

The Marumbi Rain cult: Gender and the interface between rainmaking and the politics of water in Gutu

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Abstract

The major concern of this paper is to analyse the socio-political dynamics of the Marumbi Rain cult in Gutu. Of central importance here will be the interface between rainmaking and the politics of water. The Marumbi Rain Cult provides an interesting scenario where a woman, Marumbi Karivara with rainmaking powers ended up transforming the power into political influence. In the end, not only did she assume control over rainmaking in Gutu, but also the control of sacred groves, pools and springs around Mt. Rasa where the rain cult was based. As a result of her rainmaking powers she also founded the Munyaradzi Headmanship. Upon her death her only son, Chinamasabwa took over control of both rainmaking powers and control of the Headmanship. In recent years disputes have erupted between the descendents of Chinamasabwa and those of Marumbi Karivara's brother Chagonda and these have centred on the control of the rain cult and the sacred groves around Mt. Rasa. The disputes have also extended to the issue of legitimacy of the descendents of Chinamasabwa's control of the rain cult, the sacred groves, pools springs and also the Munyaradzi Headmanship. This paper is therefore an attempt at giving a genealogy of the intricate politics of rainmaking, water, gender and politics in an area that is drought prone. It submits that for the Shona, the whole rhetoric of water politics remains inseparable from the institution of rainmaking, the influence of rainmakers and the spirituality of water.

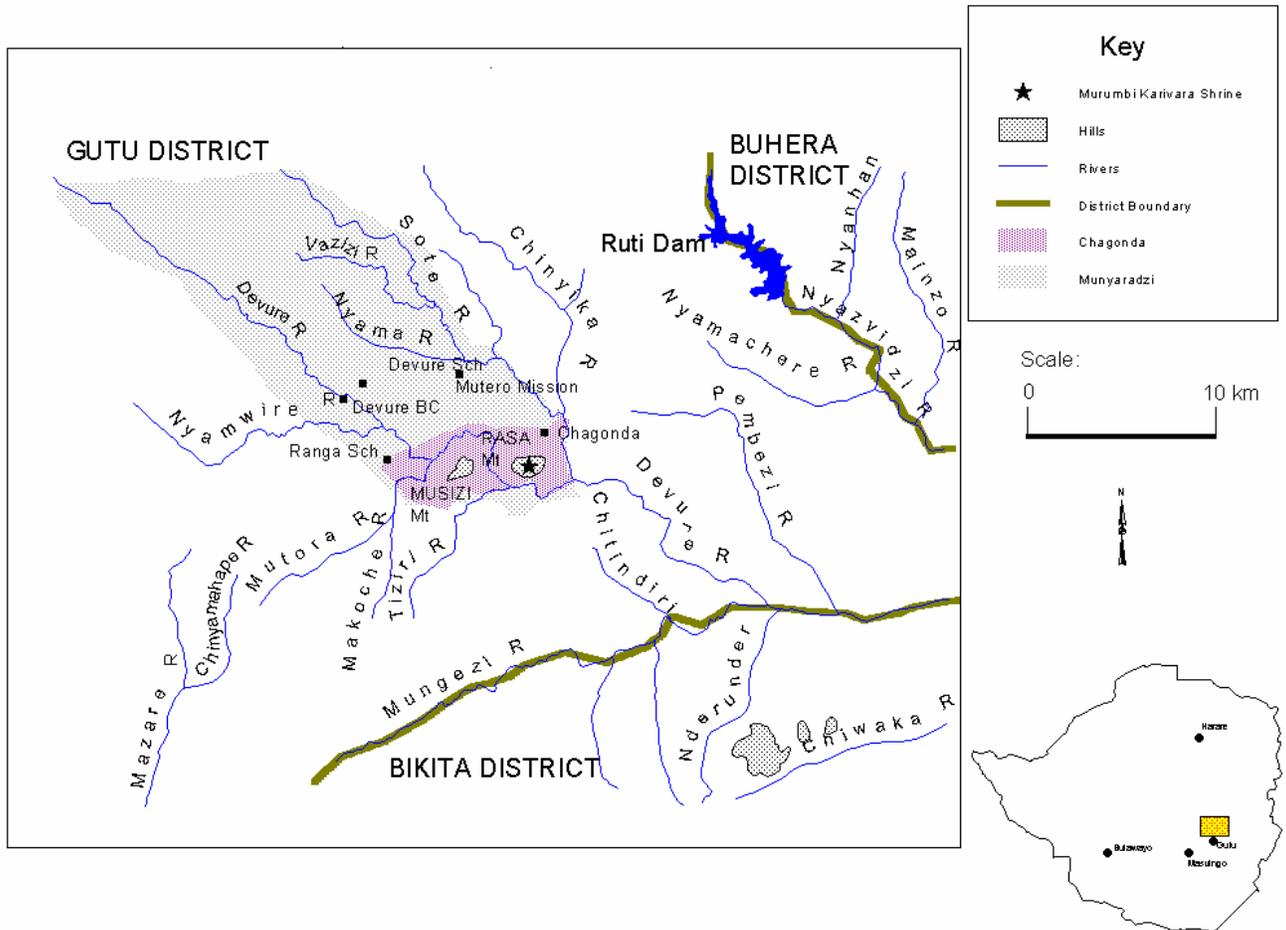
Introduction

Gutu is a district, which falls in the ecological region 4 and 5 of Zimbabwe, which are the regions that receive the least rainfall and has poor soils too. The inhabitants of this area are essentially agriculturalists and they strongly rely on rain to sustain their agricultural activities. Since rain is quite erratic in the area rainmaking institutions have often taken the centre stage in the socio-politics of the people in the area. It is in this light that the Marumbi Rain cult has taken a great socio-political position in Gutu. The two main custodians of the cult are the Munyaradzi people who are of the Shava (eland) totem and the Chagonda who are of the Moyo (heart) totem. The two clans are related in that the Munyaradzi are descendents of Marumbi Karivara the rainmaker who established the cult and the Chagonda are descendents of Neusaka one of the brothers of Marumbi Karivara.

The central argument in this paper is that though in the western world rain and water are two separate phenomena in some African communities water politics are a direct continuation of politics of rainmaking. In the end, violating or pollution of water sources would in most cases lead to failure of rains. This is a concept known as *kupunjira*.

This paper argues that though water and rain have been treated separately more often than not the two phenomena are linked. The history of the Marumbi Karivara rain cult illustrates the interface that exists between rainmaking and the socio-politics of water. The socio-politics of both the Chagonda and the Munyaradzi communities largely oscillate around the Marumbi Karivara rain cult and the whole rhetoric of the spirituality of water sources. In this light, this paper tries to analyse the Munyaradzi and Chagonda communities' interaction with the Marumbi Karivara rain cult and explore how such interactions have impacted on their perceptions of the various water sources in their area. Much emphasis would be put on the two communities' perception of the spirituality of the waters of the VaZizi and Devure Rivers. These rivers are greatly linked to the Marumbi Karivara Rain cult based at Rasa Mountain and therefore are of great cultural and spiritual significance to the Munyaradzi and Chagonda communities.

Map showing location of Marumbi Karivara Rain Cult



The origins of the Karivara Rain cult

The Marumbi Karivara cult is one of the many cults in Zimbabwe with a heavy bias on rainmaking. Other similar cults include the Mwari cult based in Matopos Hills (Mabweadziva), the Mandara rain cult of the Duma people and the Musikavanhu and Muchembere cults in the Chipinge area¹. The Mwari cult seems to have played a notable role in the socio-political and economic lives of the people of Gutu. For instance, the Gutu-Rufura people sent messengers to the Matopos Hills on yearly basis to consult the

oracular voice of Mwari, the High God, on matters of succession, to plead for good rains as well as asking for spiritual guidance on issues such as droughts and pestilences. The influence of the Mwari cult was instituted by a hierarchy of *Masvikiro* (spirit mediums), *Mbonga* and *Manyusa* (Mwari Messengers). Though the Mwari cult was the most powerful in as far as rainmaking among the Karanga (a branch of the Shona people in south central Zimbabwe) was concerned, it was indeed not the only source of rain.² As highlighted above, the Duma people's Mandara rain cult was equally influential in the region that at other times the Gutu people would appeal for rain through it. Its influence was also felt in Gutu that at times would appeal for rain through it. R. M. G. Mtetwa argues that the Mandara cult was so influential that it even played an important part in the succession struggles between Makwarimba and Chaurura, two claimants to Gutu chieftainship, in the mid nineteenth century.³ To strengthen his position against the rival claimant to the throne, Chaurura, Makwarimba is argued to have married, 'Machida, the daughter of the Duma chief, Makore Marevakare (1808-39) through whom Gutu appealed for rain at Mandara'.⁴ This marriage alliance reveals the importance, attached to rainmakers and rain making by not only the people of Gutu but also the majority of the Shona people in the region.

It is in the context of the above that the Marumbi Karivara rain cult emerged and grew to become a powerful institution in Gutu. Its origins can be traced to a woman known as Marumbi Karivara of the Muusha-Gumbu dynasty. She had migrated from Buhera and settled in Gutu on the foot of Mt Rasa.⁵ Her father Chamutsa Mugomberwa had given her the rain making powers.⁶ According to M. L. Daneel, Chamutsa Mugomberwa was a

¹ See B. B. Mukamuri, 'Local Environmental Conservation Strategies: Karanga Religion, Politics and Environmental Control' in *Environment and History* (special issue:Zimbabwe) Vol. 1, No. 3 October (1995), p.300.

² *Ibid*

³ R. M. G. Mtetwa, 'The relationship between the Gutu Dynasty and the Mwari Cult in the 19th century' in *Rhodesian History* (1975), 6. p.92.

⁴ *Ibid* Chaurura had established close relationships with the Mwari cult by appointing all messengers from Gutu to the Mwari cult from his house.

⁵ R. M. G. Mtetwa, 'The relationship between the Gutu Dynasty and the Mwari Cult in the 19th century', p.89.

⁶ O. Dewa, 'The Marumbi cult: Once defunct but now operational' Unpublished B. A Honours Dissertation, Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy, University of Zimbabwe, 1992,

close relative of Soshangane the King of the Gaza State.⁷ Chamunorwa Chagonda, however disputes Chamutsa Mugomberwa's relationship with Soshangane and argues that he originated from the Chipinge area.⁸ Apparently the area, from which Chamutsa Mugomberwa came from, Chipinge, was the same area in which the more powerful Musikavanhu rain cult also emerged making this area the cradle of these two powerful rain cults.

One important feature about the Marumbi Karivara rain cult was that a woman, Marumbi Karivara, controlled it. However, the question that needs to be addressed here is how Marumbi Karivara inherited the rain making powers from her father when she had elder brothers who could have inherited it instead. According to O. Dewa, Chamutsa Mugomberwa conferred his rainmaking powers to his daughter Marumbi Karivara against Shona tradition, which dictated that such a privilege was a preserve of the eldest son.⁹ The Karanga people are patriarchal and their traditions dictate that the eldest son is the one who inherits his father's estate. This means that daughters are normally not counted among heirs of their father's estate especially when there are brothers to take the inheritance. This explains why Marumbi Karivara's inheritance of her father's rainmaking powers sparked a lot of animosity between her and her brothers.

Oral traditions of both the Chagonda people who are descendents of Neusaka one of the brothers of Marumbi Karivara and the Munyaradzi people who are descendents of Chinamasabwa Munyaradzi the son of Marumbi Karivara give some insights into how Marumbi Karivara came to inherit the rainmaking powers. It is believed that when Chamutsa Mugomberwa was on his death bed, he decided to carry out the ritual of

p.11., see also PER5/5/60 L. J. de Bruijn N. C. Gutu to P. N. C Fort Victoria, 22 February 1960. (PER 5 Files are kept at district offices and the ones used here are kept at the Gutu District Offices).

⁷ M. L. Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Vol. I: Background and Rise of the Major Movements (Mouton, The Hague, 1971), p.21.

⁸ Chamunorwa Chagonda quoted in O. Dewa, 'The Marumbi cult: Once defunct but now operational' Unpublished B. A Honours Dissertation, Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy, University of Zimbabwe, 1992, p.11.

⁹ O. Dewa, 'The Marumbi cult: Once defunct but now operational' Unpublished B. A Honours Dissertation, Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy, University of Zimbabwe, 1992, p.12.

vomiting the water stone (*rubwe or hurungudo*) which he had swallowed as part of a ritual for him to be possessed by a rain making spirit to live longer.¹⁰ Most Shona groups believe that a person who swallows this ritual stone will have a long life and would not die until he/she vomits the stone and passes it on to another person who would in turn swallow it and automatically take over his/her powers of longevity.¹¹ However, seeing that if they performed this ritual their father would die all the sons of Chamutsa Mugomberwa turned down their father's request.¹² As fate would have it, one day when all the sons had gone on a hunting expedition Chamutsa Mugomberwa gave his daughter his rainmaking charms and all the paraphernalia of the rain making ritual and asked her to swallow the ritual stone that he vomited.¹³ Immediately after this ritual, Chamutsa Mugomberwa died and the rainmaking spirit fell on Marumbi Karivara, his daughter. Upon their return from the hunting trip and finding their father dead Marumbi Karivara's brothers accused her of killing their father by swallowing *rubwe/hurungudo* (water stone/pebble) the ritual stone.¹⁴ As a result of the conflict that ensued, Marumbi Karivara and one of her brothers, Neusaka, fled to chief Nyashanu's area in Buhera. Neusaka was the only one who had supported Marumbi Karivara in the conflict with her other brothers.¹⁵ Thus, almost by default, Marumbi Karivara became possessed by the rain spirit which once possessed her father. Be that as it may it can be argued that the rain gods had chosen Marumbi Karivara thus creating circumstances that would allow her to inherit the powers. Against this background one can argue that the process in which Marumbi Karivara inherited the rainmaking powers was more complex than just the swallowing of a the *rubwe/hurungudo*.

The symbolic meaning of vomiting or expunging among the Shona people however needs to be elaborated here. Vomiting is largely associated with cleansing one's body after

¹⁰ Interview with Z. M. Makuvaza, Makuvaza, Gutu, 5 January 2003, Interview with Z. W. Chagonda, Chagonda Village, Gutu, 10 January 2003.

¹¹ Interview with Z. W. Chagonda., Many other rituals for having a long life are known among the Shona though this was common among kings. See also I. M. Zvarevashe, Dzinza RavaGovera vaChirumhanzu naMutasa (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1998), p.8.

¹² Interview with Z. W. Chagonda.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ O. Dewa, 'The Marumbi cult: Once defunct but now operational', p12.

having eaten something bad. However, in the case under discussion, the process of vomiting the *rubwe/hurungudo* served as a ritual of transferring the rain making powers from Chamutsa Mugomberwa to her daughter Marumbi Karivara. The act of swallowing the stone was by the same token symbolic of the recipient's acceptance of the powers being transferred to him or her. This process carried a lot of water symbolism in that the transfer of the rain making powers was symbolised by the exchange of the *rubwe/hurungudo* and the rain making paraphernalia, *nhumbi*. This symbolised the link that existed between the person with rain making powers and water from which the water stones/pebbles (*rubwe/hurungudo*) are obtained. According to H. Aschwanden, 'rain and water symbolises all those liquids (semen, amniotic fluid, vaginal liquid) which are necessary for the creation of new life.'¹⁶ He adds, 'water is not only nature's life-giver but, in the widest sense, it is a symbol of all the kinds of sap which not only create human life but also help sustain it.'¹⁷ In fact there are no separate names for water and rain among the Karanga people as both are referred to as *mvura*. Hence among Karanga water and rain and indeed all other kinds of natural liquids carry a lot of symbolism which radiates around life and its substance and also fertility and fecundity.

The Manifestations of the rainmaking powers of Marumbi Karivara

It was during her stay in chief Nyashanu's court that Marumbi Karivara's rainmaking powers began to manifest themselves. She was staying with one of Chief Nyashanu's wives who acted as her foster mother since she was a very young girl at the time. Whilst staying in Chief Nyashanu's court, she did a number of household chores and including herding cattle. Her foster mother soon realised that in spite of it being a drought year, Marumbi Karivara would bring fresh vegetables from the pastures and the cattle she herded remained very healthy. It was later established that Marumbi Karivara was making rain in the area she grazed her cattle and that it had become an island of green pastures amidst a dry and waterless area. At the centre of this 'micro-environment' was

¹⁶ H. Aschwanden Karanga Mythology (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1994), p.194.

¹⁷ Ibid

indeed the abundance of water from the rain, which fell each time she sang her rainmaking song:

Uyo nooyo rukore

Uyo nooyo rukore

*Uyo nooyo rukore*¹⁸

Loosely translated this song meant ‘rain clouds gather, rain clouds gather’. After singing this song rain would fall in that small area and the animals would drink from the water that would have collected in wells. Juxtaposed to the rest of Buhera which was dry and drought stricken Marumbi Karivara’s ‘microenvironment’ epitomised the power of water and its nourishment to human beings, animals and plants. Moreover the green vegetables that she brought her foster mother were also in stark contrast to the dry and lifeless surrounding environs.

As she sojourned in Buhera, Marumbi Karivara met Makuwa Nyashanu one of Chief Nyashanu’s sons and they had a son together whom she named Chinamasabwa (Munyaradzi). The marriage however, never worked and the two never lived together as husband and wife.¹⁹ It is however, not clear whether Marumbi Karivara’s rainmaking activities had anything to do with the failure of the marriage. In the late 18th or early 19th century she crossed the Nyazvidzi River and settled in chief Gutu’s area.²⁰ R. M. G. Mtetwa puts the date of the death of Marumbi Karivara at around 1794+/-36 and that of her son Chinamasabwa at 1892+/-32.²¹ Upon settling in Gutu Marumbi Karivara established her rainmaking cult at Rasa Mountain. According to Dewa, when Marumbi Karivara’s rainmaking powers were brought to Mabwazhe (Chief Gutu 1)’s attention, he sent her to Matonjeni (Matopo Hills/Mwari Shrines), the centre of the Mwari cult where rainmakers had gathered to see who could be successful in making rain. She was the only

¹⁸ Interview with Z. W. Chagonda, see also O. Dewa, ‘The Marumbi cult: Once defunct but now operational’, p.46.

¹⁹ PER 5/Gutu/1973 R. Menzies District Commissioner Gutu March 9 1973.

²⁰ R. M. G. Mtetwa, ‘The relationship between the Gutu Dynasty and the Mwari Cult in the 19th century’, p.91.

²¹ Ibid.

rainmaker who was successful in making it rain.²² As recognition for her work Mabwazhe rewarded Marumbi Karivara with the area between the Sote and Dewure Rivers in Gutu.²³ This area later became the sub chieftainship of Munyaradzi (Chinamasabwa) after Marumbi Karivara's death. However, later on Nyamande encroached into the area and crossed Sote River to take control of the strategic Rasa Mountain. This he did because he feared the frequent Ndebele raids and wanted to take advantage of the *nhare* (strongholds) provided by the Rasa Mountain.²⁴ To further strengthen his position Nyamande who belonged to the Gutu royal family and was the son of Chaurura (Gutu IV), entered into a marriage alliance with Munyaradzi by marrying three of Munyaradzi's daughters.²⁵ The Gutu people managed to strengthen their influence on the Marumbi Karivara rain cult by this marriage alliance. In spite of the occupation of the Rasa *Nhare* by Nyamande, the Chagonda community however remained settled in the area surrounding the mountain.

It is important to highlight that rainmaking among the Karanga has always fallen under the ultimate control of the Chiefs/Kings. In a recent discussion with Chief Mukanganwi of the Mukanganwi Chieftainship (Duma) in Masvingo, he argued that Marumbi Karivara could have been a 'roaming Magician' rather than a true rain maker in the true tradition sense of a rainmaker.²⁶ His argument emanated from the fact that traditionally rainmakers do not operate outside the control of the chiefs. In this case it had to operate under the overall control of the Gutu Rufura dynasty which is the chiefly clan of Gutu. The Marumbi Karivara was however by no means an exception since there is evidence to the fact that the Gutu Rufura dynasty still retained some political control of the rainmaking activities of Marumbi and her descendents. This probably explains why the Gutu Rufura

²² O. Dewa, 'The Marumbi cult: Once defunct but now operational', p.13.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.14, Interview with Z. W. Chagonda.

²⁴ National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) S2929/8/3 Delineation Report Gutu, Report on the Nyamande Community by C. W. Collett CDO, 18 December 1963, Nyamande's sons only left Rasa after the arrival of the European settlers at Fort Victoria in 1890.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Personal communication with Chief Mukanganwi 21 March 2007. Apart from being a Lecturer in the Linguistics Department at the University of Zimbabwe Chief Mukanganwi also presides over rainmaking activities in his area which are done through the Mandara cult. Chief Mukanganwi argued that it was not possible for Marumbi Karivara to operate outside the realm of the Gutu Dynasty because traditionally she would be just a roaming magician rather than a rainmaker.

people were keen to establish marriage alliances with the Munyaradzi people. Control of the rainmaking institution by the Gutu people was also ensured by the fact that they were the ones who had given the Munyaradzi people a *bandauko* (headmanship) and had appointed Munyaradzi as one of the most important *gota* (councillor) in Gutu. Hence far from being a ‘roaming magician’ as Chief Mukanganwi argued, Marumbi Karivara operated within control the Gutu chieftainship which had given her a *bandauko* and had established marriage alliances with her.

It should also be mentioned that though the Marumbi gained some measure of prominence in Gutu it however did not drown other avenues through which the people of Gutu appealed for rain. For example the people continued to send messengers to the Mwari shrines in Mabweadziva (Matopos hills) to ask for rain and at times they would also appeal to the Mandara cult among the Duma people.²⁷ The people have thus continued to hold their *Mitoro/Mikwerere* which are rainmaking rituals associated with the Mwari shrines. The rainmaking institution established by Marumbi had thus managed to coexist with other institution in Gutu which were linked with rainmaking.

Rivers and Rain

It is interesting to note that the area that was given to Marumbi Karivara is arguably the most well watered area in Gutu. The area has rivers and streams such as Dewure, Sote, Vazizi, Chavana and Chinyika among others (see map). The Munyaradzi people also developed a close relationship with these rivers that, apart from these rivers and streams being sources of water for them they are also embedded with cultural meaning. Thus water sources, especially rivers, and sacred pools formed the backbone of this community whose identity largely revolves around rainmaking and water.

Illustrative of the above relationship is the way in which the Munyaradzi and the Chagonda communities revere the waters of Vazizi River which is to the north of the

²⁷ See R. M. G. Mtetwa, ‘The relationship between the Gutu Dynsaty and the Mwari cult in the 19th century’, p92.

Munyaradzi territory (see map). These people revere the river so much that there are claims that they neither drink its water nor take it for any domestic uses such as cooking or brewing beer.²⁸ The reason for this is argued to have been Marumbi Karivara's own desire to have her remains thrown in VaZizi River after her death. Thus when she died 'she was buried in the river' as she wished.²⁹ As a result of this rather strange burial of Marumbi Karivara, both the Munyaradzi and the Chagonda people regard VaZizi River not as a mere river but more importantly as Marumbi Karivara's 'grave'. The fact that Marumbi Karivara was 'buried' in VaZizi has thus been used by her descendents to claim ownership of the river and as justification to revere its waters. Hence, to the Munyaradzi and Chagonda people, VaZizi River is embedded with a lot of meaning as it projects them as people with a very close relationship with the rainmaking prowess of Marumbi Karivara and her control of the waters of VaZizi and Devure rivers. Among the Shona people this kind of burial would be very much out of place as people are normally buried on dry ground or in caves save for young children and pregnant mothers. These would be buried on riverbanks apparently to 'cool their spirits'. However, as a rainmaker, Marumbi Karivara might have chosen to be 'buried' not on the riverbanks but in water due to the fact that she had a water spirit, which had to be gathered together with the other water spirits in the river. The burial place of Marumbi Karivara carried a lot of significance of symbolism to the life that she had lived, which largely revolved around water and rainmaking.

Closely linked to the Marumbi shrine is also Hururu or Chengoma (where drums beat) pool in Devure River. It is believed that the pool was named Chengoma because aquatic drums were heard coming from this pool in the morning. The people also believe that there is a *njuzu* (mermaid), which resides in this pool. It is from this pool where people fetch water used to prepare grain for brewing of the beer used for the rain making rituals.³⁰ Thus the pool features prominently in the rain making process because the ritual would not be complete without a visit to this pool. In essence both VaZizi and Devure

²⁸ Interview with Chakura Munyaradzi, 22 January 2003, Munyaradzi, Gutu.

²⁹ Interview with Chakura Munyaradzi, Z. W. Chagonda. Mtetwa, p. 91, R. M. G. Mtetwa, 'The relationship between the Gutu Dynasty and the Mwari Cult in the 19th century', p92 puts the death of Marumbi Karivara at 1794+/-36.

River have become part of the larger cultural landscape of the Marumbi rain cult whose identity revolves around water and rainmaking.

Kupunjira and the politics of water and rainmaking

Among the Karanga people in Gutu and indeed many other Shona groups there is a great link between rainmaking and the socio-politics of water. In most cases some norms and taboos are normally to be observed on all water sources considered to be of great spiritual or economic significance to the community at large. These taboos and norms are meant not only to protect the water sources from pollution, but also ensure that the water spirits are not angered by the people's mismanagement of the water sources.

The violation of the taboos on water sources is known among the Karanga as *kupunjira* or *kuwozhera*. Normally such misdemeanours are thought to anger the water spirits leading to the drying up of the water sources and severe droughts. Rainmaking spirits are closely linked to the *njuzu* (mermaid) water spirits. Though people with the *shave renjuzu* (mermaid water spirits) are normally known for their healing powers the *njuzu spirit* is especially known for cleanliness and detest for any pollution of water sources. Thus if any perennial pool or spring which was known to be an abode of the *njuzu* spirits was polluted or violated it would dry up and at times rain would not fall until rituals to appease the water spirits were conducted. Thus it is traditionally an important drought mitigatory measure to preserve the aquatic dwelling places of the water spirits such as perennial rivers, pools, springs and fountains. Violation of these sources would lead to their drying up and the desertion of the water spirits.

Conflicts in the control of the rain cult

The Chagonda and Munyaradzi people have for a long time been sworn enemies despite the fact that they are closely related. The conflicts between these two groups have largely centred on the control of the Marumbi Karivara Rain cult at Rasa, Rasa Rambotemwa

³⁰ O. Dewa, 'The Marumbi cult: Once defunct but now operational', p41.

(sacred grove) and the legitimacy of the descendents of Chinamasabwa's control of the Munyaradzi Headmanship. The Chagonda people have remained the main custodians of the Rasa Rambotemwa and have assumed leadership of rainmaking activities at the cult. They claim that they are the rightful heirs to the rainmaking powers of Marumbi Karivara because their great grandfather, Neusaka, was the younger brother of Marumbi Karivara who migrated with her to Gutu. Furthermore the Chagonda people are of the same totem with Marumbi Karivara (Moyo Sithole) whilst the Munyaradzi are descendents of Marumbi Karivara's son with Makuwa Nyashanu of the Shava wakanonoka totem. This makes them maternal nephews and nieces, hence not eligible heirs of Marumbi Karivara.³¹ Furthermore, whilst Headman Nyamande encroached across the Sote River into Munyaradzi's territory that includes the area around Rasa, but the Chagonda people have remained settled on the foot of the contested mountain.³² The Chagonda people have taken advantage of their proximity to the Rasa shrine to strengthen their claims of being the legitimate heirs of the rain making powers of Marumbi Karivara as well as rightful custodians of the shrine. It is also interesting to note that the Chagonda community has also tried to ward off any challenges to its control of the Rasa shrine through renaming themselves after the mountain. They have changed their name and now refer to themselves as *VaRasa*, which means 'people of Rasa Mountain' or the owners of Rasa Mountain.³³ The aspect of renaming has thus played a big role in the struggles for the control of the Marumbi Karivara rain cult at Rasa. The Chagonda people have thus sought to be viewed as having a very close relationship with the Marumbi Karivara rain cult based at Rasa Mountain.

On their part, the Munyaradzi people have maintained that they are the rightful heirs to their great grand mother (Marumbi Karivara)'s rainmaking shrine at Rasa largely because

³¹ Interview with Z. W. Chagonda, Maternal nephews and nieces can however inherit from their uncles only when there are no bloody relatives to inherit the estate.

³² S2929/8/3 Delineation report, Munyaradzi, see also Mtetwa this happened in the late 19thc at the height of the Nguni raids as Nyamande sought refuge in the mountain strong hold (Nhare).

³³ Interview with Z. W. Chagonda, Interview with Z. M. Makuvaza, see also M. L. Daneel *African Earthkeepers Vol. 1: Interfaith mission in earth-care* (Unisa, Pretoria, 1998) , p.211., He refers to them as VaRasa (people of the Rasa Mountain) and considers them to be the main keepers of the Rasa sacred groove.

they have managed to maintain political power (see appendix).³⁴ The famous rainmaking *nhumbi* (paraphernalia) left by Marumbi Karivara are said to be in the possession of the Munyaradzi people though the *VaRasa* have continued their rainmaking activities without the rain making paraphernalia.³⁵ During his fieldwork in Gutu in the 1960s, M. L. Daneel noted that, ‘

Chief Chagonda’s court was pressing for a full chieftainship at the time. It was also attempting to retrieve the famous ‘possessions of Marumbi’ (*Nhumbi yaMarumbi*), which were said to be in unlawful possession of the Munyaradzi people. These possessions included the famous rain stones of the Rasa rainmaker...As the stones were required to bolster the political authority of the Chagonda people and give clout to their grove protecting activities...³⁶

The Chagonda people obviously needed the rain making *nhumbi*, which included the rain stones to strengthen their political position in their struggle against the Munyaradzi people. In 1983 the District Administrator of Gutu wrote that the Marumbi rain prophet had been inactive for a few years, ‘because of the disputes between the VaRasa and Headman Munyaradzi over the acquisition by the latter of certain properties (Makona Oushe) which the VaRasa want returned to them’.³⁷ Getting possession of the rainmaking *nhumbi* coupled with the issue that they were the active custodians of the shrine was definitely going to project the Chagonda as the most powerful and legitimate of the two feuding sides.

What emerges here is that the political struggles between the Chagonda (*VaRasa*) and the Munyaradzi people largely centred on the control of the rainmaking activities at Rasa and also the possession of the rainmaking *nhumbi*, especially the rain stones left by Marumbi

³⁴ The genealogy of Marumbi Karivara has taken a political and patriarchal twist that from Marumbi the genealogy is traced through Munyaradzi down to the descendents of Chinamasabwa Munyaradzi.

³⁵ Interview with Z. W. Chagonda, Interview with C. Munyaradzi.

³⁶ M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers Vol. 1*, p.211-212.

³⁷ PER 5/Gen/83 D. A. Gutu to the Undersecretary Ministry of Local Government, Masvingo, 25 February 1983.

Karivara. All this carries the symbolism of being in communion with the water spirits of the area such as the *njuzu (mermaids)* which require people to ‘ensure respectful use of life-giving water and the protection of all *njuzu* abodes’³⁸ such as sacred pools and springs. On the whole, control of rainmaking meant control of the water politics in the area. Hence, for the Munyaradzi and Chagonda (*VaRasa*) communities the socio-economic and political issues in their communities are anchored on the importance of rainmaking coupled with the symbolic and spiritual significance of water.

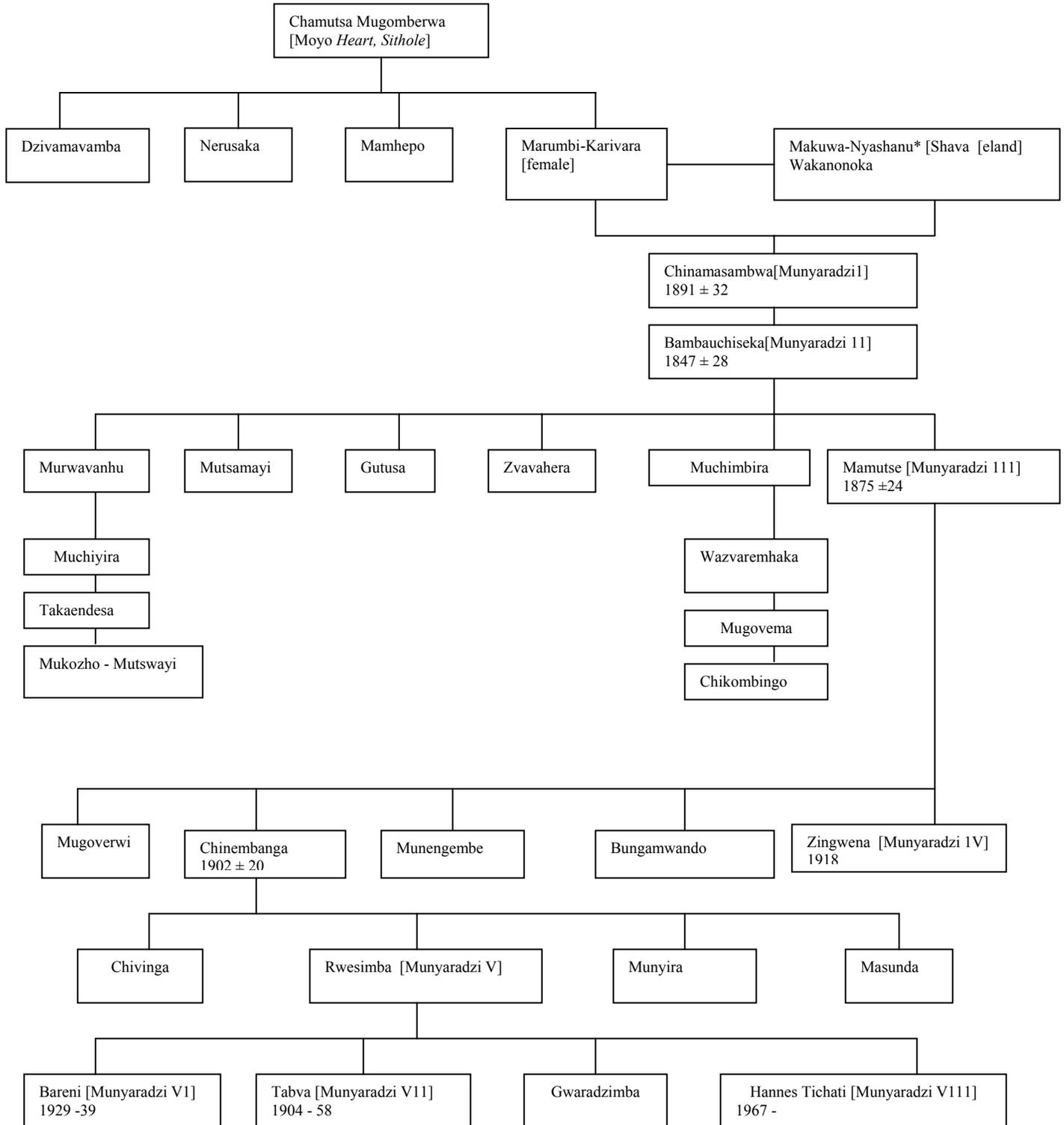
Conclusion

In conclusion it can be argued that among the Shona people and indeed many other African communities there is an inextricable relationship between water and the socio-politics of rainmaking. In the case of the Munyaradzi and Chagonda communities, socio-political issues are to a large extent mediated by rainmaking activities at Rasa Mountain and the spirituality of the various water sources in the area. These include the sacred pools in Rasa Mountain and also in Devure and VaZizi River among other places. Conflicts that have arisen between these two communities have largely centred on control of the rain cult and by extension, the legitimacy of the claimants to the position of rainmaker and custodian of the shrine. The close relationship between the politics of water and rainmaking is best illustrated by Marumbi Karivara’s decision to be ‘buried’ in VaZizi River, which was as strange as it was symbolic of her relationship with water. In the end, the descendents of Marumbi not only revere the waters of VaZizi River but also derive ownership of the river from the fact that it is their great grand mother’s ‘grave’. Thus not only did the Munyaradzi and Chagonda communities gain prominence in Gutu because of their links with the Marumbi Karivara rain cult but their very social life largely radiated and to a greater extent continue to radiate around rain making and respect of the spirituality of water.

³⁸ M. L. Daneel, African Earthkeepers, p.230.

Appendix

Genealogy of the Munvaradzi neone



* Marumbi Karivara married Makuwa Nvashanu