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## RAIN-MAKING, POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND GENDER IMAGES: A CASE FROM MUTEMA CHIEFTAINCY IN ZIMBABWE

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### Abstract

*This article is based on field research in the Mutema chieftaincy of Chipinge District of Zimbabwe. It considers legends and rituals related to rain-making. Apart from the different political agendas of different leaders, a central theme is that people attribute drought to conflicts between traditional political leaders at various levels. To ensure good rains, leaders must resolve their conflicts and come together for rituals to worship their ancestral spirits. The article also considers the important role of women in ritual, and rain-making in particular: men are powerless without the co-operation of their women.*

### INTRODUCTION

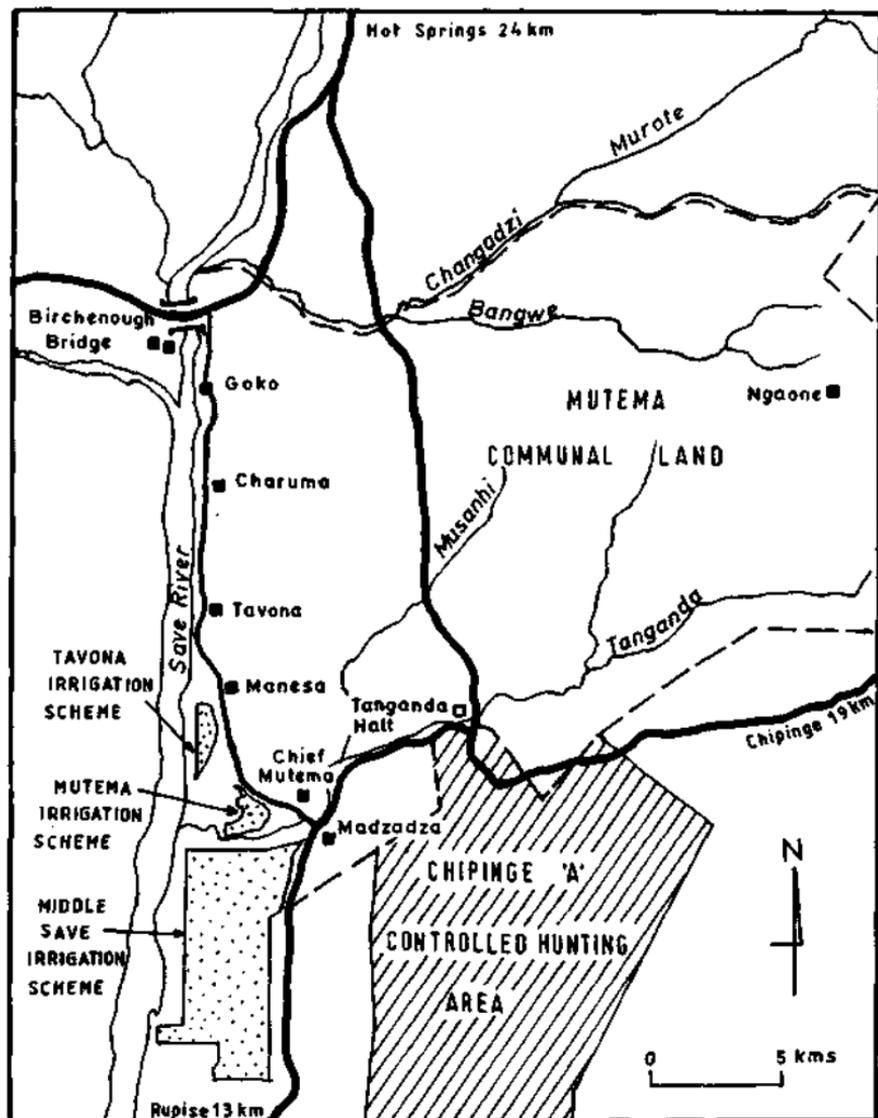
IN THIS ARTICLE I explore how men and women explain drought by historical and present conflicts over leadership and land. Drought is associated with political authority, power and control. Men and women believe that ancestors (*vadzimu*) keep away rain if chiefs have conflicts and do not worship their ancestors together. Women and men also believe that drought is caused by changing climate and cutting down trees. My main aim is to explain how women and men themselves perceive rain-making at the local level and how they simultaneously reconstruct certain gender images.

First, I give a brief political and religious background, in order to understand the social context in which the rain-making practice and the conflicts take place. Then the history of the Mutema chieftaincy is given, by presenting the perspectives of the Mutema chiefs themselves. The history of the chieftaincy shows that conflicts among successors are associated with rain-making. Consequently, I describe the historical constructions about rain-making as perceived by the Mutema chiefs. They argue that Mutema was the rain-maker in the past, but that Musikavanhu

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## LOCATION OF RESEARCH AREA



stole the rain-making power from them. Therefore, at present, Mutema and Musikavanhu cannot do the rain-making without each other, otherwise there will be drought.

Drought also occurs when *vatape* (village heads) do not co-operate. In this article I give three examples of such power struggles, namely: struggles over leadership in a village; conflicts between supporters of different political parties in the chieftaincy; and conflicts about the leadership of Madzadza, which is the most important worshipping place in the Mutema chieftaincy. I show that women and men associate these political conflicts with drought.

I examine the historical constructions of the Mutema chiefs and refer to constructions of the Musikavanhu chiefs in existing literature, to indicate that constructions are power issues, through which every chieftaincy tries to claim superiority. Then I explore how drought and rain are associated with political authority and power. Subsequently, I discuss the gender images which are constructed and reproduced by women and men themselves about the Ndaу women and men in worshipping and rain-making. Women appear to be important in that context.

## BACKGROUND

The Shona peoples cover most of Zimbabwe and part of Mozambique. They classify themselves by their chieftaincy or their dialect group: Zezuru, Manyika, Korekore, Karanga and Ndaу. Although these classifications are linguistic, and although the boundaries of the groups classified in this way are not precise, they do reflect the cultural patterns of the Shona peoples and also to some extent their various histories (Bourdillon, 1987, 16–17). The Ndaу group encompasses different chieftaincies such as Muwushu, Saungweme, Saurombe, Mafusi, Mapungwana, Ngorima, Mutambara, Garahwa, Mutema and Musikavanhu (Rennie, 1973, 89). All chieftaincies have their own territory/country (*nyika*) to rule in the south-east of Zimbabwe (Chipinge District).

The chieftaincies within the Ndaу group distinguish themselves by totemic clans (*mutupo*; pl: *mitupo*). For example the two Ndaу chieftaincies in this article, Mutema and Musikavanhu, have different totems. The totem of Mutema is cattle (*mombe*) and of Musikavanhu is hippo (*muyambo* or *mvuu*). However, within the chieftaincies live different clans with different totems, due to marriage, migration, etc. Ndaу women keep their own totem when they marry. For example in the village of my research in Mutema chieftaincy, 63% of the men and 57% of the women belong to the cattle clan. Other clans within the village are hippo (10%), and smaller clans (below 10%) are for example dog (*sigauke*), termite (*dhliwayo*), eland (*mhofu/shava*), bird (*shiri*) and zebra (*dube*). Bigger clans, like bird and cattle have

sub-clans (*chidao*; pl: *zvidao*). The cattle sub-clans are for example leg (*gumbo*) and heart (*mwoyo*). The cattle-heart (in Ndaus called *chirandu*) is the totem of the chiefs and they are perceived as the owners of the land.

The boundaries of Mutema chieftaincy in Chipinge District are Hot Springs in the North and Kondo in the South. The political organisation of the Mutema chieftaincy is as follows. The highest chief and ruler of the whole chieftaincy, the paramount chief, is called *Mambo*. The paramount chiefs are listed in Table 1.

Table 1  
PARAMOUNT CHIEFS OF THE MUTEMA CHIEFTAENCY

By Semwayo (1995)	Estimated Dates (by Rennie, 1973)
1. Shiriyedenga	1678-1705
2. Chikanda Fekura	1705-1732
3. Chiongo Chembire	—
4. Muriro Mutsva	—
5. Furidzo	—
6. Bindura Uta	—
7. Mutsatsiki	—
8. Nyagoya	1732-1759
9. Dengura	1759-1786
10. Makopa	1786-1813
11. Chikomba Charipirwa (Saurozvi)	1813-1840
12. Marigo Chando	1840-1881
13. Munodani Shambaririmugura	1881-1923
14. Muzura	1925-1933
15. Zarura and Mwatuma	1934-?
16. Mwatuma	? -1957
17. Gadzai	1957-
18. Mwadzongonya	—
19. Mwanema and Mapipana	—
20. Siwonani and Mapipana	1995-

Numbers 15 to 18, namely Zarura, Mwatuma, Gadzai and Mwadzongonya, are the four ruling houses at present. This means that paramount chiefs are chosen from these families in turn. Freddy Mwanema (19th) was of Zarura house and therefore the present paramount chief, Siwonani (20th) is from Mwatuma house. At present the Mutema chieftaincy

has two paramount chiefs, namely Siwonani for the government and Mapipana for the ancestors.<sup>2</sup> The spirit medium of Makopa chooses the person from within the appropriate house to be chief. Makopa was the tenth Mutema chief and is the royal ancestor (*mudzimu*)<sup>3</sup> who is worshipped by the whole Mutema chieftaincy. Makopa is perceived by everybody as the highest spirit and speaks through a medium (*svikiro*): the reason is that during and before his rule people lived more or less in peace. After his death there were many conflicts over leadership. The medium of Makopa is a woman. Her name is Zvavakuru Chanaka and her totem is guinea fowl (*hungwe*). Everybody calls her Makopa and *Baba ndiwe* (Father is you).

Another chiefly title in Mutema chieftaincy is *Semwayo*, which means the one who follows the paramount chief. He rules the whole chieftaincy together with the paramounts and the spirit medium. He was a main informant and I call him Semwayo in this article. Below these chiefs are five *madumburanzou*, who are followed by two other headmen. The use of these two titles, *dumburanzou* and headman, are often confused and in general the term 'headman' is used. In fact, they all have similar duties, as they all rule large areas within the Mutema chieftaincy. However, the *madumburanzou* are involved in the selection of a paramount chief and the other headmen are not. *Dumburanzou* literally means to skin and cut open an elephant. When people found or killed an elephant in the past, they were not allowed to skin and cut it open before they had informed the chief. The title, *dumburanzou*, is derived from this obligation.

All the different villages within the chieftaincy are also ruled by chiefs. These call themselves *mutape* (plural *vatape* — informer of the paramount chief) or *saguta* (owner of the village, or of the big homestead), or *sabhuku* (owner of the tax book), or *sadunhu* (owner of a small area), or kraalhead (a term introduced by the colonial administration). These chiefs have only small areas to rule, that is, a few villages, one village or sometimes only part of a village. *Vatape* are sons of Mutema and they are 37 in the chieftaincy. Some *vatape* are called *madziashu*, because from their family once a paramount chief was chosen to rule. They are called *mutape* when their families were not involved in the nomination of a paramount chief. Since the concepts kraalhead, *sabhuku* and *mutape* are frequently used at

<sup>2</sup> See for an explanation the chapter 'The reign of power and the power of rain' of my PhD thesis (forthcoming). During the time of the Paramounts Zarura (15th) and Mwanema (19th) this distinction between Paramounts was also made (see Table 1).

<sup>3</sup> The several Shona groups use different concepts for royal ancestral spirits. In Ndau chieftaincies a royal ancestral spirit is referred to as *mudzimu* (spirit). David Lan (1985) used the term *mhondoro* to refer to royal ancestors. He distinguished *mhondoro* from *mudzimu*, the family ancestral spirit. Bourdillon (1987, 254) wrote: 'Among the Karanga, the name *mhondoro* is not normally used for chiefly spirits.' He also commented, 'In central Shona country, the spirit head of any large family who comes out in a medium is called *mhondoro*, but in the north it is very rare for a commoner to acquire this title.'

village level, I found *mutape* most appropriate for this article, in preference to the two common terms, owner of the tax book and kraalhead, that were introduced during the colonial era. I also use *madziashe* when the term is appropriate.

The national government in the chieftaincies is represented by the Rural District Council through its councillors and committees and by the Local Government through the administrators and all the different chiefs and headmen.

Concerning the religious context it appears that people belong to many different churches. For example in the village of my research (389 homesteads), 20 churches or religious groups exist. The biggest churches are Zion (30% of the homesteads in the village) and United Christian Church of Zimbabwe (UCCZ — 10%). All other religious groups have a membership of below 10% of the homesteads. Being members of a church or religious group does not imply that people do not worship their ancestors. One belief does not exclude the other, as I will argue later.

#### MUTEMA CHIEFS ON THE HISTORY OF THEIR CHIEFTAINCY

A *mutape* in the Mutema chieftaincy explained the following about the history. Shiriyedenga was the first chief of the Mutema chieftaincy. He was called *Shiriyedenga* (bird of the sky) because he could fly. Therefore he was also called Chiphaphami, which was derived from the sound of his wings: pha-pha-pha. Another *mutape* explained that the place which is used at present for worshipping the royal ancestors is called Madzadza. Madzadza comes from *kudzadza*, to descend, and is perceived as the place where Shiriyedenga came down for the first time to establish his chieftaincy. Chiefs are enthroned at Madzadza and some chiefs are also buried there. Another meaning of Madzadza is to fulfil people's needs and wishes, which can be done by worshipping royal ancestors. These needs and wishes often concern rain for the area and arbitration in conflicts.

The *mutape* gave an example of the greatness of Shiriyedenga. When Shiriyedenga was at a beer party and they decided to go to the next beer party, Shiriyedenga told the people to leave and that they would meet him upon their arrival. When the people left, they would hear pha-pha-pha, the sound of wings of a flying bird. It always appeared that Shiriyedenga was the last to leave and the first to arrive. The *mutape* explained that Shiriyedenga was not named Mutema. Chief Saurozvi (11th paramount) was the first paramount who was named Mutema. Saurozvi had a conflict with his brother and was chased away by him and it did not rain. Therefore people begged Saurozvi to come back and on his return he killed his brother. When he arrived in his territory, immediately also dark clouds gathered in the sky. Then he took a big sword, pointed to the sky and cut the clouds. In doing so, he cut the clouds open and it started to rain.

Therefore this chief Saurozvi was named Mutema, after *kutema*, to cut, or *mutemi*, cutter-of-clouds in this context. The meaning of Mutema can also be derived from *tema*, meaning black, which may refer to dark black clouds.

Semwayo had another opinion and said that Munodani was the first paramount who was named Mutema. He explained:

Munodani was enthroned at Madzadza, but his younger brother Muraaswo wanted to attack him and take over the chieftaincy. Then Munodani ran away and during his absence it did not rain for seven or 10 years. The people thought it was better to collect Munodani. When he arrived at Madzadza it started to rain.

Semwayo did not relate Mutema to cutting of clouds, but referred to the sounds of rain on a roof: *tema, tema, tema*, which could be heard when Munodani returned. He explained that Mutema means establisher of peace.

#### SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTIONS ABOUT RAIN-MAKING

I shall now recount how Semwayo, a chief, and the members of a village in Mutema chieftaincy reconstruct their history concerning rain-making. I will also describe how these people perceive women in rain-making and how women themselves perceive their role in worshipping, which is an important aspect of rain-making.

#### Chiefs and villagers in a village in Mutema chieftaincy

Semwayo explained:

Shiriyedenga married a Musikavanhu woman and she learned how to make the rain and then ran away. You see, a man cannot do anything in the house without his wife knowing it. She must know how to do it also. She is the wife. But when troubles come the wife says 'I am going' and then she goes away to her home. She ran away with the wisdom of the medicine [*mushonga*], because a husband and a wife they know each other's secrets.

When I told Semwayo that it is written in books that Musikavanhu is the rain-maker, due to the fact that the establisher of the Musikavanhu chieftaincy (Nyakuvimba) stole the rain medicine from the VaRoZvi king, Semwayo reacted:

No, No, No. It was the wife of Mutema who ran away with the secrets of rain. The Musikavanhu people got that wisdom from us.

Then I asked if the rain medicine was always kept by Musikavanhu, after the wife took it. Semwayo explained:

It is actually not kept by Musikavanhu or Mutema himself, but the power of that, the rain secret was taken by the wife. But even the Mutema

people, we know a little bit of it. But we cannot do anything without the wife. That is why we continue to unite with that woman.<sup>4</sup> Because if we throw away this wife, it will not be alright for us. We are going to continue to unite with her because a wife has got power inside the house. We cannot do the rain-making ourselves, without the wives. It is not possible.

Semwayo also explained that the spirit medium of Makopa, the royal ancestral spirit of the Mutema chieftaincy, is very important in rain-making:

Makopa cannot do it alone. There is time when she sits down and does some things before sending some people to Musikavanhu. All chiefs from other areas go to Makopa first. Makopa is the headquarter for everyone. And then Makopa sends somebody to Musikavanhu for rain.

Another *mutape* said:

The wife of Shiriyedenga did not steal, but she learned something. Mutema still has powers. Mutema is the first to move the clouds and then Musikavanhu follows in the moving of clouds, and then the clouds meet. But these days Mutema and Musikavanhu have separated ideas and there is not a good connection. They should unite as the first chiefs were doing. Musikavanhu cannot do it alone.

The majority of women and men in the village knew that representatives of Mutema go every year for rain-making ceremonies to Musikavanhu. The reason they gave is that it seems to be better that the two request for rain (*kukumbira mvura*) together. Others believed that Musikavanhu has the power (*simba*), because of stronger ancestors. One informant referred to the totem of Musikavanhu, which is hippo. A hippo lives in water and therefore Musikavanhu knows a lot about water. Mutema, whose totem is cattle, has less knowledge about water, because cattle live on land. Those who are closely related to Mutema chiefs and belong to the ruling sub-clan (*chirandu*), like *vatape*, explained that a wife of a Mutema chief took the magic or rain-making power and therefore Mutema has to visit Musikavanhu every year. However, the majority of villagers did not seem to know that history.

### Women in rain-making

Women are the spirit mediums of royal ancestral spirits in Mutema and Musikavanhu chieftaincies. Women also brew beer to worship ancestors. After describing these two aspects, I will describe the perceptions of women themselves concerning worshipping.

Every year representatives of the Mutema chieftaincy go to Musikavanhu. That will not change said Semwayo, because Mutema cannot

<sup>4</sup> The spirit medium of the royal ancestor of Musikavanhu is also a woman.

work without a wife. Musikavanhu has the rain-making power. Until today Musikavanhu men and women are perceived as wives by the Mutema.<sup>5</sup> Semwayo explained:

Women have a big role in rain-making because they are thieves. They stole the wisdom. Women are clever. We cannot stay without a woman in a house. It cannot be a home without a wife.

Before visiting Musikavanhu, the representatives of the Mutema chieftaincy first visit the female spirit medium of the royal ancestors of Mutema. Also the chiefs from the other Ndau chieftaincies first go to this spirit medium of Makopa and therefore Semwayo perceived the spirit medium of Makopa as a headquarter. She foresees, foretells and selects the people to take the messages to the female spirit medium of Musikavanhu, who has the rain-making power. Musikavanhu cannot make the rain without the preparations of Mutema. Neither Musikavanhu nor Mutema can do the rain-making on their own. They need to co-operate. That means that both chieftaincies and their spirit mediums have secret powers. Semwayo pointed out that it is mainly women who are spirit mediums in Ndau chieftaincies:

You women are lucky. Women are liked by ancestors. Makopa is not a woman, but Makopa himself comes through a woman. We have to pay her for staying with our forefather. That woman works a lot on our behalf. If any woman comes out with our spirit, then we have to honour that woman.

In addition, Semwayo was of the opinion that,

It is much better that women are spirit mediums, because they are not boastful and proud of themselves and they can keep secrets very well.

Beer brewing is a very precise and fundamental practice. Only old women brew beer for the ancestors, because they follow certain rules of not sleeping with men and they will have stopped menstruating. Ancestors want hygiene and very clean persons. If something in the process of beer brewing goes wrong, the ancestors will not communicate with the living. A *mutape* in the Mutema chieftaincy explained it as follows:

Worshipping needs old women and old men. They worship together, but women are in front because they give the things (beer, cloth, snuff etc) to the spirit medium. We men cannot enter a house before a woman opens the door. The woman is in front and that means that she is a leader, because she prepares the house for the man. She must be clever.

Women's own perceptions regarding worshipping is that men cannot brew beer to worship ancestors, but women have to do that. A sister of Semwayo explained:

<sup>5</sup> This is not only related to rain-making. If the chiefs travel together, the Musikavanhu chief is supposed to make the bed for the Mutema chief.

It is like a child. If you do not give it food, it cannot go to the field to weed. Similarly, ancestors cannot do their work without being worshipped. Then they will be hungry and angry and therefore there will be no rain.

A wife of a deceased chief said:

During worshipping men talk to ancestors. Our work is to clap hands, so that the worshipping to the ancestors is received by our clapping. There is nothing to be worked out without a woman in between.

The sister of Semwayo explained that there is no ancestral spirit who is being worshipped without women. But men will worship and talk to the ancestors. When I asked her, who is in front with worshipping, men or women, she explained:

Men and women are opposite each other, they are facing each other [*kutarisana*] while they worship their ancestors. But those with spirits on them [spirit mediums] always walk with women who give them the things when they worship. It is difficult for a spirit to wake up [*kumuka*] on men, because women are very soft and easy.

These two women emphasise that men talk to ancestors. However, an elder daughter of a *mutape* told me that old women worship and talk to the female ancestors (*madziteteguru*; the big father's sisters). She pointed out:

If the beer and worshipping is for men, then men do it. But if the *madziteteguru* are being worshipped, then I am doing the worshipping myself. That is what we do here. Women worship women.

#### DROUGHT DUE TO POLITICAL CONFLICTS

People believe that royal ancestral spirits bring rain. Accordingly, they also believe that ancestors are able to keep away rain or to stop it. People refer to conflicts between chiefs as reason for drought. They argue that these conflicts restrain chiefs from worshipping. Ancestors do not let it rain if they are not being worshipped. I will illustrate that perspective by describing the conflicts over leadership in a village, the struggles between supporters of different political parties in the chieftaincy and the conflicts over leadership at Madzadza, which is one of the two places of worship of the chieftaincy.

##### **Conflicts over leadership in a village**

Very old people in the village of my research, who were born around 1910 and who still remember the stories of their grandfathers and grandmothers, indicated that conflicts and drought existed in the past centuries. One informant explained that people in those days had nothing apart from skins to wear. People were very cruel because they could just kill each other for that skin. He also pointed out that there was no rain in the early

days and that the land was very dry. His father told him that many people died because of starvation.

Also in 1995 it did not rain in several villages in the Mutema chieftaincy, including the village of my research. Drylands had no crops in the beginning of January 1996. Many villagers said that drought was caused by a conflict between the present *mutape* and his brother. The conflict was about who the real *mutape* was. People said that the *mutape* did not worship the ancestors for rain and that the brother had the power to stop the rain when it was about to start.

However, the situation in the village was more complicated. The present *mutape* could not worship the village ancestors because he was not descended from the first *mutape* of the village. The first *mutape*, and not of the present one, was descended from the ancestors who were buried in the small sacred forest near the village. A descendent of the first *mutape*, who is living in the village at the moment, explained:

The present *mutape* cannot be responsible for worshipping. He has only one forefather there [the sacred forest] and we have maybe seven or eight. So that forest is ours. If the present *mutape* worships there, the forefathers will not answer him, because they are our forefathers.

The first *mutape* of the village descended from Nyagoya (paramount chief, 1732–1759) and probably arrived with his people in the Save river valley around 1740 and established the village. The ancestors of the present *mutape* descended from Makopa and were sent by him (around 1800) to establish peace, because the first *mutape* fought with his brother over the leadership of the village area. So the ancestors of the present *mutape* were sent to rule. They could not own the land, because it was owned by the first *mutape* of the village area. However, the new ruler also started to control the land. The ancestors of the first *mutape* told his descendents and the present *mutape* to solve their conflicts about land. A descendent of the first *mutape* explained:

I went there [the sacred forest] with the present *mutape*. He was told by the ancestors to share the pin of the *mutape*. He should give us a pin and if he gives us, it will be raining. The ancestors told us that if the present *mutape* gives us a pin, we can worship again in that forest. otherwise we cannot worship there. So I cannot worship because I do not have that pin.

The village ancestors told the present *mutape* to share the pin of the *mutape*. That means that he has to give several homesteads to the descendent of the first *mutape* of the village, so that he can be *mutape* too. If the two have solved that conflict about the leadership in the village, then it will rain. Semwayo, who took this case to the spirit medium of Makopa said:

The spirit medium said: 'You should work together and co-operate.' But there is no co-operation between the descendent of the first *mutape* and the present one. If there is no co-operation, there is no rain.

The descendent of the first *mutape* put it as follows: 'When we are not united it will not rain. We have to travel together.'

### **Conflicts between supporters of different political parties in the chieftaincy**

A session with the spirit medium of Makopa and all *vatape* of the Mutema chieftaincy was organised by Semwayo on 11 November 1995. The spirit medium was possessed for almost two hours. Makopa associated droughts with political conflicts at chieftaincy level. The war (1965–1980) was linked with the present political conflicts between supporters of ZANU (PF) and those of ZANU (Ndonga)<sup>6</sup> and with rain. I summarise what the spirit medium of Makopa said about these three essential topics of war, political conflict and rain:

I was seeing them, the Black soldiers and White soldiers. I said to myself, let them look for each other themselves. I am not a father who will say: you child, go away because you are bad. I cannot select my children. A clever person and a fool are all my children. I am the chief [*mutape*] for the whole chieftaincy and not for a small area.

You are hating each other because of parties ZANU (PF) and ZANU (Ndonga). Why are you separating? Why are you doing that when you come from one country? Do not hate each other concerning political parties. These two people, Sithole and Mugabe, they are eating together from the same plate. Please unite people of Mutema. I called you here so that my children should unite. I am the father of everyone. You did not brew beer to celebrate Siwonani [the present paramount chief for the government]. Why are you not celebrating that selection, as you have done for celebrating the political parties of Ndabaningi Sithole and Mugabe? You are for this party and this one for that party. Forgetting to celebrate the selection of Siwonani.

The rain is coming very soon. Please stop all these wars between yourselves. The rain is coming to everyone, without leaving other areas. I am not an ancestral spirit [*mudzimu*] for children of the Mutema family [*vazvare*] only, but also for people who are not related to the Mutema family, the foreigners and strangers [*vatorwa*] in the Mutema area. The rain is coming, look in the sky. The clouds are pregnant because of rain.

<sup>6</sup> The Ndonga supporters originate from Chipinge and ZANU (Ndonga) obtained the only two opposition seats in the elections of May 1995, mainly through the votes of the people in Chipinge. ZANU (Ndonga) is headed by Ndabaningi Sithole who is also the Member of Parliament for Chipinge South. At the end of 1995, Sithole was arrested because of a suspected attack on President Mugabe. This led to conflicts between ZANU (PF) and ZANU (Ndonga) people, especially in the chieftaincies in Chipinge District.

But it is not going to descend on earth before you come and worship me.  
Please play together well, with each other.

Semwayo had called upon the spirit medium of Makopa to arbitrate in these political conflicts between the *vatape*. Due to these conflicts, chiefs do not worship together, resulting in drought. Makopa's main message was that people should unite. People should accept each other regardless of their political background, descent and colour. After uniting they can worship their ancestors for rain.

### **Conflicts over leadership at Madzadza**

Another session with the spirit medium of Makopa was organised by Semwayo on 13 January 1996, because of the conflicts about the leadership at Madzadza. A *madziashe* and *mutape* who were responsible for worshipping at Madzadza had a conflict about who should lead during the opening speech and about the leadership of the place. The *mutape*, who did not lead in the opening speech, claimed that Madzadza belonged to his area. However, Makopa defined the exact roles of the *madziashe* and *mutape* at Madzadza and said that the place should be led by *madziashe*, who should lead the opening speech. On 14 January 1996, the day after the session, it rained in the Mutema chieftaincy. Many people therefore perceived the meeting as a rain-making ceremony. The meeting was organised, however, in the first place to solve the conflict over leadership at Madzadza. The association between conflict and rain was perceived as follows. Beer was brewed in reparation for the conflict (*ruregerero*). During the session the *madziashe* and *mutape* agreed that they had failed to maintain order and had conflicts (*kubvuma* for *kutadza*). After agreeing and excusing for the conflicts, they were forgiven (*kuregererwa*) and rewarded with rain. Hence their urgent need for rain was fulfilled (*kudzadza*). That reflects again the meaning of Madzadza.

## **CONSTRUCTIONS, POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND GENDER IMAGES**

I examine how the Mutema chiefs construct the history of their chieftaincy. After that I discuss the association between rain and the conflicts about leadership and land, which implies political authority, power and control. Then I will explore the construction and reproduction of gender images in worshipping and rain-making.

### **Socio-historical constructions**

Mutema chiefs explained that Mutema was the rain-maker for the Ndau chieftaincies in the past, but that Musikavanhu stole that power from them. However, Rennie presented a different story, according to which Musikavanhu was always the rain-maker for the Ndau chieftaincies. Rennie

revealed that Musikavanhu chieftaincy was established by Nyakuvimba, the younger brother of Shiriyedenga (the founder of Mutema).<sup>7</sup> Traditional history recounted that Nyakuvimba and his sister Chapo stole the ritual objects for rain bringing from the Rozvi king. Fleeing with it he was killed, but the rain medicine was given from successor to successor. Therefore Musikavanhu was the rain bringing specialist for the whole Ndaou area (Rennie, 1973, 65–69). Rennie's account differs from that of the Mutema chiefs, probably because Rennie revealed the perceptions of the Musikavanhu chiefs. Although his book, which is based on an impressive literature review and archival work, deals with the Ndaou chieftaincies in general, his specific case studies come from Musikavanhu. Both Musikavanhu and Mutema chiefs may have aimed to reconstruct their history in such a way that they are portrayed as most powerful. For example Beach (1994, 248–252) explained that oral traditions are preserved for the benefit of the people of the community and not for the outsider. It is often to prove an internal point, as for example the claim to leadership or to strengthen a position. He argued that oral traditions are not strictly factual accounts, though they often relate to something factual in the past. They contain a message. From the historical construction of the Mutema chiefs it becomes clear that they claim superiority, by explaining that they had the rain-making power in the past. However, at present Mutema chiefs have to admit that Musikavanhu is superior in rain-making, but they perceive themselves superior by emphasizing that Musikavanhu is the wife.

The names of Chiphaphami and Shiriyedenga are sometimes mixed up. Chiphaphami is perceived as the father of Shiriyedenga or Shiriyedenga as the Rozvi king (Rennie, 1973). Mutema chiefs perceive Shiriyedenga and Chiphaphami as one person and their first paramount chief. The written accounts suggest that the very first chief of the Mutema chieftaincy took the title of Mutema (Meredith, 1976; Rennie, 1973). However, Mutema chiefs give the name or title of Mutema to the 11th or 13th chief because he established peace and made rain by cutting the clouds. Maybe therefore the first ten chiefs are not given the title of Mutema, because before Makopa's time the tribe lived more or less in peace. Rennie (1973, 74) wrote that Mutema is derived from *kutema mitemo* (to make laws). The Mutema chiefs are of the opinion that the name Mutema refers to *mutemi* (cutter-of-clouds) and is therefore related to rain. From the historical constructions about the Mutema chieftaincy it becomes clear that war and conflicts about leadership of the chieftaincy coincide with droughts. When the rightful successors were chased away, there was drought. As

<sup>7</sup> Semwayo doubted whether the establisher of Musikavanhu chieftaincy was a brother of Shiriyedenga.

soon as they were installed as chiefs, it started to rain. Accordingly, those who could let it rain successfully became chiefs. That indicates already a link between rain and political authority at chieftaincy level, which will be discussed below.

Musikavanhu is presented as the rain-maker for the Ndaу chieftaincies by Rennie (1973). Meredith (1976) stated that the first Mutema chief was the father of the whole area, and that he sent his brother, Nyakuvimba, to another area. That could also be a reason why the Mutema chiefs explained that Mutema is perceived as the head (*mukuru*) and superior to Musikavanhu. The perspective of Mutema as father of the whole area, could also be related to the opinion of the Mutema chiefs that Mutema was the rain-maker for the Ndaу chieftaincies in the past. Mutema chiefs explained that a daughter of Musikavanhu learned and took the power of rain-making to her Musikavanhu tribe when she divorced her husband, the Mutema chief. The existing pattern in rain-making suggests that this could be a true historical construction for two reasons: first, because the Musikavanhu chiefs are regarded as wives and they are said to accept it; and second, because representatives of Mutema chieftaincy go to Musikavanhu, after executing the necessary preparations. Although Rennie (1973, 73) indicated that Mutema people go to Musikavanhu in times of drought only, Semwayo pointed out that Mutema representatives go every year to Musikavanhu. Mutema chiefs explained that both chieftaincies have power and that they have to unite and work together to let it rain successfully. The perspective that the two chieftaincies, Musikavanhu and Mutema, are dependent on each other and cannot do the rain-making without each other, is absent in the existing literature.

The written accounts indicated that the rain-making medicine or ritual objects were stolen (Meredith, 1976; Rennie, 1973). The Mutema chiefs mentioned that wisdom, power, and secret things were stolen. However, what exactly was stolen will always remain a secret. If the secret is revealed then it will no longer be a secret and nobody can gain power or respect from it. The *mutape* explained that the wife of Mutema learned the secrets of rain-making from Mutema. That implies that Mutema stayed with the knowledge he had. Semwayo also said that Mutema still has knowledge and that is also reflected by the preparations for rain-making, which the spirit medium of Mutema executes. Most likely, the wife also stole ritual objects for rain-making, based on the knowledge she acquired when she stayed with the Mutema paramount chief. Maybe it was a cloth, a sword or clay pots. It may have been the holy things, which were kept by chief Mutema and belonged to the ancestors. Maybe she took the most important thing, for example the sword for cutting the clouds and chief Mutema was left with the less important things. Therefore the spirit medium of Mutema can perform the rain-making preparations, but the royal ancestors cannot

make rain. They need to co-operate with Musikavanhu who has the most important thing for making rain. Musikavanhu is therefore perceived more powerful in rain-making.

### **Rain and political authority**

Anthropologists have long overlooked hierarchy and conflicts in African societies. For example, Rennie (1973, 46) writes as though Nda history is characterised by a relatively homogeneous system, in which there was little differentiation and practically no inherent conflict. However, *varozvi*, the name of the people from whom the Nda originated in 1600–1700, means people who take goods, slaves and land by force. This indicates that conflicts about leadership and land already existed centuries ago. In fact, conflict occurs at all times and in all societies.

Rennie associates changes in culture with colonialism, religion and modern education. During (1995, 88–89) associates drought with changing culture, and argues that due to Christianity and modern education people no longer worship their ancestors. He argues that rain-making ceremonies are no longer performed because people's beliefs have changed. However, people pointed out that droughts occurred even before the arrival of Christianity and modern education. It is not only external influences that cause fundamental changes in culture (see also Bourdillon, 1987, 247–249). I argue that people fail to worship together because of conflict rather than new religions and modern education. New beliefs exist side by side with old ones, and women and men strategically combine them.

Lan (1985, 171, 103) argued of the Korekore that the people whose ancestors bring the rain are perceived as the owners of the land, and they are able to make the rain fall. I provide two observations to place this argument in perspective. First, despite the fact that Mutema and Musikavanhu are the owners of the land, they cannot make rain independently of each other. Second, often a situation occurs in which the owners of the land are present, but there is no rain. People's perception about drought is that the royal ancestral spirits are not happy with the conflicts among leaders who do not worship their ancestors together. Consequently, the ancestors keep the rain away. Besides this belief, people also believe that changing climate and cutting down trees cause drought. People use the conflict argument in order to explain why there is no rain in their specific village, while it rains in a neighbouring village, whereas in both villages almost all trees are cut down. For example the rain ceremony can be executed at area level, but it may occur that certain villages do not receive rain. The people in the villages may then point at their chiefs and argue that the *vatape* do not worship their ancestors. That they do not worship is often based on historical and present conflicts about leadership and land, as we have seen.

Both chief and medium derive their political authority from the royal ancestor — the chief — because he is descended from him, and the medium because he is possessed by him. Chiefs and mediums share political authority. Lan (1985, 138–139) pointed out that Korekore mediums of royal spirits wield political and social control. Generally among the Shona, territorial spirit guardians help to bring and keep local communities together and to reinforce the chieftom as a political and administrative unit. Spirit mediums exert some influence in the politics of their chieftom (Bourdillon, 1987, 260–272). I found further that in Mutema, ancestral spirits, through their mediums, fulfil peoples' wishes and needs through arbitration in conflicts.

The greatest wish of the ancestral spirit, Makopa, is that people solve their conflicts and unite. That is also the aim of Semwayo, the one who follows the paramount chiefs. He has many conflicts in his area, which he cannot solve on his own. He once indicated that he solves small conflicts himself, but for the bigger problems he organises meetings with Makopa, as appeared from the three conflict cases in this article. He seeks advice from the royal ancestors through the spirit medium of Makopa, to solve the conflicts in the chieftaincy. The *vatape* in Mutema chieftaincy will listen to the ancestral spirit who talks to them. They are more eager to listen to a person with a spirit on her (medium), than to Semwayo, who has no spirit. The ancestral spirit explains that if the chiefs do not solve their conflicts, it will not rain.

Some people who do not believe in ancestral spirits may argue that chiefs together with spirit mediums, organise their meetings when it is about to rain. This would be difficult in practice, because the meetings need to be announced and organised in advance. Moreover, the beer for the meetings takes seven days to brew. On the other hand, perhaps the ancestors really have the strength to move the clouds. I have indicated that many people hold to this perspective, in combination with other beliefs. Since the people believe that the ancestors have the power to make or stop rain, the ancestors through the spirit medium and the present chiefs, can exert some control over people and lead them.

### **Gender images in worshipping and rain-making**

Women and men in Mutema chieftaincy do not portray women as ignorant and unimportant in worshipping.<sup>8</sup> Women brew beer and clap their hands so that the messages are received by the ancestors. Indeed men talk to the ancestors. However, that does not mean that men are more important in

<sup>8</sup> Not in every Shona group are women important in worshipping. Korekore women are portrayed by Lan as unimportant: 'Women's exclusion from participation is justified on the grounds of ignorance.' (Lan, 1985, 95).

worshipping than women. Both women and men perform important tasks. Without beer, worshipping is simply impossible. Hence women and men have to co-operate in worshipping their ancestors. And if the *madzite* (plural of *vate*) are to be worshipped, then women will talk. Whether women or men are portrayed as important or not in certain practices, depends to some extent on the gender images of the researcher as well as the women and men portrayed. When women and men sit together to worship their ancestors, it can be perceived that men sit in front. Others may say that women and men sit opposite each other. Or another person, like the *mutape*, argued that the women sit in front, because they have to give the things to the spirit medium. It is always women who walk with and assist the spirit medium. The chiefs in this article are convinced of women's importance in worshipping. The women themselves indicate that their practices in worshipping are relevant, but they hesitate to state clearly that women are important. They may hesitate because of existing ideas that men are superior and more important than women. Gender ideology (images, existing ideas and values) is often not considered in analysing situations.

In the Ndaou chieftaincies it is women who are the mediums of the royal ancestral spirits.<sup>9</sup> I have indicated that spirit mediums wield power and control over the people in the chieftaincy. So women as spirit mediums of royal ancestors have political authority and lead the territory together with the male chiefs. This is an important observation and indicates that in practice women rule. It contradicts the existing ideas that women operate in domestic spheres and men in public spheres.

Women's historical role in rain-making in Ndaou chieftaincies determines the present pattern, practices and relationships in rain-making ceremonies. The historical constructions about rain-making also portray women in a certain way. Women are thieves or murderers (Lan, 1985, 75–83). Women marry the owners of the land, so that their tribes are able to conquer the leader. If a man is seduced by the conqueror's daughter, the medium will regard him as his wife (Lan, 88–89). Similarly, chiefs from the Mutema chieftaincy regard women and men in the Musikavanhu chieftaincy as our wives (*vakadzi vedu*). The Musikavanhu wives are respected by the Mutema husbands, because they have rain-making power. Wives are powerful because they are the organisers of the home. Therefore wives will know everything in that home. In that way, the wife obtained the secrets of rain-making and became a thief. Consequently, the wife is inferior to the

<sup>9</sup> Among the Korekore described by Lan, women are rarely considered to be the mediums of the royal ancestors of the whole chieftaincy area. Of the 60 such mediums he came across, only three were women (Lan, 1985, 95). Lan's (1985, 70) conclusion is that women are possessed by low-level, family ancestors (*midzimu*).

husband, who was the former owner of the rain-making medicine. Therefore the wife has to make the bed for the husband.

Two existing proverbs in Shona society reproduce these two images of wives, namely as organiser of the home and as thief, which are reconstructed in the rain-making history. The proverb, *Musha mukadzi*, literally means, 'A home is a woman.' It means that when a woman is not present, the home is not well organised. This proverb originates from practices in the past. Men went hunting and were absent for months. They left everything in charge of their wives. The men knew that for a homestead to function well, a woman needs to be present and needs to know everything.

Another Shona proverb, *Chawawana idya nehama: mutorwa anokanganwa*, means literally, 'Whatever you have, eat it with your relatives: a stranger will forget.' A woman is perceived as a *mutorwa* (stranger, one who is taken). Shona marriage is virilocal, which means that a married woman will live in the *dzinza* (patrikin group) of her husband. A woman is not a relative, but a stranger. Therefore she is not fully trusted and she should not be told everything otherwise she will misuse the information (see Vijfhuizen, 1996). Such misuse could have taken place in the Mutema chieftaincy.

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