A Chiefly Succession Dispute in the Mid-Zambezi Valley: Contemporary Challenges and Dynamics*

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ABSTRACT

Chiefly succession disputes no longer constitute a key idiom of political conflict as they did during the precolonial past, but they must still be considered an important element of rural policies and politics of the post-Independence Zimbabwean state. This article is about the latest competition for the Chisunga chiefly office. It reconstructs a conflict that ran from 2001 to 2007 in the Mbire District in the Zambezi Valley, which ended with an administrative appointment that was not endorsed by the 'traditional' leadership. This ethnographic account of the first post-Independence succession dispute in this area situates it within the post-2000 Zimbabwe crisis to clarify the extent to which state politics affected the process.

It shows, on the one hand, how the ancestral past of local lineages was used and adapted in the present day to meet the needs of the various actors regarding appointments, and on the other, how significant this ancestral past can still be for the rural administration to legitimize its decisions. The study argues that, despite the politicization of rural local government institutions, this alone does not explain entirely the Chisunga case.

INTRODUCTION

The present article aims at presenting a partial reconstruction of the Chisunga chiefly succession dispute in northern Zimbabwe that developed from 2001 to 2007. This reconstruction is primarily based on the author's interviews and participant observation of

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lineage ancestral assemblies held during field research from late 2004 to mid-2006. Also considered are secondary sources useful in understanding the context of this process: parliamentary speeches, press releases and archival sources.

The first anthropological studies on succession conflicts in Zimbabwe focused primarily on their formal, ritual aspects, and regarded the function of the colonial administration as limited to ratifying the 'traditional' election (Bourdillon 1979, 1991; Garbett 1966). David Lan (1983, 1985) reduces chiefly successions to battles amongst royal houses which follow the ideal rules of the adelphic succession system arbitrated by *mhondoro* mediums alone. The intervention of state institutions and politics, both colonial and post-Independence during the process is absent. In contrast, Norma Kriger (1992) offers a wealth of evidence from the Mutoko District in the 1970s on the effects of guerrilla coercion, during Zimbabwe′s war of independence, in successions and appointments of chiefs, and acting chiefs loyal to the colonial administration. Historical studies from the Chimanimani District in the 1960s, show further examples of the complex participation in chiefly crisis of a good number of actors: that is not only of the 'traditional' leadership and the mediums, but also of the District Commissioner, agricultural officers, nationalists and the American Methodist Mission (Alexander 2006). Likewise, a social history of the Hwesa people in Nyanga District revealed that precolonial antagonisms amongst royal factions or houses could be so deeply rooted that they would re-emerge at subsequent political power struggles throughout the colonial and postcolonial period (as for example in claims to the chieftainship) (Maxwell 1999). In this regard, some authors still tend to reduce the role of *mhondoro* ancestors in succession conflicts about the chiefly office to that of a mere 'facilitator of consensus' (Gundani 2004: 304).

Little attention has been given to the study of chiefly successions (and appointments) within Zimbabwe's post-Independence state politics, and particularly to how the ancestral past of local lineages is used and adapted in the present day to meet the needs of the various actors regarding appointments,[1] as well as to how significant this ancestral past can still be for the contemporary rural administration to legitimize its decisions. This article about a chiefly succession

conflict in the Mbire District that broke out during the post-2000 Zimbabwe political and institutional crisis, offers a detailed example of the practices, both 'traditional' and administrative, that characterize such conflicts. This case study does not prioritize the ritual aspects of the succession dispute, it rather illustrates how they interact with the practices and positioning of rural local government authorities to make both the relations amongst the actors and the processes of the conflict more visible. It can also reveal a historical link between the role of a present-day Acting Chief and that of an interim ruler during the precolonial interregnum.

The present article begins by outlining some geographical, administrative and historical considerations related to this particular chieftaincy. Then, the second section considers the Portuguese precolonial sources and traces several similarities between the role of an interim ruler during the interregnum of some precolonial polities in the Zambezi Valley, and that of an Acting Chief in present-day succession conflicts in the Dande area. The next section provides empirical detail on the conflicts, procedures, and uses of lineage genealogies in the last competition for the Chisunga chiefly office. This part is an ethnographic account where both ritual ancestral assemblies and local government meetings articulate the actors' conflicts of interest. The last section situates this chiefly succession dispute in the post-2000 Zimbabwe state's political and institutional crisis and questions to what extent state politics determined the final appointment of the chiefly candidate. It argues that, despite the politicization of rural local government institutions, this alone does not explain the Chisunga case.

1. GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND ADMINISTRATIVE BACKGROUND

The Chisunga chieftaincy of Mbire District is comprised of two full wards. These are Ward II, Angwa, and Ward XI, Masoka. In addition, a part of Ward III (Chikafa) and Ward X also belong to this chieftaincy. This area remains amongst the least developed in Zimbabwe in terms of roads infrastructure based on dust roads, food aid dependency, and poor facilities in the realms of school, health, and water. At the same time it is rich in natural resources, particularly in wildlife. For this reason, the communities of the chieftaincy

benefit somewhat from the high annual revenues from professional hunting activities, which are channeled through the Rural District Council in conjunction with CAMPFIRE.[2] Also known as Dande Communal Land, today, the Mbire District stretches along the mid-Zambezi Valley from Kanyemba (near the confluence of the rivers Luangwa and Zambezi in the North) to the Muzengezi River near Mahuwe (in the East). In 2007, the District administrative center was moved from Guruve (Guruve Rural District Council) to Mushumbi Pools in the Valley and was renamed Mbire Rural District Council.

As is common in the Zambezi Valley, soils in this area are poor and the annual rainfall is very low compared to the Plateau. Cyclic droughts and famines over centuries thus have made the lives of its inhabitants exceptionally difficult. Nowadays stream-bank cultivation primarily is done by hand since mechanical tillage is not accessible to most of the farmers. Extensive crop raiding by wild animals aggravates this difficulty. Despite these hazards, farmers rely on smallholder agricultural production for subsistence as well as for cash income, which above all is based on cotton production.

This chieftaincy claims descent from the MaKorekore Shona founding ancestor Nyamapfeka, who conquered the Angwa river area in the late seventeenth century. Oral histories recount that, as a result of Nyamapfeka's conquests he became the 'owner of the land'.[3] In Beach's dynastic history of precolonial Zimbabwe, Nyamapfeka is documented as the 'Hurungwe equivalent of Mutota – who allocated land to a dynasty that we know to have been in existence by 1696' (Beach 1994: 232). In turn, oral histories describe Nyamapfeka as a junior descendant of (Nyasimba) Mutota on the grounds that Nyampfeka's mother, Biri, was one of his grandchildren.[4]

Mutota is considered the founder of the Rozvi dynasty of the Mwene Mutapa (or Monomotapa) kingdom, one of the powerful states of precolonial Africa. The Mutapa state was dominant south of the Zambezi from the fifteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries in what are now the modern states of Zimbabwe and Mozambique but its decline began in the early eighteenth century. Politically organized in a system of interrelated chiefly dynasties, the Rozvi dynasties did not recognize a paramount chief. Thus, if a chief

conquered new land, a sub-chief would be installed to found a new sub-dynasty (Newitt 1973: 23).

Without intending to establish a general historical continuity between some precolonial political hierarchies and polities and present-day 'traditional' structures and political practices, two traits of the Rozvi precolonial past seem to have persisted to an extent up to the present in some parts of the Zambezi Valley. These two traits, however, were adapted and redefined: namely, the relevance of chiefly houses (royal houses) and the ritual mediation of dynastic ancestors (*mhondoro* or *pondoro*) in chiefly successions by means of a network of mediums. In mythological terms, these *mhondoro* represent the ancestors of the kings of the precolonial past, and thus, these royal lineages are of patrilineal descent.

Grouped in houses or clans, the male living descendants of the founding ancestor (*machinda*) who reside in the Chisunga Chieftaincy's wards form part of the influential 'traditional' leadership and become particularly visible during a chiefly succession crisis. Contrary to Fry's findings on the Zezuru chieftaincies (Fry 1976: 12), the Chisunga chieftaincy does not take the name of the founding ancestor (*dzinde*). Nyamapfeka thus is the founding ancestor of his *dzinza*, which consists of all the *mhondoro* of his descent line and the living descendants of some of these *mhondoro* (since not all of them have living descendants). Furthermore, Nyamapfeka's *dzinza* is divided into two segments: the descendants of Chidyamauyu and the descendants of Nyamasoka.

Within the Nyamapfeka descent line, the chiefly houses that currently have the right to claim the Chisunga chieftainship in a succession dispute are the descendants of two of Nyamapfeka's sons: the *mhondoro* Chidyamauyu (also called Mhande) and Nyamasoka, since only these two lineage descents (*dzaka*) have living descendants scattered among the wards of this chieftaincy. Residing mainly in the villages of the Angwa and Masoka wards, they are the descendants of the *mhondoro* Kavhinga and Konje (both of the Chidyamauyu *dzaka*) and the descendants of the *mhondoro* Dzeka (of the Nyamasoka *dzaka*). Thus, the Kamufungu, Chasasa, and Mutungambera Chimusaro chiefly houses are the descendants of the *mhondoro* Kavhinga, while the Nhamoyemari, Chibata-

muromo and Chiutsi houses are the descendants of the *mhondoro* Konje. The descendants of Dzeka are grouped in two chiefly houses and reside largely in the Masoka ward while the descendants of Kavhinga and Konje settled in Angwa. Villagers have reported that the *mhondoro* Chimau and Chizombi (both of the Chidyamauyu *dzaka*) also have descendants but that currently the members of these houses live outside the chieftaincy, and are therefore ineligible for the chieftainship.[5]

As we shall see throughout the present case study, Nyamapfeka, Chikwamba, Nyamupahuni and Mubaiwa constitute the group of *mhondoro* who oversee the election and validate the ritual appointment of Chief Chisunga. They also select and appoint the Acting Chief whose significance is to function as interim chief during the whole succession process. Only the first three *mhondoro*, however, had a medium during the period of the succession crisis.[6] We may observe that, firstly, the task does not lie exclusively in the hands of the senior *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka, and secondly, that no *mhondoro* of the Nyamasoka lineage is represented in this group (only those of the Chidyamauyu lineage) although his descendants may well claim the chieftainship in a succession dispute. Furthermore, the antagonism during the contest was less between the chiefly houses within a lineage than between the two patrilinear descent lines of the founding ancestor Nyamapfeka. In fact the descendants of Chidyamauyu, both those of the *mhondoro* Kavhinga and those of Konje, joined in alliance in favor of a candidate of the Konje descent line.

2. INTERREGNUM, THE *MUSUNGI WEMASASA* FOR THE CHIEFTAINCY – AND THE ADMINISTRATION

In a recent article, Reid has drawn attention to the gradual marginalization of precolonial history from the mainstream Africanist and African historians' research for almost the last forty years, and has reminded scholars of the relevance of linking the precolonial past with contemporary events for a proper understanding of both shifting and constant processes (Reid 2011). This is highly valid for our case at hand. Indeed, an analysis of the extensive legacy of Portuguese documentary records from as early as the sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries is indispensable for a reconstruction of the pre-

colonial past in the mid and lower Zambezi Valley. These records are particularly useful for understanding the political, social and economic life of the Monomotapa state and its neighbors, as well as the relations between the Portuguese authorities and the local polities. Knowledge of this precolonial past thus may elucidate recent political events and dynamics in this area. Besides, some of these records represent an invaluable source of ethnographic data in many other respects as well.

Before discussing the case of the Chisunga chieftaincy, the following examples from the mid and lower Zambezi Valley will help to historicize some political practices and hierarchies related to succession crises and to the role of an interim ruler in the precolonial past, as well as to the position of the Portuguese authorities. This brief historical evidence shows how some bureaucratic and 'traditional' political practices associated with the chieftaincy crisis today might be reminiscent of patterns that existed prior to the colonial period. The evidence also illustrates how the power vacuum of the interregnum used to be resolved.

Thus, for example, the Portuguese sources of the mid-eighteenth century refer to a figure, known as the *Nevinga*, who, after the death of a Monomotapa and until his successor was crowned, exerted power and maintained order during the usual chaotic interregnum. Once the successful enthronement of the new Monomotapa was completed, the *Nevinga* used to be killed (Randles 1975: 91).[7]

Barue (also Barwe) oral histories of the second half of the nineteenth century (Isaacman 1973: 400–401) recall the existence of an interim ruler with judicial powers known as, the *Mukomawasha*,[8] who governed during the prolonged competitive succession crises that used to follow the death of a king. Isaacman observes that within the Barue Kingdom, located in the lower Zambezi valley linked to the Monomotapa state (until its defeat in 1918), an interim ruler's figure assured a degree of stability during these periods. Furthermore, a general rule excluded the royal family from holding the hereditary position of the *Mukomawasha* (*Ibid.*). Much earlier, however, he is described in Portuguese documents of the early seventeenth century as a captain general of the Monomotapa forces (Newitt 1995: 45).

In 1861, the Portuguese officer Albino Manoel Pacheco kept a diary during his expedition from Tete to Zumbo. Founded by the Portuguese at the junction of the Luangwa and Zambezi Rivers, Zumbo had been a prosperous fair and trading center during the eighteenth century (Miller 1910: 416). Pacheco's mission was to reopen the Zumbo fair, and to establish a base for the invasion of territories in the Kafue and Luangwa Valleys (Newitt 1974: 23). His diary is an important source of ethnographic information about the political practices and oral traditions in the Dande and Chedima areas at the end of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, when the Zambezi region was still not part of any national territorial state.[9] Pacheco's diary provides evidence about a succession crisis and bloody battles between the two houses that claimed power in the Chedima area at that time. At the end of the crisis, the governor of Tete demanded that the ultimate winner should be conveyed to him for official recognition and thus the Portuguese government of the Tete district legitimized the chiefly successor. Pacheco reports on February 20, 1861: 'The succession is rendered account to the government of Tete, in order for them, or for a delegation, to crown and bless [the successor] with the usual ceremonials, and to honor [him] with the presence of our troops' (my translation) (Pacheco 1883: 30).

This obligation, however, was blatantly rejected and the procedure interrupted by the Chedima rulers between 1806 (under Choofombo) and 1861 (under Gire do Boroma). This refusal significantly affected the already deteriorating trading and political relations between the Portuguese authorities and the local dynasties who were directly related to the Monomotapas (*Ibid*.: 27–30).

Alpers states from a historian's perspective that within the Barwe Kingdom, documents from 1811 record the practice of a kind of 'baptismally derived acceptance of water from the Portuguese Crown' called *mazi a manga* or *madzi-manga*,[10] which represented the Portuguese official sanction of the enthronement of a new king from the Makombe dynasty of the Barwe (Alpers 1970: 212).

Currently, the death of a chief of the Chisunga chieftaincy 'traditionally' entails the nomination and appointment of a *musungi wemasasa* for the period of the succession dispute. Literally in ChiShona, 'one who ties the doors', or 'one who locks the doors',

the *musungi wemasasa* carries on the duties of Acting Chief until the new one is appointed.

It was at the funeral of the late Chief Chisunga in 2001 that the senior *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka together with his grandchildren, Nyamupahuni, and Chikwamba were expected to select and appoint an appropriate *musungi wemasasa* for the chieftaincy. Eligible for this office is any male descendant of the founding ancestor Nyamapfeka. The appointment is then presented at the District Administration for official approval. Ideally, the office is meant to last two years, however in practice the position is held until the succession crisis ends with the appointment of a new chief.

Likewise, the Acting Chief 'traditionally' is explicitly forbidden from becoming Chief Chisunga. This ritual prohibition resembles the political practices of the precolonial interregnum that were established to avoid any unilateral usurpation of power. Thus, contrary to what occurred in this specific succession conflict, the post of Acting Chief has always been conceived as an interim office and not as an intermediate step to chieftainship.

3. THE CHIEFLY SUCCESSION DISPUTE: CONFLICTS, PROCEDURES, AND THE USES OF GENEALOGIES IN THE COMPETITION FOR THE CHIEFLY OFFICE

The present section explores how the *mhondoro* ritual practices articulate with local government's administrative and political interests in chiefly succession crises as well as the role of the state in sanctioning a chief who has been selected and appointed 'traditionally'.

The late Chief Chisunga, Jabu Chasasa (also known as Jeffrey Dzvete), passed away in the Angwa ward in March of 2001. His chieftainship had lasted unusually long, from 1964 to 2001. The succession that concerns us here therefore represents the first post-independence dispute. According to the delineation report for Sipolilo District 1965 ('Report on the Chisunga Chieftainship: Dande Tribal Trust Land'), the District Commissioner appointed the previous chief, Jasi Chasasa, on October 1, 1957. His term lasted from 1957 to 1963. About the ritual selection of the late chief, Jabu Chasasa, the District Commissioner wrote: '[…] the chief was selected by the mhondoro called Nyamapfeka – that is, the spirit of Nyamapfeka enters one, [the medium] Seda [Boroma]'.[11] Before

Jasi Chasasa, according to informants, Mhande was Chief Chisunga from approximately 1937 to 1955, who was preceded by Mondoka (*ca.* 1921–1936).[12] Throughout the Rhodesian Front government (1965–1979), the late Jabu Chasasa, had co-operated with the state as most chiefs had in the Dande area during the 1960s (Lan 1985: 138).

During the ritual funeral of Jabu Chasasa in March of 2001 and much to the surprise of those who attended, the then elected Councilor of the Masoka ward Duster Chisunga – who claimed descent from the *mhondoro* Dzeka[13] – presented two letters to the elders from the Angwa and Masoka wards. Allegedly, the District Administrator in Guruve had issued one of the letters and the late Chief Chisunga, Jabu Chasasa, had written the second one. Both letters were proposing that same Councilor as interim, as *musungi wemasasa* for the chieftaincy. The procedure raised suspicion amongst the 'traditional' leadership since in their understanding the selection and nomination of the new Acting Chief Chisunga was the sole task of the *mhondoro* of the Nyamapfeka lineage, and by no means the result of instructions given by anyone in written form. The political atmosphere at this stage was particularly intimidating; presidential elections were to be held in a year's time in March of 2002, which dissuaded those unwilling to accept the Councilor's procedure from protesting against it, since this stance could easily be misinterpreted as militating against the then (and still) dominant governmental party ZANU-PF. Moreover, being a Councilor, the aspirant Acting Chief was a member of ZANU-PF. Some *machinda*, however, amongst them a son of the late Chief, disputed the authenticity of both letters at the funeral.

Witnesses report that subsequently during the second half of 2001 the Councilor of the Masoka ward began visiting the *mhondoro* Nyamupahuni, reminding him of the letters and asking for his advocacy. Somehow, he eventually obtained Nyamupahuni's support and this *mhondoro* nominated him unilaterally as Acting Chief, in the absence of Nyamapfeka, Chikwamba, and of the chiefly houses. Subsequently, the Councilor of Masoka resigned from his post about a year before his term expired. As a result, his post remained vacant until the next Rural District Council elections.[14] He then assumed the office of Acting Chief during

the first half of 2002, despite the fact that his nomination had not been backed by Nyamapfeka and Chikwamba in the presence of the chiefly houses, and that the District Administrator of Guruve had not appointed him yet. In fact, Nyamupahuni's unilateral nomination was presented to the District Administrator in early 2004, when the official appointment of the Acting Chief took place at the local government level, and his office would be valid until October 2006. This period of two years was intended to give the *mhondoro*, the chiefly lineages, and the inhabitants of the wards enough time for resolving the dispute and appointing the next chief.

'Lineage Politics'

On the death of the late chief in 2001, the senior *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka had suggested at an assembly that the chiefly title had remained for too long within one lineage, and that, 'the next chief should be from the MaMhande' (the Chidyamauyu *tsaka*) for 'there had been in the past enough chiefs appointed from the Ma-Dzeka'[15] (the Nyamasoka *tsaka*).

At a ritual meeting held on December 22, 2004 by Nyamapfeka and with no other *mhondoro* present but Nyamupahuni, the latter stated that he intended to hand over the *ndoro* – the symbol representing the Chisunga chiefly title – to the Acting Chief, thus appointing him the new chief. Nyamapfeka objected, arguing that not all the chiefly houses were present at the assembly.

The day after the meeting, another assembly was convened at the same ritual place, attended by the *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka and Nyamupahuni and by representatives of the chiefly lineages, however in the absence of the rest of *mhondoro*. Nyamapfeka placed the *ndoro* on a wooden plate, and the appointment of the Acting Chief as Chief Chisunga was expected to follow. Nevertheless, some senior *machinda* from both Mhande (Chidyamauyu) and Dzeka lineages contested the two *mhondoro*'s decision and strongly disagreed with the procedure. They inquired about the criteria Nyamupahuni had applied in selecting the Acting Chief as the new chief. They complained that the chiefly houses were supposed to select the new chief from one of the two patrilineages (*tsaka*) instead of being selected by any single *mhondoro*, particularly not

Nyamupahuni. They also asked Nyamupahuni why the rest of the *mhondoro* of the Nyamapfeka lineage were not present at this key assembly.[16]

In the course of this meeting, a senior representative of the Nhamoyemari house (of the Chidyamauyu lineage) asked Nyamupahuni what made him choose the Acting Chief, since Nyamupahuni had informally told him – in private conversation – that the next Chief Chisunga should be appointed from the Chidyamauyu and not from the Dzeka lineage. Nyamupahuni justified his decision, answering that he had never received a reply from the houses of the Mhande *tsaka*, so he had assumed that no one wanted to assume the office of Chief Chisunga. The Nhamoyemari representative replied angrily to Nyamupahuni that the latter should have gathered the chiefly lineages (*machinda*) and all the *mhondoro* to announce that the MaMhande *tsaka* had been nominated for the chiefly office, and that the MaMhande had been waiting for that assembly.[17]

At the same meeting on December 23, 2004, the Nhamoyemari representative took a step further into 'lineage politics'. He asked from whom the Acting Chief descended. Nyamupahuni said that he descended from Mutungambera. The representative pressed on by inquiring whether Mutungambera was of Dzeka or of the *mhondoro* Gwera (through Khavinga). Nyamupahuni answered that the Acting Chief was 'a child of' the Mutungambera of Dzeka.[18]

The representative refuted this categorically, arguing that, the Acting Chief was definitely not a descendant of Mutungambera. He did not give any further reason for his statement, nor was it disputed by anyone at the assembly.[19] He was referring to the fact, known by the *machinda* circle, that the Acting Chief was a 'commoner', a stepchild of Mutungambera and not a legitimate descendant of the *mhondoro* Dzeka, so he was not eligible as Chief Chisunga. At the end of the assembly, Nyamapfeka withdrew the *ndoro*, symbolizing the chiefly title, and instructed the chiefly houses and Nyamupahuni to begin a new procedure at a further date.

Until the end of January 2005, Nyamupahuni had sided with the Acting Chief. At that point, however, the *mhondoro* of the Nyamapfeka lineage responsible for nominating the patrilineage for the chiefly office agreed by consensus to recommend the Mhande

tsaka (Chidyamauyu). They then advised the royal houses of that lineage to choose amongst them an appropriate candidate for this office.

Then the Nhamoyemari house, which continued to push its candidacy, called upon the *mhondoro* Nyamupahuni, Chimau, Gwera and Chikwamba to inform themselves about the origin and history of the Chisunga Chieftaincy and the way in which the chiefly title had been passed.[20] As will be shown in this article, in the subsequent course taken by the dispute, these oral histories were not used during the competition to reinforce the house's position as eligible, and in this sense they did not work as a 'legitimating charter' in the Nhamoyemari house's claims to chiefly power as has been the case in other succession disputes (Maxwell 1999: 155). In April of the same year, the Chasasa, Kamufungu, Chibatamuromo, and Nhamoyemari houses met at the homestead of the latter. Participants agreed to propose a junior representative of the Nhamoyemari house (present at the meeting) as the new chief. The candidate was middle-aged, fairly well educated and worked in Harare where he lived with his family. He was not particularly interested in the chiefly office, but as he had been chosen, he felt that he should assume the responsibility if appointed, which would imply moving back to Angwa ward. 'If the people want me to be the chief, I'll accept', he said.[21] Furthermore, to understand the dynamics of this dispute, it is also important to bear in mind the material basis of this office, which includes a lifetime salary amongst other benefits. As a resident put it: '[compared to the Nhamoyemari house candidate] no job awaited the Acting Chief at the end of his term as ward Councilor'.[22] Thus, he resigned from his ward Councilor position before the term expired and entered the competition for the chiefly office.

Old Debts, New Alliances and the Fluidity between Bribes, Favors, and Payments to the *Mhondoro*

At the beginning of March 2003, the Acting Chief handed Nyamupahuni his own gun and some money as payment to this *mhondoro* after Nyamupahuni had reported to him that the late Chief Chisunga, Jabu Chasasa, had taken his gun and never returned it.[23] It was common in Angwa throughout the colonial period that some

headmen and more affluent residents, but also some *mhondoro*, possessed shotguns to protect their homesteads above all against wild animals, which is still the case today. As for the headmen, the gun is usually inherited and passed to the next member holding the office of *sabhuku* in the family line. In the same way as at the ancestral level hoes, axes, cloths (*machira*) and money from people's payments to the *mhondoro* become part of his or her[24] property, so too the shotgun counts as part of the *mhondoro*'s belongings – although in fact it is mainly used by the medium's relatives living at the homestead. Informants reported that in Angwa shortly after Independence, the new administration collected residents' shotguns on the grounds that it wanted to issue licenses but never returned them.

In March 2005, Nyamupahuni had tried to regain his shotgun through the arbitration of the Acting Chief. The fact that he had obtained instead the Acting Chief's gun, which came to light at Nyamapfeka's assembly held on December 22, was unknown to most of the villagers. In view of the tensions and quarrels surrounding the election of the new chief, participants at that meeting became suspicious and interpreted this event as an attempt of the Acting Chief to buy the chieftainship by bribing Nyamupahuni. In addition, they learned of this episode at a *dare* where Nyamupahuni intended to appoint, again unilaterally, the Acting Chief as the new Chief Chisunga. This incident reveals the fluidity between bribes, services, and ritual payments to the *mhondoro*. In certain situations such transactions are difficult to differentiate from one another. Attempting to bribe or actually bribing a medium, however, is a sensitive issue and provokes immediate animosity in the community. In turn, this affects the legitimacy and authenticity of the medium, even more so when the distinction between the medium's agency and that attributed to the *mhondoro* is not always evident.[25] Nevertheless, some authors have rightly described bribes and 'gifts' to mediums – which seem intrinsic to 'lineage politics' in succession disputes, as well as the dissemination of slander about rival houses – as a subtle strategy to eventually gain the mediums' backing when presenting one's chiefly house as *the* eligible candidate during

the competition for the chiefly office (my italics) (Maxwell 1999: 157, 164).

Colonial Chiefly Genealogies 'Appropriated', Contested and Redefined

As mentioned earlier, by April 2005 the chiefly houses had already selected a candidate for the chiefly office. Yet during the following months the contest took a new turn and the *mhondoro* ritual assemblies were more frequent.

On June 6, the senior *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka held a key assembly for the ritual appointment of the Nhamoyemari house candidate as the next chief. The meeting convened almost all the *machinda* in the presence of the *mhondoro* Chikwamba, Chimau, Goredema, Chirimudombo, and Chizombi and of Gomwe. However, the *mhondoro* Nyamupahuni and the Acting Chief did not arrive. Under these circumstances, Chikwamba refused to proceed with the meeting and said that no discussion would take place in the absence of either one of them. In his opinion, their presence was imperative, and he postponed the meeting. On the following day at dawn, the session was resumed, this time attended by Nyamupahuni but not by the Acting Chief, who was represented by the headman from Mubairakwenda village. A substitute was unacceptable, however, and so the ritual gathering was postponed until June 9.

At that meeting, despite the absence of the Acting Chief, the ritual appointment of the next Chief Chisunga was finally carried out. Members of the Chidyamauyu lineage presented to the group of *mhondoro* and others in attendance the junior representative of the Nhamoyemari house they had selected as the candidate for the chieftainship.

The traditional procedure followed and the *ndoro* representing the chiefly title was handed to the new chief in the presence of members of the chiefly houses residing in Angwa and Masoka, and other ward residents. Nyamapfeka and the other *mhondoro* then selected a delegation of three village headmen and four more villagers to present the credentials of the new chief to the District Administrator at the Guruve Rural District Council. The headmen represented the villages of Muparaganda, Mupedzapazi and Kamufungu, but only the last one was a *muchinda* (lineage elder), the first two elders

were of leading families but had no right to claim chiefly power. A few days later, when the delegation reached the office of the District Administration they met with a cold reception: the District Administrator did not acknowledge the chief appointed by the *mhondoro*. Instead he announced a meeting in Angwa for June 22, 2005, which he later brought forward to June 18. Each chiefly house was informed about this event in a letter issued not by the District Administration but by the Acting Chief who personally brought it to Angwa.

On June 18, 2005, the much awaited meeting with the District Administrator was held at the Chisunga Primary School in Angwa in the presence of the District Administrator of Guruve, the Acting Chief, the *mhondoro*-appointed chief, descendants of the Chidyamauyu lineage, descendants of the Dzeka lineage, headmen from the Angwa ward, ward residents, the headman of the Masoka ward, and ruling Party political leaders – amongst them the Councilor from the Angwa ward, the District Party ZANU-PF Chairman, the District Party Chairwoman (who was the representative of the Women's League ZANU-PF) and their Committee Members. During the session for reasons unclear to the houses, the District Administrator declared that he would not approve the chief appointed by the *mhondoro* group from Angwa, and that the whole procedure should start again. Moreover, he instructed the chiefly houses to select amongst them a group of elders to represent them at the *mhondoro* assemblies held for chiefly appointments.

A week later, a non-ritual meeting for that purpose was held at the Training Center in Angwa, attended by lineage descendants of the Angwa and Masoka wards, the Acting Chief, and the *mhondoro*-appointed chief. Political leaders were not represented and all the headmen were *machinda*. During this meeting, and following the District Administrator's instructions, the *machinda* chose the elders who would represent them at the ritual assemblies: two elders from the Dzeka lineage (from which the Acting Chief claimed descent) and a third one who claimed to be a ‘brother’ of the late Chief Chisunga (of the Chidyamauyu lineage) although he was unable to substantiate his kinship relation or to give details about his descent. It was also agreed that the *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka, Nyamupahuni

and Chikwamba would learn the names of the selected elders but this information never reached them.

In August, at the Annual General Meeting of CAMPFIRE held at the Angwa Primary School, the Acting Chief, wearing some chiefly paraphernalia, announced that the DA from Guruve District had officially appointed him chief. The *mhondoro*-appointed chief's reaction was firm; members of his house (the Nhamoyemari) went immediately to the DA to confirm the truth of the Acting Chief's assertion. The DA stated that the Acting Chief had not changed his position: the paraphernalia he wore at the meeting were lent to him for the National Annual Conference of Chiefs held a couple of months before, and should have been returned to the District Administrator's office.

On November 11, the District Administrator called an urgent meeting for the next day at the Angwa Primary School, but many interested parties were unable to attend on such short notice. Notable amongst the absentees was the *mhondoro*-appointed chief who worked in distant Harare. During the meeting the District Administrator requested the genealogy of both contenders. The Acting Chief presented a genealogy that was partly derived from the genealogy described in the 1965 delineation report for Sipolilo District. This officially constructed genealogy accredited Nyamapfeka as the founding ancestor. It formally recognized, however, only one patrilineage (*dzaka*), namely Nyamasoka, but not the second patrilineage Chidyamauyu. According to this colonial genealogy, Nyamasoka had two descendants: Nyamazunzu, from whom the late Chief Chisunga was made to descend, and Dzeka from whom the Acting Chief claimed descent through his father (or stepfather) Mutungambera. At the Angwa meeting, the Chasasa house, through a son of the late Chief Chisunga, contested vehemently the Acting Chief's genealogy – that is the genealogy of the colonial file. Instead, he described the Chasasa house as descending from the *mhondoro* Chidyamauyu (via Mubaiwa, Gwera, and Kavhinga). In the absence of the chief appointed by the *mhondoro*, there was no one at the meeting to present and defend the genealogy of the Nhamoyemari house. By the end of the session, the District Administrator was unclear about how to deal with these conflicting genealogies and whether they accurately described the descent

lines of each of them.[26] The meeting with the District Administrator had another peculiarity: the colonial genealogy, which was supposed to be the 'genuine' genealogy of the chieftaincy, was presented to the community in written form, which had to some extent an intimidating effect. In the Angwa and Masoka wards many heads of lineages and senior members of chiefly houses remain illiterate, hence they were before the Acting Chief and the District Administrator in a weaker position to contest the purported official genealogy. Christian mission schools did not arrive in this part of Dande in the early and mid stages of colonialism, as was the case in other parts of Zimbabwe (Maxwell 1999), thus literacy developed in this area much later. The government-run primary school (today Chisunga Primary School) was in Mupedzapasi village and moved to Angwa center in 1976.[27] The Masoka ward was even less developed: prior to 1988 there was no school. In addition, prior to the construction of the bridge over the Angwa River in 1965, this northernmost part of Dande was partially isolated during the rainy season, from December to March.

To return to the 11 November 2005 meeting, in a later ordinary assembly held by the junior *mhondoro* Chimau, Chimau also contested the Acting Chief's colonial version of local history. He explained that within the Nyamapfeka lineage there was no *mhondoro* named Nyamazunzu. He claimed instead that, 'he [Nyamazunzu] came from an area in Zambia' and that 'he settled in what is now Upper Guruve where he owns the Chipuriro chieftaincy in the same manner as Nyamapfeka is the owner of the Chisunga Chieftaincy'. Chimau continued: 'Close to the Zambezi on the Zambian side there is a mountain called Nyamazunzu, this is Nyamazunzu's mountain'.[28] Thus, his oral history account delegitimized the chiefly colonial genealogy of the 1965 delineation report for Sipolilo District.

Two key meetings were held on 18 November 2005: the first was at the senior *mhondoro*'s place at dawn and the second in the early afternoon at the Angwa Primary School, the latter with the DA present. Both were convened by the Acting Chief and again the chiefly houses were called only the day before. Thus, some people like the delegation of elders and the *mhondoro*-appointed chief could not attend. At these assemblies, the Acting Chief had ensured

the presence of those *machinda* of the Chidyamauyu and Dzeka lineages who he assumed would support his chiefly appointment. Previously he had paid regular visits to the *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka to persuade the *mhondoro* to back him.[29] It is likely that the Acting Chief's lobbying contributed to Nyamapfeka's decision to announce at the assembly on November 18, in the absence of the rest of *mhondoro*, that the chiefly appointment would proceed. Instead of handing the Acting Chief the *ndoro* (the symbol of the Chisunga chiefly title), Nyamapfeka handed him his own ritual horn (*hunda*) as token, to show publicly that he was going to be the next chief. [30] Those chiefly houses that did not support him firmly disagreed with the procedure. Besides, procedural inconsistencies were tackled months later when a senior member of the Nhamoyemari house blamed the senior *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka for having already appointed the chief but then attempting to appoint again (irregularly) the Acting Chief as Chief Chisunga. This member confronted Nyamapfeka: '[…], what bores me is that you take from me [my house] what you have given me before'.[31] In view of all the objections at the meeting on November 18, Nyamapfeka wearily returned his ritual horn to his hut and left the chiefly houses with the responsibility of selecting again the successor, although they had already opted for one of the Nhamoyemari house that had even been validated by the *mhondoro* a few months before. The atmosphere was tense and in the midst of the quarrel between the two lineages, the Acting Chief burst into the senior *mhondoro*'s ritual hut, took his horn by force, and left the assembly abruptly. In the meeting held later on the same day with the District Administrator in Angwa, which was planned to announce the next Chief Chisunga, chaos reigned in reaction to the events of the morning session. It was impossible for the chiefly houses and the rest of the people to reach a consensus. In the late afternoon, the District Administrator left the Angwa Primary School and went back to the district's offices in Guruve with nothing accomplished.[32]

Finally, despite the state's concern about the genealogical legitimacy of its chiefly candidate, the Rural District Council did not wait any longer for the *mhondoro*'s approval and in August 2007 the District Administrator appointed the Acting Chief as Chief Chisunga. His installation by the state was conducted at the Chisunga

Primary School in Angwa in the presence of, amongst others, the Minister of Local Government, I. M. Chombo. The District Administrator had tried to justify the appointment on the grounds that, unlike the other contender, the Acting Chief shared the same name (Chisunga) with the '[historic] very first chief' which proved that he was 'a true' lineage descendant.[33]

4. HAD STATE POLITICS DETERMINED THE ELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW CHIEF?

Since the colonial state demoted the precolonial kings (*mambo* or *ishe*) to chiefs, the appointment and legitimization of 'traditional' chiefs has been an issue in state politics and policy. Hence, the hereditary office of chief has been sanctioned by the state and official appointments were made by first the colonial Governor, then the District Commissioner (former Native Commissioner) and, after Independence, by the District Administrator (today on behalf of the President) (see, *e.g.*, Garbett 1966; Bourdillon 1991).

It is tempting to view this case in terms of co-optation as I initially tended to, influenced by the undemocratic conditions that prevailed when this chiefly dispute took place. While it is true that this period was marked by the state's violent abuses of power, particularly in certain spheres of the administration, it is also true that reducing this succession conflict to a matter of political co-optation would leave unexplained important aspects of the process. What is interesting about the Chisunga case is not so much that the rural council's chiefly candidate suited its political projects (although this is part of the story) but that, its own candidate needed to make a case for his genealogical legitimacy[34] even though the Rural District Council is empowered to appoint who ever it chooses. Despite the politicization of rural local government institutions, this alone does not explain entirely the Chisunga case. The political context during the dispute and after the chiefly appointment also adds to our understanding.

The Chisunga succession dispute and subsequent appointment took place during the post-2000 Zimbabwe crisis, an era marked by abusive governmental practices and politics. Some authors have stressed that, within this 'disrupted democracy', local government, and particularly traditional leaders, gradually became

involved in partisan politics from at least 2004 onwards as the ruling party began to co-opt chiefs and headmen to fight a growing opposition that was a real challenge to the political hegemony of ZANU-PF (Hammar 2005). Nonetheless, the co-optation of chiefs and headmen has a long history during the colonial and postcolonial state.

In this situation in 2005 an amendment of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provided for the inclusion of 18 traditional chiefs in the Senate[35] from among those who already sat on the Council of Chiefs (Makumbe 2010). Therefore, chiefs who are senators now are empowered to vote and deliberate on all matters that concern the Upper House of the legislature. So far, they have always voted in favor of the then ruling party ZANU-PF, in part because – as a consequence of the Traditional Leaders Act 1998 – they are Presidential appointees (*Ibid.*). In practice the present constitutional framework does not guarantee the political neutrality of Senator Chiefs no matter which party dominates in Parliament.

As mentioned before, Chief Chisunga took office in August 2007. Then, shortly after the presidential and parliamentary elections of March 2008, he was appointed Senator Chief for Mbire District, a move that, in the eyes of many residents, confirmed that his chiefly appointment was above all (ZANU-PF) politically driven.[36]

Recently, the work of the MPs and Senators during the last legislature has been scrutinized exhaustively. An investigation examining how ZANU-PF and MDC MPs and Senators had been contributing to debate in Parliament since 2008 discovered that the Senator Chief of Mbire District was amongst those 'who have been mum in the Senate'.[37] This report on Parliamentary speeches indices indicated that 50 per cent of the total Senator Chiefs had not contributed to any debate.

The period from early 2009 to 2013 brought in some changes in the political context – that of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) between ZANU-PF and the various MDC factions. During this period a Government of National Unity (GNU) was operating. This would have affected Parliamentary speeches, including attempts to appear non-partisan even though actual practices may not always have been in consonance with such statements. Thus in a Parliamentary speech given on March 31, 2009, Chief Chisunga stated: '[…],

my constituency condemns all forms of violence in our societies as it is barbaric and distorts our cultural and social fabric'. He continued: 'No one should be segregated due to political affiliation, and politicians should take a leading role in denouncing violence'. Despite the fact that the political context of the GPA may have allowed more political space for such statements in Parliament, it remains doubtful whether this changed any abusive practices at the rural local level. Thus apparently the authoritarian governance by the Chisunga chief's office remained unchanged: by the end of 2010, constituents of the Chisunga chieftaincy denounced abuse of power exerted by the chief.[38]

In the same Parliamentary speech he went on to say:

> Due to the devastating successive droughts, my constituency benefited from various interventions. Food Aid has helped my constituents, however, I would like to appeal to the government that such Aid be channeled through the traditional leadership which operates apolitically. In my province, traditional leaders managed very well the old grain loan scheme and the recent mechanization program benefited all irrespective of their political affiliation.[39]

However, less than four years earlier during his term as Acting Chief, when politicization of food distribution was the order of the day in the Angwa ward, only residents who held a ZANU-PF card benefited from maize aid.[40]

Local politics during the period of the chiefly dispute in this constituency was a reflection of the state's political crisis. Thus, for example, the parliamentary elections of 31 March 2005 resulted in the election of the ZANU-PF candidate for the Guruve North constituency, D. P. Butau. Butau is a businessman and economist who was, and is to date, the chairman of the Zimbabwean Parliamentary Committee on Budget and Finance, as well as being chief executive of the late General Solomon Mujuru's vast holdings in the country. General Mujuru was the late husband of the Vice-President Joyce Mujuru, for a long-time viewed as a behind-the scenes 'king maker' in Zimbabwean politics. MP Butau, however, was unable to finish his term due to corruption charges that were widely reported by the local media.[41] About two and a half years after his election, he fled the country to avoid arrest after

having been accused of illegal currency transactions and money laundering which involved the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor, G. Gono. On his return to the country, in March 2009, the MP was arrested for trial, and in May of the same year he was acquitted after the prosecution 'withdrew the charges for lack of evidence'.[42]

At an ordinary assembly held shortly before the parliamentary elections of 2005 at Nyamapfeka's ritual place, a participant informed the meeting that the Acting Chief and D. P. Butau (the then contender for the office of ZANU-PF MP in the coming elections) planned to pay Nyamapfeka a visit to discuss the chieftainship succession; and that 'Butau wanted to introduce himself to Nyamapfeka as the [already elected] ZANU-PF MP for the Dande'. In reaction, a senior member of the Nhamoyemari house angrily asked the senior *mhondoro* Nyamapfeka 'why should the Acting Chief and the MP candidate discuss succession concerns with you [Nyamapfeka]?' The senior *mhondoro* evaded the issue.[43]

As mentioned, party politics accompanied 'lineage politics' amongst the chiefly houses throughout the Chisunga succession conflict. In this regard, there were two other possible factors at work during this case: that of political co-optation and the political career of one of the contenders. The government probably co-opted the Acting Chief at a time when it was losing political hegemony and needed a chief loyal to the ruling party ZANU-PF and its political projects in the rural council. In addition, the Rural District Council's favourite candidate had rapidly risen from a low level office (ward Councilor) to Senator Chief with the aid of his ZANU-PF connections.

'Traditionally' the political core of a chieftaincy is formed by constituent factions or chiefly houses: as living representatives of the *mhondoro* they have the right to claim and dispute power in chiefly successions. Constitutionally, however, 'chieftaincy' and the institution of 'chieftainship' are vaguely, if at all, defined. Instead, an Act of Parliament[44] establishes chiefs (and headmen) as the implementers of government policy for which they receive a lifetime salary and allowances because they are still considered state functionaries as they were during the colonial administration. According to sections 111 (1) and (2) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the President

appoints the chiefs and the Council of Chiefs. Furthermore, there seems to be a gap in the Constitution and in the Chiefs and Headmen Act, in that both provide for the appointment of chiefs but not for the procedure of their selection. Chiefly successions thus remain an arena for potential power struggles between the state (*i.e.* rural local government) on the one hand, and on the other, the 'traditional' leadership with their ritual procedures of chiefly selection and appointment, which may be delegitimized at any time by the state.

The Chisunga case shows that even though chiefly houses or royal houses in the Dande region may still retain same high degree of ritual (symbolic) authority, as during the colonial period and the early 1980s (Lan 1985), this does not necessarily translate into effective political power in the rural administration, particularly not with respect to succession disputes. Thus the chief appointed by the *mhondoro* of the Nyamapfeka lineage still holds the ritual symbol for the chiefly title (the *ndoro*) even though he never took office. When appointing the new Chief Chisunga, the Rural District Council overruled the chiefly houses and their 'lineage politics'. Today in this part of the Mbire District, *mhondoro* mediums still regulate chiefly successions and validate the final election. Nonetheless, the official state sanction of a chiefly election takes place at the Rural District Council office through the District Administrator who has the *de facto* veto and appoints the chief on behalf of the President.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of this case is not intended to present proper or accurate succession procedures either from a 'traditional' standpoint or from the perspective of the District Administration, nor is it intended to describe how they might be manipulated by various powerful interests. However, it appears that, as during the colonial past, these procedures still remain a 'fertile ground for dispute' (Alexander 2006: 95), and that like the oral histories and the genealogies related to the chieftaincy, they are subject to renewed interpretation, and negotiation in the succession disputes as well as civil trials.

During the political conflict of the dispute, contenders competing for the chiefly office mobilized backing from various supporters: the Acting Chief from the *mhondoro* mediums, the chiefly houses, the rural government, and (ZANU-PF) party political lead-

ers. The alternative candidate sought backing from the mediums and the chiefly houses.

Delineation reports were produced throughout Southern Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s during the Rhodesian Front government to record what they considered 'genuine' local history, but also to establish clear land boundaries for 'natural' communities (Alexander 2006: 94–95) for political reasons, that is to 'bolster "tradition" against' the growing nationalist movement (Maxwell 1999: 168). Delineation Reports recorded also whether and where *mhondoro* rain-making and first fruits (harvest) rituals were held (Ranger 1987: 117). After 1972, as Kriger observes: 'when the guerrilla war spread and security deteriorated, Smith's apartheid-oriented government returned to the policy of bolstering the administrative powers of chiefs to counter nationalists' quest for power' (Kriger 1992: 66). Nowadays, officers of the District Administration still make use of colonial files, such as the chiefly genealogies, as if they were official records in a modern civil registry covering hundreds of years. Hence, the genealogy of the Chisunga chieftaincy compiled by colonial officials in the district's delineation report 1965 was used by the District Administrator to authenticate the descent of its candidate in his claim to the chiefly office. The opposite faction, supported by a junior *mhondoro*, contested the validity of the colonial genealogy and asserted its candidate's descent based on people's memory of the orally transmitted lineages and on oral histories.

The political affiliation of the chiefly candidate mattered to a Rural District Council then dominated by ZANU-PF, but the historical, ancestral legitimacy of its candidate also mattered to the Council, which is what the *mhondoro* rituals are supposed to provide. The candidate supported by the District Administrator did not belong to any house of the Chisunga chieftaincy and so he tried to obtain his ancestral legitimacy by fabricating a genealogy based on the colonial records, which was unacceptable.

Why did the Rural District Council spend almost seven years to appoint a candidate who, as it became clear later on, was more or less programmed to sit in Parliament as Senator while it could have appointed him much earlier? The present analysis of the case suggests that, it pursued all these years the ritual appointment of its

candidate but never obtained the historical legitimacy from the *mhondoro* in Angwa.

Finally, I intended to historicize this particular chiefly succession conflict and to locate it within the contemporary Zimbabwe politics, by trying to avoid any presentist interpretation of the past. I mentioned several precolonial practices of the interim ruler during an interregnum in the Zambezi Valley, which do not justify present practices of the Acting Chief in succession disputes. Rather the precolonial context suggests some possible similarities and connections between both political figures as opposed to drawing a neat historical continuity. One has to bear in mind, however, the complex (but necessary) task of how to link the 'precolonial' to contemporary (post-Independence but also colonial) events and social phenomena without seeming to take presentist interpretations of the past from an anthropological or even historiographic standpoint. As Bayart stressed, to understand contemporary African politics and the state one must consider political processes in the long term, that is in relation to Africa's precolonial past (Bayart 1993). If one of the issues in dealing with precolonial history in Africa is the availability of sources, this is not the case for the mid and lower Zambezi Valley. The Portuguese documentary records supply valuable historical information on life conditions, trade and political matters from the late sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Even if these sources do not help much to reconstruct a 'history from below', they remain important for anthropologists (and other Africanist scholars) studying processes and practices in this region. Oral histories also add to this endeavor.

NOTES

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rors in content. Besides the EASA-2012 conference panel, most conclusions were first presented at the conferences 'Producing legitimacy: governance against the odds' at the University of Cambridge (April 22–23, 2013), and 'Culture without borders' at St. Anthony's College, University of Oxford (June 29, 2013). The University of Vienna contributed towards conference traveling expenses. Finally, this article is dedicated to the sadly late Skelli Nhamoyemari for his commitment, generosity and honesty throughout my research period in Angwa.

[1] It is beyond the scope of this article to draw a comparison of succession disputes in other post-Independence African states. However, for detailed descriptions of such conflicts in, for example, Ghana see Ladouceur (1972), Lenz (2000), and Tonah (2005) as mentioned in the introduction of this journal special issue. Furthermore, for a good compilation of related processes such as the renaissance of precolonial aristocracies and the 'resurgence' of chieftaincy in both Anglophone and Francophone African countries see Perrot and Fauvelle-Aymar 2003.

[2] Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources.

[3] Interview with Smart Mundoga and Hardlife Mundoga, 19.01.2006 in Mupedzapasi village.

[4] Interview with Gwera Chitsiko, 18.11.05 in Muzeza village. Interview with Skelli Nhamoyemari, 12.03.06 in Nyahungwe village. David Lan maintains that the link of Nyamapfeka to Mutota is established through Biri's father Nyajore (Lan 1985: 90).

[5] Interview with Gwera Chitsiko, 18.11.05 in Muzeza village. Interview with Smart Mundoga, 21.11.05, Mupedzapasi village.

[6] The *mhondoro* Nyamupahuni, Chikwamba, and Mubaiwa are Nyamapfeka's grandchildren. Nevertheless, Mubaiwa's ritual territory is not in the Chisunga chieftaincy, and thus in the Zambezi Valley, but on the Plateau in the Chundu chieftaincy (Hurungwe District). So, Mubaiwa's medium travels only occasionally to Angwa when requested.

[7] W. G. L. Randles mentions here the sources of António Pinto de Miranda, 'Monarchia Africana' (*c*. 1766) in A. A. Andrade, *Relações de Moçambique Setecentista*. Lisboa, 1950.

[8] *Mukomawasha* is related to *mukoma wa ishe*, and can be translated as 'elder brother, male cousin, or respected relative of the king'.

[9] Despite the fact that the presence of the Portuguese in the Zambezi Valley began in the sixteenth century, the area did not attain colonial status until 1891. Furthermore, the historian Mudenge notes that Portuguese documents on Zumbo from the 1770 to 1800 show considerable evidence on the roles played by the *mhondoro*, amongst others, Nyamapfeka and Nyamasoka 'as arbiters in matters of war and peace, trade disputes and political misunderstandings between the Portuguese at Zumbo and the neighbouring African rulers as well as among these rulers themselves' (Mudenge 1976: 34–35). Additionally, 'In the absence of a superior authority recognized by all the groups in the region the senior spirit medium acted like the final court of appeal' (*Ibid.*: 35).

[10] See Isaacman 1973 for an analysis of the ritual function of the *madzimanga* in the ritual investiture of the Barue kings.

[11] National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ). S 2929/2/7, Delineation Report for Sipolilo District, 1965. Delineation Officer B.P. Kashula.

[12] Oral sources contradict to a great extent the colonial genealogy of government recognized chiefs described in the above-mentioned delineation report. Interview with Gwera Chitsiko, 18.11.05 in Muzeza village, and Smart Mundoga 21.11.05 in Mupedzapasi village.

[13] Regarding the origin of the *mhondoro* Dzeka, a myth recounts that one of Nyamapfeka's sons, Nyamasoka, was given Dzeka as an adoptive son since he did not have descendants.

[14] In the run up to the Rural District Council elections held in September of 2002, the political tension broke out into physical violence and was especially gruesome at some districts.

[15] Interview with Gwera Chitsiko, 07.02.06, Muzeza village.

[16] Interview with the lineage elder of the Nhamoyemari house, 15 February 2005, Nyahungwe village.

[17] Interview with the lineage elder of the Nhamoyemari house on 15 February 2005, Nyahungwe village.

[18] The argument concerned genealogy. There were two *machinda* named Mutungambera: one belonged to the *mhondoro* Dzeka and the other to Kavhinga; the latter Mutungambera belonged to the Chimusaro *imba*, one of the three houses that constitute the living descendants of the *mhondoro* Kavhinga in the Chisunga chieftaincy.

[19] Interview Nhamoyemari lineage elder 15.02.2005.

[20] Interviews with Regiment and Skelli Nhamoyemari, 12.03.06 in Nyahungwe village. Interview with the Nhamoyemari chiefly candidate in May 2006, Harare.

[21] Interview with the Nhamoyemari chiefly candidate in May 2006, Harare.

[22] Interview 04.02.06 Muzeza village.

[23] It remains unclear whether this occurred at some stage during Zimbabwe's war of independence, or immediately after independence.

[24] As mentioned at the introduction, most *mhondoro* ancestors are male but a few are female. For example, within the Nyamapfeka lineage, Nyamapfeka's daughter Chiguhwa is an important figure.

[25] For a further example of such bribery occurred in the context of the implementation of a governmental project in the 1990s in Chief Matsiwo's jurisdiction (Dande Communal Land), see Spierenburg 2009: 28–30; 2004: 164–168.

[26] Echoing a striking continuity with colonial practices, the District Administrators of most Rural District Councils are nowadays appointed to distant areas where they usually have no idea of the history of the local royal lineages. I thank Chenjerai Hove for this observation (personal communication 22.07.2013).

[27] At the present site of Angwa Business Center, in 1972, a colonial district administration office and a Rhodesia Security Forces Camp were established. This settlement was expanded during the second half of the seventies with a couple of rural stores, the Chisunga Primary School and the Angwa Rural Health Center.

[28] Chimau narrated this mythical account at a *dare* held on 30 April 2006, Muzeza village.

[29] A few months later at an ordinary assembly Nyamapfeka complained that the Acting Chief was no longer paying his respects, stating that: '[…] when he [the Acting Chief] wanted the [Chisunga] chieftaincy, he was coming to visit me frequently'. *Dare* on 14.03.06, Nyahungwe village.

[30] The *ndoro* was no longer in the hands of Nyamapfeka since he had handed it on June 9, 2005 to the junior representative of the Nhamoyemari house who still retains it.

[31] *Dare* on 14.03.06 at Nyahungwe village.

[32] I completed my field research in July 2006, and so I could not follow in situ the aftermath of the succession dispute. However, in 2007 the Nhamoyemari house brought the Chisunga case to the High Court in Harare for civil trial.
The venture failed: the case was suspended when the Nhamoyemari could no longer afford to pay the lawyer (personal communication, 2007). Recently, the High Court invalidated the appointment of a Chief from Nyanga on the grounds that the incumbent had been 'non-procedurally' appointed by the Nyanga District Administrator, as the appointee did not belong to the chiefly lineage. 'Court nullifies chief's appointment', *The Herald*, 27 December 2011.

[33] Resident's personal communication via email (18.05.2013).

[34] I thank Joost Fontein for making me aware of this.

[35] The representation of Chiefs in the Parliament is in no way a post-Independence development. The Rhodesian Front government also increased the Chief's powers. Thus, in 1964, when the Chiefs endorsed unanimously the government's proposed unilateral declaration of independence from Britain they demanded Parliamentary representation. Then, in 1969, after Rhodesia had declared its independence the constitution provided seats for Chiefs in the Senate and House of Assembly (Kriger 1992: 66).

[36] Resident's personal communication (18.05.13).

[37] 'MPs in Parly: When silence is not golden', *News Day*, 2 June 2012.

[38] According to a communication via Facebook of December 2010 [accessed on 21.10.12], Chief Chisunga arbitrarily dismissed from his post (implying withdraw of salary and other benefits) a headman from the Angwa ward for having supported the opposition party at the 2008 presidential and parliamentary run-off elections. Furthermore, this source claims that, the mentioned headman was also assaulted by 'war veterans'. In addition, a second headman of Angwa ward was dismissed by the chief for political reasons. The web page and poster's name have been omitted for confidentiality. As confirmed by a local resident, the two headmen belonged to Muzeza and Nyamhandu villages in the Angwa ward (resident's personal communication 18.05.13).

[39] URL: http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/attachments/article/68/31_March_2009_18-16.pdf

[40] Interviews on 28.11.05 on the occasion of a food aid distribution at Angwa check point (Business Center). Names of interviewees have been omitted for confidentiality. For the role of chiefs during this period as gatekeepers to access subsidized maize from the Grain Marketing Board (GMB), whose distribution was in control of ZANU-PF, see Hammar 2005: 15.

[41] See for example: 'Zimbabwe MP flees to UK over currency probe', *Zimbabwe Situation*, 31 December 2007; 'Zanu PF Chickens Coming Home to Roost', *Change Zimbabwe*, 29 December 2007; 'Official Corruption Exposed in Currency Dealing', *Change Zimbabwe*, 25 December 2007; 'UK Denies Offering Safe Haven to Zimbabwean Criminals', *Zim Online*, 4 January 2008.

[42] 'Zimbabwe: Butau Acquitted', *The Herald*, 15 May 2009.

[43] *Dare* held on 13.03.2005, Nyahungwe village.

[44] Chiefs and Headmen Act No.7, 1992.

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