protecting them against domestic ani-

mals and other forms of aftercare. The wider 'ecumenical' perspective is therefore provided not so much by ritual address of specific guardian ancestors as by the creation of a new ritual context, which – through numerous conscientising speeches and the participation of tribal dignitaries from further afield – links the local spirit order with that of the entire nation in pursuit of a liberated environment.

In an article entitled 'Ecological religion', Makamuri (in Virtanen 1991: 146f) indicates how immigrant elites in the rural areas vied for political power with the ruling elites of the chiefs. He argues that the creation of village and ward development committees (VIDCOs and WADCOs), together with the curtailment of the traditional chiefs' land allocation powers in the post-Independence period, enabled many immigrant kraalheads and ward headmen to gain considerable local political power as VIDCO and WADCO councillors. In some instances 'they even took over from tribal chiefs the power to allocate land', says Makamuri (1991:151). The political conflict between immigrant kraalheads and chiefs manifested itself partly in the subdivisioning of *mukwerere* or *mutoro* rain rituals. This is not a new phenomenon, but Makamuri's description of the mushrooming of *mutoro* rituals in the Mazvihwa communal lands of the Chivi district suggests intensified politicisation of traditional rituals with a view to obtaining local control of natural resources. 'Each clan in Mazvihwa,' Makamuri (1991:157) contends, 'created its own *mutoro* because they were seeking to establish religious autonomy in order to undermine the political domination of the other clans.' The chiefs in their turn tried to maintain the status quo by neutralising the demands of prominent immigrant kraalheads in various ways: by incorporating them in the chief's council (*dare*) as *makurukota* (senior advisers); by refusing to permit *mutoro* fragmentation on hereditary grounds; or by recognising immigrant spirit hierarchies and a degree of ritual autonomy, provided the immigrant ritual unit acknowledged the final authority of the regional spirits of the ruling elite.

AZTREC's *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies apparently transcend, even if only temporarily, the tribal political conflict manifested in the proliferation of immigrant *mukwerere* or *mutoro* rituals. Common concern for the environment and 'ecumenical' unity of spirit powers find expression in united action, in much the same way as the crisis management of *chimurenga* required nation-wide unity, superseding divisive tribal

Plate 23 Forward the war of the trees! Spirit medium vaZarira Marambatemwa encourages fellow earthkeepers to persevere in the struggle

Plate 24 (above)
Communing with the guardian ancestors by presenting them with snuff and talking to them as an introduction to tree-planting.
From left: MuDende (feathered headgear), Chinovuriri (white shirt) and vaZarira (leopard skin)

Plate 25 Chief Murinye addresses the local guardian ancestors and drinks beer on their behalf during an AZTREC tree-planting ritual

political rivalries. It is not clear at this stage whether our earth-clothing tree-planting ceremonies are in fact contributing to lasting solutions between ruling and immigrant elites. Yet in the ritual context of *mafukidzanyika* presiding chiefs and VIDCO or WADCO councillors (both immigrants and members of the chiefly lineages) demonstrate convincingly the will to form a common front in the war of the trees. In none of the numerous AZTREC tree-planting ceremonies conducted since 1988 have tribal political rivalries surfaced or marred the proceedings.

There can be little doubt that the tribally comprehensive *mafukidzanyika* rituals benefit the chiefs by enhancing their status and reinforcing their political authority. Some of them almost certainly view AZTREC as a means of restoring at least some of their former powers and dignity. Nevertheless, the fact that immigrant kraalheads and headmen have on the whole cooperated with the chiefs in the new ritual context and that there has been no overt protest in the AZTREC chiefdoms against tribal political misuse of the new association, suggests that what we observe here is much more than mere pragmatism or power play on both sides. Whether because of ancestral sanction and persuasion or ecological urgency, or both, the fact is that the new ritual engenders unity of purpose and resolve. Unlike the fragmentation of *mutoro* units, which emphasises clan autonomy and tribal diversity, AZTREC's improvised *mukwerere* rituals promote multitribal unity in a national, if not a continent-wide, cause.

4.1.2 Mystical union: a condition for ecological combat

At the start of each *mafukidzanyika* tree-planting ceremony there is a presentation of beer and snuff, together with a ritual address to the land's guardian ancestors. The senior chief, medium or tribal elder conducting the ritual proceedings congregates with other traditional dignitaries around the beer pots, which are placed next to the seedlings to be planted. Dressed for the occasion in official regalia (ostrich-feathered headdresses, necklaces made of bones, beads or carnivore claws, a variety of leopard, cheetah, civet and rock-rabbit skins, etc), the AZTREC mediums highlight the traditional nature of the ritual. The chiefs wear their bronze breastplates and white pith helmets, old colonial symbols of their political authority. While addressing the ancestors, the ritual officiant pours ancestral beer from a calabash down the sides

of the beer pots and on the seedlings. Snuff is also presented to the ancestors, while snuff-horns are passed round amongst the tribal elders, symbolising communion with the spirit world (plates 24 & 25).

The following addresses illustrate the nature of ritual union between the living and the living dead enacted during *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies:

In December 1988 AZTREC proceedings in Chief Negovano's area in Bikita district were opened by spirit medium vaZarira. She knelt next to the beer pots and seedlings, clad in black with a splendid leopard skin draped round her shoulders. With quiet respect she spoke the following words:

> Now that we come to address our ancestors we do so in the knowledge that the ancestors are the land, the ancestors are the water, the ancestors are the *sadza* (stiff porridge) we eat, and the ancestors are the clothes we wear. Without the ancestors we will be without water, without food, without clothes. All our wellbeing (*upenyu hwakanaka;* literally 'good life') will be lost. So at this point we arrive at a moment of truth, one of great importance. It is not a time to laugh derisively as some of you do when you enter your churches.
>
> Today we want to place our own spirits with those of our ancestors, together with our activities in their land. We cannot simply act on our own without informing them. If we do so, we would be transgressing. Then all the trees we plant will die. We will have worked to no purpose, without directing our action in truth. Should we then later find that the trees of Negovano have died, we will know that we have come here without (an ancestrally sanctioned) purpose.
>
> All of you, please bow down now!
>
> (To the ancestors, while performing beer libation and snuff ritual:) Oh, you people, you who have received the staff (land authority) from Negovano, the staff which has existed since ancient times, we did not initiate this (responsibility for the land). You did that long ago. You venerable ones, go and tell Negovano. You, Negovano, lift to your forefathers this action taken by the council of spirit mediums (then still AZSM) in your land. Let your fathers in turn notify their forefathers so that they can inform Musikavanhu (literally 'creator of people', that is, God) of the work of the children, the council of mediums, here in the land of Negovano. I thank you greatly for having

gathered the spirit mediums and their supporters here.

We ask for dew. Make us dew, the dew of old, in which the children played outside so as not to disturb the home. That (rain) came in the past with such abundance. We kneel for it in all earnest. See us, oh forefathers, and let the good things of the past return. Let the holy rivers, together with all the blessings we once saw, return. Return the good things of old, we beseech you, so that we can see that you are the ancestors of truth.

You have returned to your ancient seats of power. Even if you were rejected (during the colonial period), you have been returned to power today. The reason for your return is the soil itself, because the entire country has become barren. So, Negovano, we request today that you will wipe out our footprints with rain. Likewise, Zhame (God), see us congregated under this tree. Oh, great Zhame, bless the purpose of our gathering here! Place our request before Musikavanhu, you of the rocks of Mwari!

Following this address, a number of ecologically conscientising speeches were delivered by chiefs, district and ward councillors, AZSM dignitaries, and so on. Then the tree-planting commenced.

On 22 December 1990, at an AZTREC tree-planting ceremony in Chief Nhema's area in Zaka district, a tribal elder, Mutengai Nhema, addressed the regional ancestors as follows:

We have gathered here today in honour of you, our ancestor, father Nhema. Your children want to clothe the earth (*kufukidza nyika*) which is naked. We want you, our father, to bless the work your children will be doing here. We ask for rain because your children are being scorched by the heat of the sun. Give us the coolness of water! Even those who provide us with seedlings are asking your guidance in their work of clothing the earth; this land which you see is barren because of our chopping down all the trees.

You, *mhondoro* (the senior 'lion' spirits), have no wilderness left in which to dwell. We want to return the forests to the naked land. (At this point snuff is given to the ancestors by sprinkling it on the ground.) Pass on our plea, you, oh Nhema and Pfupajena, to the unknown ancestors. You, our forefathers, also pass on our plea to Musikavanhu (God) so that the trees we plant will be watered suffi-

ciently to survive. We ask you, in addition, to bring the numerous deaths out here to an end, to eliminate the (figurative) lion which is devouring many of our people.

We have brought you this calabash of beer so that you and the other ancestors can quench your thirst. Your children are ready to clothe the earth. Notify the ancestors whom we do not know and Musikavanhu. Your children want to protect your holy shrines with trees so that you can rest in the shade. We want to thank you that you have gathered us here. Don't forget us. (At this point ancestral beer is poured down the sides of the beer pots and on the ground.) Once again we give you snuff to share with our guests.

You, grandmother Chabata (addressing Lydia Chabata, then still nursery supervisor of AZTREC), tell our guests that this snuff-horn is our ancestral spirit. For it is the one we use when we approach our holy graves to tell the ancestors about our problems.

After this address, spirit medium vaZarira, then still AZTREC vice president, as always wrapped in her leopard skin, made the following speech:

I am fearful as I stand here addressing the descendants of Nhema, because I am standing on the bones of our (Duma) ancestors. I call upon you, father Nhema, as I am in your country, I being a Duma medium. I did not elect to be a *svikiro*, but I was elected to be one while still in my mother's womb. As I stand under this *muonde* (wild fig tree) I request vaNhema to be present here because he used to rest under this very tree; here where he received food from Matonjeni before he travelled to confer with Zhame. This indeed is the tree where Nhema ate and rested, the *muonde* which provides human beings with nourishing fruit.

I want to call upon vaNhema today. Whether he is in the cave (grave), up in this tree here, or in the pool of water over there, we ask him to come and witness what his children are doing in his territory. The problem of our land is that it is like a woman whose dress was eaten by white ants. Surely such a woman will not be happy.

If you are in the pool, vaNhema, lift up your head and observe what your people are doing in your area. You have allowed us to come here today. Had you not done so, nobody would have been present to plant trees.

We, the spirit mediums, have a problem with the way people are destroying the country. The holy shrines where our ancestors were buried are being destroyed. These shrines (encompassing large tracts of wooded mountain) sustained people with food and life. But the people themselves destroy them. I am deeply concerned about our people not realising to what extent our country – the country of our ancestors – is being destroyed. Some people will say: 'The old woman is mad! Why should she involve herself in tree planting?' You may have heard that my name is vaZarira. But my nickname is *Marambatemwa* (the name traditionally used for holy groves where all tree felling was prohibited). I was nicknamed thus because whenever I find a person felling trees, I fall ill and go home in a terrible state.

If you go to the mountains you will find all the holy groves naked, because of wanton tree felling. These shrines used to be the fortresses and the dwelling places of the ancestors and the ancestral lions (*shumba dzavadzimu*). Since we ourselves are the destroyers of trees, we have to restore the shrines through tree planting. Where there are no trees there are no rains, no springs, no marshlands. As this is our own fault, we, the children of Nhema, shall dedicate ourselves to clothing the denuded land. Forward, the war of the trees!

When we started this organisation people were asking: 'What are the *masvikiro*?' They did not know that we, the mediums, represent the ancestral guardians of the land and that we fight this war of the trees, helped and directed by the guardian ancestors.

The trees are a gift given to us by Musikavanhu through our ancestors. We are alive as people because of the trees. The trees clean the air we breathe. Our ancestors in earlier years were strong people with a longer lifespan than ours because they breathed clean air, while we breathe polluted air in the absence of trees. That is why many people are just dying these days.

In the past we were prohibited from moving in certain forests after dark. The elders warned that the lion spirits of our ancestors were active in those areas at that time. Nowadays these *mhondoro* are no longer seen because we have destroyed their habitat. Now, as you observe the barren land, note that all the *masvikiro* are shedding tears in the midst of such devastation.

One of the most striking features of these ritual addresses, which characterise AZTREC's new *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies, is the similarity to *mukwerere* rain rituals in the approach to the regional guardian ancestors. In an earlier description of *mukwerere* rites I wrote:

> Due to the spiritual superiority of the tribal spirits the attitudes of ritual participants seem more reverent than during a family ritual when, for example, the daughters-in-law are allowed to jest with their *tezvara* (father-in-law) spirits, or the ritual officiant is heard to rebuke his family ancestors (*midzimu yapamusha*) ... To the Western observer *mukwerere* procedure therefore seems to conform more closely to what is understood by 'worship' (religiously paying homage to), and the supplications to the tribal spirits sound more like genuine prayers than does the straightforward approach to the family ancestors (Daneel 1971:127).

Both the ritual officiants quoted above, vaZarira and vaNhema, showed great respect to the apical ancestors of the chiefdom. VaZarira knelt as if in prayer while addressing Negovano and insisted that her communication constituted a serious moment of truth, more so than church services attended by flippant church-goers. At this point the *svikiro*'s reaction against some church people's pharisaic and judgmental attitudes towards traditional religion surfaced.

It is only natural that the *mafukidzanyika* should include pleas for rain, as good rains and AZTREC's afforestation goals go hand in hand. Again we observe the *mukwerere* metaphor of requesting rain 'to wipe out the footprints' of the ritual participants. Traditionally the obliteration of footprints by rain (be they the footprints of delegations to the Matonjeni oracular shrines or those of *mukwerere* participants), either on the day of the ritual or soon afterwards, is interpreted as a sure sign of divine and ancestral approval. Although the entire hierarchy of senior tribal spirits is not enumerated in the same detail as in *mukwerere* ceremonies, their central function of mediating between living descendants and rain-giving God is no less prominent. Both the ritual officiants, vaZarira and vaNhema, requested the apical ancestor(s) to pass on their requests via the body of unknown ancestors to God.

Of interest here is the firm belief in the close link between apical ancestral spirits and the creator God, and their common concern for ecological issues concerning the land. The closeness of God and the people's

dependence on him/her as the ultimate owner of the country or universe are more pronounced in the *mafukidzanyika* (and *mukwerere*) context than in family rituals. The notion of a united council of tribal guardian spirits, operating under the direct guidance of Mwari and giving directives to the ecological fighters, is a clear parallel with the ancestral *dare rechimurenga* under whose authority the guerrillas operated. It should be noted here that whether God was addressed directly or through the tribal ancestors – an alternation also characteristic of rain rituals (Daneel 1971:127) – the names 'Zhame' and 'Musikavanhu' featured more regularly than 'Mwari'. This could be attributable to Rozvi-Duma rivalry, as a result of which for a long time the Duma tended to frequent the high-God shrine of Musikavanhu in the Chipinge district rather than the Rozvi-affiliated shrines of Mwari in the Matopo hills. Both ritual officiants and tribal spirits in these ceremonies were obviously Duma.

In both rituals communication with the ancestors, the symbolic reaffirmation of mystical union between the living and the living dead, featured as a premise of the ecological struggle. True to the Shona worldview, major environmental endeavours cannot be initiated without the guidance and approval of the mystical forces regulating land issues. The ritual officiants addressed the ancestors as the ones who had actually gathered the people for tree planting, and the ones from whom the new association sought guidance. It was the initiative of the ancestors that mattered. Ecological endeavour without their inspiration and directives would be futile as, to quote vaZarira, such action would be misdirected and result in destruction of the trees planted. Here fervent belief in the mystical powers of the regional spirits features strongly. They are the ones representing the traditional staff, the ancient seats of (tribal political) power, despite their temporary rejection by the colonial powers. They, therefore, are entitled to retaliate by withdrawing their protection from the trees planted, or to give their blessing to the green revolution.

In the ritual context full recognition of the powers of the ancestors remains a dominant theme. This is highlighted by vaZarira's insistence on complete union – the placing together of spirits – between the living and the living dead, in preparation for ecological combat. The indispensability of ancestral power for the creation and maintenance of human wellbeing is poignantly stated in the apt portrayal of the *midzi-*

mu as actually being the land, the food, the rain and the clothing of the people. No harmony or equilibrium between the forces of nature and humanity is conceivable without the ritually re-enacted union between all members of human society – deceased, living and unborn. This union, manifested in ritual, once again persuades the mystical ancestral powers to preserve socio-ecological wellbeing. Here individualism is rejected as offensive and destructive. Hence the assumption, too, of the pervasive presence of the ancestors. It is required of them to maintain, through their mystical power, the checks and balances of socio-ecological harmony. Whether *tateguru* Nhema was in the burial cave, up in the wild fig tree or in the nearby pool, he had to 'lift up his head' so as to observe the tree-planting proceedings and bring the entire event to God's notice. Only thus will the holistic interplay of natural forces, human beings, spirit powers and God him/herself be complete and the curative treatment of the environment lasting and beneficial.

Ancestral presence also has an *ethical dimension*. It is to the guardian spirits, whose privilege it is to rest in the shade of trees in the holy groves (*marambatemwa*), that public confessions of guilt about environmental destruction are made by the ritual officiants on behalf of all participants. In a sense, therefore, the ancestors are the ecological conscience of their living descendants. They are the ones who provoke confessions of guilt and instil resolve to remedy the situation, since they are the custodians of the land whose prerogatives are denied through wanton destruction of their forests. Their own wellbeing is being threatened by the irreverence of their living descendants who no longer heed customary ecological laws or show ritual respect. A direct result of such neglect is the barrenness of those areas where the *mhondoro* (lion) spirits used to dwell and the resultant disappearance of the latter – a withdrawal which leads to drought and agricultural decline in the community.

Ritual officiants are only too aware of this sad state of affairs. Their ecological concern surfaces in lament and nostalgia for the past when there was abundance, when the holy rivers flowed and wildlife abounded in the forests. VaZarira fervently pleads for restoration of the past. But her nostalgia and pleas to the ancestors do not stagnate in passive fatalism, as if a new order can only be ushered in by God and the spirit forces. On the contrary, her communion with the ancestors reflects determination to fight the war of the trees personally, and to involve all

her fellow tribespeople and fellow Zimbabweans in the struggle. In other words, confessions to the ancestors about ecological guilt convert into resolve and remedial action. Significantly, too, the speeches of tribal dignitaries and the tree-planting activities which complement the *mafukidzanyika* addresses to the ancestors, reflect the growing conviction of AZTREC participants that all is not lost, that an ancestrally induced and directed 'war' can still turn the tide of environmental degradation.

Similar trends in the ranks of the AAEC will be discussed in *African Earthkeepers*, volume 2. Here, however, the agent motivating the confession of ecological guilt is the Holy Spirit, operating through AIC prophets. Thus the Holy Spirit functions as the inspiring and protective *muridzi venyika* who directs the Christian forces in the green struggle.

4.1.3 The role of the chiefs

As mentioned before, most *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies are characterised by a wide representation of traditional elders, government institutions, Cabinet Ministers, educational institutions, religious bodies and rural people. A strong sense of unity and common purpose marks ritual celebration, speech contents and tree planting. Shared concern for a fast deteriorating environment acts as a catalyst for joint action. It is striking, too, that much of the inspiration, ideology and organisational drive for ecological warfare is expected to come from the traditional ecologists – the chiefs and *masvikiro* – in their age-old capacity as ritual and political representatives of the senior ancestral guardians of the land.

Said Gonese, former general secretary of ZIRRCON-AZTREC, at one of the ceremonies: 'The arrangement of our association is for the chiefs and *masvikiro* to take the initiative against deforestation, because they represent the customs of our ancestors, they have the (ecological) knowledge to instruct the young, and they have the authority to prevent destruction. Their aim is this: *Let the holy places of the past once again be honoured as holy! Let the places where trees were chopped down be restored!*'

Significantly, this prominent ex-combatant here attributes a leading role to chiefs and mediums jointly, as if they are one. In his view, therefore, the controversy regarding the unequal contributions of these tribal

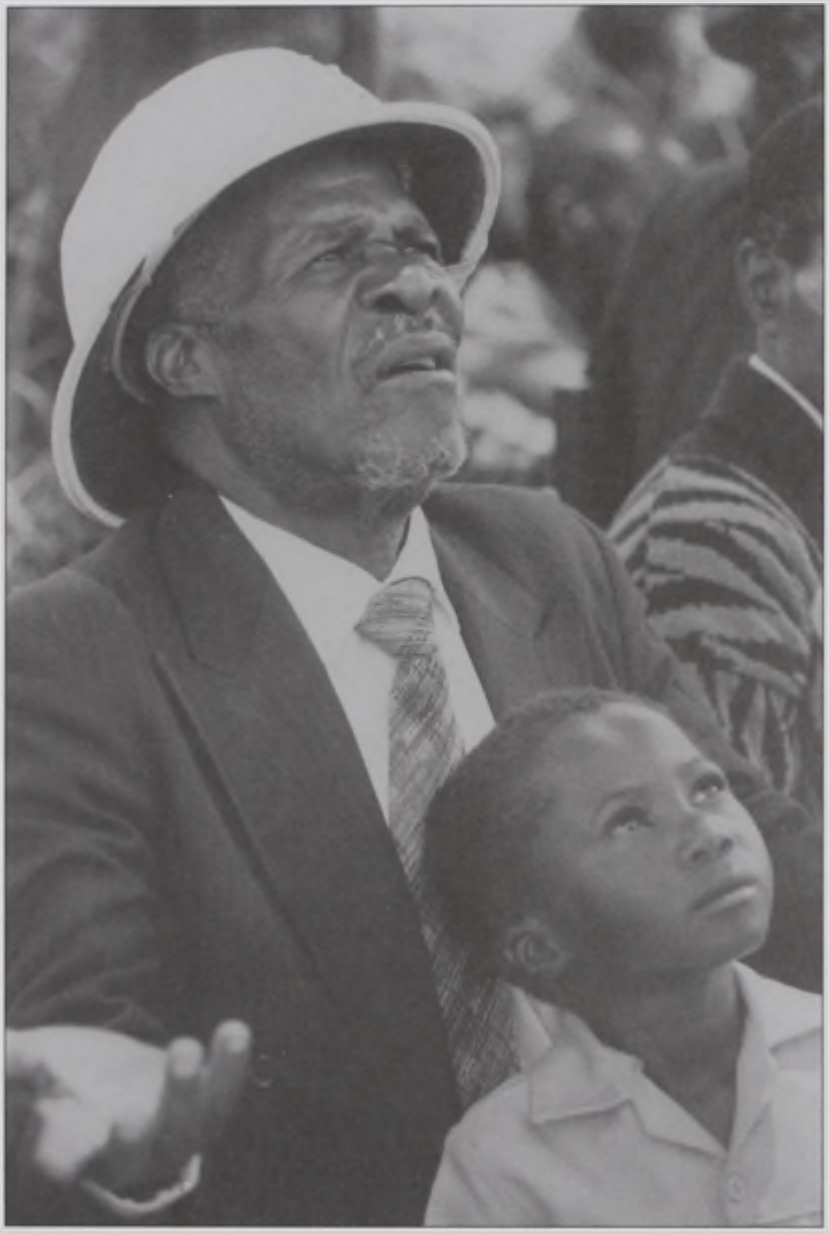


Plate 26 Chief Chikwanda complains about the barren land and requests intensification of the earthkeeping struggle during a *mafukidzanyika* ceremony

Plate 27 Chief Chikwanda addresses the guardian ancestors of the land during beer libation preceding tree planting

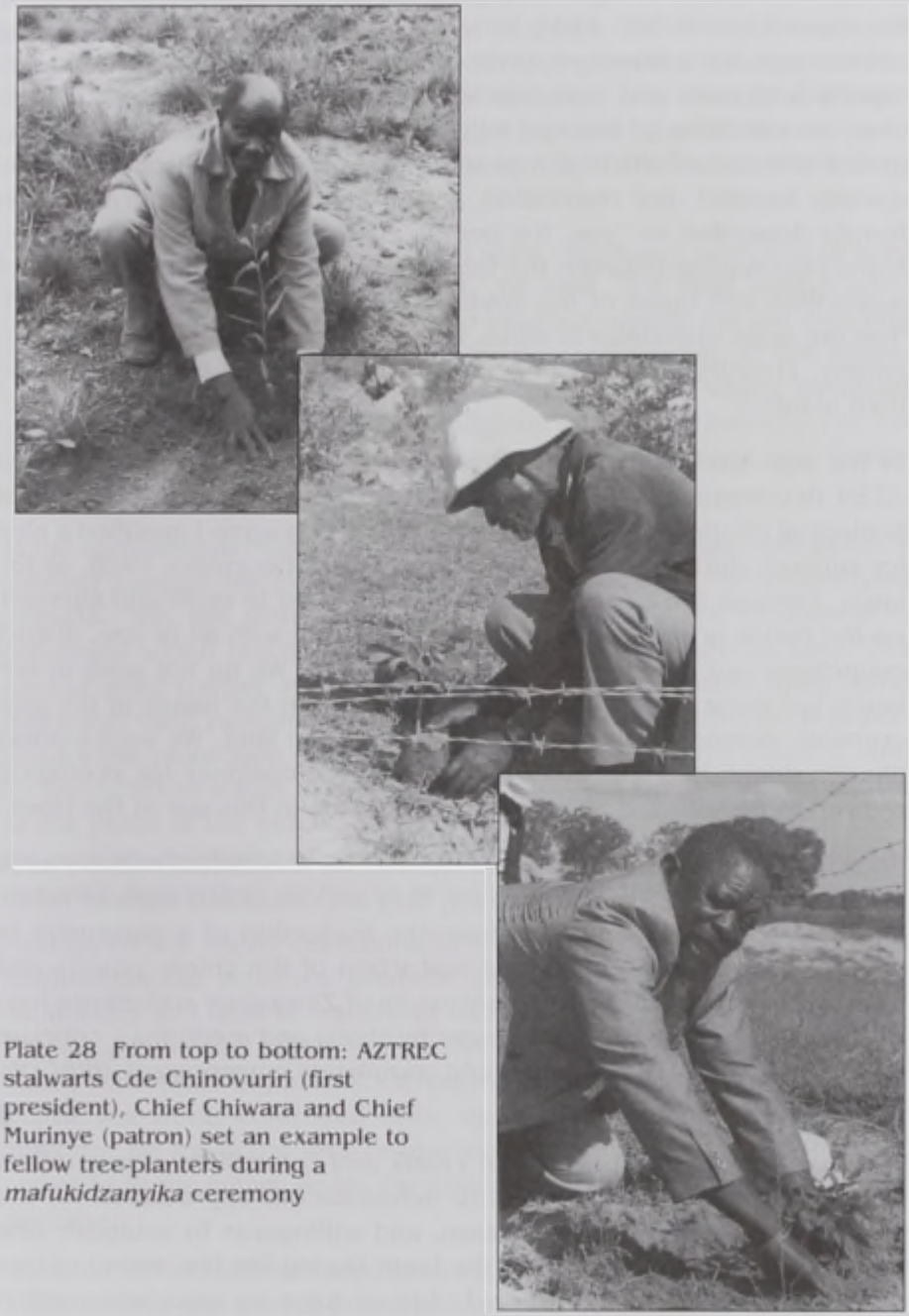


Plate 28 From top to bottom: AZTREC stalwarts Cde Chinovuriri (first president), Chief Chiwara and Chief Murinye (patron) set an example to fellow tree-planters during a *mafukidzanyika* ceremony

authorities to *chimurenga* (as argued for example by Lan, in favour of the *masvikiro*; cf Lan 1985:166–170) does not feature in the new *chimurenga* for a liberated environment. Both these role players are equally important and interdependent! Their combined efforts, moreover, are not those of isolated religious professionals but are fully integrated with the efforts of the people, the *povo*. For, as Gonese subsequently insisted, the restoration of the land and the return of lush forests depended on 'you, the people'. Gonese also postulated an integral relationship between the tree-planting ventures of the traditional authorities and those of the government. 'The government,' he said, 'has the same objectives in mind. Whenever there is a tree-planting ceremony, President Mugabe is seen with a tree in his hands, which he then plants.'

In my own tree-planting speeches – particularly in the early days of AZSM development – I, too, underscored the link between traditional ecological efforts and government policy. At Negovano I qualified a plea for support, during a tree-planting ceremony in December 1988, as follows: '*Through the chiefs and masvikiro we want to uplift and strengthen the hands of the government.* We cooperate with all of you, district councillors and cabinet ministers from Harare. We do not work in isolation but serve the country openly ... We are in the hands of the government, demonstrating our ability to serve the land. We want leaders like President Mugabe (himself a staunch campaigner for ecological reform) to be satisfied with the progress made in this war of the trees.'

Such statements should not be interpreted as unqualified subservience to the government. On the contrary, they are calculated signs of reflection and constraint emanating from the leadership of a movement in which opposition to government restriction of the chiefs' powers and uninhibited loyalty to the tribal ancestors of Zimbabwe sometimes lead to sharp criticism of the government by chiefs and mediums – criticism which, if taken out of context, could completely misrepresent ZIRRCON-AZTREC objectives.

The *mafukidzanyika* speeches of chiefs and councillors clearly reflect the need for united action to curb deforestation, appreciation for the endeavours of the new association, and willingness to establish new patterns of cooperation to heal the land. During the first round of tree planting in 1988 Chief Gutu said: 'Let us have an association which

binds us, which unites us in strength; one which is recognised by our government and which we support at all times.' Chief Mukaro, also of Gutu district, expressed enthusiasm for tree planting 'because it satisfies our stomachs and fills our eyes and ears'. He thought that now there was new hope for the barren land because 'the chiefs and mediums are uniting and mobilising people as they did in the war – this time to fight the destroyers of the land'.

Councillor Shamhu Mavurenga called upon chiefs and mediums to lead the ecological struggle. 'In the past,' he said, 'the land always prospered when the chiefs and *masvikiro* together upheld the old customs and religion. Let them do so again, for the land belongs to the ancestors.' These words articulate a *holistic worldview* in which ancestral guardianship, sound government, religious interaction between the living and the living dead, and environmental protection are interwoven strands of the same fabric.

At the ceremony at Negovano in Bikita, councillor Mutingwende publicly pledged support for the AZSM and the local chief in *mafukidzanyika* pursuits. 'We, the councillors,' he said, 'will help Chief Negovano to determine which places in our wards are suited for special care. *The kind of strict control which applied during the war should again come into force!* Each person should know that his own contribution is important for the protection of the land. We have set aside this piece of land for the AZSM as a sign of our support. From now on this will be known as the place of the elders, which has to be protected with great care. We want the mediums to return from time to time, to encourage us and to satisfy themselves about the growth of these trees.'

Mutingwende's words corroborated the suggestion made above that *mafukidzanyika* activities promote cooperation between chiefs and councillors and tend to transcend local political rivalry between them. The councillor was openly supportive of the local chief and, in accordance with AZSM objectives, envisaged an all-encompassing conservationist war front, controlled once again by *chimurenga* strictures. In addition, he expected and encouraged an escalation of tree-planting activities in the future under the continuing guidance of mediums and ancestors.

Whereas both chiefs and mediums act as *ecological conscientisers and mobilisers* of the people in *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies, they do so in

different ways. The mediums, as religio-historical experts, focus on the ritual expression of union between the living and deceased members of society, the powers exerted by the guardian ancestors in conservation and the religious history of the country, more than the chiefs do. They, in their turn, take stock of the details of ecological degradation in their chiefdoms. They interact with the councillors in determining where trees are most needed and take a strong lead in mobilising villagers to take full responsibility for woodlot development, in conjunction with ZIRRCON-AZTREC. *The chiefs, then, can be described as warlords concerned with the practical battle strategies of the green forces, the logistics of the war of the trees.* Capitalising on the combination of religious fervour and ecological resolve aroused by the mediums, the chiefs give substance to the battle cry by condemning deforestation and soil erosion. Inventive chiefs, like Chief Murinye of Masvingo district, actually help coin new slogans, adding variety to the *mafukidzanyika* expressions of commitment: Forward the war of the trees! Down with the tree fellers! Forward the protection of our soil! Down with the use of sledges (causing erosion gullies)! Forward ZANU-PF and AZTREC! Let the destroyers receive instruction! And so forth.

Paramount in the speeches of chiefs is the theme of the barren earth, the rampant destruction in their own areas. In Gutu, for instance, Chief Gutu expressed concern about the absence of many species of wildlife formerly found in the district. He complained about the desecration of burial sites where the dense copses of trees (holy groves) were chopped down. He claimed that, as a result, one could no longer hear the drumbeat of the spirit world on Mount Jerimanda at the onset of the rains, which used to be a sure sign of the land's prosperity. Chief Mukaro, of Gutu south, described the barren land there as follows: 'We have no poles left for building houses, no game to hunt, no fish in the rivers to catch, as they were all netted out.' Chief Makumbe complained, resentfully and sadly, about soil erosion in his densely populated region. 'All over Gutu you find eroded gullies (*makoronga*),' he claimed. 'The people even attempt cultivation in the *makoronga*. They chop down saplings for firewood, but these only produce smoke and no fire. So we have great expectations from AZTREC to bring us trees. In the past we had holy places where you could hear the drumbeat of the spirits, indicating the pleasure of the ancestors. But these places are quiet nowadays. So we request comrades Chinovuriri and Daneel to

stand fast in their work. Let them uplift our district: the trees, the dams, the animals.'

Similar comments were made at *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies in all the districts of Masvingo Province. In Bikita a chief said: 'We are aware of the grave trouble towards which we are heading. If we do not produce firewood by planting trees we shall ultimately make fire with cattle dung. In some areas this is already happening.'

These comments have a ring of desperation; they reflect a near-fatalistic sense of being confronted with a situation that is all but beyond repair. The chiefs' lament, like that of the mediums, expresses nostalgia for past abundance. There is a yearning for the forests, the dense *marambatemwa* copses where the ancestors and their lion spirits dwelt, where the drums of the spirits (ancestral drums in praise of Mwari, the rain giver, and *njuzu* drums from an aquatic world to draw even more rain) heralded the onset of good rainy seasons; the time when the creator, Mwari or Musikavanhu, was apparently satisfied with his people and showed his approval of their observance of ancient customs by sending abundant rain and providing human and crop fertility.

Here, too, nostalgia does not stagnate in escapism. AZTREC's tree-planting programme has rekindled hope of finding a solution and restoring environmental vitality. The battle cry, 'Forward the war of the trees!', is elaborated in rousing speeches calling for support of AZTREC's work: 'If you people follow the instructions of the chiefs and the mediums the land will be built afresh' ... 'Plant indigenous trees and the barrenness of the land will cease.' Chief Makumbe expressed confidence in the ability of AZTREC's chiefs and mediums to effect lasting ecological change. 'As we plant trees,' he asserted, 'the rains will abound, the *mhondoro* (here an umbrella term referring to all wildlife) will return and the *njuzu* spirits will inhabit the pools.' Chief Gutu (plates 29 & 30), again, expressed the conviction that all ecological control at district level should be vested in the chieftainship, the seat of traditional political power. 'It is not enough,' he claimed emphatically, 'to see the District Administrator and the police (in preparations for tree planting), as I, Chief Gutu, am the one who controls the *zvidoma* (witch familiars), witchcraft mediums of this district!'

In the last two statements we observe, first, the chiefs' inclination to express ecological concern in traditional religious idiom; second, an

Plate 29 Chief Gutu addresses the founding ancestors of the Rufura (Gumbo Madyira) people during a war heroes' re-burial ceremony. Prior to the ceremony ZIRRCON/AZTREC members had planted trees around the heroes' acre

Plate 30 During the war heroes' re-burial ceremony, Chief Gutu presents President Robert Mugabe with a calabash of ancestral beer to establish communion with the ancestral war council (*dare rechimurenga*) which had provided mystical sanction and directives during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle

indirect hint at their frustration over the curtailment of their powers, coupled with a veiled threat of retaliation in the claim of control over the forces of witchcraft; and third, confidence that AZTREC can succeed ecologically, with the implicit expectation that it will be instrumental in elevating the powers of the chiefs.

Christian chiefs and councillors are sensitive to religious pluriformity in the *mafukidzanyika* context. Said councillor Mavurenga on one occasion: 'Although the land belongs to the ancestors, it is not only a matter of *kupira midzimu* (ancestor veneration). We must all pray perseveringly for the wellbeing of our country, because Mwari is the God of us all – both Christians and traditionalists.'

Ultimately, however, all environmental remedial activity is directly or indirectly related to the ancestral world by chiefs and headmen, Christian and non-Christian alike. The attitudes of the senior tribal ancestors, the guardians of the land in each district or region – their anger at neglect and their protective goodwill when they are recognised and venerated by their living descendants – are considered crucial to the existing environmental situation and its future repair.

All the chiefs and mediums on the AZTREC executive are agreed, for instance, that environmental deterioration is due to the decline of traditional religion. Said Gonese: 'By not recognising the spirits you people cause destruction to the land.' He considered Zimbabwe's liberation and independence to be proof that the ancestors control the history and ultimate destiny of the country. A positive response to their ecological directives could heal the land in the same way as it had led to victory in war. True to the traditional religious revival of *chimurenga*, Gonese insisted: *'No progress whatever will be made if we reject the old customs,* if we ignore the rules laid down by our forefathers and propagated by our *masvikiro.* We need to follow the ways of truth by honouring our ancestors. This is the sole condition set by Chief Gutu and the elders for the people to engage in conservation. Progress in conservation will derive from agreement between the ancestors and the diligent ones who are prepared to work' (my italics).

4.1.4 Mediums and spirit world

Mafukidzanyika is an extension of traditional ritual in a modern context. Likewise, the ritual activity of the mediums is still couched in the tradi-

tional idiom even while addressing modern ecological issues. Thus medium vaZarira addressed the ancestors as being fully in charge of ecology. She considered them to relate, at the grassroots, to the old order of tribal political organization – the kraalheads, ward headmen and chiefs as ecological authorities. These elders, representing traditional society in its entirety, need ancestral directives for environmental repair. The whole community, in its turn, is subject, in vaZarira's perception, to the creator God (referred to as Musikavanhu, Zhame or Mwari) who still speaks from the oracular caves at Matonjeni and who still sends rain in response to the requests of cult messengers who annually visit Matonjeni on behalf of their districts.

In terms of this traditional worldview, vaZarira's concern about a partly defunct traditional religious system is understandable. On one occasion she lamented: 'Where have the *vanyusa* (Matonjeni messengers) gone? Why do many of them no longer travel to Matonjeni to fetch rain?' Like Gonese, she considered the breakdown of the old system to be directly related to ecological degradation. In this situation tree-planting rituals provide the mediums with an opportunity to propagate and resuscitate the old order. To them, AZTREC creates a forum where they can voice complaints, a platform from which to promote the revival of old beliefs and customs.

At the same time the inspirational and protective value of the old order in no way inhibits modern activities and objectives. Contrary to the old custom whereby *masvikiro* had to eschew Western utensils, clothing and any form of modern transport so that they did not jeopardise their authority, AZTREC mediums propagate responsible use of vehicles and funds, the use of polythene bags and modern equipment in nurseries, fencing of woodlots, etc – in the same way as modern weapons were part of the ancestrally supported strategy of *chimurenga*. Thus the ancestors themselves are conceived of as modernising or contextualising their directives for ecological action.

In their evaluation of the modern situation the spirit mediums are both critical of government, in so far as they consider it to be ignoring or destroying the traditional order which is essential for proper land use, and willing to cooperate if their religious identity and contribution are recognised. Said vaZarira in one of her *mafukidzanyika* addresses: 'Don't be disturbed when I ask for the return of the Mantonjeni mes-

sengers. This will happen when the government realises that the spirit mediums, the Matonjeni messengers and the chiefs are one in their work for the benefit of the land. Don't you remember that before the government cast the chiefs and *masvikiro* away (through the new system introduced after Independence), we, the bones of old (the ancestors), we, the *masvikiro,* were in the (colonially imposed) wilderness? But we have returned to our lands.'

VaZarira's criticism of the government conveyed the feeling that the spirit mediums were not afforded the prominence in independent Zimbabwe which their crucial role in *chimurenga* warranted. In her own deliberations with senior government officials, her visits to Matonjeni, and in the heightened expectations that the government would restore at least some of the chiefs' former powers – and, in the process, the political status of the mediums as well – vaZarira saw prospects of a return of the traditional religio-ecological order. As may be observed in her communications with the ancestors cited above, tree planting only makes sense in a society where unity between God, ancestors and living beings is constantly reaffirmed and maintained through ritual. In this perspective reconciliation and cooperation between the present government and the traditional representatives of divine and ancestral power become a cardinal condition for environmental wellbeing: ample rain, good crops, abundant wildlife and afforestation.

In the *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies the mediums assume elevated positions of authority through identification with the mystical powers of the spirits they represent. They proclaim the message of an inseparable link between religion and ecology and identify fully with the ecologically liberating objectives of their association. Lydia Chabata, former supervisor of nurseries, introduced herself to tree-planting audiences as the religious adviser to guerrilla fighters at the war front, now extending her former duties to the war of the trees. She used to claim that comrade Daneel's involvement in founding the association and in tree planting derived from ancestral inspiration similar to her own. We have seen how vaZarira, in the Negovano ritual, identified the ancestors with rain, land, food and clothing for the people. This was tantamount to claiming a unique ecological function for all *masvikiro.* Without rain and food – in other words, without the ancestors and their living mouthpieces in society – there is no life. No important environmental activity can be carried out without the ancestors being properly informed. The elevat-

ed position of the *svikiro*, however, secures not only status and privilege. It also exacts hardship. VaZarira frequently spoke of her fasting and spiritual struggle on account of ecological problems. 'We fight to preserve and clothe the land,' she said. 'We plead with the ancestors to return to their former holy places with renewed vigour, thereby revitalising the mediums.' The abomination of tree felling in the holy groves actually sickened this medium physically. But the strife and suffering were not in vain, for as vaZarira subsequently asserted: 'New life will return and the whip which brings suffering to Zimbabwe will be laid down.' *Svikiro* Tovera, in one of his speeches, claimed: 'We, the mediums, are busy with such important work that even if President Mugabe is present he does not question it.'

What, then, do the *masvikiro* consider this important work of theirs to be? Judging from the speeches of vaZarira, Chabata and Tovera, it is primarily to *maintain equilibrium* between divine, human and natural forces. This is achieved through various forms of *veneration* (as illustrated in vaZarira's supplication to the Negovano ancestors and Musikavanhu), through *mediation* between the guardian ancestors and their living descendants, through *upholding or reinterpreting* the old customs and customary law (for example honouring the ancestral rest day, *chisi*, and prohibiting tree felling in the *marambatemwa* groves) and by maintaining *just government* in the land – an area of tribal political organisation in which the senior mediums, together with their respective chiefs, used to play a prominent role. If the oracular high-God is not honoured via the local hierarchies of ancestral spirits, he/she retaliates by not sending rain. If *chisi* day is not kept, the ancestors retaliate by sending lightning to destroy the crops, or *chapungu* (bateleur) eagles to impair the health or sight of the offenders. If the holy groves are spoilt, the ancestors withdraw their protective powers, thereby exposing the community to hardship through droughts, family conflict and mental disorders. If the government ignores the council of leading regional ancestors in the spirit world and their official mediums, peace and order will not prevail in the country. In a subsistence rural economy, where this philosophy of constant interplay between human performance and spirit intervention prevails, and where rain remains the prime symbol and determinant of wellbeing, the *svikiro*, as religio-ecological officiant, clearly remains a kingpin.

Considering this background to the *mafukidzanyika* context, the preoc-

cupation of mediums like vaZarira and vaTovera with rain (be it local *mukwerere* rituals or consultations at Mwari's oracular shrines) and with government's attitude towards the mediums is understandable. Both these mediums faulted the government for its failure to fully recognise them and heed their advice. The consequences of such negation, they suggested, could be grave. Mystical intervention could be expected from *Mabweadziva*. That is why vaZarira claimed, during one of the 1988 ceremonies, that she had returned from the oracular shrine without a positive message for the senior government official who had sent her, as if to suggest that proper mediation for rain might be suspended until the government was prepared to give the mediums and chiefs due recognition. As the pinch of persistent drought was increasingly felt over the next few years, the *masvikiro*'s criticism of the failings of government as a major cause of mystical retaliation became more outspoken.

Tovera likewise vented his frustration by suggesting at tree-planting ceremonies that *Mabweadziva* had noted the fear of the country's rulers to publicly recognise both senior spirits and mediums of the land. Consequently things had gone wrong in the country. Economic progress, order and peace, he thought, could only be achieved by reintroducing customary law. Tovera also expounded his views on envisaged changes in the old high-God cult of Matonjeni. The concentration of senior ancestral and divine power at the Matopo hills, and at the shrine of Dzilo (controlled by the Chokoto family) in particular, was to cease. Instead of God's voice being heard at the Matonjeni shrines in Ndebele territory, it could now be heard in the voice of a person moving around the country. As he had adopted one of the popular praise-names of Mwari – the one used most frequently by traditionalists at the onset of a shower of rain – Tovera was strongly suggesting that he himself was the new representative of the traditional Mwari. Through him the Voice would carry all over the country, as happens in radio services. The extraordinary pole structure he had erected at Chitarara village in Ndanga district was to become the new oracular centre for traditional worship. His additional identification with the national *mhondoro*, Chaminuka, suggested that his activities form part of the attempts of Shona traditionalists in post-Independence Zimbabwe to move the old cult centre from the Matopos to Great Zimbabwe, or at least to a new site in Masvingo Province not far from the ruins. To many of the

masvikiro attempts such as Tovera's are evidence of a fairly common belief that, prior to the emergence of the Matonjeni oracle, Mwari's voice was heard at Great Zimbabwe, possibly during the Rozvi reign.

Similar sentiments emerged in vaZarira's 'lectures' on sound government. It is at Great Zimbabwe that the government should commune with the senior ancestors of the country. 'The current problems of the country (drought, land distribution, deforestation, the breakdown of traditional customs, etc),' she said, 'come from the soil (that is, the ancestors) because matters have not been arranged properly. The ancestors complain, saying: "You people of the government have not informed us that you now have (that is, govern) Zimbabwe. We have been waiting to see whether you recognise us and whether you rule the country properly." This has been a very urgent matter ever since the country was taken from the whites. The message of the *midzimu* is: "You (the country's leaders) should go and tell the *vakuru* (elders of the spirit world) at Great Zimbabwe about the outcome of the war. Then you will not be bitten by those lions who do not heed our message."' By subsequently claiming that this omission was the killer spirit (*ngozi*) of Zimbabwe, vaZarira was emphasising the seriousness of her message and the prospect of further complications in the land issue if the authorities failed to heed it.

The comments of Tovera and vaZarira on religio-political development in Zimbabwe indicate the significance of AZTREC as both a religio-cultural movement and an outlet for political frustration. As has been pointed out, the ritual context of *mafukidzanyika* is much wider than that of either traditional rain rituals or the chief's council where traditional cult messengers deliver Mwari's oracular message for the district. In the presence of this more diversified new audience – encompassing traditionalists, church people and government representatives – a wide range of subjects is dealt with: the significance of comprehensive ancestral directives for the whole country, the prospects of an alternative Mwari cult centre at or near Great Zimbabwe, traditional religious developments in relation to rural and national politics, and the persistent underlying theme of the integrality of religion and ecology.

Thus many people who seldom attend traditional rituals, who have partly forgotten the old customs and laws and who rarely hear anything new about the secretive old high-God cult are exposed to a fascinating range of religious information and directives. Religious rivalry is also bound

to surface in the new ritual context. Tovera's claims to being the mouthpiece for a more widely diffused form of oracular revelation by Mwari is a case in point. On the one hand, Tovera's activities may be motivated by self-interest. On the other hand, his attitude towards Matonjeni could well reflect a general need among Shona traditionalists to situate their own oracular centre outside Ndebele territory – nearer home and nearer that towering symbol of Shona accomplishment, Great Zimbabwe. These important religio-cultural matters, going to the roots of Shona society, link the past with the present, fill the AZTREC participants with a sense of dignity and pride and give purpose to the earth-healing struggle. In addition the link and sense of shared destiny between participant urbanites (politicians, government officials, educators, etc) and rural folk are convincingly and visibly demonstrated.

When interpreting the roles of AZTREC spirit mediums, one should bear in mind that there is nothing unusual about these religious professionals speaking out boldly on politically oriented issues, even if it means treading on the toes of the highest authority in the country. In their world such criticism is mystically sanctioned by the ancestors, as long as it is generally felt not to be destructively subversive but to serve the interests of both society and the environment. VaZarira's insistence that the government should inform the senior ancestors at Great Zimbabwe about the outcome of the war reflects the *masvikiro*'s quest for official recognition of their wartime role, as well as their mystically affirmed claims to a greater say in running the affairs of a modern state, particularly those pertaining to land distribution, agricultural policy and ecological control. All this is based on keen insight into current land issues and development matters – a highly critical assessment of Cabinet Ministers owning former white farms while the resettlement of destitute small farmers lags behind, and resentment about the neglect of peasant society in contrast to large-scale urban and industrial development.

Considering the role of the *masvikiro* in the AZTREC tree-planting context, the institution could well develop into a socio-politically and ecologically stabilising agency. It is certainly instrumental in bringing the frustrations and ambitions of key tribal political figures into the open. At the same time it creates new opportunities for both chiefs and *masvikiro* to regain part of their former prestige and to take pride in a sustained and widely acknowledged contribution to the progress of the country.

From the government's point of view, ZIRRCON-AZTREC could be a means of accommodating the needs and aspirations of traditional ecologists country-wide. Our support could force a major breakthrough in environmental policy making, legislation, funding and mobilisation at the grassroots, giving new impetus and direction to Zimbabwe's green revolution and ecological endeavour. There can be little doubt about the vast ecological mobilisation potential of this movement once it spreads nation-wide.

4.1.5 Community response

Integral to the *mafukidzanyika* earth-healing ritual is the varied response of the participant community. First, the elders of the ward where the new woodlot is being established, such as the ward headmen (plate 33), village headmen and councillors, confirm the ritual addresses to the guardian spirits by summoning all tree planters to heed ancestral directives concerning afforestation. They usually embroider on the preceding speeches of mediums and/or chiefs, recounting the traditional customs and ecological retrictions in their region. So they spell out specific instructions in traditional terms to the villagers charged with the upkeep of the woodlot. In this respect they reinforce and reinterpret customary ecological values.

Second, the politicians and representatives of Agritex, the Natural Resources Board, Forestry Commission, etc, make conscientising speeches, informing villagers about the significance of afforestation, modern land husbandry techniques and nature conservation generally. They represent the modern ecological component at *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies, capitalising on the mystically induced resolve of rural people and relating it to their own fields of ecological expertise. As a result traditionalist fervour, instead of focusing on the 'ways of the forefathers' as an exclusive end in itself, is concretely and meaningfully extended to the world of modern environmental endeavour. The very presence of government and other officials, and their explicit appreciation of our afforestation programmes, provides much-needed recognition and an added incentive to an often neglected rural society.

Third, all ritual participants, be they dignitaries or commoners, join in the actual planting of seedlings. The mood at this juncture is festive, ranging from the dignified feasting of chiefs to the exuberance of the

youth. It is also an opportunity for improvisation. Sometimes the seedlings are addressed as 'brothers' and 'sisters' who have the important task of binding the soil with their roots to prevent soil erosion, or of sprouting many leaves to provide protective shade and oxygen. Spirit mediums may call on the ancestral guardians to observe their earth-keeping activities as they position seedlings and fill the holes with soil. Others address Mwari or Zhame directly with requests for rain, lest the seedlings die and the new woodlot prove a failure. Women in the background ululate at each apt remark of the tree planters, even at criticism of the senior ancestors for neglecting their living descendants, and girls and boys execute dance steps in honour of the earthkeepers and the spirit forces they represent.

Hence the entire ritual congregation is active in the actual tree planting, a combination of planting and watering seedlings, supervising each other, communing with the spirit world – all this to the rhythm of dance, hand-clapping, song and ululation. Thus the trees of new life are sung, danced and spoken into the soil. The soil here symbolises the ancestors, which means that the trees planted are committed to the protective custody of the ancestors. The entire human family – potential life, the living and the deceased – enacts the rebirth of creation, launching a new life cycle which hopefully will provide better conditions for all of life yet to be lived.

Fourth, festive song and dance accompany ritual proceedings throughout. Tribal elders lead traditional war and *shavi* dances (plate 32) to rhythmic drumming, emphasising the urgency of the liberation struggle and reminding everybody that a real war is being waged. The leaders of women's clubs compose new songs for female choirs to tell the history of AZTREC, support its key figures and generally appeal to all people to join in the war of the trees. Teachers and head pupils of participant school communities proudly exhibit their school choirs (plate 31), vying with each other in the originality of their ecological message and musical impact. At the Mushayavanhu tree-planting ceremony conducted in Gutu district on 19 January 1991, the following songs were recorded. Mushayavanhu's secondary school choir welcomed AZTREC's enterprise by singing:

Plate 31 Schoolchildren sing, dance and prepare for tree-planting during *mafukidzanyika* proceedings in the Gutu district

Plate 32 Traditional war dances underscore the militant nature of the green liberation struggle

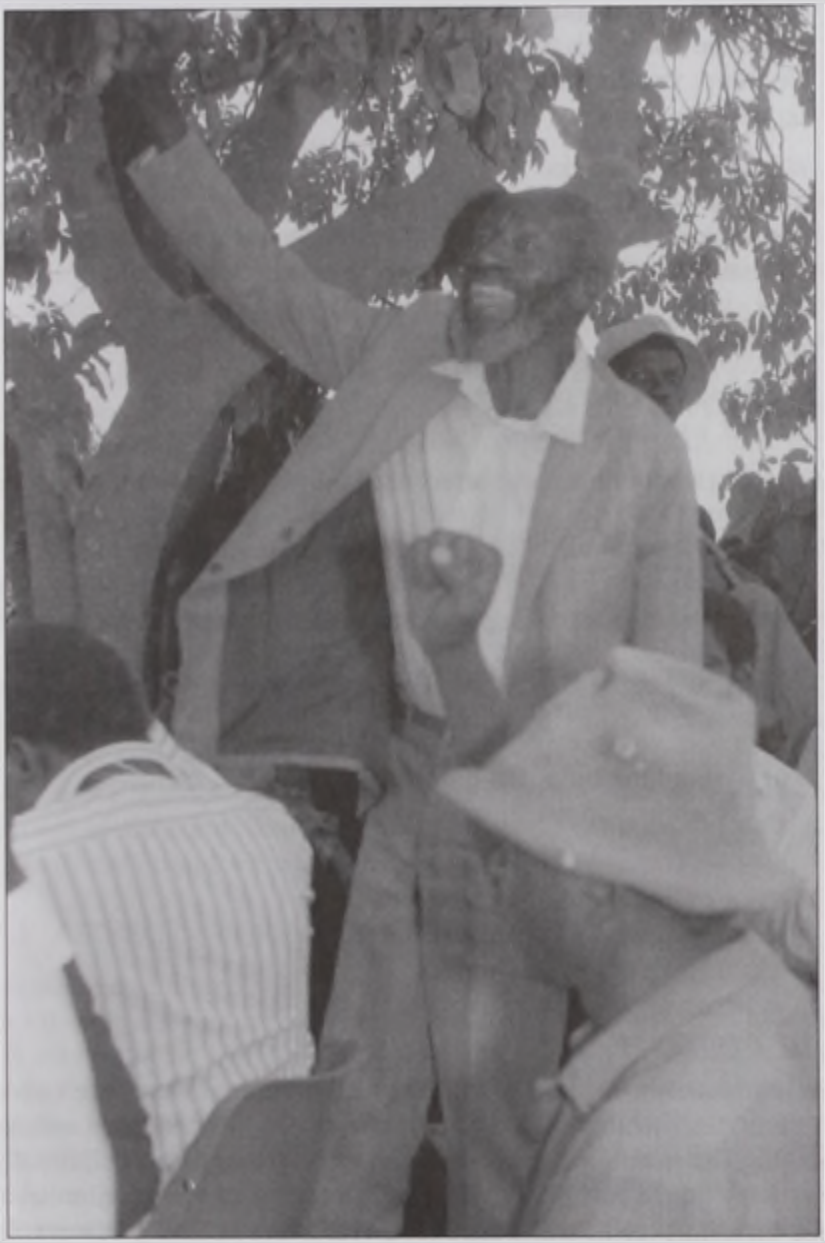


Plate 33 Gutu headmen shout war slogans with raised fists to rally the traditionalist green army

We thank you earthkeepers
who heal the earth for the people
We thank you for letting the schools plant trees
So that we can have new forests.

We thank you elders
who plant trees for us
Helping us to build granaries, houses, kraals and stores
So that we can live in abundance in this country.

We thank you teachers
who give us a proper education
Teaching also our parents
So that we can improve life in this country.

Mabhugu's school choir responded with the following song:

Zimbabwe is rich – plant trees!
Zimbabwe is rich – plant trees!

A single choir member then chanted against a background of humming:

You tree, you are a thing
which was not seen (appreciated) before
We look at you
like a man looking at his girlfriend
You are an important thing.

You tree, you are a woman
We eat of your fruit
We carry firewood from your womb
We take planks for our houses
Shame on us for felling saplings
For our houses.

In the *mafukidzanyika* context African school communities are exposed to ritual activity which goes to the roots of their culture and religion – something which many school children experience only peripherally or sporadically, since full ritual participation in traditional religion usually comes later in life. In this respect AZTREC has an indigenous religio-cultural impact on the youth, one which is not antiquated but which relates to modern ecological objectives. In addition, the ritual context is sufficiently flexible and wide to allow school communities to add

colour to the occasion, to make their own unique contribution to the war of the trees.

4.2 Mwari's oracular involvement

Mukwerere rain rituals establish a local spirit link with Matonjeni through the ancestral hierarchies of ruling and immigrant clans, and relate to the local cult messenger's annual visits to Matonjeni for direct consultation with the rain oracle. In similar fashion the new *mafukidzanyika* rituals establish a twofold pattern of communication with the traditional Mwari. First, as illustrated by vaZarira's ritual discourse quoted above, the ritual officiant appeals to Mwari via the senior guardian spirits, with specific requests for rain and protection for the trees planted. Second, after completing the season's tree-planting programme, AZTREC delegations visit the shrines of Matonjeni to inform the oracular deity about recent developments and to obtain guidance and inspiration from the oracle for the ongoing struggle to heal the land. This development corresponds with the wartime recognition of the ancient high-God as the ultimate head of the ancestral dare *rechimurenga* (war council), and represents a new variation of the *chimurenga* practice of conferring directly with the oracular 'warlord' at the Matopo shrines about the progress and strategy of the struggle. In this instance the deity emerges as environmental liberator – yet another aspect of his/her traditional image as rain-giver – rather than as the sociopolitical liberator from white oppression of the war years.

4.2.1 AZTREC delegations at Matonjeni

As explained in chapter 2, *chimurenga* delegations to the shrines were either the regular cult messengers (*vanyai*), who represented prominent spirit mediums and/or bands of guerrilla fighters in addition to their standard duty of requesting rain for their districts, or actual groups of fighters who consulted the oracle directly. By contrast the composition of AZTREC delegations to the oracle is innovative. Instead of a single *munyai* arriving at the shrine representing his paramount chief, senior spirit medium and tribal elders who had commissioned him at the chief's council to carry the district's gifts to Mwari, a large contingent of chiefs, mediums and fellow traditionalists, representing an entire province, now converge on the high-God's shrine. In other words, tribal

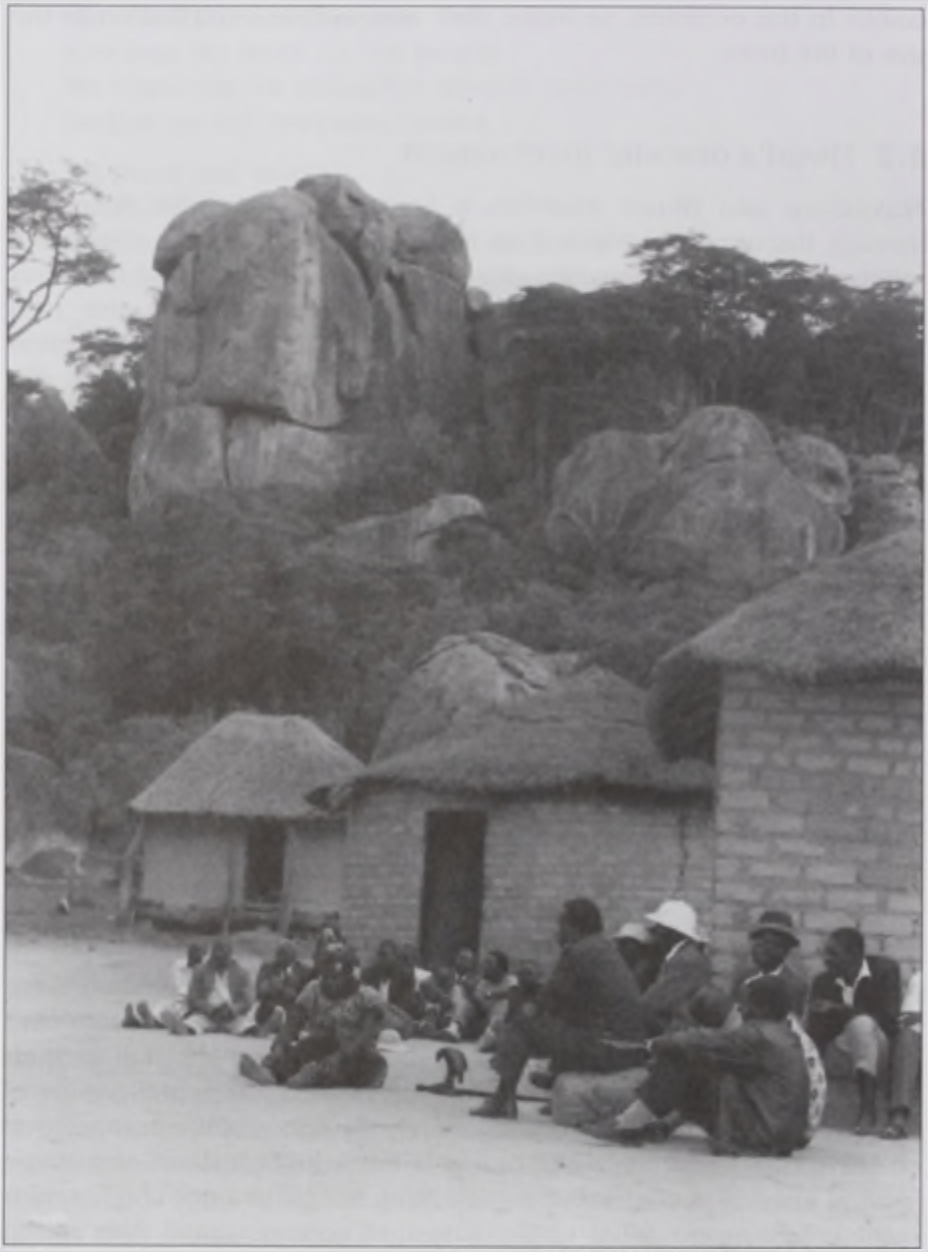


Plate 34 AZTREC delegation of chiefs and mediums arive at the Dzilo shrine to confer with the Shona high-God about the war of the trees

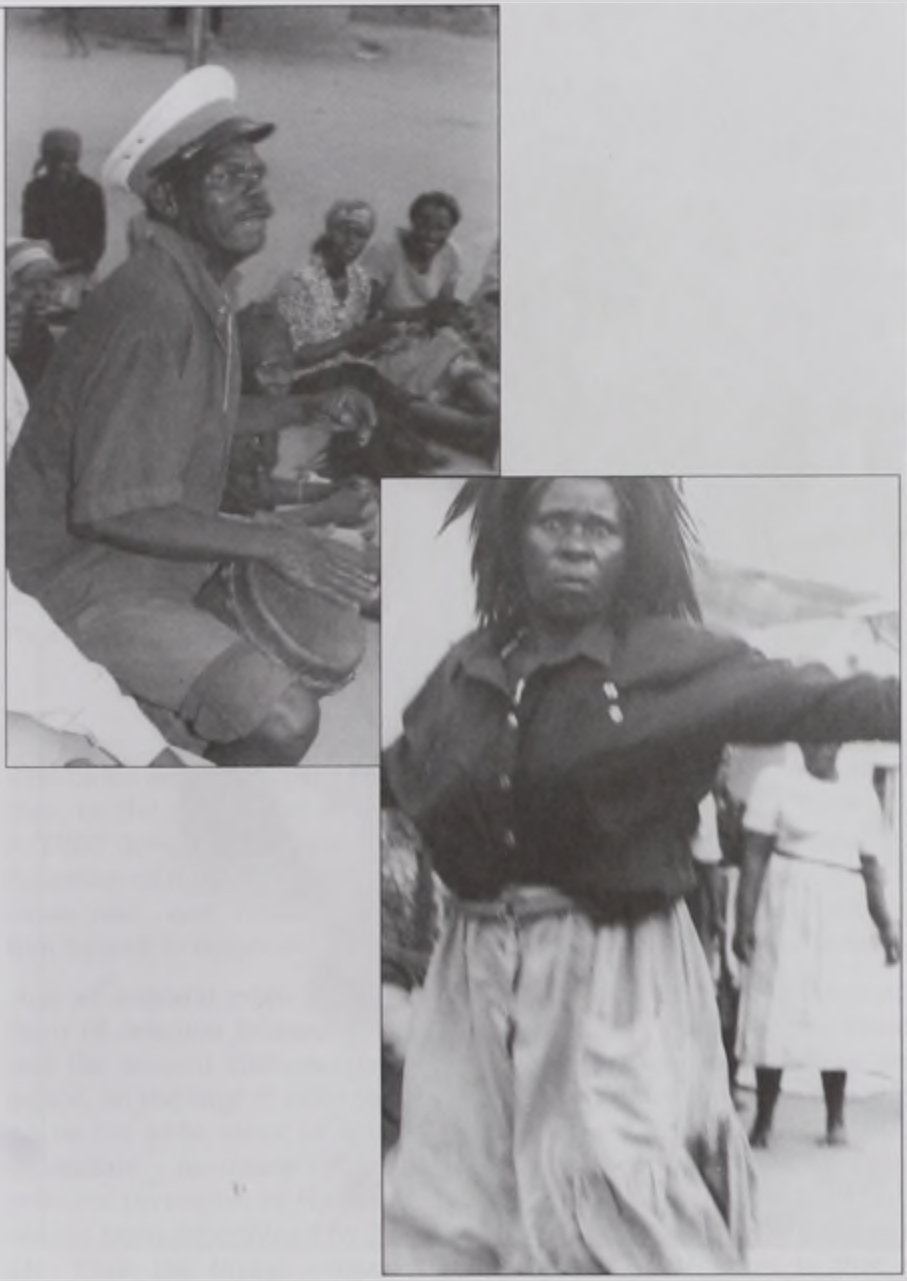


Plate 35 The drumbeat at Matonjeni elicits spirited, and at times spirit-possessed, dancing in honour of Mwari

Plate 36 A traditional dance of celebration in the early morning in recognition of Mwari's oracular revelations during the night

Plate 37 AZTREC delegation takes leave of the elderly priestesses and *mbonga* women of the Dzilo cult colony. Raised fists indicate renewal of earth-keeping commitment in response to the night's oracular revelations

dignitaries are much more widely represented in the AZTREC delegation than in the traditional unit sent to Matonjeni to request rain. The AZTREC delegation, moreover, represents an institutionalised new configuration of fighting cadres, reports on a different struggle from the previous one, and virtually compels Mwari to reveal another side of him/herself in response to yet another set of liberationist requirements.

Just as national crisis and changing circumstances elicited a specific form of oracular intervention from Mwari during the 1896 rebellions and the second *chimurenga*, revealing him/her as a deity of war and peace, so the urgent need for country-wide ecological reform – indicated by the wide range of spirit hierarchies represented in the AZTREC delegation – promotes yet another mutation in the understanding and oracular revelation of Mwari. The features and message of Mwari have always been determined by the deepest collective needs of his/her people. Thus the image evoked by the AZTREC delegation is that of 'guardian of the tree planters', the one who ultimately directs all ecological conservation, the liberator from environmental catastrophe.

In January 1989, after the AZSM's first tree-planting campaign, the delegation that visited the shrine of Gogo Itombiyamazulu at Vembe and that of Jonas Chokoto at Dzilo (an extension of the former shrine at Wirirani) consisted of AZSM president Haurovi Chinovuriri; spirit medium MuDende (vice president); spirit medium Lydia Chabata (treasurer); Daniel Zvanaka (research worker and AZSM executive member); and myself as founder and adviser. Early the following year, 1990, after AZTREC had planted 165 000 trees, a much larger delegation, comprising most executive members and some sixty chiefs and mediums, visited Matonjeni. The planting season of 1990–1991, when well over half a million trees were planted, was characterised by such hectic and all-absorbing activity that the visit to the shrine was postponed. But on 17 January 1992, when it became evident that the persistent drought had reached catastrophic proportions to the detriment of all agricultural activities, including our tree-planting programme, another delegation was sent to the Dzilo shrine. This time the participants were: spirit medium vaZarira *Marambatemwa* (AZTREC president); Chief Murinye (AZTREC patron); Chiefs Shumba and Zimuto (executive members); spirit medium Mundende from Zaka who, on account of a dream vision, insisted on consulting the oracle; Solomon Zvanaka (ZIRRCON assistant director); and myself (ZIRRCON director).

The composition of these delegations is a clear departure from the age-old tradition of small-scale district representation at the shrines. As will be seen below, the oracular consultations also differ from the fairly stereotyped rain supplications and individual requests. Formerly individual healers (*nganga*) and/or spirit mediums did visit the shrines occasionally, but the regular visits of AZTREC delegates are a novel development. It was quite moving, during the 1990 visit, to observe the expectancy of chiefs as they arrived for the first time at the cult centre, whose rich tradition they had only heard about from their local messengers and fellow tribesmen. Their attitudes at Matonjeni reflected awe, respect and mystification, as if they were about to probe the mystery of their origins, the very heart of Africa. From the secret depths of the shrine cave, the rocks of Mwari, they were to hear for the first time the voice of Africa's creator God – or at least that of an ancient medium whose entire being was attuned to the revelations of the divine.

On this pilgrimage to their roots, the chiefs and mediums were in their finest attire. The chiefs wore suits and their white helmets and bronze

insignia, while the *masvikiro* were dressed in black, draped with furry skins, and plumed headgear. During the afternoon and early evening, while arrangements were being made with high priest Chokoto for the late-night shrine ceremony, the tribal elders sat around the village at the foot of Mount Dzilo, meditating in silence or conversing in muted voices, all indicative of a profound sense of the presence of the supernatural – there among the massive black domes of Musiki, the creator. Even before the cave ceremony the value of a Matonjeni visit was apparent. The key figures of an earth-healing movement had come to report on their work; to find the real meaning of their down-to-earth, hand-soiling labour, thus imbuing their ecological venture with mystical significance; to have it elevated, in the presence of Mwari, to national if not universal import.

4.2.2 Oracular messages

The following excerpt from an article (*Masvingo Provincial Star*, 19 January 1990) by Golden Makwena – a reporter who had participated in, and reported positively on, our tree-planting activities from the start – portrays the main features of the nocturnal shrine ceremony at Dzilo attended by AZTREC's largest delegation to date:

> It was exactly 1:36 am when a delegation of about 60 people who had travelled a distance of more than 500 kilometres, from Masvingo to Matonjeni in Matabeleland South were awakened by Cde Chokoto Ncube, who is the High Priest and Keeper of the sacred caves at Matonjeni, right in the heart of Matopos.
>
> Although Chokoto uses the Ndebele *mutupo*, Ncube, he is in reality a member of the Mbire Shoko people, the original priestly clan of Mwari over the centuries.
>
> The delegation of spirit mediums, chiefs, headmen and a news reporter from this paper had waited with an air of expectancy hanging around all night for this moment ... The High Priest gave instructions as to how movement into the sacred mountains was to be done.
>
> Everybody was told to remove his or her shoes and watches and no cameras or tape recorders were to be carried into the holy shrine. With hearts beating faster everyone obeyed without asking any questions and by 1:45 am the delegation formed one long queue.

As soon as the queue was out of the gates (of Chokoto's village) everyone clapped hands so to punctuate the High Priest's arrival. In a few moments the long line of people arrived at a dark place where Mwari's *dombo* (rock) was invisible although the moon was shining brightly.

Everyone was told to face the way he or she had come from, north (at Wirirani delegations always had to face east, from where, it is believed, Mwari's eventual return to his people will take place), and Cde Ncube started clapping hands while he informed the holy place of the presence of the delegation in traditional manner.

After a few speeches a hoarse voice answered from the cave. Everyone's backs were to the cave. That it was a hair-raising experience was reflected in the movements of those who were no longer feeling at ease.

The senior *svikiro*, Zarira *Marambatemwa*, handed over the sum of $40 to the High Priest, who in turn told the 'voice' about the money and the intention of the delegation. The voice answered in appreciation and gave the *svikiro* an opportunity to narrate what had made them travel such a long distance.

Cde *Marambatemwa* reported on the progress made so far by the Association of Zimbabwe Spirit Mediums since the last time they visited the sacred place (in 1989) and were given the blessings and go-ahead by the Guardian of the land.

The voice from the cave replied that the association's efforts to liberate the land ecologically were appreciated and they were promised good rains, guidance and success in the future.

The voice spoke in a mixture of Shona, Kalanga, Rozvi and Ndebele which most of the members of the delegation found difficult to understand. However, there were two interpreters, one who spoke in Ndebele while the other one spoke pure Shona. Communication was therefore eased ...

Their conversation took nearly 45 minutes and when the keeper of the shrine invited individuals to discuss personal problems the *Star* reporter took the lead ... Next to approach the Guardian was Cde Davidson 'Sub' Mberi who asked for the recently formed War

Veterans Association (ex-guerrilla fighters) to be guided and the ex-combatants who are unemployed and sick to be blessed and strengthened as regards their repayment for their contribution during the war of liberation. The voice promised him that the message would be carried to the ancestors and the oracle God.

Another member of the delegation (Cde Daneel) identified himself as a descendant of Mabwazhe Chinamukutu, the founder ancestor of the vaRufura in Gutu. He asked the Guardian of this land to strengthen the AZSM and the Government of Zimbabwe ...

It was around 4 am when all business was finished at the cave and everyone descended from the mountain in single file after having been told not to look back at the cave. The delegation was also told to go into the large hut where they had slept and sing till dawn for their ancestors to acknowledge their presence at Matonjeni.

This was accepted and with the provision of eight drums (*ngoma*) and the additional two brought from Masvingo and accompanied by two horns (*hwamanda*) music reverberated from the hut like thunder.

From this newspaper report it is evident that the atmosphere at first was tense with excited anticipation, even a bit awesome when the 'hoarse voice' first came from the dark depths of the shrine cave. After a while, however, as discussion between the oracular voice and delegates progressed – via elaborate Ndebele and Shona interpretations, hand-clapping and repeated calling of Mwari's praise names – the atmosphere relaxed noticeably. Mwari was responding to his/her people, approving the new association's earth-healing activities, promising rain, support and future success. Mwari was addressed as the ultimate guardian of the land and responded in this capacity. Attention was paid to national political, ecological and individual matters. The cult ceremony appeared to focus more on informing the creator-guardian of the universe about communal and private matters and receiving divine endorsement, inspiration and encouragement than on lengthy and detailed divine responses to each request. At no point was Mwari's judgement questioned and when the delegation moved away from the shrine, deep satisfaction and a sense of relaxed accomplishment were noticeable. The drumming, singing and dancing that followed until the skies reddened in the east were the final ritual affirmation of mystical encounter

between the creator, all life that had gone before and the still living creation.

Carefully recorded oracular sessions capture the actual discourse taking place during a cave ceremony in greater detail. On 10 January 1989, when our delegation paid the first official visit to Matonjeni, we spoke to the oracle of high priestess Gogo at the Vembe shrine. Sitting under a massive overhanging rock which had slid halfway down a mountain slope a few years ago, we were facing the east which, between 4 and 5 am, held a promise of dawn. Sibanda, Gogo's husband, interpreted our Shona communications to the 'Voice', while priestess Gogo herself – sitting about three metres behind us in a pole enclosure, half hidden under the *dombo* of Mwari – interpreted back into Shona for our benefit what the entranced female Voice of the oracle transmitted from the cave depths in a mixture of ancient chiRozvi, Ndebele and Kalanga.

Sibanda: Tovera, we have come with your *vazukuru* (sister's sons) from Masvingo who have arrived with their *mbonga*.

Author: We have come to observe your ways, how you deal with requests for rain, because there is drought in the Masvingo area. We have also come on behalf of the Association of Spirit Mediums. On these two issues we need your guidance.

Sibanda: Tovera, the delegation has come to request rain and to hear your comment on the *bato ramasvikiro*.

Voice: Each matter should be considered in its own right. If it is rain you are requesting, you must come towards the beginning of the year. That is the law which should be kept.

Author: And what are the requirements for delegations coming here? Must a blanket and some gifts be brought after consultation with the chiefs back in Masvingo?

Voice: You arrange for the required amount of finger millet; then send two people. But those who live far from here are also allowed to bring money as gifts when they ask Tovera for rain. All the people of this region will congregate here today. You can see them when they come and ask them

how they perform their ceremonies here at the *dombo*. You are invited and allowed to attend with them.

Author: We thank you, Tovera! *Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko*!

Voice: The people congregate here because they are worried about the drought. They know that at the onset of a new year they have to come here. These days, however, they tend to neglect this custom.

Author: Why is that so?

Voice: The people are ignorant. They forget. Only when they feel the heat of the sun do they come. Otherwise they forget.

Author: What then are the rules for such a gathering?

Voice: The rules are good. It is only a matter of proper worship. When the people approach this *dombo* they must beat the drums and dance. That is all.

Spirit medium MuDende (AZSM vice president):

I have come to ask about the Association of Spirit Mediums, Tovera. Will it make good progress and be a success? Will the people follow the arrangements made by the executive to elevate (*kukwidza*, literally 'lift up', that is, respect) the land? To heal the land? We request that this movement will become well established and prove itself publicly.

Voice: I want you to know that I am greatly pleased to see a white man approaching this place. It shows the eagerness of all people to heal the land. I am most thankful and expect the association to achieve in a great way. Mwari does what he/she wants to the people.

Chinovuriri (AZSM president):

We want to know about this Association because Mwari knows the outcome of it all. Many people ignore it because they are satisfied to simply spend their money, to stuff themselves with food and then to forget (about the state of the environment).

Voice: I am very happy with the Association and what it is doing in the country. He (the white one) has been given this association by the ancestral elders, so that we can render a great service to the people to survive.

Author: I want to ask something else. Years ago when I first visited Wirirani, Shoko, Mwari told me that the whites are the *vazukuru* (sister's sons) of their black *vadzisekuru* (maternal uncles). Now that Zimbabwe is liberated, is there something specific which Mwari wants to communicate about *kubatana* (cooperation or reconciliation) between blacks and whites?

Voice: I have been sent into the world to do the work of my Father. The Father has been given the whites and has shaken hands with their *she* (literally 'chief', that is, main representative). But I myself have not shaken hands with the Father. I only do my work on this earth. I am fearful of shaking hands with the Father, he who has told me to go and work in the world.

Author: So it is said that the messenger of Mwari was sent to the world but has not shaken hands with the Father.

Voice: The whites and blacks are one! When you have brought up a child and the child is mature, and you then give that person a command which the person refuses, what then can you do with that child? It means, no human being elects or appoints another; no human being should hate another. No! We are simply one as people, blacks and whites.

Author: Does Mwari see that there will be peace between the races now that the war has ended?

Voice: Nothing bad will happen between blacks and whites, for they are one!

Author: Is this message of racial unity also given to other whites when they visit the *dombo*?

Voice: No. This has not been discussed before. Whites do not normally come here. Only one or two from the newspapers have ever visited this place.

Priestess Gogo (spontaneously):

And what about the water, Tovera?

Voice: There are no fountains here, but when the rain is sent there will be enough water. These days there will be no rain.

Delegation: Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko! (with handclapping, sighs and expressions of gratitude to conclude the ceremony).

Later that morning a large number of local women and girls from the surrounding villages indeed converged on the shrine. They had green twigs and leaves stuck in their hair – symbols of fertility, life and life-giving rain – as they drummed and danced at Mwari's *dombo*. The priestess, Gogo Itombiyamazulu, was now seated in front of the shrine's pole enclosure, watching in dignified silence as the others danced. Meanwhile the menfolk were removing dead wood from the surrounding forests as if to symbolically 'remove' the drought and emphasise the community's belief that Mwari would soon bring new growth through ample rain. While the ceremonial procedure was thus building up to yet another oracular climax of divine-human encounter later that night, our delegation left for the Dzilo shrine deeper in the heartland of the Matopos.

At Dzilo we were heartily welcomed by high priest Jonas Chokoto, keeper and ritual officiant of the shrine, which had formerly operated under the tutelage of the late Simon and Adam Chokoto, Jonas's younger brothers, Simon's wife Kombo and the well-known Rozvi *mbonga*, MaMoyo (Daneel 1970:25). That night we had the following discourse with Mwari:

(Handclapping and praise-names called repeatedly by way of introduction.)

Author: Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko! I have brought you a gift, a sign of joy. I do so because in the distant past I also visited you when your *dombo* was still over there at Wirirani, when Simon and Adam were still officiating. They received me well on that occasion. And you, Shoko, said that I should come again. So I have arrived once more. It was in 1967 that I spoke to you at Wirirani – twenty-two years ago. I am

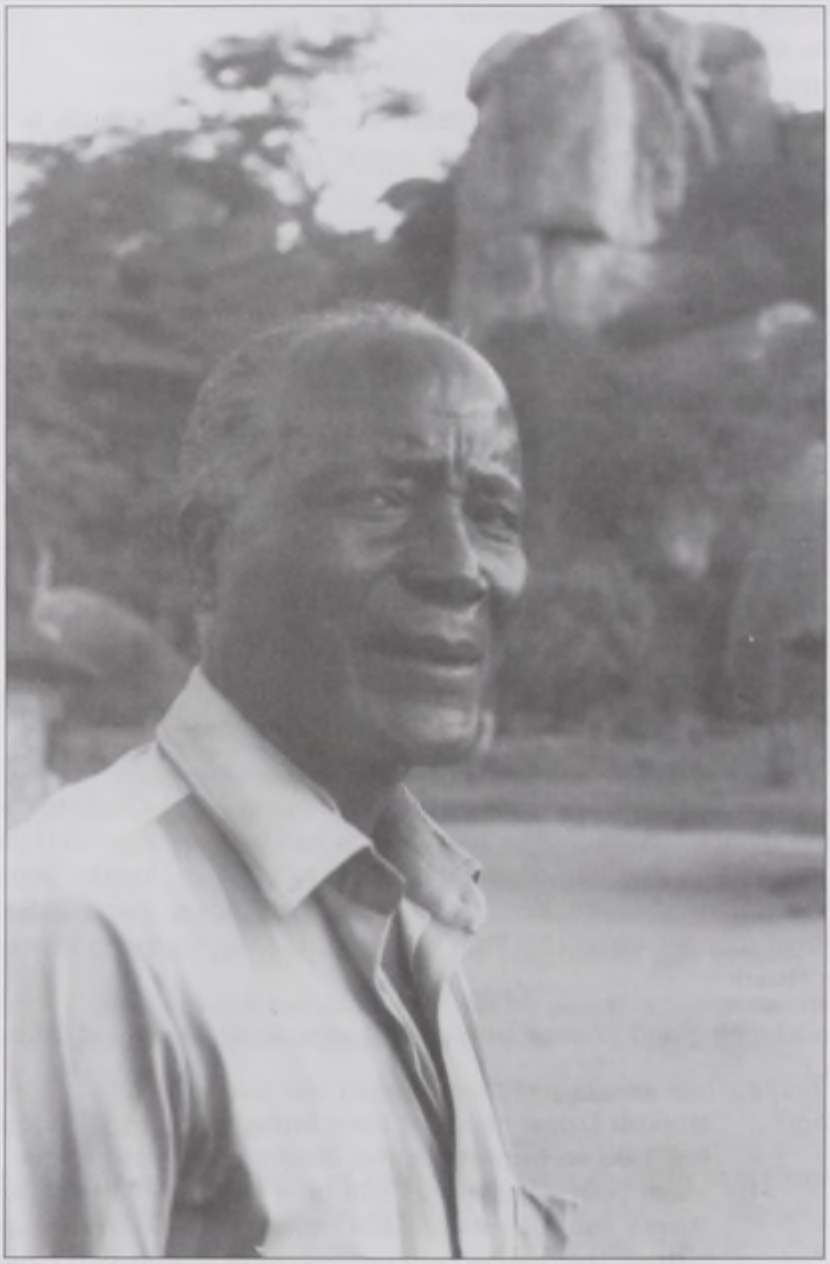


Plate 38 High-priest Jonas Chokoto in the courtyard of his homestead with the Dzilo shrine in the background

happy to be back. We had a good journey here. Here is your gift, $29 – a sign of joy and thankfulness for the safe journey. In the past I came from Gutu, together with the Gutu *munyai*, by the name of Vondo Mukozho. Now I am accompanied by the elders of the Spirit Medium Association. They are: the president, comrade Chinovuriri; vice president *svikiro* MuDende; the treasurer, *svikiro* Lydia Chabata; and executive member Daniel Zvanaka. I myself am the council's adviser (*mupi vemazano*), my name in this group being Muchakata Daneel.

Priest Jonas Chokoto:

There you are, Shoko! He is Muchakata Daneel, Shoko, and he says that he has come to bring thanks to the great Father (*babamukuru*). So he has presented his gift of $29, Tovera, Dziva!

Voice: (via female Shona interpreter who lives in cult colony): I am most thankful that you have arrived here. You are my *muzukuru* (sister's son). I can see that you are troubled. Therefore I shall mediate properly on your behalf (*ndichandoudzavo zvakanaka*, literally, 'I shall go and tell it properly'). I shall protect you. (*Ndichakutaririrai*, literally 'I shall look after you'.)

Delegation (with hand clapping):

Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko!

Chinovuriri (AZSM president):

As the leader of this association of spirit mediums – the one you have asked us to form, Shoko – I present it to you; as you can see. We have come to consult with you, Tovera, Mbedzi, you being Shoko, the Great One of the mountains here at Mwari's place. Do you support this movement and see that it will make great progress when we attempt to expand it all over Zimbabwe? This is actually your council of all Zimbabwe; not only a small thing of one ward (*dunhu*). We want to know whether we have your blessing to proceed with your work.

Priest Jonas Chokoto:

Your *vazukuru*, Shoko, have come to ask that your work out there make good progress. They said: 'Let us go and consult our Great Father, Tovera.' They need your support for it to be successful (*kubudirira*, literally 'to come out properly') and to grow, Dziva, Shoko.

Voice: I am most happy with this development. In accordance with your request I shall look after you, so that this movement will spread over the entire country, as you have said. *Vachakupirirai zvikuru* (he/she will intercede on your behalf with great intensity).

Delegation (with hand clapping): Tovera! Dziva! Shoko!

Author: I also want to ask about the rain, because in Masvingo the drought is severe indeed. We want to know why the rains are failing to this extent. Are there issues that must be arranged over there in Masvingo? Have you any advice for us?

Priest Chokoto:

There it is, Tovera! They say the earth is scorched in Masvingo, and they want to know what is preventing the rain from falling there.

Voice/interpreter:

The voice says that he/she too, is labouring on your behalf, interceding for you in prayer, being aware of your suffering. I am also crying, just as you are doing. But it is appropriate that you come like this, crying for rain.

Delegation: Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko!

Lydia Chabata (AZSM treasurer):

I am asking as a young child who is nonetheless entrusted with the work of the elders, the work of the Association of Spirit Mediums. I myself am a spirit medium. I am asking for a husband who will keep me and look after me wherever I go. This will give me security and status. I did great and responsible work while the war was on, Tovera. For many years I operated in the bush. After the war I looked

for a husband who will care for me, but up to now I am without a husband. What kind of *svikiro* will I be without a husband? As a single person I will not be properly honoured. Yet even after the war I kept working, doing the work which the ancestors have sent me to do, to liberate the land.

After the war the ancestors complained about the barrenness of the earth, so we keep busy, trying to mend the situation. But without a husband I cannot work properly. Perhaps I have transgressed against the ancestors.

In the second place I present the matter of the white man who is with us – Prof Muchakata. He has left his own tribe in order to work with the black people. He is the one who founded and organised the Association of Spirit Mediums and chiefs – for it to exist. He did this to build the land, by planting trees, by keeping the holy places, the springs (water resources) and wildlife. He did this to revive the customs of the past because we notice these days that many people throw away their customs, the customs of the blacks.

This is a great task, but as yet we lack money. Comrade Daneel keeps providing money from his own pocket. Wherever we travel, he is the one who pays. He paid for the trip here. It is his car we travel in, his petrol we use, his food we eat. He provides everything from his own funds, without any gain. So, I ask you to open doors, wherever he is trying to raise funds, so that the necessary funds be found. Bless his dealings with all the *vakuru* up there (government officials) so that he will not meet with unnecessary resistance. Because there are those who are hardheaded, who will oppose this association and block its progress.

We are therefore seriously requesting your full support and guidance for our work. After all, it is your work, Shoko. We have gone without salaries throughout the war from 1976. We simply did our duty without any compensation. And now, in the AZSM, it is the same story all over again: work

without full salaries! How long will this situation continue? It is as if you do not want me to have a husband, to work without a salary. Do you want me to become a whore?

Voice: I thank you for coming here. Your own senior ancestors of Chabata have preceded you in coming here. So we have been waiting for your arrival. If you had not come here, you would not have been able to make progress in any of these matters. But since you have come, you can now return with a relieved heart because all matters will go well from now on. Because I shall guide you in whatever you do. Go and do your work, for I shall be your guide in all matters at all times.

Delegation (clap hands, give thanks and, still calling Mwari's praise names, shuffle from the shrine in single file)

4.2.3 Interpretation of oracular messages

Despite some repetition, I have deliberately included the recorded text of two oracular sessions, simply because detailed accounts of what transpires at Mwari's shrines are rare. Priest Jonas Chokoto has repeatedly impressed on me that no other whites are allowed to converse with Mwari at the Dzilo *dombo*. Gogo also indicated during the session cited above that only a couple of white news reporters had ever attended at Vembe, but that on those occasions Mwari did not make pronouncements on race relations. In view of the trust placed in me and the unusual privilege of participating as a white in one of Zimbabwe's most ancient, treasured, if still secretive, rituals, I have reproduced in full and as accurately as possible the dialogue of the first two cult sessions concerning our green revolution.

Mwari's oracles constitute a source of broad insight which warrants comprehensive theological reflection. At this point, however, I offer only a brief interpretation, lest we digress too much from the main subject: earthkeeping. (I hope eventually to make a more comprehensive historical study of Mwari's oracular revelations).

4.2.3.1 Vembe and Dzilo: a comparison

The Vembe and Dzilo shrines belong to the same complex in terms of priestly kinship. Gogo is the daughter of one of Jonas Chokoto's pater-

nal uncles. She decided to have her own shrine after experiencing a divine call. Her cult ceremony contains some innovations on the one at Dzilo, for instance the annual gathering of local villagers to remove dead wood from the Vembe forests. However, in regard to belief systems and oracular pronouncements, the use of praise-names and the nature of the divine revelations, the two shrines operate on similar lines. In both instances a male priest interprets and presents the requests of delegates to Mwari, and Mwari's pronouncements are uttered in a hoarse, entranced female voice, which is interpreted to the audience by one or two female priestesses. Significantly, therefore, Mwari's revelations are made, or at least controlled and/or monitored, by women.

When comparing the two shrines, our earthkeeping delegation felt that the Dzilo shrine, because of its age-old tradition and country-wide support, is more authentic than its later offshoot at Vembe. As a result all subsequent AZTREC pilgrimages were made to the Dzilo shrine. Nevertheless it was felt that Vembe should also be visited from time to time.

4.2.3.2 Attributes of Mwari

In the oracular ceremony the nature and gender of the divinity at Matonjeni is not clearly specified. Priest Jonas Chokoto addresses Mwari as Great Father. Insofar as Gogo identifies her own role with that of the incarnate Christ, she also refers to God as Father. Yet as Dziva or Dzivaguru (the Great Pool) – a name Jonas frequently uses when replying to the female Voice from the cave – God is somehow the Mother of Creation, the Great Pool of fertility, the One who speaks from the cave, the womb of the earth, in a woman's voice. The interpreting priestess at the shrine always either speaks in the first person, impersonating Mwari, or refers to 'the Voice' which says this or that, with the result that no fixed gender is attached to Mwari. The ambivalence is probably also attributable to the fact that the Shona language does not have separate pronouns for different genders. Yet the anthropomorphic attributes of an androgynous deity – both father and mother – seem to be implicit in the proceedings.

A strong undercurrent of femininity and fertility is noticeable not only in the popular image of Mwari as rain-giver and guardian of all creation,

but also in the contents of oracles. For instance, the warm response to Lydia Chabata's plea for a spouse, the keen interest in her ancestors and the promise of Mwari's guidance and protection in her female world emanate from the understanding of a woman and a mother rather than from a male deity.

Despite his/her presence at the shrine, Mwari remains the unfathomable, the unknowable – the *mysterium tremendum*, to use Rudolf Otto's term. He/she is too mighty, too remote from human conceptions to be captured in manipulable definitions. Such an awareness is reflected in the 'fluctuating identities' of the Voice and interpreting priestess. Note, for instance, that Gogo sometimes intimates immediacy and presence, which strengthens the assumption that the Voice is that of Mwari him/herself. At such times she speaks in the first person, as the deity. But at other times she also identifies with the Voice, as if the communicating being of the oracle is an intermediary, possibly a spirit at the apex of the ancestral hierarchy, who intercedes between living beings and a remote deity. On occasion she even opts for a third possibility – that of herself as 'messenger of the Father' who is sent to work in the world. Here she uses biblical terminology, reminiscent of the words of Jesus Christ. In this regard it should be noted that priestess Gogo is an avid Bible reader, so that we have here an interaction of traditionalist and Christian influences. From the oracle it is not quite clear, however, whether Gogo was momentarily relegating the tricky issue of race relations to the more remote Father (in heaven?), the one who had 'shaken hands' with the whites and therefore knew the answer to my question, or whether she was suggesting some analogy between the incarnate Christ and her own role as a kind of 'mediator' between Mwari and her fellow human beings.

At Dzilo the proceedings were also characterised by shifting identities. Sometimes the Voice speaks directly as Mwari, Tovera, Shoko, Mbedzi or Dziva – hence as approachable through personal praise-names or the clan name (*mutupo*) of the priestly Mbire-Shoko lineage. Then it suddenly comes across as an intermediary between God and the delegation: 'The voice is labouring on your behalf, interceding for you in prayer ... I am also crying as you are.' So the revelatory Being can be interpreted one moment as God, the ultimate power of all creation, and the next as possibly the most senior ancestor of all humanity, the ulti-

mate mediator responsible for approaching the unknowable creator deity.

Shifting identities in no way appear to confuse issues during ritual procedure. *Africa in its wisdom shrouds the near-impossible presence of the divine in infinite mystery.* It refuses to be trapped into conjecture and final definitions, probably considering these presumptuous. Somehow Mwari draws near, listens to and responds to the needs of his/her creation.

Christian influence on the traditional perceptions of Mwari appears to be undeniable, although, during discussions, cult officiants at Matonjeni understandably disclaim any form of syncretising conceptual interaction so as to safeguard the unique African identity of the cult. Opposition to the mere suggestion of Christian influence on the cult is attributable to the resurgence and reinforcement of traditional belief systems during the *chimurenga* years, when it became fashionable among traditionalists to reject Jesu Krestu as the deity of the white colonialists. After all, to many people the Matonjeni cult represents the final bulwark, even if only symbolic, against the religio-cultural encroachment of white 'civilisation' on the inner soul of black Africa. There is also antagonism and rivalry between cultists and prophetic AIC movements, notably Mutendi's Zion Christian Church, because of the latter's claims to mediate for rain on behalf of church-affiliated chiefs – claims which directly challenge the ancient power base of Matonjeni (cf Daneel 1970:64f).

Mutual influencing can, however, take place in subtle and profound ways. On the one hand it is possible for tradition-oriented Christians still to see the Christian Mwari predominantly as a God of fertility, to be approached by 'cult specialists', the clergy, on behalf of the entire church, while individual matters remain essentially the domain of the family ancestors. In the traditional setting, on the other hand, Christ can become a role model for ritual officiants, as seems to be the case with priestess Gogo Itombiyamazulu. Many traditionalists, moreover, have little trouble incorporating Jesus Christ into their religious worldview as the senior *mhondoro* spirit of the white tribe, the mediator who is as close to Mwari as the African national ancestors, Chaminuka and Nehanda, are. Christian influence might also have stimulated a more pronounced image of the oracular deity as Creator, Father and Liberator – observable in both Jonas Chokoto's and Gogo's perception of Mwari

as Great Father (*Babamukuru*), despite the continuing suggestion of a shrouded, mysterious Being.

4.2.3.3 Race relations

I deliberately raised this issue with the oracle because of the will in ZIRRCON-AZTREC to promote interracial reconciliation in our ecological struggle; also because Mwari's pronouncements way back in 1967, when I first visited Wirirani, included admonitions about racial harmony between his/her black people and their sister's offspring – their *vazukuru*, the whites (Daneel 1970:84–85). Mwari's assertion at the Vembe shrine that whites and blacks are one and that peace should prevail between them accords with the oracle's earlier urgings, at the onset of the *chimurenga* struggle, that racial equality should be achieved and that the discriminatory disregard of the *sekuru-muzukuru* kinship obligations – as perpetrated by the white immigrant vazukuru on their black *vadzisekuru* – should cease. Mwari's reference at the Vembe shrine to children who mature and then follow their own ways might still be a veiled criticism of the inclination of the 'unburnt pot', the white people, to 'handle' and 'twist' the world after their own design (to use the phraseology of the old Matonjeni dirge, which expressed the despondency of black cultists after the failure of the 1896 rebellions; supra, p 24), regardless of Mwari's commands.

Mwari's approval of and conciliatory attitude towards a white man attending shrine sessions project the goodwill of the cult community, just as the deity's emergence as an ecological liberator is a result of the determination of God's people to start healing the earth. Accepting a white man as a participant at the shrine certainly does not imply waiving the secret nature of the cult, or any change in the role of Mwari vaMatonjeni as the preserver of black African custom and culture. The shrine gates have certainly not been thrown wide open to white observers and participants. My own involvement could already have struck a false note – for all Mwari's conciliatory gestures – in the cult tradition. It should, according to the cult officiants concerned, be considered a special privilege brought about by unusual circumstances. White participation at one of the most exclusive of black Africa's rituals is not to be taken lightly. It requires an attitude of humility and respect as one feels the heart throb of the mysterious holy of holies at Mwari's sacred rocks.

4.2.3.4 Mwari's response to ZIRRCON-AZTREC's earth-healing activities

At both shrines Mwari responded quite positively to our enterprise. During the cave ceremonies, because of the initiative taken by the green delegation, Mwari's rain-giving image mutated, as it were, into that of an ecological liberator, the one whom we petition to be the ultimate guide, protector and affirmer of the green revolution. Note, for instance, vaChinovuriri's recognition at the Vembe shrine of Mwari as the originator of our ecological enterprise in Masvingo Province. Yet simultaneously he hands over 'your work out there, Shoko' to Mwari as a self-initiated endeavour of the people, a distinctly human activity which still requires divine affirmation. In the oracular encounter the dynamic and flexible image of the divine can be ascribed both to Mwari's self-revelation from the mystical beyond and to human perceptions or intervention in regard to the concrete and socially justified needs of this existence. The concept of the divinity is born anew and remoulded in the endless cycle of divine-human encounter.

An element of uncertainty about the future and a need for divine affirmation characterise the attitudes of delegates reporting on their fledgling movement for the first time. Funds have not yet been secured and government attitudes to our green revolution have not yet been fully gauged. In addition there is the involvement of a *murungu* who may not stand up to the stresses and strains of interreligious and cross-cultural endeavour, hence the insistence of AZSM key figures that Mwari should reveal something about the future development and prospects of success of the new movement.

The response to such inquiries at both shrines is positive and confirms future divine guidance, support and protection. But whilst guaranteeing successful fund raising for tree planting, the oracle does not describe detailed battle strategies or predict exactly the future attitudes of people and the expansion of the movement. As happened during the war years, the details of the struggle are taken care of by the ancestral war council, while the oracle more generally inspires perseverance as a condition for ultimate victory. Significantly, therefore, Mwari hints that the white one has 'received the AZSM from the ancestors', as if to convert him, an outsider, into becoming an insider to black culture, implying full acceptance of customary norms and ancestral directives. In doing so Mwari identifies with the interracial features of the movement and accepts guardianship of it.

4.2.3.5 Impact on ZIRRCON-AZTREC

Divine affirmation of our earthkeeping struggle at Matonjeni has a psychologically motivating effect. It provides a tangible link with the ultimate liberating power behind *chimurenga*, the real source of the new state under black rule. As a result the complex and often frustrating task of tree planting and experimentation with indigenous species, the survival rate of which can be dishearteningly low, are elevated to a mystically sanctioned undertaking of national significance. Oracular recognition also stimulates a wider vision of ecological reform among the chiefs and spirit mediums. It strengthens their determination to persevere with their voluntarily accepted task of improving their environment.

To many chiefs and mediums who had never been to Matonjeni before, the trip to the oracle was an adventurous highlight after weeks of demanding work, organising and establishing new woodlots in their own chiefdoms. Communing with the very source of their tribal political powers – powers which have been radically and disturbingly curtailed by President Mugabe's government – offered the chiefs an outlet for their frustrations, possibly also a new sense of destiny in the new Zimbabwe as their imaginations were fired to innovate and lead fellow Zimbabweans in Mwari's expanding war of the trees. Small wonder that in 1992 – a year of tribulation, of drought and famine – a number of AZTREC chiefs kept insisting that they needed to visit Matonjeni more regularly. It is to be expected that, amongst other things, they needed to consult Mwari about the prospects of the government restoring their former land allocation and judicial powers. In this respect AZTREC, in so far as it is a council of chiefs, cannot avoid some measure of political involvement.

Shrine visits and the recording of oracular pronouncements also provide ZIRRCON with a unique opportunity to pursue its mission as a research institute. Thus my own inquiry into the attributes of Mwari, subsequent to the 1989 visit, triggered lengthy dialogue and even heated debate among fellow delegates about divine presence at the shrine caves. The 'shifting identities' of Voice and female interpreter caused arguments and counter arguments on whether Mwari speaks directly from the cave (either in her/his own voice or through an entranced medium), or whether a senior spirit (once again, either directly or

Plate 39 AZTREC chiefs plant tree-seedlings next to the late high-priest Jonas Chokoto's grave – an act of shared commitment in the country's earthkeeping struggle

through a medium) is mediating between God and humanity. The then AZSM president, Chinovuriri, accepted that the oracle's pronouncements were the result of the creator God's direct presence, whereas MuDende, the vice president, argued that the Matopo Mwari was not the universal creator at all but a mediatory spirit, less significant than the national ancestor Chaminuka.

Such discussions, besides being useful clues to conceptual variations, also helped me to clarify my own role as Christian observer and ritual participant at Mwari's shrines. Those AZTREC delegates who are also practising Christians tended to agree with my view that Matonjeni is an instance of the universal Mwari's general revelation, as portrayed in Romans 1:19f. In other words, we were not dealing with a demonic non-Christian power, but with Africa's age-old perception of, and reliance on, the Mwari whom we worship as Christians. Although in biblical terms the oracular deity of Matonjeni represents an incomplete and in some respects misleading perception of Elohim, the supporting traditional belief system is in a process of change and contains some Christian impulses. Without suggesting that Matonjeni must become a hybrid of traditional and Christian practice, I felt that relating to the oracle, understanding the cult and having dialogue with its cultists were more in keeping with Christian tolerance and witness to the presence of the cosmic Christ than radical rejection and dissociation would be.

In a sense, oracular support is the logical outcome of practising earth-keeping on holistic religious and African philosophic lines. The old high-God is the final power which unites and approves the disparate yet interrelated ecological directives of a wide network of guardian spirits. Thus the concerted activities of AZTREC are elevated to almost unassailable mystical and national significance, resulting in greater overall resolve at the distant district levels. In the process religio-cultural consciousness and identity are placed in historical perspective; research is promoted; and partly obscured theological issues concerning Christian missionary impact, conceptual change in God concepts and the resilience of African traditional religion are brought into the open.

4.3 *Chimurenga* history and the birth of a new myth

Traditionalist tree-planting ceremonies present the tribal elders and war

Plate 40 Cde Chinovuriri, AZTREC's myth-maker, interprets *chimurenga* history in an earthkeeping context

veterans with an ideal platform for recounting their *chimurenga* experiences and drawing on the religious motivation of the war to inspire ecological action and commitment. Drawing on the rich heritage of *chimurenga* religion enables the elders to introduce a dimension of myth and mystical empowerment which appeals to the imagination and reinforces the call and sanction of both guardian ancestors and creator God. In the process a new myth is born, in which *chimurenga* history is reinterpreted in the context of the green revolution in such a manner that cultural, religious and nationalist-patriotic motivational forces converge in a powerful imperative to participate in environmental reform.

The late Haurovi Chinovuriri, first president of the AZSM and subsequently general secretary of AZTREC, was a passionate exponent of the continuity between the liberation war and our ecological struggle. During the war he had been personally involved in the establishment of ZANLA camps in Mozambique. For several years, while acting as intermediary between the spirit mediums and ZANLA high command at the Chimoio camp, he was able to observe at close quarters the impact of spirit counsel on the determination of guerrilla strategy. Because of this war background and his prominent position in the movement, Chinovuriri was AZTREC's main war historian and mythologist during *mafukidzanyika* rituals (plate 40).

Let us consider the main features of Chinovuriri's war stories, focusing on his narration during our tree-planting ceremony at the Gutu heroes' reburial site in 1989. On this occasion Chinovuriri started by regaling everyone on the details of the battle of Chinhoyi in 1965 – the clash which marked the start of *chimurenga*. This battle, he maintained, had prompted the guerrillas' first serious attempt to obtain *svikiro* support. At an early stage the guardian ancestors had already indicated, through their mediums, that the country could not be taken from the north (Zambia) or the west (Botswana). The campaign had to be conducted from the east, they said, following the course of the sun. This had prefigured the eventual offensive from Mozambique. These early contacts between guerrillas and mediums represented the origins of our earth-keeping association, Chinovuriri maintained. When the guerrillas accompanied the aged medium, Nehanda, from Dande to Mozambique, and when ancestral directives for military strategy were faithfully recorded in 'the book of the *masvikiro*', the foundations of our earth-healing movement were already being laid.

Chinovuriri described at length the development of the Nyadzonya, Tembwe and Chimoio camps in Mozambique. At Chimoio the *masvikiro* were given their own living quarters at the four points of the compass, in close proximity to the camp. Thus placed, they provided a vital link between the ancestral war council, ZANLA high command and the fighters at the front. *Svikiro* MuDende, the AZSM's first vice president, was a key figure at Chimoio. Chinovuriri told how, through persistent visions of birds of prey hovering above the camp, MuDende had predicted the exact date and time of the massive Rhodesian air attack on the camp, the flight paths of the bombers and the deployment of paratroopers. At first the ZANLA commanders were sceptical. But eventually commanders Nhongo and Tongogara heeded MuDende's warnings, evacuating non-combatants from the camp and rearranging the anti-aircraft weaponry to counter the attack.

'It happened exactly as MuDende had told us,' Chinovuriri recounted. 'The preparations for defence against the enemy attack were made according to the directions of the *masvikiro*. We were ready for them. So many aircraft were shot down in the attack that Samora Machel could build a big township from aeroplane parts alone. Among the aircraft shot down were three Mirages ...'

I could not but smile at the hyperbole of Machel's township built of aeroplane parts. Informed historical accounts do not confirm such a loss of aircraft – in fact, they record a crushing defeat, in military terms, and destruction of the ZANLA camp (Moorcroft & McLaughlin 1982:151–157). Chinovuriri's account, however, turned a devastating experience into a powerful myth capable of informing and inspiring earthkeeping ventures in rural communities for generations to come ...

Chinovuriri told how the remains of Mbuya Nehanda's *svikiro* were kept in a special grave in Mozambique during the war. Afterwards her bones were carried by Chinovuriri, Takawira and others, travelling on foot all the way from Chimoio to Dande in northern Zimbabwe. This was in direct obedience to the instruction of Chaminuka, Zimbabwe's national war ancestor, that the fallen fighters should be properly buried in all districts of Zimbabwe. This injunction triggered the reburials at heroes' acres all over the country, with the approval of President Mugabe and Vice President Muzenda.

One of the aims of the reburials was to restore the balance of mystical

power which, having been disturbed by the war, was adversely affecting the annual rains.

'We considered that the rain may refuse to fall on the exposed bones of our people,' Chinovuriri recalled. 'It was necessary to conduct proper burial ceremonies in each district of Zimbabwe. We also fetched some soil from Mozambique to appease our dead. We told them: "We cannot carry the bones of all of you who died in Mozambique back to Zimbabwe, but in carrying this soil we have brought all of you back home."'

Chinovuriri was not perturbed by the failure of the *masvikiro* and his fellow tribal elders to launch an 'association of Zimbabwe' after their earlier deliberations at Chitungwiza. It had been prophesied in Mozambique, he said, that after Independence the *masvikiro* would 'go to sleep' for a while before rising to public prominence once more. And sure enough, just as they reached a particularly low ebb, the situation changed.

'President Mugabe thought: "Ha! Let us give the chiefs their power." I don't know how it happened, but that same week comrade Muchakata (my nickname) called me and I found a big gathering of *masvikiro* at his house. His house became our office and there we officially formed AZTREC. Subsequently we informed the chiefs and they told us that the government had granted them certain powers.'

Chinovuriri sketched the intinerary that the ancestors had laid down for future meetings of AZTREC: 'We have to go first to Chipinge and then to Dande, where Chaminuka's knife is embedded in a rock; from there we should proceed to *Mabweadziva* (the shrines at Matonjeni). But before going to *Mabweadziva* we should go to Chitungwiza where Chaminuka lived, because that is the real seat of the council of Zimbabwe's spirit mediums.

'Then, from *Mabweadziva*, we shall all proceed to Great Zimbabwe. There we will conduct the final meeting, so that everything will be done properly in accordance with the wishes of the ancestors. We shall do all this in honour of the old customs. Thus we shall overcome the destruction of the country and restore the old order.'

Chinovuriri was expressing a widely held conviction that peace and real progress in the country depend on the proper accommodation of the

senior ancestors of Zimbabwe at Great Zimbabwe. For the Shona at least, the main cult centre of traditional worship has to be established at or near the ruins. Such a move would require official government recognition, ritually enacted by the head of state displaying the recaptured land to the war council of the spirit world, which *Marambatemwa* insisted had to be done. Only then will the mystical forces that were blocking the rains and stifling economic progress be propitiated. Once satisfactory liaison between the ancestral guardians of the land and the current rulers is established, the old customs will have been honoured and national stability restored.

Chinovuriri's narrative was in harmony with the call of the chiefs and *masvikiro* during *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies to heed the ecological directives of the ancestors and Mwari. But he also showed that AZTREC is providing a public platform for a reconsideration of *chimurenga* history, the outcome of which will stimulate ongoing, ritual manifestation of spirit forces country-wide. The ancestors themselves, through Chaminuka, were presented as having laid down a postwar religious programme – pilgrimages to the traditional holy places in the country – so as to maintain the national unifying power of traditional religion which dominated during the war years (in contrast to localised lineage or tribal concerns which often characterise traditional ritual life) for the benefit of the entire nation. In the pilgrimage to the holy places the new ecological liberation theme introduced by AZTREC acquired special significance. For in describing how Chaminuka's command was heeded and how Nehanda's bones were carried cross-country, Chinovuriri was honouring two liberation traditions – respectively developed in response to erstwhile Ndebele and colonial oppression – and accepting them as both the origin of, and the justification for, AZTREC's aims and activities. When Chinovuriri linked the holy places of the prominent national ancestors and the traditional high-God (Musikavanhu at Chipinge; Mwari at *Mabweadziva*), moreover, he was showing continuing recognition of the close interaction of these spirit forces in the interest of human and, by implication, environmental liberation – an interaction that was powerfully manifested in *chimurenga*'s spirit war council.

Chinovuriri's narrative suggested, furthermore, that political liberation is not yet complete. There is still an imbalance between the traditional spirit world and the ruling powers of the day, painfully evident in the

persistent drought. Restoration of the national balance, it was suggested, could only be achieved if the necessary rituals were performed at the ancient citadel of Great Zimbabwe, the symbol of national well-being. AZTREC, it was hinted, should be instrumental in bringing about this event, which will give due recognition to the true spirit owners and guardians of the land. Insofar as the envisaged harmony between spirit powers and government will propitiate the forces that are withholding the life-giving rains, and so restore nature as well, both political and ecological liberation motives are realised to some extent. Here one discerns once again the holism of Africa's religion and worldview. Good politics, harmonious intertribal and race relations, a thriving subsistence economy (based, for AZTREC's peasant participants, on stable climatic conditions and a healthy environment), and ritual reciprocation between the living and the living dead – all of life hangs together in a seamless totality.

Like dreams, myth and ritual symbols inform religious life and facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances. AZTREC's new myth, as developed by Chinovuriri, was historically based. Yet, couched in mystical terms, it assumed and affirmed supernatural sanction of innovation in the form of ritualised ecological and nation-building appeasement of the ancestral world. On the one hand, the new myth confirmed and embellished the old tradition built into *chimurenga* history. The national ancestors as symbols of resistance, and the holy places (particularly Great Zimbabwe) as symbols of national progress and good government, were retained and extended to the new struggle.

At the same time the emergent myth acquired new dimensions, articulated by Chinovuriri but also willed and approved in the *mafukidzanyika* context, as if a groundswell of the collective unconscious was irresistibly breaking through the hiddenness of the unknown. New was the 'edited' rendering of *chimurenga* battles, such as the air attack on Chimoio, in such a way that ancestral intervention could be seen to provide real solutions: protection against military might, liberation from white political and cultural domination, and the building of a new society in which imperialistic presumption had been vanquished (symbolised by Machel's township built from destroyed enemy aircraft parts).

New, too, was the admission of a white participant to an essentially black African enterprise. Chinovuriri on a number of occasions likened

my role in founding the AZSM to that of a 'chief'. By saying that I was not made a chief only recently, but was one already in my mother's womb, and that I could therefore not escape this chieftainship even if I wanted to, he was in a sense contextualising my role, identifying it with the problematic position of the chiefs in post-Independence Zimbabwe and referring to the inevitability of destiny. It could be that the white participant was being persuaded subtly to stick to his guns should the going get rough. Yet the ease with which, in terms of broad classification, an erstwhile 'enemy' of the liberation cause could now be accommodated as fellow combatant indicates flexibility in the new myth – the will to take responsibility for a new programme of racial reconciliation and to change attitudes for the sake of a racially open-ended revolution.

Even more significant was that the new myth recounted the past in such a way that Zimbabwean nationalist sentiments could take the form of an ethos – an ethos which defines progress not only in terms of repossession of the still 'lost lands' held by whites, or in terms of the good life (financial rewards, consumer products), but in terms of *altruistic labour invested in environmental reform.*