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SUGGESTIONS OF BUREAUCRACY IN KOREKORE RELIGION: PUTTING THE ETHNOGRAPHY STRAIGHT

M.F.C. BOURDILLON

Department of Sociology, University of Zimbabwe

THE PURPOSE OF this paper is to correct a widespread misconception in Shona ethnography.¹ Fry typified Korekore (northern Shona) spirit mediums as 'bureaucratic' in contrast with the 'charismatic' Zezuru (central Shona) mediums.² Although Lewis does not adopt this misapplication of Weberian terminology, he has accepted Fry's contrast between mediums in these two groups of Shona.³ A recent publication by Garbett, on whom Fry relied for his Korekore material, shows that the Korekore system of mediumship is nowhere near as rigid as Fry depicted it, yet Garbett still comments on the order and hierarchy of the Mutota cult of the Korekore as being 'fundamentally incompatible with the charismatic, non-hierarchical nature of the Zezuru mediumship'.⁴ Werbner comments on Fry's misrepresentation of Korekore material, but still contrasts the Korekore hierarchical ranking of mediums, and their jurisdiction over clearly defined ritual territories, with the unranked (but graded) mediums of Zezuru society, who lack demarcated constituencies.⁵ Murphree has briefly criticized Fry's typology,⁶ but a more detailed critique is needed. This essay presents a systematic critique of the various points of contrast suggested by Fry, focusing on Korekore mediums, and making appropriate comparisons with their Zezuru counterparts. I shall argue that only very minor differences exist between the two systems, and that they need to be taken even more cautiously than Garbett and Werbner take them.

THE DATA

There are three sets of data on which the discussion primarily relies. Firstly, there are the data on which Fry relied for his remarks on the Korekore, namely, those collected by Garbett in 1960-1 and 1963-4 among the Korekore of the Zambezi

¹This is part of a paper presented to the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth in February 1981. I acknowledge helpful comments from Angela Cheater, Marshall Murphree and others of my colleagues who participated in the departmental seminar at which an early draft was discussed.

²P. Fry, *Spirits of Protest: Spirit-Mediums and the Articulation of Consensus among the Zezuru of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), 54-60.

³I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971), 136-40.

⁴G.K. Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', in R.P. Werbner (ed.), *Regional Cults* (London, Academic Press, 1977), 91.

⁵R.P. Werbner, 'Introduction', *ibid.*, xxxiii f.

⁶M.W. Murphree, 'The study of religion in Central Africa', *Zambezia* (1981), IX, 71.

Valley in the Centenary and Sipolilo Districts of Zimbabwe.⁷ Central to Garbett's fieldwork was the late medium of Mutota. Mutota was the legendary founder of the Korekore people and is the senior spirit in the Korekore complex of mediums. The late medium of Mutota, George Kupara, had been established for over forty years when Garbett was in the field, and the latter's recent work suggests that the cult as he has described it rested to some extent on the charisma of the then current senior medium.⁸

In order to spread the discussion of Korekore mediumship beyond the immediate sphere of influence of so dominant a figure, I also drew on my own fieldwork data, obtained in 1969-70 among the Eastern Korekore in the extreme north-east corner of Zimbabwe (stretching 200 km to the east of Mutota's domain), and supported by casual contacts with informants during subsequent years. The Eastern Korekore are different from, but comparable with, the Valley Korekore. The eastern people recognize the seniority of Mutota, although they are for the most part too far from Mutota's domain to have any contact with his medium or his cult. The cults of the Eastern Korekore are smaller in scale than that of Mutota, and although in practice they are autonomous, at the cognitive level they are subsidiary to the cult of Mutota. Nevertheless, for the purpose of Fry's depiction of Korekore mediums, the Eastern Korekore provide apt data. They are culturally, linguistically and historically related to the Valley Korekore: the eastern chiefdoms appear at times to have been incorporated into the Mutapa State, which was ruled by Mutota's successors. The senior spirits in eastern Korekore chiefdoms are located in chiefly genealogies, and operate in territorial domains (although not always so clearly and individually defined) like those of the Valley Korekore, and unlike the senior spirits of the Zezuru peoples.⁹

Finally, there is Fry's fieldwork data, obtained among the Zezuru of Chiota in 1965-7. This was a time of intense nationalist feeling and political suppression, and Fry's data was collected in a situation of hostility and suspicion. His data consisted largely of the case studies of a few mediums who were rising rapidly in status, and whose careers he was able to describe in sensitive detail. The question arises, however, as to whether any differences that are established between

⁷G.K. Garbett, 'The Political System of a Central African Tribe with Particular Reference to the Role of Spirit Mediums' (Univ. of Manchester, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1963); 'Religious aspects of political succession among the Valley Korekore', in E. Stokes and R. Brown (eds), *The Zambesian Past* (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press, 1966), 137-70; 'Prestige, status and power in a modern Valley Korekore chiefdom, Rhodesia', *Africa* (1967), XXXVII, 307-26; 'Spirit mediums as mediators in Valley Korekore society', in J. Beattie and J. Middleton (eds), *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 104-27.

⁸G.K. Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 74, 91.

⁹There is a difficulty in simply accepting the distinction between Korekore and Zezuru in that there is no clear demarcation between the two peoples, and the identity of many related peoples cannot unambiguously be located in any of the major Shona groupings. I use the terms in this paper simply to indicate the peoples under discussion, alluding to the similarities mentioned in the text between various 'Korekore' groups, and their distinction from the 'Zezuru' studied by Fry.

Korekore mediums and those studied by Fry relate more to the peculiar circumstances of Fry's fieldwork than to permanent differences in the Korekore and Zezuru cults.

SHONA SPIRITS AND THEIR MEDIUMS

To provide background necessary for the discussion which follows, we need an outline of beliefs of the Korekore and Zezuru about their spirits and about spirit mediumship.

Most Shona peoples have some belief in a High God, known under various names. There is a cult of the High God, with an established priesthood, in southern Shona country,¹⁰ but this is far from the Zezuru of Chiota and further from the Korekore. For these peoples, the High God is traditionally considered as remote and unapproachable except by the greater spirits. In the immediate sphere of influence of an especially powerful spirit medium, such as the late medium of Mutota, the High God can be obscured.¹¹

Below the High God, the Shona believe in a host of lesser spirits: spirits of regional significance; spirits associated with a particular territory or local community; spirits of deceased family ancestors which are associated with their descent groups; spirits of strangers and certain animals which are associated with personal traits; and nature spirits, associated with certain pools, hills or other phenomena in the environment.

Of these, the most dominant in everyday life are family ancestors, who are believed responsible for the health and general well-being of their descendants. The ancestors are regularly propitiated with offerings and libations, particularly when a member of the family is threatened by illness or some other misfortune. Occasionally a family spirit is believed to be angered by misdeeds of, or against, its descendants, or against the person of the spirit before he or she died; such an angry spirit (*ngozi*, a term which, as we shall see, has a second denotation for the Korekore) is extremely threatening. Family spirits may occasionally communicate with their descendants through a medium.

The Shona also believe in a variety of spirits, *mashave*, which are normally depicted as unsettled spirits of strangers who died away from home, and which can also be the spirits of certain animals, especially baboons. These are not associated with any corporate group, and supposedly pick their hosts haphazardly, the first signs of possession being illness and subsequent divination. Such spirits are often supposed to convey to their hosts individual skills, especially the powers of divination and healing; in many cases they are said only to dance in entertaining possession seances.

¹⁰ Werbner, 'Continuity and policy in Southern Africa's High God cult', in his *Regional Cults*, 179-182.

¹¹ Garbett tells me that he never heard any mention of a High God among the Valley Korekore, and that the possessed medium of Mutota used to claim that there was no-one above or before himself (i.e., the spirit Mutota).

Higher in the spiritual hierarchy are spirits of ancient members of chiefly lineages, who are believed responsible for the chiefship and the affairs of the chiefdom. Such spirits are propitiated for rain and good crops. The senior of them are often responsible for settling, through their mediums, disputes over chiefly succession. At the same level as chiefly spirits are certain spirits of autochthonous, conquered peoples, which are regarded as particularly influential in the production of rain and in the fertility of the land. Also, occasionally, the spirit of a person associated with the history of a chiefdom, perhaps a slave or close associate of the founder, may be considered as being roughly equal to some of the chiefly spirits and responsible for a section of the chiefdom. The spirits at this level are often associated with territorial domains within a chiefdom: among the Valley Korekore, each spirit is associated with a clearly defined territory, within which it is regularly propitiated at a tree shrine, and in which the medium is normally supposed to live.

Among the Zezuru, but not among the Korekore, some of the most powerful spirits, *makombwe*, are believed to be of people who lived in the land long ago, before anyone can remember. Such 'heroes' (as Fry depicts them) are not, therefore, related to the history of the people among whom they operate, and are not associated with particular territories or particular groups of people. Although they do not fit into any accepted genealogical hierarchy, certain of these spirits, such as Chaminuka and Nehanda, have legendary fame, making them clearly more influential than, and senior to, all others.¹² Other *makombwe* may be associated with the founders of chiefdoms, in which case they are conceived of as territorial spirit guardians, much like the Korekore *mhondoro*. Others still may be linked to lineages or clans so remotely that the precise genealogical connections are no longer remembered.

All the spirits referred to in the preceding two paragraphs, together with senior family spirits among the Zezuru, are classified as *mhondoro* (lion). Shona people say that a person becomes a *mhondoro* through taking during his lifetime powerful medicines which enable his spirit to become strong and to manifest itself in the form of a young lion, an animal which is frequently associated with powerful spirits. In practice, the only way of discovering that a person has successfully acquired and taken such medicine is when the spirit 'comes out' by possessing a medium. People assume that such medicine is usually provided by 'lion' spirits secretly to persons closely associated with the chiefship.

The Shona believe that any spirit can possess a man or a woman. Usually the first signs of possession are illness, usually with symptoms of mental disturbance, followed by divination, perhaps by a senior medium. Subsequently, it is usual for the new host to go through an initiation rite under the direction of established hosts of the appropriate type of spirit, in which the spirit formally announces itself in the host, and the host becomes permanently associated with the spirit, often subject to a

¹² M. Gelfand, *Shona Ritual with Special Reference to the Chaminuka Cult* (Cape Town, Juta, 1959), 13 ff.

variety of rules and taboos associated with mediumship. Then, and from time to time subsequently, the host can become possessed, going into some kind of trance in which the person is supposed to lose his own consciousness and the spirit takes over. Apart from the utterance of oracles of the spirit, possession is characterized by recognizable sounds, actions and postures associated with the spirit, including a radical change of voice. After the seance, the host is not supposed to know anything of what happened during it, and has to be informed of all that took place. If the host shows signs of being aware of what happened while he or she was possessed, or if the spirit (that is, the possessed host) showed itself too familiar with the activities of the host, this can become grounds for suspecting that the host was not really possessed. It is generally believed that a spirit will have only one host at any one time, and when more than one person claims to be the medium of a single spirit, not more than one can be telling the truth.

Although a clear distinction is made in principle between the spirit and the host, in the case of important mediums the medium is normally called by the name of the spirit and receives, even when not possessed, the respect due to the spirit.

Mediums at all levels may practise divining and healing. A person who practises through possession by a *shave*, which has no community responsibilities, can make through the art considerable profits, nominally attributed to the spirit. Ideally a territorial spirit cares for its people and should not charge them fees, though the medium may accept gifts on behalf of the spirit, which should not be used for personal aggrandisement. Garbett described how the medium of Mutota redistributed most of the wealth he received from clients,¹¹ and Korekore mediums generally tend to live at least as simply as most of the people in their domains. It is, however, possible for a medium to travel outside his domain and practise his divining and healing arts for gain (the only case of this I came across in my fieldwork was during a time of famine after a particularly bad harvest).

FRY'S ARGUMENTS REFUTED

Fry summarizes the contrast he sees between the 'flexible' system of spirit mediumship among the Zezuru and the 'rigid' system of the Korekore by outlining six areas of difference: spirits presented, structure, procedures of legitimation, basis of authority, rivalry, and mobility. He concludes that mediumship is on the increase in Zezuru country, and on the decline among the Korekore. I shall deal with each of these six areas in turn, and then with the waxing and waning of mediumship, and finally with Fry's implications concerning the exercise of authority.

1. Spirits presented On spirits presented, Fry states that whereas among the Zezuru all spirits, ranging from the most senior heroes to the most junior deceased ancestors, may speak through mediums, spirit mediumship among the Korekore is

¹¹ Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 75.

confined to the long dead. This is not accurate. Among the Korekore, a wide range of spirits may in fact speak through mediums: various categories of spirits of strangers and animals (*mashave*), relatively junior family spirits (*ngozi*, though not necessarily malevolent), and senior territorial spirits (*mhondoro*). It is true that *mashave* are usually associated with 'possession' trances and dances in cults of affliction, rather than with 'mediumship', in which the emphasis is on the communication of messages from the spirit world;¹⁴ nevertheless, occasionally a person divines and heals through the mediumship of a *shave*, and the oracles of many dancing *mashave*, normally frivolous in nature, may occasionally touch on a serious topic and be taken seriously, as when baboon spirits threatened dire consequences for those who tried to poison baboons in the wild.

Garbett depicts *ngozi* as malevolent spirits,¹⁵ following the connotations of *ngozi* in the rest of Shona country.¹⁶ Gelfand, however, points out that among the Korekore to the south of where Garbett made his study, *ngozi* can refer both to malevolent, angry spirits, and to benevolent ancestral spirits which possess mediums¹⁷—an observation which concurs with my findings among the Eastern Korekore.¹⁸ In these areas, one finds groups of women, and occasionally men, possessed by *ngozi*, coming together at seances regarded primarily as entertainment, although the oracles of a possessed host may occasionally have serious consequences for the descendants of the spirit concerned. In conversation, Garbett has confirmed that a similar institution exists in the Valley and that *ngozi* does not necessarily carry malevolent connotations among the Valley Korekore, although he observes that a medium is likely first to become possessed by a *ngozi* in a threatening situation of conflict. The main point is that minor ancestral spirits do speak through mediums among the Korekore.

There remains a difference between Korekore and Zezuru mediumship in that the Korekore do keep their cults clearly distinct. Territorial 'lion' spirits, who are usually associated with chiefly lineages, do keep a distance from minor ancestral spirits. I was once present when a visiting Zezuru host of a family ancestral spirit, called *mhondoro* (lion) in his home community, but akin to *ngozi* among the Korekore, became possessed in the presence of the local territorial spirit guardians, who immediately created a threatening scene, causing the visiting host to be hurried away. Yet even this distinction between 'lion' spirits and others is not always conceptually clear: I came across one case of a commoner, having no apparent connection with the chiefly lineage, who was accepted as a 'lion' when his spirit

¹⁴ See R. Firth, 'Problem and assumption in an anthropological study of religion', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (1959), LXXXIX, 129–48.

¹⁵ Garbett, 'Spirit mediums as mediators in Valley Korekore society', 105, 123.

¹⁶ M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1976), 270–3.

¹⁷ M. Gelfand, *Shona Religion with Special Reference to the Makorekore* (Cape Town, Juta, 1962), 69, 74–83.

¹⁸ M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Some Aspects of the Religion of the Eastern Korekore' (Oxford Univ., unpubl. D.Phil. thesis, 1972), 300–3.

possessed his grandson. The only explanation I could get for this case was that the man must have got hold of special 'medicines' when he was alive in order that his spirit could come out as a 'lion'.

This case is significant since it does appear to involve a break from the traditional association between 'lion' spirits and the chiefship. It also represents an innovation in that a 'lion' spirit does not normally take its own descendant as its host: normally 'lion' spirits do not possess any member of the chiefly lineage and ideally choose someone from outside the chiefdom, an ideal which is significant when mediums are involved in resolving a succession dispute, in which they are not supposed to be personally involved.¹⁹ One explanation of this case could be that the senior medium of the chiefdom was having her authority challenged, and her recognition of this medium of a family spirit would provide guaranteed support in any conflict which she may have anticipated between the 'lion' mediums of the chiefdom.²⁰ An important point arises from this case: the new medium and the senior medium were able to generate wide acceptance of their view that the spirit of a relatively unnoticed commoner had come out as a 'lion' spirit, possessing his grandson as the medium. Perhaps the Zezuru pattern of family spirit mediums provided the symbolic pattern for such an innovative manoeuvre in a Korekore community.

The distinction between the 'lion' cult of the Korekore and other possession cults corresponds roughly with the distinction between morality cults and peripheral cults.²¹ This characterization is not exact. Not all 'lion' spirits have wide moral or political significance among the Korekore, and some lesser spirits can utter oracles which have moral force, or otherwise influence behaviour, among their limited clienteles. Nevertheless, 'lion' spirits normally operate in circumstances associated with the well-being of the community as a whole, while lesser spirits are largely associated with personal afflictions. Notice that among the Zezuru there is a parallel distinction at the cognitive level between *makombwe* and lesser 'lion' spirits, but the two types of cult are not kept rigidly apart in practice.

From my observations so far, I argue that there is no significant difference in the spirits presented between the Korekore and Zezuru mediumship cults. I notice, however, that Korekore mediumship is slightly more structured in that the most senior spirits are kept clearly apart from the rest.

2. Structure Fry argues that the Korekore have a rigid hierarchy of spirits, based on the genealogy of the Mutapa dynasty, which contrasts with the fluidity of

¹⁹ Garbett, 'Religious aspects of political succession among the Valley Korekore', 166.

²⁰ The commoner spirit came out shortly before I first went into the field. Although this explanation fits subsequent events, it is somewhat speculative.

²¹ This follows the distinction elaborated in Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*. Note that Lewis is not correct in saying that 'inspirational possession' among the Korekore 'is virtually a male monopoly' (p. 139). Although the *mhondoro* cult is dominated by males, there are a number of very influential female spirits and female mediums. The *ngozzi* is dominated by females, and is largely a peripheral cult; but certain other peripheral cults are exclusively male.

the relative statuses of Zezuru spirits. Much can be said about this characterization of the Korekore hierarchy. Firstly, genealogies based on oral traditions are notoriously flexible. Bohannan records a classic case of how genealogies can be adapted and moulded by political exigencies.²² I am also reminded of the way in which successive District Commissioners wrote down 'correct' versions of Korekore genealogy in order to obviate future succession disputes, in each case simply dismissing the previous attempts of the predecessors as erroneous.

Outside Mutota's immediate sphere of influence, we find the cases in which the relative statuses of Korekore mediums are not rigidly determined by the place of their spirits in an acknowledged genealogy. In the easternmost chiefdom of Chiruja, there is considerable ambiguity concerning the relative seniority of the spirits of the founding brother, Nemuru, and sister, Kotswa, of the chiefdom: the brother is supposed to have been the first chief and ruler of the chiefdom, but he is said to have depended on the magical powers of his sister, to whose commands he was supposed to defer.²³ Depending on the point at issue, each medium deferred to the other (as when they were uncertain of the appropriate decision) or demanded obedience (as when trying to promote a favoured candidate for the chiefship). This ambiguity never resulted in open conflict, but it did allow for strategic manoeuvring. In one case in Chiruja, a new medium of Dzimati, a reputedly powerful spirit, commanded little confidence and was not entrusted with the roles in chiefly rituals which were traditionally assigned to the spirit (that is, the roles had been performed by the previous medium of Dzimati, and were now said to be the traditional tasks of the spirit). Although a number of people had informed me that Dzimati would supervise all rites at the graves of past chiefs, when the possessed senior mediums appointed to this task a spirit from the neighbouring chiefdom (citing traditional ties of friendship as justification), no one expressed surprise: people simply commented that the present Dzimati was not as strong as his predecessor had been. The medium complained about the decision to get an outsider to do the work of his spirit, but to no avail. The traditional roles were symbols of the higher status of the previous medium, which the new medium claimed in accordance with orthodox belief that status comes from the spirit, but which no one else was prepared to accord to him. In these cases, the status and authority of spirits depended as much on the performances of their mediums and the support the mediums were able to acquire, as on the position of the spirits in a genealogical hierarchy—a situation very similar to that in which certain junior spirit mediums find themselves in Zezuru society.²⁴

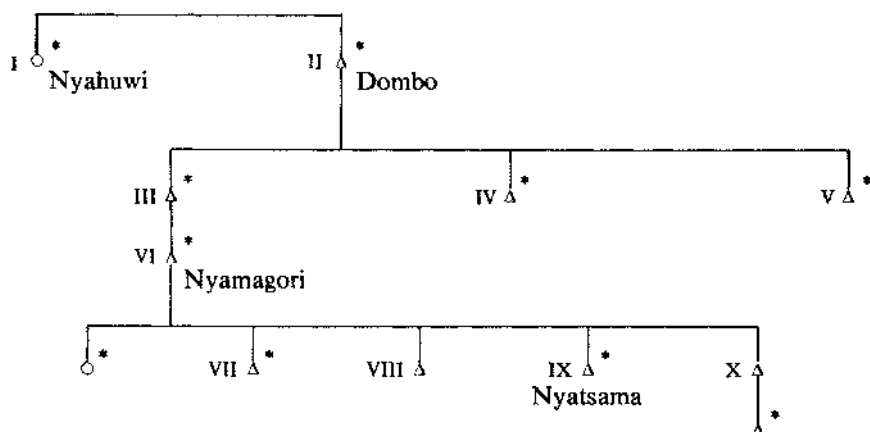
In the neighbouring chiefdom of Diwa, the medium of the senior spirit, a woman, was constantly complaining that mediums of spirits who, though male, were junior to her (for the most part by at least two generations), did not give her the

²² L. Bohannan, 'A genealogical charter', *Africa* (1952), XXII, 314.

²³ M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'The peoples of Darwin: An ethnographic survey of the Darwin District', *NADA* (1970), X, ii, 103–14.

²⁴ Fry, *Spirits of Protest*, 59.

respect which was her due. The case is instructive and worth looking at in some detail:



Numerals indicate order of accession to chiefship.

* indicates *mhondoro*.

Figure: GENEALOGY OF THE CHIEFLY *MHONDORO* OF DIWA

Nyahuwi is said to have been the first in the country, killing the autochthonous ruler by trickery before calling her brother, Dombo, to live with her. She is said to have been the first chief or ruler. There is some dispute as to whether Dombo and his three sons were real chiefs: the sons were murdered in quick succession. Dombo's grandson, Nyamagori, was certainly a chief and is the ancestor of all subsequent chiefs. His medium is an aged and respected man, and according to some he is in charge of all issues concerning the chiefship, a status which Nyahuwi (through her medium) claims for herself. Dombo, for no reason that I could ascertain, is a relatively unimportant spirit, and his medium pays passive deference to Nyahuwi at seances. Recently the spirit of Nyatsama 'came out' in a medium, and, immediately after the initiation of the medium, began to defy the authority of Nyahuwi, relying on the support of the descendants of Nyatsama who were putting in a claim for their house to succeed to the vacant chiefship. It soon became clear that the medium of Nyamagori had no intention of deferring to Nyahuwi on the question of the vacant chiefship, claiming that the country could not be ruled by a woman, and that he was likely to support another rival to Nyahuwi's candidate. The clear hierarchy of spirits, as defined by the chiefly genealogy and traditional history of the chiefdom, turned out to be very fluid in practice, with status depending largely on the support the various mediums were able to obtain.

On this point, it should be noted that the existence of a traditional genealogy does not determine which names will be associated with spirit mediums. As the Diwa genealogy shows, some ancient chiefs have never come out as 'lion' spirits, while juniors to them have acquired this status. Besides, apart from those at the top of the hierarchy (usually the names associated with the founding of the chiefdom), a genealogy leaves the relative status of other spirits indeterminate, especially where male-female relations are concerned, or when spirits come from branches of the chiefly lineage which for some reason have been excluded from the chiefship.

In Chiruja in 1969, there were five active 'lion' mediums, three of whom were successors to previous mediums. People could cite the names of four other spirits from the chiefly genealogy each of which had possessed a medium in the past, but none of which had 'come out' after the death of the first medium. Six out of the nine 'lion' spirits had possessed only one medium, who accordingly had no traditions to follow. In Diwa, there was only one spirit which had not 'come out' again after the death of its first medium, but five of the eleven mediums active in 1969 were possessed by 'new' spirits which had no traditions of mediumship. Garbett does not give figures for the Valley Korekore, but he indicates that a number of spirit provinces did not have active mediums (which is not necessarily evidence that the cult is on the wane²⁵) and that new spirits have from time to time emerged and been given a section of some existing territorial domain. The point being made is that new mediums are often completely free of the constraints of any traditional role and status. This is relevant to the idea of routinization of charisma: the mediums of new spirits are, like the Zezuru mediums described by Fry, free to develop the characteristics of their spirits, limited only by the general expectations that surround mediumship.

Moving closer to the domain of Mutota, it appears that the status of autochthonous spirits traditionally associated with Korekore cults has only recently, and presumably largely under the influence of the late medium of Mutota, diminished among the Valley Korekore;²⁶ elsewhere the relative statuses of Korekore spirits and autochthonous spirits remain ambiguous.²⁷ In particular, the cult of the autochthonous spirit, Dzivaguru, appears to have flourished around the turn of the century under the influence of a roving and politically active medium.²⁸

On the Mutota complex of mediums, Garbett has pointed out how, in the genealogy acknowledged by Valley Korekore mediums, the founder of the dynasty

²⁵ Contra Fry (*ibid.*, 60).

²⁶ Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 67.

²⁷ M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'The manipulation of myth in a Tavara chiefdom', *Africa* (1972), XLII, 112-21; 'The cults of Dzivaguru and Karuva amongst the north-eastern Shona peoples' in M. Schoffeleers (ed.), *Guardians of the Land* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1979), 235-55.

²⁸ Bourdillon, 'The cults of Dzivaguru and Karuva amongst the north-eastern Shona peoples', 250f. The cult of Dzivaguru is strictly Tavara rather than Korekore. The Tavara, however, were incorporated into the Mutapa state at its zenith, and the cult of Dzivaguru has at various times been influential in Korekore country; see *ibid.*, 235-55; Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 73; Bourdillon, 'The manipulation of myth in a Tavara chiefdom'.

(Mutota) is listed as having a large number of children, but only a single line of descendants, giving the genealogy an unusual 'T' shape.²⁹ Garbett argues that this is partly due to a variety of mediums, including some from Zezuru country, trying to enhance their status by gaining support from the old medium of Mutota. The visiting spirit, through its medium, claims to be a child of Mutota, and Mutota acknowledges that he had so many children he could not remember them all, thus increasing his clientele and realm of influence. It could be argued that the apparent rigidity of the Korekore system, and the unquestioned supremacy of the senior spirit, depended largely on the charisma of the medium of Mutota.

It is thus not true that the association of Korekore spirits with chiefly genealogies fixes their mediums in a hierarchy of authority. Equally it is not true that Zezuru mediums are without hierarchy. Certain of the *makombwe* spirits, particularly Chaminuka and Nehanda, are so famous in Shona history and legends that they are unquestionably senior. Indeed Chaminuka is so well known³⁰ that when Mutota, after a seance with a pretender to the mediumship of Chaminuka, claimed that Chaminuka was one of his sons, the claim was ignored by other Valley Korekore mediums.³¹ Fry points out that the people of Chiota think of their spirits in hierarchical terms, and that there is a certain stability of authority relations between spirit mediums,³² suggesting that at the ideological level there is little difference between the Korekore and the Zezuru systems. In fact many of the senior *makombwe* among the Zezuru are, like their Korekore counterparts, associated with the founding of chiefly dynasties. The fact that a number of Zezuru mediums have been attaching themselves to the medium of Mutota indicates that they do not see their system as fundamentally different from that of Korekore mediums. In practice, it appears that the most important of the Korekore mediums build up fluctuating spheres of interest just as do the Zezuru mediums.

The case of Nehanda is particularly interesting. In Zezuru country, Nehanda is a *gombwe* spirit of particular renown, so much so that often there are a number of simultaneous pretenders to her mediumship, each commanding acknowledgement in a particular locality. Nehanda was prominent in the 1896-7 war against White settlers, and remains a nationalist figure today.³³ In the Zambezi Valley, Nehanda is known as the daughter of Mutota. She is said to have formed an incestuous union with her youngest brother who succeeded to Mutota's rulership, and she is a 'lion' spirit with a medium and a territorial domain. The Korekore identify their Nehanda with the spirit of the same name on the Zezuru plateau, even though they acknowledge that there are two distinct and genuine mediums—the one exception

²⁹ Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 80.

³⁰ Gelfand, *Shona Ritual*, 30-9; D.P. Abraham, 'The roles of "Chaminuka" and the mhondoro cults in Shona political history', in Stokes and Brown, *The Zambesian Past*, 28-46.

³¹ Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 84.

³² Fry, *Spirits of Protest*, 44.

³³ T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7* (London, Heinemann, 2nd edn, 1979), 384 f, 392 f.

to the belief that two persons cannot at the same time be mediums to a single spirit. Garbett comments on how one of the pretenders to the mediumship of Nehanda in Zezuru country incorporated herself into the Mutota cult,³⁴ presumably in a bid for status and recognition *vis-à-vis* her rival. In the course of the recent war, nationalist guerrillas associated the medium of Nehanda in the Valley with the Nehanda of the 1896–7 war, and took her across the border to Moçambique for protection. Neither the medium active in the 1896–7 war nor the daughter of Mutota are fixed historical facts: rather they are vague notions which can be conjured up and fused in the symbol of the name, Nehanda, to be used as the occasion demands—by the medium of Mutota to emphasize the pre-eminent status of his spirit; by the medium of the Zezuru Nehanda to validate her claims; by guerrillas, fighting a nationalist war, to obtain courage and unity from a symbol of the glorious past and hopes of a glorious future.

Related to the apparently rigid structure of the Korekore mediums is the apparently rigid system of spirit domains, established in the distant past: at least in the Zambezi Valley, and to a lesser degree elsewhere, each spirit associated with the 'lion' cult has a territorial domain, clearly defined by publicly known boundaries, of which it is the spirit guardian. In practice, as Garbett points out,³⁵ new provinces have been created from time to time to accommodate spirits which 'come out' in a medium for the first time, without prior association with the 'lion' cult. Also there is a general belief that all territorial spirits have small ritual territories in addition to their principal domains, scattered throughout the region, and for the most part known only to the spirits, who can reveal them through their mediums should the need arise. This belief in sacred territories, established in the mythical past and progressively revealed, legitimizes any medium who is forced, or chooses, to operate outside his traditional domain. Here the ideal structural stability can provide a stratagem for mobility.

Summarizing the question of structure, then, Korekore mediums apparently differ from Zezuru mediums in their ideological association with specific persons in traditional history and with particular neighbourhoods. I have shown that this appearance is largely illusory: the associations are not in practice very limiting. The appearance of these limitations, however, has a bearing on the operation of traditional religious authority, a topic I shall return to later in the discussion.

3. Procedures of legitimation The third point Fry raises in his argument that the Korekore mediums are bureaucratic is the legitimation of new mediums. He claims that whereas the Zezuru mediums of Chiota need recognition by a senior medium and 'belief' of a following, for the Korekore recognition by senior mediums is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the establishment of a new medium. This corresponds with Korekore belief: people say that a new medium must be

³⁴ Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 86 ff.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

recognized by the senior mediums of a chiefdom, and that these would never accept a person who was not a true medium. In practice, it seems to have applied in Mutota's sphere of influence while the long established medium maintained widespread authority. Among the Eastern Korekore, however, practice does not always correspond to the ideal. Two cases illustrate this.

The first concerned a man who claimed to be the medium of Nyanhehwe. In the local legends Nyanhehwe was Mutota's youngest son who rose to ascendancy over his older brothers and succeeded Mutota by committing incest with his sister, Kotswa (a senior local spirit).³⁶ Nyanhehwe's home is supposed to be across the international border in Moçambique, but people said that he could no longer operate in that area since the previous medium had come into conflict with the Portuguese authorities. The senior spirits of Chiruja rejected the new medium when he tried to settle in that chiefdom, on the grounds that Nyanhehwe would never try to live in the same country as the sister with whom he had committed incest. The medium became established, however, in a neighbouring chiefdom and after a year every one, at least overtly, paid him the respect due to the medium of Nyanhehwe, until his early death and the subsequent disturbance of his grave by hyenas indicated, in the minds of some, that the original judgement of the senior mediums of Chiruja had been correct. Prior to this, even the Chiruja mediums began tacitly to accept the new medium's claim, attributing the attempted encroachment into their domain to the spirit rather than to a false medium.

The second case was of a medium who refused to reveal the name of his spirit, and who quickly acquired a wide reputation for his performances while possessed, during which he was able to throw into confusion the established mediums of the chiefdom in which he settled. He moved to a neighbouring chiefdom when his prediction of good rains proved false and a whirlwind destroyed his spirit hut, which suggested to many that the senior spirits of the chiefdom were more powerful than originally appeared. There were still strong rumours that he might be the medium of the spirit Dzivaguru, very famous but long inactive,³⁷ until he lost credibility by trying to stop the building of stores, schools and dams (Dzivaguru was particularly associated with anti-White activities and conflict with the Government), and ran foul of the chief, who then had government authorities take the man away to his home in Zezuru country. The point of this case is that, notwithstanding the apparently structured system of mediums in Korekore country, the medium acquired and then lost public recognition on his ability and then failure to acquire public confidence.

A further point on legitimation is that a new senior medium has to be legitimized by established mediums of less senior spirits. The essential feature of the process of legitimation is recognition by established mediums. Normally, for an

³⁶ This is a variation of the Valley Korekore legend, in which the sister is identified as Nehanda; see above.

³⁷ Bourdillon, 'The cults of Dzivaguru and Karuva amongst the north-eastern Shona peoples'.

important spirit, recognition is sought from the mediums of the most senior spirits. When the new medium claims possession by a spirit senior to those of the established mediums of a chiefdom, he or she will be subject to them in certain matters up to the time of initiation, and immediately afterwards will take on a role of leadership.

Fry points out that in Chiota, the backing of a senior medium is worthless outside the sphere of influence of that medium. The same in practice applies to the Korekore. Among the people studied by Garbett, the sphere of influence of the medium of Mutota was very extensive, which obscured the weakness in the structure of mediumship. Beyond the sphere of influence of this medium, the clear structure of Korekore mediumship applies to the Korekore ideals rather than to their practice.

4. Basis of authority The points that I have just raised also nullify Fry's fourth argument, that 'whereas Korekore mediums receive their authority from "above", from more senior mediums, the mediums of Chiota derive their authority from the recognition accorded them by other mediums and the lay public, "from below"'.³⁸

5. Rivalry Fry goes on to bring up the question of rivalry between mediums. He cites a case in Chiota in which two mediums each simply claimed seniority over the other. He argues that the more rigid system of the Korekore puts constraints on rivalry between mediums. This is true. It does not mean that rivalry is eliminated, but simply that rivalry has to be conducted in the contexts of traditions about the spirits. Disputes about the relative authority of Diwa mediums, mentioned above, concerned arguments about the status of women, and in particular the status of the woman who, according to the medium of the spirit and many other informants, was the founder of the chiefdom and its first ruler. Garbett also mentions a certain rivalry between the medium of Mutota and the medium of Chihwahwa, another influential spirit:³⁹ it is true that the seniority of Mutota was never questioned, but his rights in Chihwahwa's traditional territory were questioned, and the medium of Chihwahwa eventually moved to what he claimed to be a grove sacred to his spirit in a domain traditionally belonging to other spirits.

Although it is rare for two Korekore mediums to claim possession by the same spirit (as frequently happens in the case of the most senior Zezuru spirits), such rivalry can take place. In the Eastern Korekore chiefdom of Tsombe, there were for many years two pretenders to the mediumship of the senior spirit, a problem which the established junior mediums were unable to solve. People said that the false medium would soon die, but the problem was still unsolved five years after it first arose. Such a situation is unlikely to persist in the case of relatively junior spirits, but this need not necessarily be explained in terms of the hierarchical structure of Korekore mediumship: rival mediums can claim possession by a variety of spirits

³⁸ Fry, *Spirits of Protest*, 59.

³⁹ Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 61 f.

from the chiefly genealogy, whose relative statuses are indeterminate. I have already pointed out that new mediums frequently claim possession by spirits which have never before been active in a medium and which may never again be active after the death of the medium.

6. Mobility Fry claims that Korekore mediums are fixed in status by the positions of their spirits in the chiefly genealogy. I have pointed out that, apart from certain very senior spirits (such as Mutota), this is not so. The status of most mediums depends as much on their performances while possessed as on the identity of their spirits.

Waxing or waning of mediumship

Finally, Fry points to Garbett's observations that many spirit guardians are not represented by mediums, and argues that Korekore mediumship is dying out, in contrast with Zezuru mediumship, which was on the increase when Fry made his study in the 1960s. Since new spirits often 'come out' in new mediums, leaving old spirits without hosts, Fry's inference is not necessarily a correct interpretation of the data, and it was certainly not true of Korekore country as a whole in the early 1970s. In some chiefdoms, particularly where chiefly succession was pending and the sayings of mediums were likely to become particularly influential, the number of active and accepted mediums was clearly on the increase.

When in the wars of the late 1970s Korekore society suffered major social upheavals, spirit mediums acquired the high status they acquired throughout Shona country. I have mentioned Nehanda's association with guerrilla forces. Garbett has mentioned how Chihwahwa was convicted of aiding them, and Mutota came under close government scrutiny.⁴⁰ The chiefdom of Chiruja illustrates the role of mediums in the war. When the guerrilla forces first arrived there, they at once paid their respects to the possessed medium of Nemuru, one of the two senior spirits. He announced that he did not want bloodshed in his country, and the guerrilla leaders informed him that his demand was impossible since they were fighting a national war.

Subsequently, he arranged for protective medicines to be planted in places around his country (at one of these spots, a government military vehicle overturned), and was constantly consulted by guerrillas. It is said that the mediums advised guerrillas when to fight and when to hide, with the result that there were very few casualties in Chiruja (equally explicable in terms of the remoteness of Chiruja from army bases). One Chiruja guerrilla attributed all losses in guerrilla forces to two causes: killing innocent people, and failing to respect the spirits of the land. His own section, whose commander was a medium, suffered no losses in three years of fighting.

The mediums had no control over the war. But they, as opposed to the God presented by missionaries, symbolized the forces of nationalist self-consciousness

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55, n. 1.

which drove people to fight. They became a source of inspiration when people were shaken by the inevitable doubts and fears of a war situation. Immediately prior to the war, after the election of an unpopular chief and a succession of poor harvests, the standing of Chiruja mediums was at a low ebb. In the course of the war, they came to be regarded as heroes, playing a vital part in the overthrow of the enemy.

Exercise of authority

Implied in Fry's idea, that Korekore mediums are bureaucratic and receive their authority from above, is a presumption that on account of their office senior mediums are able to exercise authority over junior mediums, and that also on account of their office all mediums are able to exercise authority over the lay public.

On the first point, it is clear that senior mediums do exercise authority over new mediums who have not yet become established—mediums who in the popular idiom are not yet strongly possessed.⁴¹ A new medium usually starts his career under the patronage of an established medium, becoming possessed at seances of the established medium, and in this way learning the arts of possession. However, as some of the cases of rivalry we have mentioned indicate, once a medium has become established and acquired an independent clientele, the authority of the senior medium can be exercised only with the consent of the junior. The ways in which mediums align themselves in situations of rivalry and conflict indicate tactical opportunism rather than conformity to a 'bureaucratic' hierarchy based on a stable genealogy. Even in the case of the medium of Mutota, whose authority and patronage allowed him to send messages of rebuke to mediums in his sphere of influence,⁴² there is no evidence that his control extended beyond such rebukes. Indeed, there is evidence to the contrary in Chihwahwa's independence of action and in the refusal of other mediums to accept Mutota's claim that Chaminuka was one of his (Mutota's) many sons. The status of seniority does not in itself convey the power to coerce or to control the activities of recognized juniors.

On the question of authority over the lay public, Garbett has pointed to constraints on spirit mediums in the election of chiefs (for which in popular belief they are responsible) and in the settlement of disputes, arguing that the mediums' role in practice is to crystallize public opinion rather than to make authoritative decisions.⁴³ People can explain away any particular oracle coming from a medium, without thereby negating their faith in the institution of mediumship, by claiming that the medium was not really possessed, or not strongly possessed, and expressed only his personal opinion under the guise of the voice of the spirit. There are always various ways of putting social pressure on a medium by withdrawing normal signs of respect when his oracles are not popular—the theoretical distinction between the

⁴¹ Garbett, 'Spirit mediums as mediators in Valley Korekore society', 115 ff.

⁴² Garbett, 'Disparate regional cults and unitary ritual fields in Zimbabwe', 76, 85.

⁴³ Garbett, 'Religious aspects of political succession among the Valley Korekore'; 'Spirit mediums as mediators in Valley Korekore society'.

person of the medium and the spirit whose oracle he utters is easily overlooked.⁴⁴ It is true that mediums can occasionally enforce a decision, regardless of public opinion, under the threat of supernatural sanctions,⁴⁵ but generally if their authority is to be maintained it has to be exercised in a circumscribed manner. Lay people stress the authority of mediums in order to stress the importance of a point of view which has the support of mediums, or of some judgement made on quite independent grounds;⁴⁶ that is, the authority of mediums is asserted when it is strategically appropriate to do so.

CONCLUSION

Although Korekore mediumship is conceptualized as having a clear and stable structure, the practices of mediums display a high degree of freedom from the constraints of structure. Fry's characterization of the Korekore situation as representing 'a state of ossified charisma'⁴⁷ does not correspond with Korekore practice. Indeed, the Korekore mediums have free, charismatic characteristics, similar to those which Fry observes in the Zezuru mediums. Now Fry's appeal⁴⁸ to the respective pre-colonial histories of the two peoples seems uncalled for. The Korekore did once come under the influence of the large Mutapa polity which at times had a vast area of influence just south of the Zambezi River, but the relationship between successive Mutapas and outlying chiefdoms appears to have been very fluid,⁴⁹ and Fry's characterization of the Mutapa state of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as an 'empire' seems exaggerated. For the most part, the Korekore chiefdoms appear to have operated as small independent States, much like the chiefdoms that comprise the Zezuru peoples. Nevertheless, Fry is probably correct in linking aspects of the Korekore cult with their ancient political structure, while the most important Zezuru cults took on regional characteristics, which traversed the political boundaries of individual chiefdoms.

A more significant point is the way in which a particular fieldwork situation,

⁴⁴ M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Spirit mediums in Shona beliefs and practice', *NADA* (1974), IX, i, 30-7.

⁴⁵ I came across only two clear cases of this. In the first, the senior spirits of Chiruja forbade the building of a dam on a site which would have flooded a sacred well, traditionally an unfailing (though very limited) source of water even after a severe drought. The possessed mediums threatened so severe a drought that the dam and the well itself would run dry. In the end a smaller, and unsuccessful, dam was built a little upstream from the well. The second case refers to a young medium who accused someone of stealing his tobacco. A fine was exacted although no-one believed the medium, who was widely ostracized in the months that followed. It is perhaps relevant to point out that in the latter case only one person was adversely affected, and in the former case only a small and uninfluential section of the chiefdom would have benefited from the proposed dam.

⁴⁶ M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Religion and ethics in Korekore society', *Journal for Religion in Africa* (1979), X, 81-94.

⁴⁷ Fry, *Spirits of Protest*, 60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 62-5.

⁴⁹ D.N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900-1850* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1980), 113-51.

such as the relatively stable situation in which Garbett was immersed or the tense suspicion that surrounded Fry, can affect the view of an anthropologist of the society he is studying. That must remain the subject of another study.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Freedom and constraint among Shona spirit mediums', in J. Davis (ed.), *Religious Organization and Religious Experience* (London, Academic Press, in press).