

# MORE THAN ONE PARAMOUNT CHIEF IN ONE CHIEFTAINCY? THE GENDER OF MAINTAINING WORLDS

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## Abstract

*A chieftaincy usually has one paramount chief. This article explores the fact that one of the Ndau-Shona chieftaincies in Chipinge district in Zimbabwe, the Mutema chieftaincy, has more than one paramount chief, namely one of the government and one or two of the ancestors. This phenomenon has several reasons. One reason is the power struggle among the royals. Another reason is that spirit mediums, chiefs and government officials use, manipulate and transform rules, values, norms and ideas and thereby shape practice. They do so in order to maintain their own worlds, which became intertwined, and from which they derive their authority, enabling them to wield power. It is the woman spirit medium of the chieftaincy who emerges as a power-broker and mediator between the different worlds of chiefs and government. Thereby, she assists both government officials and chiefs in maintaining their worlds.*

## INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE IS based on field research<sup>2</sup> in the Mutema chieftaincy of Chipinge District (see Appendix 1). We explore the fact that the chieftaincy has more than one paramount chief, namely one of the government and one or two of the ancestors. Usually one person carries out both religious and governmental duties in a chieftaincy. Bourdillon (1987, 117–118) referred to one chieftaincy where these duties were divided between two chiefs in the 1930s, but pointed out that this was no longer acceptable to candidates in the 1970s. In every chieftaincy, there is a hierarchy. At the top of the Mutema chieftaincy are paramount chiefs who look after the whole chieftaincy area (*nyika*). Below them are seven area headmen, five of whom have the special title, *madumburanzou*, and are involved in the appointment of paramount chiefs. Finally, there are 37 village heads, who

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<sup>2</sup> This research among the Ndau-Shona in Manesa village took place from July 1994 to August 1996.

are also called *mutape* (informant of the paramount), or *saguta* (owner of the village or homes), or *sadunhu* (owner of a small area), or *sabhuku* (owner of the tax book), or kraalhead (a term introduced by the colonial administration).

This article has five sections. First we compare different lists of paramounts of the Mutema chieftaincy and show that such are constructions by those who compiled them. Second, we look at the rules, practices, norms, values and ideas of members of the royal families, concerning their selection of a paramount chief. In the third section, we show that leaders want to adhere to these rules of selection, but also manipulate the rules to a certain extent. On the other hand, it seems that government officials use one selection criterion and that is age. Fourth, we explore the enthroning ceremony of the paramount of the government, which took place on 19 July 1996 in Ngaone village of the Mutema chieftaincy. In the last section we look more closely at the intertwined worlds of government officials and chiefs.

### CONSTRUCTED LISTS OF PARAMOUNT CHIEFS

Different social actors have compiled varying lists with names of paramount chiefs of the Mutema chieftaincy. In Appendix I, we have depicted five lists which we obtained from Meredith who was an administrator (1903); Rennie (1973) who was a scholar; the District Administrator (DA) who represented the government in Chipinge District (1996); Semwayo Mwaneseni who represented the royals of the Mutema chieftaincy (1995); and the spirit medium of Makopa (1996).

If we compare the lists, we see that they are almost similar up to the 13th chief, Munodani. Only Meredith depicted variations for the fourth, fifth and sixth chiefs. However, after Munodani there are two crucial differences. The first difference is that only the Semwayo mentions Muzuru as the 14th paramount chief. The Semwayo said that he trusted this list because he obtained it from a very old man who used to know everything. He argued that only the spirit medium of Makopa could indicate whether Muzuru was a paramount chief or not. That spirit medium was experienced.

Makopa was the 10th paramount chief and is at present the most important royal ancestral spirit (*mudzimu*) of the Mutema chieftaincy. Makopa has a medium, who from time to time becomes possessed by the spirit and speaks with the voice of the spirit. Because of their links with ancient chiefs, one of the tasks of such a spirit medium is to nominate a paramount of the house whose turn it is to rule. The medium (*svikiro*) of Makopa is a woman, approximately 58 years old. She is a niece (*muzukuru*) of the paramount chief. Everybody calls her 'Makopa' and 'father is you' (*Baba ndiwe*). She explained that the spirit came to her after her father had passed away. He had the spirit before her. She said:

I was very young. I was *kumuka* [literally: to wake up, i.e. possessed with a spirit] before I married. I started to 'wake up' when there was Mwatuma.

She saw the following five chiefs being enthroned: Mwatuma, Gadzai, Mwadzongonya, Mwanema and the present Siwonani. She said that Zarura came after Munodani had passed away, and did not mention Muzuru. She explained that Zarura Mukowa was the first to work in pairs of paramount chiefs: he worked with Mwatuma.

This leads to the second difference within the five lists: only the medium of Makopa indicated that there are two or three paramount chiefs at one time — one who is responsible for government duties and one or two who are responsible for religious duties such as worshipping the ancestors.

This shows us that lists with names of paramount chiefs are constructions of different social actors who could have specific interests. For example, the spirit medium has an interest in maintaining the ancestral world from which she and certain royals derive their authority. The interests of government could be that they have an educated representative of the chieftaincy to work with. Interests and rules are often intertwined.

#### CHIEFS' RULES FOR SELECTING A PARAMOUNT CHIEF

The ruling family of the chieftaincy is organised according to houses. There are four ruling houses at present, namely Zarura, Mwatuma, Gadzai and Mwadzongonya. A paramount chief will be chosen from each house in turn. For example the previous chief of the government, Freddy Mwanema, was of Zarura house and therefore the present government chief is from Mwatuma house. We shall examine the phenomenon of a royal house, taking Zarura house as an example, because its members live in Manesa village, where the research was conducted.<sup>3</sup>

Late Chief Zarura had many wives and in total 15 sons. Three of these did not have sons. The remaining 12 had 54 sons in total. Their families represent 12 of the 15 current houses of Zarura house at present. If it was Zarura's turn to rule, these 12 houses would participate in the selection of a paramount chief, who is usually the eldest male.<sup>4</sup> But this is not always the case as many disputes arise about succession.<sup>5</sup>

Thus time and date of birth need to be carefully monitored. Apart from age, the nominated chief has to comply with rules and requirements which are outlined below. Such information needs to be carefully recorded,

<sup>3</sup> In January and February 1996, Gumiso Makono, a student of the University of Zimbabwe, participated in the research and looked more closely into this chief's house.

<sup>4</sup> However, in Masvingo in 1996 the daughters from the house whose turn it was to rule were also considered and a young woman was chosen by the government to become a chief.

<sup>5</sup> Such disputes elsewhere are explored by Weinrich (1971, 106–166).

and it is mainly wives within the house who formally pass the information around, creating a 'channel' (*murandu*; pl. *mirandu*: the message about a child or marriage is taken from homestead to homestead by the respective wives, until all the families in the royal house are informed). Wives carefully monitor and record, because sub-houses within a house compete for the nomination of a paramount chief. A member of the family explained:

When a baby is born you have to inform all family members within a house. You have to do that fast. When another baby is born later, but is reported earlier, the real first born can be the last born. The first reported, is the first born.

Wives of the chiefly family establish channels for marriage, birth, umbilical cord and teeth.<sup>6</sup> Those are some of the criteria for selecting a paramount chief.

The 'marriage channel' is called *matufurabere*, meaning 'we have shot a hyena'. A son of a chief's house will approach his *vatete* (father's sister) to inform her that he is married. The *vatete* will inform her brother about his son's marriage, using metaphors: She will tell him that his son has *kufurabere*, meaning that he was brave enough to kill a hyena. The marriage channel is continued by the wives of the families, who take the bride from homestead to homestead,<sup>7</sup> where they also explain some of the issues about making love. They also repeat that the bride should live well with others and respect her *vatete* and parents.

The second channel is to inform the different families in a chiefly house that a woman gave birth. If the child was born with the legs first (breech), no channel is carried out. Such a child is called *sunama*, and such sons are excluded from selection to the paramouncy. The birth channel is started by the grandmother (*ambuya*), who usually acts as the midwife. When a woman visits a homestead to inform the family about a birth, she indicates by metaphor whether it is a boy or girl.

A third channel is carried out when the umbilical cord (*chinzou*<sup>8</sup>) of the baby falls off. The midwife takes the cord and shaves the hair from the baby's head. Cord and hair are put in a hole with some ashes on top.

The fourth channel is for the coming out of the teeth. If the upper teeth of the child come out first, that child is not supposed to be selected to be a paramount chief. The whole family is supposed to take medicine, because it is believed that such teeth can kill them. An older wife of a chief

<sup>6</sup> People who are not related to chiefs also inform their family members about birth, marriage, teeth and umbilical cord, but in a less systematic way than is the case for chiefs. In chiefs' families the information reaches all the homesteads within a house in a few days.

<sup>7</sup> We once joined in a *matufurabere* by going from homestead to homestead and were twice involved in a birth *murandu* in 1995.

<sup>8</sup> *Chinzou* literally means a trunk. The umbilical cord holds and feeds the baby in the womb and that resembles an elephant trunk.

explained that long ago, before the colonial era, *such* children were drowned in the river.

Even if a baby boy is born in a normal way, the umbilical cord fell off nicely and the teeth came out well, a son does not qualify automatically for the nomination of a paramount chief. In addition to this, he should have lived without accidents, boils, operations or any misconduct. The chief's sons are not allowed to be stitched in any way, otherwise they cannot be nominated as a paramount chief. Consequently, each house in the Mutema genealogy, representing different families in smaller houses, controls carefully the nominated paramount chief of tomorrow. Below we will see that from these rules power struggles emerge. Beach (1994, 242) argues that to understand the reasoning behind the construction of the genealogy, we need to understand the dynamics of Shona politics. He recognises two conflicting tendencies: the tendency of fathers to pass on power to their sons and the tendency of brothers of rulers to seek the title when the ruler dies. These can lead to a third tendency of an uneasy 'rotation' of power between the houses. This is what we are going to see in the next section. But we will see that the uneasy rotation is not only caused by the royals who represent different houses; it is also caused by government officials who have their own ideas about who should be nominated as a paramount chief.

#### MORE THAN ONE PARAMOUNT EMERGES FROM THE USE OF DIFFERENT IDEAS AND RULES IN TWO WORLDS

In this section we will see how government officials diverge from the royal selection rules. We will also show how royals themselves use those rules and thereby reproduce and transform social practices. The medium of Makopa explained<sup>9</sup> why chief Zarura Mukowa introduced the pairing of paramount chiefs as follows:

Zarura said I want to work with the government and then my young 'brother' Mwatuma will work with the ancestors (*vadzimu*), because I was bitten by a crocodile. When you are bitten by a crocodile, you will not worship the ancestors (*kudira ndiro*).<sup>10</sup> Zarura was given a badge of office. Then Zarura went to his young 'brother' Mwatuma. He said to him: 'please worship the ancestors for me and for our chieftaincy (*umambo*)'.

<sup>9</sup> We visited the medium of Makopa several times in Ngaone (see Vijfhuizen, forthcoming) and also spent a night at her place during the weekend of 19 August 1996. The information in this section is mainly derived from taped interviews during that weekend.

<sup>10</sup> *Kudira* (Ndau-Shona) or *kupira* (Standard Shona) means to worship. 'Ndiro' means 'wooden plate'. When people worship, they put a wooden plate in front of them and after worshipping they will take the plate home and keep it at a special place. This wooden plate is holy and will not be mixed with the other plates in the homestead.

Thus although this son of Zarura, Mukowa, did not qualify to become a paramount chief, he was chosen by the government because he was the eldest son of Zarura house, whose turn it was to rule. Makopa explained that Zarura was the first paramount chief who brought the government badge of office to the Mutema area. She said it looked like a half moon with a hare's picture on it. Zarura did not want to lose this opportunity, and so he chose Mwatuma, a 'brother' from the next house, to be the paramount of the ancestors. Or perhaps he did not want to perform both duties, as is normally the case. Bourdillon (1987, 118–119) explains that 'on the one hand the chief is the traditional "father" and speaks to the spiritual powers and on the other hand, the chief is a government employee'. This normally applies to the Mutema chieftaincy: after Zarura, Chiefs Mwatuma and Gadzai were both ruling alone. Mwadzongonya seemed to have ruled together with Chamwakaona. When Chamwakaona passed away, Mwapinga took over and later Mwadzongonya was alone (see the fifth list in Table 1, Appendix D).

Then Zarura's house had its turn again to rule the Mutema chieftaincy. Freddy Mwanema was the eldest son in this house. However, the royals and medium of Makopa said that he did not qualify for selection because he was once injured. They chose Semwayo Mwaneseni from Zarura's house as the chief of the government and Julius Mapipana from Mwatuma house as the chief of the ancestors.

The government said that the people of the chieftaincy did not choose well, because they had taken the youngest son, while the eldest son was there. The medium of Makopa recalled:

Then Freddy Mwanema came to me in a car and said: Chief Makopa I was bitten by a crocodile. I was stitched. But this chieftaincy is not going to bypass me, because my father was also bitten by a crocodile and he worked with Mwatuma. So that is what I am going to do. I am an elder to Mapipana and Semwayo Mwaneseni. Let those two worship the ancestors.

After Freddy Mwanema had passed away in 1992, the spirit medium and royals again chose their paramount chief. At the end of 1994, Julius Mapipana was chosen by the medium of Makopa. The medium said that he had swallowed the stone of the paramount chief, meaning that he had complied with all the rules for selection. The medium explained that they choose a paramount chief according to the laws (*mitemo*) of the chieftaincy and that the ancestors do not consider education. However, the government chose Siwonani as paramount chief, because he was the eldest son of Mwatuma house. Siwonani was also educated abroad. Then the government approached the medium of Makopa early in 1995 to discuss the nomination of the chief. During a seance in April 1995 in Manesa village, the Makopa chose Siwonani as the paramount of the Mutema chieftaincy. Most probably she changed her choice because: Siwonani was the eldest and chosen by

the government; he was an educated person; and she had experienced several times before that the government does not take into account the chiefs' selection rules.

We could argue that if Siwonani became the paramount of the government, Mapipana could be the paramount of the ancestors. However, that seemed to be a problem. The medium of Makopa explained that the two are from the same house, Mwatuma, and are therefore not allowed to rule together. The existing rule is that there can be more than one paramount, but they ought to be from different houses, namely, that house which has its turn to rule and the house which follows it. The medium of Makopa explained that in the present case the paramount chief of the ancestors is supposed to be Godfrey Munhukwaye, the eldest son from Gadzai's house. She did not, however, see it as her task to settle this conflict. She tried to have the name of the paramount of the ancestors announced during the enthroning ceremony in July 1996 (see below), but nobody wanted to make the decision. In August 1996, she explained:

The government has finished. They have installed their chief. We want to know who is going to work with Siwonani. It is not possible for Mapipana, because they are both children from one house. The *vazvare* (eldest sons of the Mutema family) and *madumburanzou* (headmen) came to me, so that I can ask Makopa. But Makopa said, 'No. You eldest Mutema sons and headmen, go and arrange it on your own. Otherwise you will say it is Makopa who makes everything go wrong. Go and inform Makopa later about the person you have chosen to work with Siwonani.'

Also the woman medium of the royal spirit of Mwatuma, who lives in Mutema village, said that Siwonani and Mapipana cannot rule together because they are from one house. It seems to be difficult for the eldest Mutema sons and headmen to make a decision. We asked why Siwonani cannot be the only paramount chief of the chieftaincy and carry out both religious and government duties. The medium of Makopa and her husband said that Siwonani will not agree to worship the ancestors on the grounds that he is an educated person. Siwonani chose to work with the government. But the medium and her husband were of the opinion that Siwonani should choose the person with whom he wants to work. They explained that after the enthroning ceremony, Siwonani had said at a private beer drink, 'Please continue to honour Mapipana for the ancestor side, because Mapipana was also throned by Makopa.' After hearing this, the medium of Mwatuma asserted again that Mapipana cannot be honoured because Siwonani and Mapipana are from the same house. Although Makopa repeated her demand that someone should be chosen, Mapipana and Semwayo continue to act as the paramount chiefs of the ancestors.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> During the installation of a headman in Mutema village which we attended in August 1996, Mapipana was present and he was honoured and recognised as a paramount chief.

## THE ENTHRONEMENT OF THE PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF THE GOVERNMENT

Enthronement ceremonies of paramount chiefs of the government are organised by the government and royals. The installation ceremony of Siwonani Josisi (or Joseph) Phillimon Mutema took place on 19 July 1996 in Ngaone village, situated high in the mountains not far away from the district capital Chipinge. Ngaone has been the residence of the Mutema paramount chiefs, but nowadays the chiefs of the government, like Siwonani, live in Harare. The chief of the ancestors, Julius Mapipana, and the medium of Makopa, live in Ngaone. Semwayo Mwaneseni lives in Manesa village. The medium lives with her husband, two of her four sons and a nephew. Julius Mapipana lives with five wives in an ordinary homestead. Unlike the chiefly homesteads of the past, it is not surrounded by walls. Old stone walls (*rusvingo*) can be found in Ngaone. The chiefs used to erect these for defence due to power struggles in the chieftaincy and struggles with paramounts from other chieftaincies. Chiefs were always fighting for wealth (*upfumi*), taking land, cattle, wives, and young men to be slaves.

On the day of the enthronement it rained and it was cloudy, making it extremely cold high in the mountains. It was difficult for the guests to drive over the steep slippery road to reach Ngaone. Important guests arrived. Some of them were: Ndabaningi Sithole who is the leader of ZANU (Ndonga), the only opposition party (with two of the 150 parliamentary seats) in the ZANU (PF) government; the Deputy Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development; the Chairman of the Chiefs' Council, that represents all chiefs in Zimbabwe; the paramount chief of Musikavanhu chieftaincy; other government officials; important Mutema royals, area headmen and village heads; 13 most important spirit mediums of the Mutema chieftaincy, including the medium of Makopa. Other people present included school children, teachers, health workers, police officers, agricultural staff and women and men from the villages. The ceremony was organised at Ngaone secondary school. The place where beer was brewed and meat was prepared, called *musasa*, was 300 metres away from the school.

The important people of the chieftaincy gathered and started to drink beer before the enthroning ceremony started around 12.30 in the afternoon. The majority of the guests sat on chairs in a tent. Other people gathered around the tent in a circle, leaving space in the middle where performances could be held and where the spirit mediums sat down.

The master of ceremonies opened the session by saying that Mutema people should clap their hands according to the Mutema culture. After clapping hands a prayer followed:

Oh God, we are gathering here because we have an important ceremony (*mudiro*) in our place Mutema. God, lead our ceremony well and let us dismiss in peace.

Then the 13 mediums of the Mutema chieftaincy, of whom ten were women and three were men,<sup>12</sup> walked into the circle and sat down on the grass. All mediums had wrapped themselves in black clothes. The medium, Makopa, talked during the ceremony, followed by the woman medium of Mwandeka.

Children from Chichichi primary school entered the ground. They danced and sang songs. They sang 'our chieftaincy should unite together' and 'people of Zimbabwe I love you all, but witches I will chase them away from the country'. After that, the master of ceremonies introduced the important guests to the people.

Then the Chairman of the Chiefs' Council of Zimbabwe gave his speech. After he had greeted all the different people, he referred to the power struggles among the Mutema royals. He berated them for taking the matter to the High Court in Harare, pointing out that the chief was the chief of the people and should be chosen by the people. He also commented that he was looking forward to chief Mutema bringing development to the area and helping his people to prosper in peace.

While the Chairman of the Chiefs' Council was talking, the medium of Makopa became possessed. She said:

There is nothing I can say to you all, you chiefs. From the beginning you were there. In times of good and bad things. Give us your speech, so that we can also hear you. Proceed with your speech. There is nothing bad.

The Chairman of the Chiefs' Council then introduced the Deputy Minister of Local Government, who gave his speech. After greeting everybody, Deputy Minister agreed with the Chairman of the Chiefs' Council, saying:

Our personal behaviour comes from the chieftaincy and all other things we always see and hear from time to time. The previous speaker, the Chairman of the Chiefs' Council said that the work of a chief is very important. It is the work of seeing if his people are living well and if the people have enough food. Do people have enough water and do they have good soil? And many other things is the work of a chief. Who is the chief? The Chairman of the Chiefs' Council said that some chiefs want to go with the chieftaincy to the High Court to be given the chieftaincy, arguing that he should be the one who is supposed to be a paramount chief. Was that the behaviour of our elders, which they used to do long

<sup>12</sup> Thus among the Ndaushona it are mainly women who are the spirit mediums of the royal ancestral spirits of the chieftaincy. Among the Karanga (see Weinrich, 1971) and Korekore (see Bourdillon, 1987; and Lan, 1985) the spirit mediums of royal ancestral spirits are mainly men.

ago (*pasi chigare*)? The Chairman of the Chiefs' Council said 'No'. Our chieftaincy in our culture is given through the *dzinza* (patrilineage). A chief of Mutema cannot be throned by people who do not live within Mutema. The patrilineage of Mutema is of Mutema and of Musikavanhu is of Musikavanhu. Those people from that *dzinza* are the very people who will get the chieftaincy.

We might notice that recourse to the High Court challenge the decision-making of government officials. The Deputy Minister went on to explain that Papami Shiriyedenga created the Mutema chieftaincy some two to three hundred years ago and listed 17 chiefs who followed him (omitting the seventh chief in the government list, Nyazviro Mutsasike). According to the Deputy Minister, Siwonani is the eighteenth paramount chief, the number that was mentioned in the newspapers which reported the enthronement. However, the government list of the District Administrator in Chipinge (Appendix I) shows Siwonani to be the nineteenth chief.

The Deputy Minister explained that Siwonani took over from Freddy Mwanema who passed away on 20 March 1992. From the way he depicted Siwonani's history, it also emerges that government officials associate education of a paramount chief with the development of a chieftaincy:

Siwonani was born on 26 March 1929 and was a teacher. He also went to the University.<sup>13</sup> He learned a lot and taught in many different schools. He travelled to different countries and went to be educated in the USA. He had high positions at work. He was once a deputy headmaster and also a headmaster. He retired in 1989. The way he travelled to different countries made his knowledge grow high. The education he has should be an important thing in this area of Mutema. The education is going to help those who want to use it. People of Mutema, it shows that you are lucky to have a leader who is going to build up the Mutema area. What we government want is that the chiefs should unite with the government and with the Council and with their people. We want your leadership. Chiefs to begin here with the people. Then to the Council and also to go as far as the government. Siwonani Mutema is being approved and being throned by the President, his excellency Robert Gabriel Mugabe on the twelfth of October, 1995. He was led by the Act which is responsible for installing the chiefs and which is called *Chiefs and Headmen's Act*. This Act was established in 1982. That the President of the country is involved in the enthronement of chiefs shows that this is important.

Then the Deputy Minister came back to the point of selecting a paramount chief, apparently denying that the chieftaincy had chosen differently from the government. He condemned again the practice of going to the High Court and argued that it is the Mutema people themselves who choose their paramount chief and not the government:

<sup>13</sup> Siwonani holds a Bachelor of Arts degree.

I am happy to see that you Mutema people chose Josisi Philimon Siwonani Mutema, when there were also others who were wanting this position. I am very sorry that my Ministry is now very much involved in these cases of installing chiefs. If the chief is about to be throned, the President will nominate the person. It does not mean that the President is choosing that chief. You, the people of that chief, you are the ones who have chosen the chief.

He complained about bickering over the chiefship through the High Court or by pressurising his ministry, and continued:

We are not adding another paramount chief when we are in Harare. We only want our country to remain in unity. If we follow what you people say, for example you will come and say I was a paramount chief, then I see that we will end up having a lot of chiefs here in the country, without having people to rule. Everybody will say I am or I was a paramount chief. It cannot be a country which has more chiefs than the people they are going to lead.

The medium of Makopa interfered by thanking him for what he had explained, but the Deputy Minister wanted to continue his speech. He said that the people should unite together so that the country will not separate.

He then moved into some policy issues. He argued that the children should also use the country and therefore soil and water should be conserved. 'There is no Chipinge without water, soil and animals', he said. The chiefs and headmen were warned that deforestation is not allowed. People may not sell sites for building houses, because in the rural communal areas there are no places to be sold: council, kraalheads and chiefs have to settle these matters. He said sites should not be given to foreigners who are people from outside the respective area: chiefs should first consider the people from their own area. He emphasized that those who shift between areas need a transfer letter from the Council or chief where the respective family was staying and the letter should include a reason why the family wants to move. Then he talked about conserving water by building dams and warned that cultivating on river banks is not allowed.

The Deputy Minister then referred to a new law. He explained that the *Chiefs and Headmen Act* of 1982 will be replaced by *The Chiefs and Allied Traditional Leaders Act*. With this change in policy formulation, the government aims to improve the collaboration between councillors and chiefs and to improve the status of chiefs by paying them for their ruling in their village courts.

Listen people, we are going to give chiefs the powers which were taken away from them in 1980, when the government came to rule. As you know, during the war a lot of things happened, so the government first wanted to investigate those things and wanted to know what was going on. Those powers, we are going to give them back to the chiefs. We want chiefs to rule and lead their people well. If there are cases which rise in

your areas, you chiefs are given powers to rule and to fine the people, as you used to do from the beginning. You will be helped by the Rural District Council. The Council will give the chiefs, headmen and the kraalheads the tax books . . . Each and every kraalhead is going to have his own court to rule and lead. The courts of the kraalheads will be the Village Assemblies where people can discuss the developments they want, like dams, boreholes or paddocks for domestic animals. Those requests go to the Ward Assembly where there is a headman who will discuss with his kraalheads. Another court is of councillors and will be called Ward Development Committee. All the chiefs should know that in the Council are also our chiefs who are there to represent the rights of chiefs and also represent the rights of all people. The truth is that the government is going to give a lot of powers to the chiefs.

Then the Deputy Minister listed 'development' activities in the Mutema chieftaincy after independence:

When the powers were in the hands of us [the government], we saw the road from Birchenough Bridge to Chipinge having tar. Then the Ngaone road was constructed. At the moment, in Mutema area, people of the District Development Fund (DDF) construct roads and small bridges. This was done through my Ministry. We are requesting the people from this area to help us with their labour in making roads so that the work can be speeded up. In terms of education, 20 schools were built in this Mutema area since 1980. In total there are now 26 primary schools and 9 secondary schools. In terms of health, before independence people travelled to the hospital in Chipinge. But now the government has built five hospitals in this rural area: Ngaone, Mutema, Checheche, Musani and Tanganda. Plan International is helping us very well. They now want to make an irrigation scheme in Ngaone. Let us hope they keep their promises. Irrigation schemes will make our country Zimbabwe very green. I know that the children of Zimbabwe have cultivating spirits (*mashave ekurima*). PTC (telephones) and ZESA (electricity) should also come to insert their wires.

He now said that the enthronement was about to take place. He argued that paramount chief Siwonani should rule his people well:

Elders are always saying the power of the fish is in the water. You cannot have powers to rule if you ill-treat your people. If a fish lacks water it won't have power, or it won't survive. That is also what will happen when the chief lacks people. Your leading and ruling won't be seen by the people.

He wished that the relationships of the chief with the people, the government and all other organisations would continue for a very long time. Then he announced the installment of Siwonani:

We are now going to install chief Siwonani Josisi Philimon Mutema. I am asking Chief Siwonani to come in front of the people, so that we can enthroner him and give him the things which will show that from now

onwards he is a chief. This chief we are enthroning today is the 18th chief in the Mutema chieftaincy. I am holding here your person Siwonani. I am enthroning him. This chieftaincy you have given to him. You as the parents of Siwonani. It is our habit, or culture of the government to congratulate with money as a present. We are congratulating chief Mutema while we are representing the government with an amount of Z\$300.

People applauded whilst Siwonani was being dressed in the cloak, the white pith helmet, badge, and given the stick. The medium of Makopa said:

Wait until the one who is dressing the chief has finished, so that you can listen very carefully to what is being said. After that you can cheer up. Do you understand me, children?

The master of ceremonies thanked the government. He said that it was now time for everybody to give Siwonani some gifts, showing him that the people are happy that he is enthroned and that they accept him as their paramount chief. He explained that people should move in a single file to offer their gifts. When people started to drop their cash gifts in a plate, he said that it was now time for the spirit mediums to talk.

The medium of Makopa immediately referred to the selection of chiefs. She indicated that three times the chieftaincy and government had chosen different chiefs. These three times were now when the government officers chose Siwonani, while the spirit medium and chiefs chose Mapipana; when the government officers chose Freddy Mwanema, whereas the spirit medium and royals chose Semwayo Mwaneseni and Julius Mapipana; and when the government chose Zarura Mukowa, and Zarura chose Mwatuma for the ancestors.

She explained:

We don't want to hear any complains. There is nobody here who doesn't know Siwonani. His name was being written in books long ago. You have heard what the government has said. Please honour this child, all of you. It might confuse the people who are gathering here, saying what is going on again? There is a paramount who is enthroned, but there was another one who was enthroned at first. What is happening now? The government throned Mwanema and the ancestors throned Mwaneseni and Mapipana. It was started long back, by Zarura Mukowa. It was like this. Zarura Mukowa was the one who was for the government. For the ancestors, it was Mwatumepfukwa (or Mwatuma). When they died, these children, all of them, the headmen took the child Mwaneseni in the house of Zarura. In the house of Mwatumepfukwa they took the child Muchapipana (or Mapipana), knowing that these children were the ones who were following and who were fit to be in the chieftaincy. Even long back, that was being done. But Mwanema came alone with a government chief's badge, which is shaped like half a moon. He said to me, 'Please hear me Chief Makopa. The children who are going to worship the ancestors are Mwaneseni and Mapipana and I will work with the government.' I, Makopa, have now finished. I am going to stay well with others.

Thus the medium complies with the decision of the government to choose Siwonani and says that everybody should accept his nomination, because everybody knows him. That may also refer to the fact that there was local support for the nomination of Siwonani and that he was not merely a government appointee. However, the medium emphasizes the nomination of a paramount chief of the ancestors and she justifies this by referring to historical practices. The way she acts and argues here shows that she is a mediator between government and chieftaincy worlds, and in this role, represents the interests of both worlds.

The master of ceremonies did not react to what the medium had said and announced that the chiefs and others who are related to the chief's family, could come to bring their gifts. But Makopa continued because she wanted to know who the paramount chief of the ancestors would be:

I want to ask the government if the children whom I was given by Mwanema, are the ones who have to worship the ancestors or not. I don't want to hear a lot of complains when you are leaving us here. I want to know if the children who worship, are going to be selected when you the government are here today.

She aimed to have it announced during this meeting whether Mapipana and Mwaneseni were going to be the chiefs of the ancestors again during the time of Siwonani, or if another person should be the chief of the ancestors. The master of ceremonies said to the government, 'Makopa, the chief, is asking you the government to answer the question.' The Deputy Minister answered:

We government, we are here to throne Siwonani only. If there is worshipping, it would be held another day. Not today.

The medium of Makopa became annoyed and responded:

If you talk like that, you have left me in a pot full of very hot soup. You did not scoop me out. You came to me saying, please Chief Makopa we want to finish this debate, so that I can tell it to all people who gather on that day when we throne Chief Siwonani.

The master of ceremonies interfered. He told the spirit mediums that the government had just said that they are here to throne Siwonani only. They are not here to solve the case of worshipping ancestors. That should be organised another day.

The medium of Makopa responded:

I know that you (referring to the government) are always cheating me and seeing me like a baby. When the baby is injured you will say, 'Please keep quite I will buy a car for you.' Stop cheating me. I know that when you go, you won't come back here again. I don't want private things. I, Makopa, I want that all people know more about the chieftaincy in public, because I was having these three paramount chiefs (*ushe utatu*)

in the regime of Mwanema. They were sending Mwanema to me, in order to work with him and to go to the children who will worship. Zarura Mukowa sent Mwatumepfukwa to worship the ancestors. So, I, Makopa, want all the things to be clear to everybody in public, so that other children will know what is going on. I want all other children to know that this Zarura was the one who brought that type of a badge. The same badge came today. I want the government to help me with what was there long ago, and is still there today. It was done by Zarura Mukowa, that the children who worship are these ones, and for the government is that one. I want all other children to hear it today when they are all listening. I don't want to hear one who will say it was the fault of that one.

Here, the medium of Makopa clearly aims to maintain the ancestor world from which the spirit mediums and chiefs derive their authority. The medium of Mwandeka said:

Did you understand that point of Makopa? Makopa did not say, 'Do not blame the field when you do not work on it.' You come with Mwanesa being Mwanenga. Leave them like that if they don't want to listen to you. Don't get angry Makopa. They are the ones who know better than you.

Mwanedeka's point is that the government (the field) should not be blamed, because it is not their duty to choose the paramount chief of the ancestors. The people of the chieftaincy (headmen and eldest sons) should choose themselves. The government, then, repeated again that the choice of a chief for worshipping would be held another day. Makopa became angry and said, 'Please what did you say?', looking into the direction where the words came from. 'Why can't you speak up, so that I can hear you again?' Then the master of ceremonies clapped his hands saying, 'Please Chief Makopa forgive them, they are children'. Makopa responded:

Eee, don't make the country very bad by saying they are children, they are children. This is just what I am saying. The government has to say all these things when everyone is here with his or her own ears. If the government is going to say that you are going to worship the way you were doing it when Mwanema was there, then some people will not know who was worshipping with Mwanema. They don't know that their brother Mwanema was doing this. Don't always say people are still children, when they are driving the country in a wrong direction. It is only me, and a few other people who know that Mwanema once came to me saying, 'Chief Makopa, I am working with the government. But there are children who are left here for the worshipping.' They should not stop the work of worshipping. I don't want to explain again about the Mutema family.

The medium emphasizes again that the activities related to the ancestors need to be recognised and maintained. The Deputy Minister responded:

Makopa please, it is not the case for which we government are here. I think that I had said it in the beginning. Those who came from Harare to

this place, came to witness the enthroning of Siwonani Mutema. If there is a case you want to solve, it can be solved another day when the government is there. If you call us, we will come. For today, let us finish the enthronement of Siwonani.

Thus this government official makes some concession to the wishes of the woman spirit medium.

After this, the master of ceremonies asked Chiefs Chivhunze and Chikwanda and others to present their gifts. When people were offering their gifts, Paramount Chief Musikavanhu gave a speech in which he agrees with the government officials that the paramount of the ancestors should be chosen by the people of the chieftaincy themselves during another session.

We receive this paramount chief while we are representing the chieftaincy of Musikavanhu. We came together with Shiriyaedenga and I remember the miracles we came with. You came here, to witness that the chieftaincy which you have, will never perish. All the names of the chieftaincy are written down. This is a big history, which you have made by enthroning your child Siwonani. A lot you have heard here what was said by the Deputy Minister. He said a paramount chief comes from the *dzinza* (patrilineage) and not from the government. I am requesting from you chiefs, through the help of our big medium Makopa whom we are having, that you are going to unite about worshipping the ancestors. When we know there is a meeting, we can finalise this case. It is not a problem of the government. It is our problem. We are supposed to sit down to solve this problem.

Then Chief Musikavanhu supported the government's choice of Siwonani, pointing to his leadership of the whole region through his teaching, and criticised the attempt to use lawyers in competition for the chiefship. He criticised the practice of consulting lawyers over the chieftaincy. He looked forward to working in cooperation with the new chief for the development of the country.

The medium of Makopa kept up the dispute:

Let us all cheer what Musikavanhu has said. But I think the government should also announce the people who are supposed to worship the ancestors in the chieftaincy, when all the people are here. That is my main aim. There are also other government officials who don't know the sequence. You come to me, asking all these four houses. Do you remember this Mlambo [the clan name of Chief Musikavanhu].

After Musikavanhu's acknowledgement, she continued:

Remember that you will tell them what the chief said. I am not going to let you know about these, because I see that my country is going to be taken. Don't forget all these names of my children.

Musikavanhu responded:

According to what you have said, we will sit down next time with all the headmen to discuss this issue of worshipping the ancestors.

Thus although the senior medium of the chieftaincy did not manage to have the chief of the ancestors announced during this session, she managed to have government officials and chiefs agreeing with each other that a chief of the ancestors would be nominated.

The master of ceremonies continued with the gifts and the Deputy Minister also received a gift. Makopa said:

Your discussion turns to be very long now. I am going. I am the one who is dying and who is struggling to get my children united. Mwandeka let us go home now, we are being called.

Mwandeka stood up and started to sing a song. All mediums stood up and started to dance. The people, especially those outside the tent, enjoyed the spectacle and also started to dance and sing. Siwonani had removed his cloak and pith helmet, when people were bringing their gifts. He did not give a speech and silently disappeared from the scene, without people knowing it. The enthroning ceremony ended with dancing and singing of the possessed mediums.

### THE WORLDS OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND CHIEFS

In this concluding section we explore the intertwining worlds of government officials and chiefs. The representatives of both worlds use and transform certain rules, norms, values and ideas in practice and thereby shape practice and establish social change. These processes are referred to as discourses (see also Arce *et al*, 1994; Long and van der Ploeg, 1994; and Vijfhuizen, forthcoming). Both government officials and chiefs try to maintain their domains of activities from which they derive authority and are able to wield power. The spirit medium emerges as a mediator, spokeswoman and power broker between both worlds. Below, we will explore four major points which emerged from this article: the return of power to the chiefs; the selection of a paramount chief of the government; the selection of a paramount chief of the ancestors; and the woman spirit medium as a power broker.

#### **Return of power to the chiefs**

At first the colonial government did not take the chiefs seriously, but that changed when the officials understood the importance of chiefs at local level. Gluckman (1949, 94) argues:

The headman is a key official, is usually unpaid, in that administration. He has to report death, illness, strangers; has to see that his villagers keep the village clean, hoe paths, use latrines, follow agricultural and veterinary regulations, pay tax, etc.

Mitchell (1949, 99) pointed out that the Administration had recognised the more important village headmen and had entrusted to them certain duties.

The chiefs were belittled again by the present government when Zimbabwe became independent in 1980. However, that changed through the years and more particularly in 1996 when government officials said that the powers will be given back to the chiefs. To some extent, this is an attempt at manipulation. Power is not invested in a position, but needs to be wielded. Villarreal (1994) explored the wielding and yielding of power, arguing that power is fluid and cannot be owned, but is embedded in social relations. Wielding refers to 'holding and using' and yielding refers to 'allowing the pressure'. Thus power cannot simply be given back to the chiefs. The fact is that chiefs are needed in government's administrative issues and plans such as the grain loan scheme, resettlement of people, the arbitration in conflicts, the organisation of cheap labour for developments in the area like the construction of roads and the building of schools and hospitals. The government's councillors also participate in the organisation of these issues, but usually the chiefs are included because they are also recruited into government and the area is regarded as theirs<sup>14</sup>.

### **The selection of a paramount chief of the government**

During the enthronement ceremony, government officials emphasize that the Mutema people themselves should choose their chief and that nobody else can do this. In practice, however, the officials chose Siwonani as paramount chief, because he is the eldest son of the relevant house. They acknowledged his education and ruling capabilities, and related these human capacities to the 'development' in Mutema area. Thus, Siwonani seemed to be more a government appointment than a people's chief.

Who, then, are the people of the chieftaincy? In contradiction to the perspectives of the government officials, it was never the case that all the people of the chieftaincy were involved in the election of a paramount chief. This was the duty of certain headmen, elder sons of the chiefly family and spirit mediums. Also today, mediums and headmen select their paramount chiefs by using their own selection criteria. They chose Mwaneseni and Mapipana, while the government officials chose Mwanema. Then they chose Mapipana, while the government officials chose Siwonani. Thus government officials did not acknowledge and implement those nominations by spirit mediums and chiefs, who use rules that could be perceived as the people's rules. The chiefs with spirit mediums regard

<sup>14</sup> In the Ph.D thesis (Vijfhuizen, forthcoming) some power struggles between chiefs and councillors are explored.

themselves as the people responsible for choosing their paramount chief, and see that their decision-making has been disregarded by government officials and therefore they went to the high court. Such steps were criticised by government officials, because it challenged their decision-making. Government officials used age as the selection criterion and suspected the royals of manipulating their own rules, because they did not choose the eldest in the house that was to rule.

Women and men in the Mutema chieftaincy know that there are different *mambo* (paramount chiefs), i.e. somebody in Harare for development issues and somebody in the chieftaincy for worshipping the ancestors. During the installation ceremony, the spirit medium of Makopa argued that people should accept Siwonani as government chief because everybody could know him. Despite that request, the nomination process of a paramount chief in Mutema chieftaincy gives a dualistic impression: the government chooses one paramount chief and the authorities in the chieftaincy also choose a paramount chief. Since the worlds of government and chiefs are intertwined, we may assume that there was also cooperation and accommodation, in the sense of local support. But nomination of chiefs has always caused power struggles. Although government officials can settle these conflicts and choose a chief, people and their leaders may not regard him as the chief of their choice.

Weinrich (1971) explores this phenomenon in Gutu District, looking at the power struggles concerning the selection of a chief. She argues (1971, 122) that it is usually an outsider who can solve those internal conflicts. In one case she discusses, it was the District Commissioner who chose the paramount chief, but the people did not understand his decision, because the nominated chief was from a house which had recently ruled. Many chiefs were therefore absent during the installation ceremony (141-150). Weinrich argues that the nominated chief was regarded as a government chief and not a chief of the people. In her book, she does not refer to the phenomenon of more than one paramount in one chieftaincy. In the cases she presents, the chiefs combined both government and religious duties and some succeeded better than others did (Weinrich, 1971, 76-106).

### **The selection of a paramount chief of the ancestors**

The royals and the medium of Makopa had to yield power concerning the selection of the paramount chief of the government. But there was still the position of the chief of the ancestors, who should be nominated among those royals who live in the Mutema chieftaincy, because he has to worship the ancestors regularly. During the enthronement ceremony, the medium demanded to know if the two who had previously been responsible for worshipping the ancestors were going to continue with Siwonani. She had already twice nominated them to be paramount chiefs and wanted public

government approval for them, which would also mean a recognition of the spirit mediums and chiefs' world. However, the government officials were of the opinion that the nomination of the paramount chief of the ancestors was a case of the spirit mediums and the local leaders. They should nominate the paramount of the ancestors during another session. Thus the government officials recognised the issue, but did not want to be involved in the nomination of a paramount of the ancestors. Representatives of the chiefs' world, like medium Mwandeka and paramount chief Musikavanhu, agreed with this government position.

### **The woman spirit medium as power broker**

In certain instances, such as the selection of a chief, government officials approach the spirit medium of the chieftaincy. This could be a strategic action. If the spirit medium complies with the decisions of the government, then chiefs and people are more likely to accept these decisions as well (see also Holleman, 1974, 48). Thus, in this case it is the medium who emerges as a representative of the chiefs and people and a mediator between the government officials and chiefs. It is this woman who is also important in ruling the chieftaincy, whether possessed or not (see Vijlhuizen, forthcoming). She maintains the world of the chiefs by criticising the government and by arguing that the government should help 'with what was there long ago, is still there today'. Therefore she repeatedly demanded that a paramount chief of the ancestors needed to be nominated. She also maintained the government's world by approving the paramount chief of the government and other governmental decisions, and by criticising government officials. While she supported government officials, they did not support her request to nominate the chiefs of the ancestors during the enthronement ceremony of Siwonani. The Deputy Minister said that the government does not want to add chiefs to the one in Harare and that they do not want to have many paramount chiefs. However, he contradicted himself when he conceded that the chief of the ancestors should be nominated during another session.

The medium emerged as a spokeswoman of the chieftaincy, representing the interests of the chiefs. She is a mediator and power-broker between the different worlds of government and chiefs. In the first instance it may appear that she is not a very effective power broker. She yields power in case of the selection of the government paramount Chief Siwonani and in case of the selection of the paramount of the ancestors during the enthronement ceremony of Siwonani. However, we could also perceive her as an effective mediator between the two worlds, because she manages to get both government officials and chiefs to agree that there should be a chief of the ancestors, although he was not nominated at the moment she preferred. One may still argue that she is not effective

against the government. But she appears to be a very strategic actor, knowing very well that it is better not to be against the government. She complies with decisions of government officials and so maintains the government world. On the other hand she maintains the world of chiefs and spirit mediums by establishing that there should be a paramount chief of the ancestors. The medium represents the interests of both spirit mediums and chiefs by maintaining the ancestors' world. If government officials recognise and comply with this, they recognise the authority of chiefs and spirit mediums.

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APPENDIX I  
*Table 1*  
 FIVE LISTS OF PARAMOUNT CHIEFS OF THE MUTEMA CHIEFTAINCY

| Meredith<br>(1903) | Rennie (1973);<br>Est Dates            | District<br>Administrator<br>(1996; Government) | Mutema Chief (1995)     | Medium of Makopa<br>(1996)                                        |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Shiriyedenga    | Chiphaphani: 1678-1705<br>Shiriyedenga | Shiriyedenga                                    | Shiriyedenga            | Shiriyedenga                                                      |
| 2. Chikanda        | Chikanda; 1705-1732                    | Chikanda                                        | Chikanda Fekura         | n.a. (not asked)                                                  |
| 3. Chinyongo       | Chinyongo                              | Chinyongo                                       | Chinyongo Chembire      | n.a.                                                              |
| 4. Furidzo         | Muriwomutsa                            | Muriwomutsa                                     | Muriro Mutsva           | n.a.                                                              |
| 5. Bindu           | Furidzo                                | Furidzo                                         | Furidzo                 | n.a.                                                              |
| 6. Muriwumcha      | Bindu                                  | Bindu                                           | Bindura Uta             | n.a.                                                              |
| 7. Mutsatsike      | Nyaziro Mutsatsike                     | Nyaziro                                         | Mutsatsiki              | n.a.                                                              |
| 8. Nyagoya         | Nyagoya; 1732-1759                     | Nyagoya                                         | Nyagoya                 | n.a.                                                              |
| 9. Dengura         | Dengura; 1759-1786                     | Dengura                                         | Dengura                 | n.a.                                                              |
| 10. Makopa         | Makopa; 1786-1813                      | Makopa                                          | Makopa                  | n.a.                                                              |
| 11. Sawurozi       | Chikomba Sawurozi; 1813-1840           | Chikomba                                        | Chikomba Chiripirwa     | n.a.                                                              |
| 12. Matsikachando  | Matsikachando; 1840-1881               | Matsikachombo                                   | Marigo Chando           | n.a.                                                              |
| 13. Munodani       | Munodani; 1881-1923                    | Munodani                                        | Munodani Shambarimugura | Munodani                                                          |
|                    | 14. Zarura; 1925-1933                  | Zarura                                          | Muzura                  | Zarura and Mwatuma                                                |
|                    | 15. Mwatuma; 1934-?                    | Mwatuma                                         | Zarura                  | Mwatuma                                                           |
|                    | 16. Gadzayi; ?-1957                    | Gadzayi                                         | Mwatuma                 | Gadzayi                                                           |
|                    | 17. Madzongonya; 1957-?                | Mwadzongonya                                    | Gadzal                  | Mwadzongonya first with<br>Chamwakaona and later<br>with Mwapinga |
|                    |                                        | 18. Mwanema ?-1992                              | Mwadzongonya            | Mwanema; the whole<br>period with Mapipana; and<br>Mwaneseni      |
|                    |                                        | 19. Siwonani 1996-                              | Mwanema ?-1992          | Siwonani and ??                                                   |
|                    |                                        |                                                 | 20. Siwonani 1996-      |                                                                   |