

Rain Making Ceremony in the Nyandoro Region, Zimbabwe

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Chapter 12

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Abstract

Shona people hold rain making ceremony every year. It is held in the end of September when the rain season begins. The ceremony goes on for a week. The ritual is held at the shrine of a female spirit medium. She is the medium of the greatest spirits of the Nyandoro clan. The spirits are called “Biri NaGanire” (Biri and Ganire). She has powers of rain making, curing diseases and appointing the chief.

I analyze the participants and the process of rain making ceremony. The ceremony is not only for the preparation for the farming season, but also the opportunity to have discussion about clan politics. The case of rain making ceremony in the Nyandoro area shows that Shona society still have their own traditional system of politics and religion. I notice two points concerning the ritual in the Nyandoro region. One is the place of the ceremony where is resettlement area opened in 1982. The medium was possessed in the newly opened village. The second point is the medium of Biri NaGanire. She was possessed by a spirit called “Biri” at the church of Methodist Church of Zimbabwe. I examine the characteristics of traditional religion of post-independence Zimbabwe.

Key words: spirit possession, spirit mediums, politics, religion, ancestor worship, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The Shona ancestor worship is famous in Zimbabwe. The worship is said to have influenced the liberation war of Zimbabwe¹. Several studies on Shona ancestor worship were carried out since 1910s and particularly during the liberation war in the 1970s. However, those studies were suspended after the independence.

Shona ancestor worship has not only religious but also political function. After the colonization

by Europeans, changes occurred in the practices of worship. In fact, before colonization, the chief of the clan was the leader of politics and religion. The chief used to be appointed by the spirit medium.

During the colonization, the chief was appointed by Rhodesian Government so that those who were against the authority were removed from the indirect control system of the

Rhodesian governmentⁱⁱ. Indeed, chiefs and spirit mediums were involved in the liberation struggle during the war. Liberation army got support from African peasants in the Tribal Trust Land by getting guarantee from spirit mediums. David Lan studied the process which liberation army got peasants' support. His publication entitled *Guns and Rain* (1985). He showed that traditional leaders, spirit mediums, had political power upon the local people.

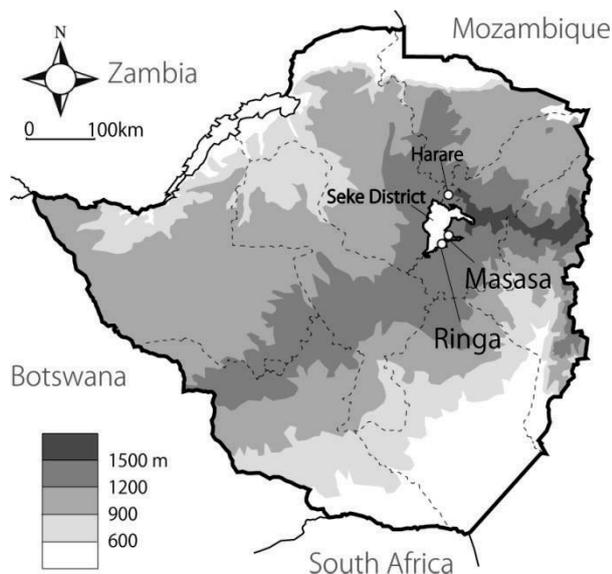
The present research focuses on the Shona ancestor worship in the Nyandoro area. The religious center of the Nyandoro clan is Masasa resettlement area. The land of Masasa was European land during the Rhodesian regime. Then it was redistributed to African people after the independence.

The reason why Masasa became the centre of the Nyandoro religion is because Nyandoro clan spirits "Biri NaGanire" possessed a woman in Masasa. She was possessed by Biri's spirit at the church. "Resettlement area" and "the church" are important elements in both religious and political functions of the ancestor worship in post independent Zimbabwe.

1. The Environment of the Nyandoro Region

1.1 The Location

The Nyandoro area is located in south east of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe (Map 1). There is no clear boundary between the Nyandoro area and the others. The place is sometimes referred to as "Chihota" region. The Nyandoro and the Chihota are neighboring areas



Map 1. Map of Zimbabwe

and there are not separated clearly.

Large area in the Nyandoro region was occupied by European during the Rhodesian regime. But before the colonization, the Nyandoro area used to be controlled by the chief Nyandoro, the leader of the Nyandoro clan. A man living in Ringa resettlement area said "there are tribal tombs in this (the Nyandoro) area".

Masasa village is today's religious center of the Nyandoro area (Map 2). There is a spirit medium (*homwe*) of the biggest spirit of the Nyandoro clan. The spirit medium lives in a shrine called "*banya*" or "*zangara*". People hold three annual rituals there.

Most people who come to rituals are from Masasa, Tsunga, Ringa, and Marondera. Masasa, Tsunga, and Ringa are resettlement areas where people started to live after the independence of Zimbabwe (1980). The land of resettlement area was distributed to the local people around 1983. In Ringa each family was given 6ha for farm and 36a for living area.

The political leader of Ringa is called "councilor" who is elected by villagers. He belongs to Ministry of Home Affairs. He is the

leader of “*sabhuku*” who represents small villages in a resettlement area. For example, Ringa resettlement area consists of 9 small villages (Map 3). Each village has its own autonomy. The leader is *sabhuku* followed by vice *sabhuku*, secretary and treasurer. The name “*sabhuku*” is the relic of the colonial administration. “*Sabhuku*” means “owner of the book – the tax-register”ⁱⁱⁱ. *Sabhuku* is elected by villagers.

The councilor and all *sabhuku* hold a meeting several times a month. The councilor gives *sabhuku* information at the meeting, for example, agricultural campaign such as seed distribution, or fertilizer distribution by the government. After *sabhuku* meeting, each village has a meeting. Villagers get information from *sabhuku*. These days people discuss about extension of living area. Living area of each village is getting narrow. They send opinion to the government through *sabhuku* and councilor.

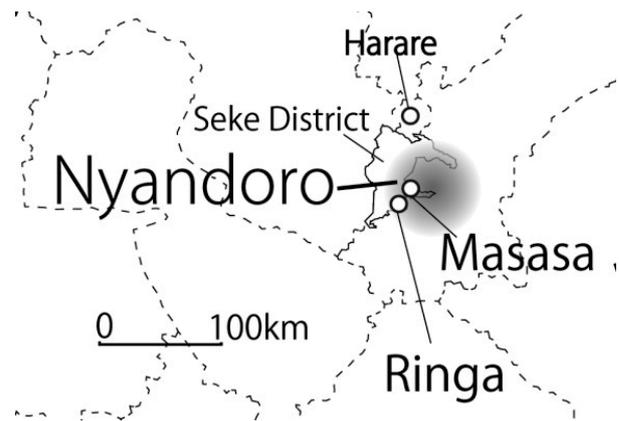
Sabhuku is in charge of public property of his village such as bush (fire wood), mud (for bricklayer), pond (for fishing) and so on. People must ask *sabhuku* permission when they want to use them.

1.2 People

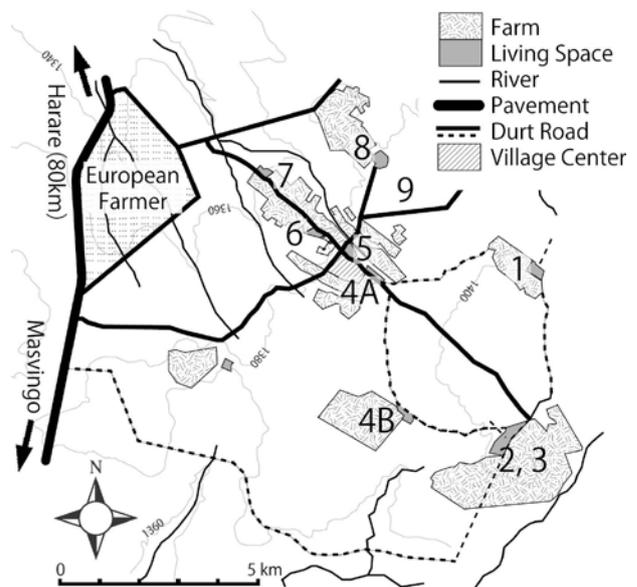
People living in the Nyandoro area are Shona language speakers. “Shona” is derived from “*chuma*” which means gold^{iv}. Shona people traded with other people in gold since the 9th century. That is why they may be called “Shona”.

The Shona people is divided into some groups (*rudzi*, pl;*marudzi*) such as Zezuru, Makorekore, Karanga, and so on. The Nyandoro area is Zezuru area.

Each Shona group is divided into some clans



Map 2. The Nyandoro Area



Map 3. Map of Ringa Resettlement Area

(*dzinza*). “Nyandoro” is a name of paternal clan. The name of paternal clan is called “*mutupo*” (totem). People call each other with clan names in the daily life.

The Nyandoro area is a multi-clan society because endogamy is not allowed. Getting married with people from the same clan is considered as incest. Because the Nyandoro men must marry non-Nyandoro women, the Nyandoro region is a multi clan society.

They are forbidden to eat things related to the clan name. For example, Nyandoro people’s symbol is an elephant (*nzou*) or a giraffe (*twiza*) that is why it is forbidden for them to eat elephants and giraffes.

Table 1. Farming Calendar (Data from The World Meteorological Organization)

Month	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May.	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.
Season		Rain						Dry				
Farm Work		Plow		Weeding			Harvest					
		Seeding										
Rituals	Rain Making			Cooperative Plowing			Thanks Giving			Praing for Calm Climate		
Rain Fall in Harare (mm)	6.5	40.4	93.2	182.7	190.8	176.3	99.1	37.2	7.4	1.8	2.3	2.9
Ave. Max. Tempalature(°C)	28.4	28.8	27.6	26.3	26.2	26.0	26.2	25.6	23.8	21.8	21.6	24.1
Ave. Min. Tempalature(°C)	11.7	14.5	15.5	15.8	15.8	15.7	14.5	12.5	9.3	6.8	6.5	8.5

People in Ringa emigrated from surrounding areas. Most people are from Chihota/Nyandoro region and the others are from Chivhu region. People from Chivhu live in the eastern part of Ringa village. The majority of village 1, 2 and 3 are from the Njanja (Chivhu) area. They are the Njanja (heart) clan. Most people living in village 4-9 are from the Chihota or the Nyandoro areas. The dominant clans in village 4-9 are the Chihota (zebra), the Nyandoro (elephant), the Mhofu (eland), and the Murehwa (monkey).

Christianity and traditional belief are two biggest religions in Ringa. About half of population is Christian (independent church), the other half is the syncretism of traditional belief and Christianity. Who believe only traditional belief are minority.

1.3 Natural Environment and Subsistence

Most people in Ringa are farmers. They grow crops such as maize, ground nuts, sunflower, beans, pumpkins, tobacco, and so on. European farmers used to cultivate tobacco and produce dairy commodities and meat in this area. In Ringa there are plenty facilities for burning tobacco and stockbreeding which were built by

white farmers during the Rhodesian regime. Though the facilities are out of use today, they remind people of the fact that the land was owned by white farmers.

A year is divided into two seasons, rain season and dry season. The raining season begins at the end of October. Dry season begins around April. They started cultivate farm in the end of September. After seeding in October or November, they weed every day until crops grow. They harvest from February to May. In the dry season they farm vegetables in garden. People hold three annual rituals accordingly. They are rain making ceremony, thanks giving ceremony, and the ritual for praying calm winter.

They have domestic animals such as cattle, goat, sheep, chicken, guinea-fowl, rabbit, dog, and so on. Cattle are the most important. They produce milk and meat. They are also used for plowing and transport. When people need money, they can sell cattle. The price of a bull for instance is about USD 400-500 (2011).

2. Rain Making Ceremony in the Nyandoro Region

2.1 A Ritual of Spirits Possession

Rain making ceremony is called “*bira rekukumbira mvura*”, “*mukwerera*” or “*rukuruva*” in Shona. It takes place in September. This ceremony is preparation for the farming season.

In the Nyabodoro area, rain making ceremony is organized at the shrine of the biggest spirit medium. The shrine was built in Masasa village. The medium lives there. The shrine is a round hut of bricks and grass roof. The shape is similar to ordinary huts in rural areas, but the size is much larger than ordinary houses. It is about 15m wide and 6m high. This shrine was donated by people in Masasa.

Some spirit mediums gather at the ritual. They are possessed by particular spirits on the first day of the ritual. They spend one week as ancestors. They discuss some issues concerning the Nyandoro clan and listen to the people’s difficulties. The ritual seems to be a traditional parliament organized by people and spirit mediums.

2.2 Participants

Participants are divided into two categories. One is spirit mediums and the other is ordinary people. Spirits are classified according to the grade. Their behaviors, costumes, powers and roles are different. Mediums are thought as sacred people and living gods.

Nine spirit mediums participated in the rain making ceremony in 2011 (Table 2). Mediums are called as “*svikiro*” (who is arrived) or “*homwe*” (pocket <for spirits>). Spirits arrive in the body of mediums or get into the pocket (body of the medium). Spirit mediums are possessed by “*mudzimu*”. The word “*mudzimu* (pl; *vadzimu* or *midzimu*)” is “ancestor”, “spirit”

or “soul”. Every human being has *mudzimu*. *Mudzimu* controls one’s body.

A flesh dies but the *mudzimu* never. The *mudzimu* of the deceased reveals itself by possessing the flesh of a spirit medium. After the death of a person, the *mudzimu* leaves the flesh and goes into the *mhepo* (the spiritual world, air). *Mudzimu* starts the second life after leaving the flesh, so *mudzimu* is also called as “*ari kumhepo* (who is in the air, spiritual world)”.

Spirit mediums are not trained. They are suddenly possessed by spirits one day and start to live as spirit mediums of particular spirits. Spirit mediums are like living gods. Mediums’ position is said to be nearer to the God. They are sacred but people are not so nervous. Spirits are of their forefathers. Sometimes spirits joke. People also play the fool at rituals. I witnessed a situation in which a possessed medium was criticized by a man who participated in the ritual because he couldn’t advise well. “*Mudzimu* was a person”, a Chihota man said, “He can make mistakes and be blamed”.

Spirits that assist to the rain making ceremony are classified into three categories, *mhepo*, *mhondoro*, *tateguru*.

2.2.1 Clan Spirit “Biri NaGanire”

The biggest spirit of the Nyandoro clan is Biri NaGanire. “*Biri NaGanire*” means “Biri and Ganire”. Biri is a female spirit and Ganire is the brother. They possess an old woman whose name is Ms. Chipu Mushambadope. She is called “*Ambuya Mugomo*” (granny in the mountain) or “*Ambuya Biri NaGanire*” (granny of Biri NaGanire). She is possessed by four spirits but she is called medium of Biri NaGanire because Biri and Ganire possess the medium most of the time.

Medium of Biri NaGanire is from the Nyandoro clan. She was a member of Methodist Church of Zimbabwe. She was possessed by Biri in the church on a Sunday service in 1982. When Biri got into her body, she took off red uniform of the church and walked around the village saying “I am Biri”. People held ritual for setting and examining the spirits (*kugadzira mudzimu*). Some time evil spirit (*ngozi*) pretends to be a great spirit so they examined the spirit. After setting of Biri, the medium was also possessed by Ganire, Murozvi and Nyakasikana. Now the medium is possessed by four spirits.

Biri NaGanire is the biggest spirit which people can ask help directly. People think that Biri NaGanire is the medium between human beings and the God (Mwari). Biri NaGanire sends peoples’ wishes to the God. People cannot talk with the God directly because the God is too great. Typical wishes of people are rain fall and curing diseases. Biri NaGanire heals patients of any disease by giving snuff (*bute*). Sometimes Biri NaGanire mixes water and snuff and sprays it on the patient’s body. The special liquid of snuff and water is called “*dova*” or “*zambara*”. The liquid has two effects, charm and cure-all. The Nyandoro people explain that their clan spirit is not only for the Nyandoro people but for all people in the world, so people of any clan come to Masasa to ask for her help.

2.2.2 Mhepo

The word “*mhepo*” means “air, wind, spirit, spiritual world”. In the Nyandoro area, Biri NaGanire and Chitsachegore are thought as *mhepo* spirits. *Mhepo* is a spirit which is not the

spirit of animals or human beings. And they had never belonged to any clan. Biri and Ganire did not exist in this world as human beings so they don’t have any kinship with people. Why do the Nyandoro people enshrine Biri NaGanire? That is because Biri and Ganire always possess the Nyandoro woman. If the medium dies, Biri and Ganire look for another Nyandoro woman as their medium.

Biri NaGanire is also referred to as “*mukombwe*” or “*gombwe*” (pl: *makombwe*). Gelfand translated “*Gombwe*” as “the great tribal spirit”^v. “*Mukombwe*” means “who are surrounded” (*anokombwa*). *Mukombwe* is a word for the biggest spirit which is surrounded by people and other spirits at the clan rituals.

The roles of Biri NaGanire are rain making, curing diseases, and appointing the chief. At the rain making ceremony, Biri NaGanire mediates people and the God (Mwari). She sends the message from people to the God. At curing ritual she gives patients snuff. She also has the right to appoint the Chief Nyandoro, but today this power is not authorized any more by the government. But she tries to carry on the tradition. So there are two chiefs. One was chosen by Biri NaGanire and the other was appointed by the government.

Another *mhepo* spirit which attends the ritual is Chitsachegore. “*Chitsachegore*” means “stump of a cloud”. People think that Chitsachegore’s power is almost the same as Biri NaGanire’s. What is different between these two spirits is the clan of spirit mediums. The medium of Biri NaGanire is the Nyandoro woman. But the medium of Chitsachegore is the Soko clan.

The medium of Chitsachegore has a problem. The medium is young man in his early twenties. He was possessed by Chitsachegore only once. He attends every ritual, but he is not possessed. At the rain making ceremony Ganire said “I must regulate something about him. The medium of Chitsachegore is not strong enough to bear the power of the spirit (*Pane chinoda kugadzirirwa. Homwe yaChitsa iri kuremerwa*)”.

2.2.3 Mhondoro

“*Mhondoro* (pl; *mhondoro*)” means “the spirit of the chief” and “a lion”. Some lions in the bush are thought as the temporary figures of spirits of the chiefs. It is said that the lions never bite people if they are the true *mhondoro* lions^{vi}. The word “*mhondoro*” implies “what is fearful”. Both *mhondoro* (the spirit) and *mhondoro* (a lion) are awful. The *mhondoro* spirit is fearful because of its super natural power, giving rain and curing diseases. The *mhondoro* lion is fearful because of its fierceness. According to my informant, people use the word “*mhondoro*” such as “*mhondoro yesoka (mhondoro of football)*”. A talented football player is also called *mhondoro*.

The *mhondoro* spirits give people rain and cure diseases. What is different from *mhepo* spirits is the relationship with people. *Mhondoro* is the spirit of a dead person. The spirits belong to the clan and the descendants live on the earth.

Three *mhondoro* spirits attended to the rain making ceremony at Masasa. They are Musanyange, Chigonga, and Machengo.

The Greatest *mhondoro* of the Nyndoro clan is Musanyange. The medium of Musanyange is Mr. Chingodza. He lives in Murehwa. He comes to Masasa for every ritual. He was possessed by



Picture 1. Medium of Musanyange



Picture 2. Medium of Machengo

Musanyange in the 1960s for the first time. He is regarded as the founder of the Nyandoro clan.

He attends rituals with his interpreter (*nyamai* or *mutapi*). This kind of big spirit needs his interpreter. The interpreter, Mr. Mombayarara said “Musanyange was alive long back ago. When he was alive, the Nyandoro people were not in Zimbabwe. They lived in Tanzania and moved to Zimbabwe. If you listen to Musanyange’s language, you can hear

Tanzanian, Congolese, Zambian, and Malawian words”. As he said Musanyange’s language is not Shona which is spoken today, so people don’t understand what he is talking about. Mr. Mombeyarara learned Musanyange’s language by talking and discussing with Musanyange. The translator mediates people and Musanyange. Without interpreter, people can’t communicate with Musanyange.

Chigonga’s medium lives in Chinoyi, about 200km North West of Masasa. His medium is the Nyandoro man, Mr. Museve. He comes to Masasa for every ritual. He comes to Masasa with his neighbors and his wife.

His daughter, 16 years old, is working as a special made of the medium of Biri NaGanire. She cooks for medium, cleans the shrine, washes medium’s clothes and washes mediums body. Those people who cook and clean for spirit mediums are called “*vakaranga* (sg. *mukaranga*)”. Chigonga’s *mukaranga* is the wife of medium. No other people are allowed to do house work for the spirit mediums.

Machengo is also a *mhondoro* spirit which belongs to the Nyandoro clan. Machengo’s medium is the Nyandoro woman. She lives at

Masasa. At the ritual her sister-in-law comes to Masasa as the *mukaranga*.

Each *mhondoro* spirit has its rank in the Nyandoro genealogy. Machengo’s rank is lower than Chigonga’s, but Machengo’s role in the shrine is important. She always sits at the center pole (*musimboti*). So her role is called *musimboti*. I saw her signing when all of mediums are possessed by the spirits at the ritual. It is said that spirits have ranks but their powers (*masimba*) are different. Machengo’s rank is lower than Chigonga’s but his power to call spirits is stronger than Chigonga’s.

2.2.4 Tateguru

“*Tateguru*” (pl; *madzitateguru*) is “great-grandfather” The spirits of them are also called “*tateguru*”. Four mediums of *madzitateguru* attended the ritual at Masasa. They are called their *mitupo* (the names of clan) by other participants. People don’t call medium’s personal name during the ritual because mediums were regarded as ancestors as they are and the humanity (*unhu*) of mediums were out of the body during the spirit possession.

Table 2. Spirit Mediums Attending the Rain Making Ceremony at Masasa

Rank	spirit’s name	spirit’s clan	medium’s clan	medium’s sex	type of spirit
1	<i>(Biri Na)Ganire</i>	none	<i>Nyandoro</i>	f	<i>mhepo (mukombwe)</i>
2	<i>Chitsachegore</i>	none	<i>Soko</i>	m	<i>mhepo</i>
3	<i>Musanyange</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	m	<i>mhondoro</i>
4	<i>Chigonga</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	m	<i>mhondoro</i>
5	<i>Machengo</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	f	<i>mhondoro</i>
6	<i>Muzanenhano</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	f	<i>tateguru</i>
7	<i>Kaseke</i>	<i>Mhofu</i>	<i>Mhofu</i>	f	<i>tateguru</i>
8	<i>Mukanya</i>	<i>Soko</i>	<i>Soko</i>	f	<i>tateguru</i>
9	<i>Shumba</i>	<i>Shumba</i>	<i>Shumba</i>	f	<i>tateguru</i>

They are nearest ancestors from people. They are easy to talk to but their ranks are the lowest in the spiritual world.

2.2.5 Ordinary Participants

Some people are appointed to some posts or assigned to some roles in a ceremony. Mr. Dzongodza Taonezvi Zinyama is the chair of rituals at Masasa shrine. He was appointed as the chair by Biri NaGanire. The chair must be the Chief Nyandoro (chief: *ishe*). But today the Chief Nyandoro is nominated by Zimbabwe Government. Government-appointed-Chief Nyandoro has never been to Masasa shrine. According to people at Masasa Chief Nyandoro is afraid of coming to their village, because he was installed by the government as the Chief without Biri NaGanire's recognition.

Zinyama, Biri NaGanire-appointed chief, is the master of ceremony. He carries out rituals. Zinyama prays for Biri NaGanire's will and he directs villagers to hold rituals. When people want to talk with Biri NaGanire during a ritual, Zinyama is the one to introduce peoples' opinion.

Mr. Mazarura is the translator (*mutapi/nyamai*) of Biri NaGanire. He is chosen by Biri NaGanire as the translator. The predecessor, Mr. Madyira, passed away and Mazarura was installed a few years ago. This position is conceded to a non-Nyandoro man. Mr. Madyira is the Madyira clan and Mr. Mazarura is the Mazarura clan.

All participants are not allowed to talk directly to Biri NaGanire. Biri NaGanire's language is not difficult to understand while Musanyange's language is on contrary difficult. The task of the translator is to translate or repeat all conversations between Biri NaGanire and all

of other participants during the ritual. This custom emphasizes the sacredness of Biri NaGanire.

Nyamai sends secret message to a particular participant. Sometimes Biri NaGanire calls Mazarura to come beside her and whispers something to him secretly. He sends the message to a particular person.

Mukaranga (pl; *vakaranga*) does house work for spirit mediums. Biri NaGanire has two *vakaranga*. One is an old woman from the Chihota clan. And another one is a daughter of Chigonga who is sixteen years old. They live together with the medium of Biri NaGanire at Masasa shrine.

Other mediums come to rituals with their *mukaranga* because mediums are not allowed to cook by themselves during the possession. They must eat only traditional food without any meat. They eat *bota rezviyo rine dovi* (thin porridge of milled finger millet with peanut butter), rice, *manhanga* (pumpkins), and bush vegetables. It is said that if mediums eat meat or blood, they die or spirits run away from mediums, so *mukaranga* must be a reliable person.

Gwenyambira (pl; *magwenyambira*) is the *mbira* player. They play the musical instrument called *mbira* (Picture 3). It consists of wooden board and 24 pieces of thin metal plate. People believe that the *mbira* instrument and the music are given to the ancestors by Biri NaGanire.

Mbira music is thought of the imitation of bird singing which used to send God's messages to people. Biri NaGanire^{vii} made some people dream and inspired about how to make and play the *mbira* to imitate the voice of sacred bird. Mr. Zinyama said that playing *mbira* or dancing with it is considered as praying for the ancestors or *mhepo* spirits.

Three *mbira* players attended the ritual, Mr.

Table 3. Ordinary Participants to the Ritual at Masasa

Post	Clan	Sex	Role
<i>Mutapi/ Nyamai</i>	<i>Mazarura</i>	m	Biri NaGanire's translator. He translates all conversations between Biri NaGanire and the others.
<i>Mukaranga 1</i>	<i>Chihota</i>	f	An old woman. house work for the medium of Biri NaGanire
<i>Mukaranga 2</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	f	A teenager. A daughter of Chigonga
<i>Ishe</i>	<i>Nyandoro</i>	m	The chair of the ritual. He must be the Chief Nyandoro
<i>Gwenyambira 1</i>			The <i>mbira</i> (a musical instrument) player.
<i>Gwenyambira 2</i>	<i>Museyamwa</i>	m	The <i>mbira</i> player
<i>Gwenyambira 3</i>	<i>Sokokumene</i>	m	The <i>mbira</i> player
<i>Gwenyambira 4</i>	<i>author</i>	m	The <i>mbira</i> player
<i>Hosho</i> player	<i>Nyandoro</i>	m	The <i>hosho</i> (shakers) player
<i>Samusuwo</i>	<i>no data</i>	m	Manager of meat, beer, and food.
<i>Mukaranga 3~</i>	<i>Chihota, Duve...</i>	m/f	House work for mediums.
Ordinary Participants	<i>Some clans</i>	m/f	Praying and discussing at the ritual.

Zinyama, Mr. Murevanhema, and Mr. Kanengoni. They learned *mbira* music from their grandfather, father, elder brother and other teachers. I was accepted as an *mbira* player at the ritual because I learned *mbira* songs from Mr. Zinyama. *Mbira* music of the Nyandoro clan has been transmitted and kept for Biri NaGanire by some players belonging to the different clans over the generations.

Samusuwo is also appointed by Biri NaGanire. His role is to keep and distribute beer, food and meat used during the ritual. He is not the Nyandoro clan. He must prevent food and beer from witches or thieves.

Other ordinary participants join the ritual to pray. They also join discussion with ancestor spirits. Any participants from any clans are welcome to join the ritual.

3. The Ritual

3.1 Preparation for the Ritual

To hold the rain making ceremony, people must prepare two kinds of traditional beer. One is for Biri NaGanire which is called "*mutswiwa*". And the other is for other participants (*hwahwa/doro*). Those are brewed from finger millet (*zviyo*).

Mutswiwa is about thirty days aged and *hwahwa* is seven days aged. How to brew is almost the same. But *mutswiwa* must be brewed by girls before ten years old and brewed in the



Picture 3. Mbira

special hut for *mutswiwa*.

Labor and materials for brewing beer are provided by Masasa village. Seven days before the ritual, ladies gather at shrine and start to brewing beer. The ritual isn't open before the beer is matured. If the beer is not matured enough, the beginning day of the ritual is put off.

Participants, who are living far away from Masasa, are informed of ceremony schedule by mobile phone. They call Zinyama, the chair of rituals, or other villagers to ask the date. They come to Masasa a few days before the opening day. The author knew the date by calling Mr. Murevanhema, an *mbira* player living in Masasa. The author was living in Ringa village where is about 20km south west of Masasa. The spirit medium of Muzanenhemo was also living in Ringa. She asked me the opening day of the ritual and we left for Masasa together by car on the 13th September.

Participants from far are given small huts to

stay during the ritual. Those huts were built around the shrine (Figure. 1). Every participant must bring their own food, blankets, commodities and a cook. I brought rice and vegetables. I didn't come with a cook, but Machengo's *mukaranga* cooked for me. I gave her my commodities and we shared them.

3. 2 The First Day (14th, Wed. September, 2011)

The Rain making ceremony was supposed to begin on the September 10th, Saturday but beer had not been fully brewed and the chair was absent. So the ritual started on Wednesday.

The opening day, they held two rituals. The first one was held in the noon. Nyamai (translator) of Biri NaGanire called people, “*Ngati pinde mukati* (Let's get inside <of the shrine>)”. People took off shoes and gathered in front of the shrine. All people had to take off

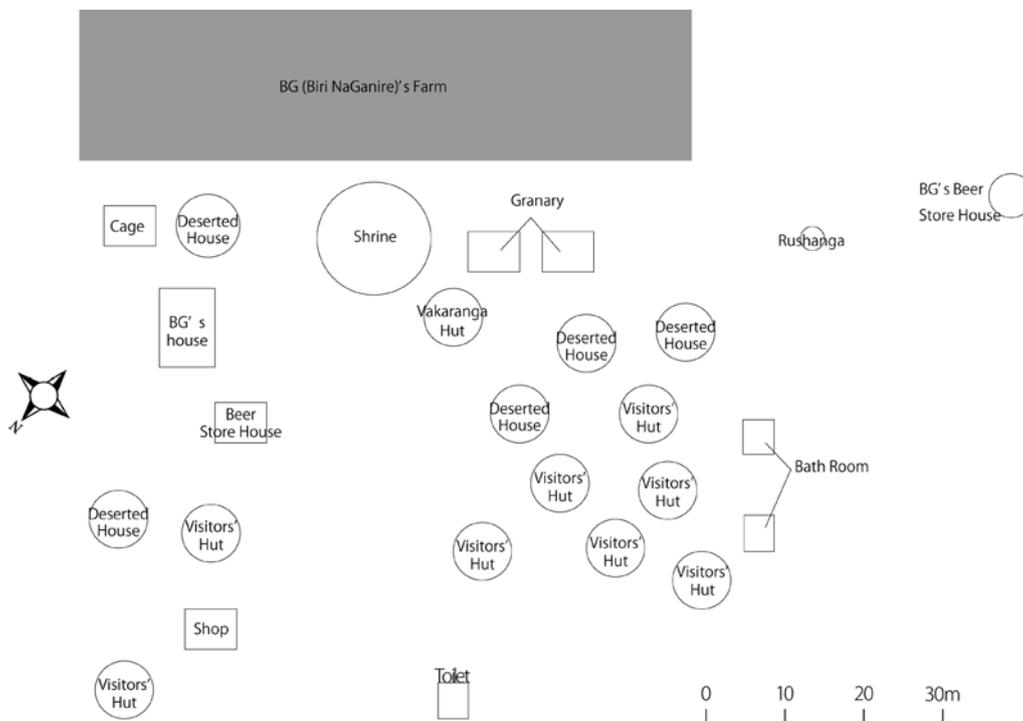


Figure 1. Biri NaGanire's Shrine at Masasa



Picture 4. Entering into the Shrine Singing Ngondo

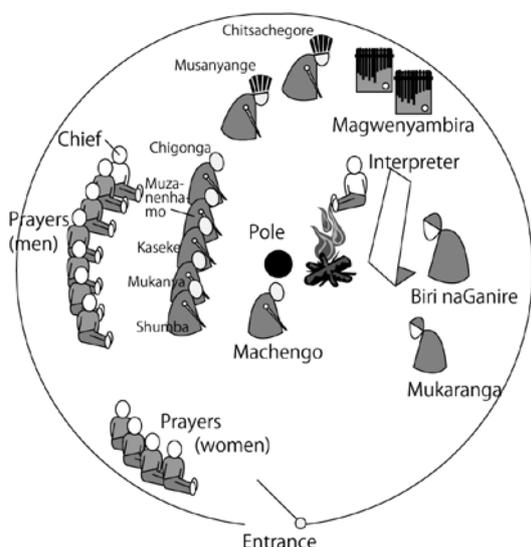


Figure 2. Inside the Shrine

shoes in and around the shrine because there was considered as sacred space.

Spirit mediums got inside of the shrine then *mbira* players followed them. Men clapped hands and women ululated to show respect to Biri NaGanire when they got inside. *Mbira* players started playing *mbira* after entering inside and sitting on their position. Other participants started singing a song outside the shrine.

Ngindingidi yarira
(Something rang)
heya heya heyaaaoh aiwa

(eya eya eyaaaoh aiwa)
Mbiri inavashe
(Cheifs are of great renown)
heya heya heyaaaoh aiwa
(eya eya eyaaaoh aiwa)

This was a song of *ngondo* (or “*n’ondo*”). *Ngondo* songs are war or hunting songs which are thought of the oldest songs of the Nyandoro people.

Participants got into the shrine singing *ngondo*. *Mbira* was continually played. After singing *ngondo* and playing *mbira* together for some minutes, they sat on a particular place (Figure 2) and greeted each other in a particular way. The positions where they sat depended on the rank of the person or the spirit.

All participants, except for the chair, sit with stretching out their legs. This way of sitting is called “*kutambarara*”. It is the politest way of sitting. The chief lies on his face. Men clap hands (*kuhombera*), women ululate (*kupururudza*) and *nyamai* (translator) starts greetings. These behaviors show respect for superior or senior people.

Nyamai started greetings as follows.

men: (claping hands together)
women: urrrrrrrrrr...
nyamai: *Zvitereerwe muzunguwe. Sekuru Chitsa, hanzi naMukombwe, kwadzisai zvenyu.*
(Listen to the voice of the spirit.
The medium of Chitsachegore, Mukombwe told you to greet her)
Chitsachegore: *Ndauya Mukombwe.*
(I came here (Masasa shrine) well, Mukombwe)
nyamai: *Hanzi naSekuru Chitsa, “Ndauya mukombwe”.*

(The medium of Chitsa said “I came here well”, Mukombwe)

women: urrrrrrrrr...

nyamai: *Zvitereerwe muzunguwe, Sekuru Musanyange, hanzi naMukombwe, kwadzisai zvenyu.*

(Listen to the voice of the spirit, the medium of Musanyange, Mukombwe told you to greet her)

Musanyange: *Ndauya Mukombwe.*

(I came here well, Mukombwe)

nyamai: *Hanzi naSekuru Musanyange, “Ndauya mukombwe”.*

(The medium of Musanyange said “I came here well”, Mukombwe)

women: urrrrrrrrr...

Medium of Biri NaGanire started greeting with the second biggest spirit medium, Chitsachegore. Greetings were proceeded by counter clockwise. Every conversation was repeated by *nyamai*. No one was allowed to talk with and look at Biri NaGanire directly. There was a board in front of Biri NaGanire. It was for hiding her face. Biri NaGanire greeted with all of spirit mediums and the chief who represented all ordinary participants.

After the greetings, participants, except for Biri NaGanire, went out of the shrine. *Mbira* players played a song called “Kariga Mombe”. Spirit mediums and participants made a line. The medium of Musanyange led the line to the place called “*rushanga*”.

There was a *Muhacha* tree (*Parinari curatellifolia*) at *rushanga*. The tree was thought to be “the tree of ancestors”. The tree was roped. People surrounded the tree. *Nyamai* talked something to the tree and poured beer of finger millet. Then mediums and other participants drank the beer. This was the ritual to inform all spirits in the air that “we are opening the rain

making ceremony”. After finishing the beer, they went back to the shrine. They reported to Biri NaGanire that they poured beer and talked at *rushanga*.

After the first ritual at *rushanga*, people were relaxing around the shrine. Some were drinking beer, talking, or eating something. The second ritual on the first day started after the sun set. After the sun set, *nyamai* called people, “*Maswero, maswero, maswero, ngatipinde mukati!*” (“*Maswero, maswero, maswero*, let us enter the shrine”). “*Maswero*” is “evening worship”. The word “*maswero*” is derived from a verb, “*-swera*” (spending a day).

After *nyamai*’s calling, spirit mediums entered the shrine. Then *mbira* players entered as well and started playing *mbira*. Finally ordinary participants entered the shrine while singing *ngondo*. People and spirit mediums sang *ngondo* on one side of shrine and *mbira* players played the *mbira* on the other side of the shrine. Two music, *mbira* and *ngondo*, were played at the same time in the different melody, lyrics, and rhythm. The two kinds of music made chaos of sound.

Spirit possessions occurred during the chaos of sounds. That was Machengo who showed the sign of possession. She started gasping such as “a, ahhh”, then other mediums reacted by gasping and trembling. Mediums took off their clothes and wore black or white clothes, some mediums wore crown (*ngundu*) and took ritual axe (*gano*) or stick (*tsvinmbo*). Each spirit had its own costume. People knew which spirit would come looking at their costume. Biri NaGanire wore black cloth and cap. They knew that the spirit was Ganire. They were going to spend a week as the ancestors.

Spirit mediums, except for Ganire, crawled and went forward to the centre of the shrine to

dance with *ngondo*. When spirits (mediums) were satisfied with dancing and singing, they sat down around the center pole. They started greetings in the same way as noon greetings. But mediums lost language. Their greetings were accompanied with roaring. After greetings, they enjoyed the *mbira* music until they got tired. Mr. Zinyama said that if mediums wanted, they play *mbira* until the dawn.

3. 3 The Second Day (15th, Thu. September, 2011)

The second day, *mbira* players got up at 4-5 a.m. They entered the shrine and started playing *mbira*. Outside, it was still dark. They played songs until the dawn. At the time when sunlight got into the shrine through the gaps of grass roof, *nyamai* called people, “*Mamuko, mamuko, mamuko*”. “*Mamuko*” is morning worship.

People made a line outside the shrine and everyman held a common stick which people picked in a bush or broke branches of some trees. Then they sang *ngondo*. The stick represented a spear or club for the war or hunting. They sang as follows.

Tora uta wangu ndoda kwenda

(Take my bow, I want to go now)

Dzinoruma

(They bite)

Nyuchi dzinoruma

(Bees bite)

Dzinoruma

(They bite)

Participants walked around the space in front of the shrine and entered the shrine singing *ngondo*. When they entered the shrine, *mbira* players did not stop playing the *mbira*. Spirit

mediums also sang and danced with *ngondo*. After ten to twenty minutes of *ngondo* singing, spirit mediums and other participants sat down and *nyamai* started greetings while *mbira* was still ringing.

After greetings, *mbira* players stopped playing. Then people started discussing. There were three subjects. (1) Which sheep and cattle to use at the ceremony (2) The cause of sickness of the medium of Biri NaGanire (3) Pilgrimage to Chinoyi.

(1) The medium of Biri NaGanire has sheep and cattle. Her livestock is used for rituals. She doesn't take care of her livestock. Her livestock is taken care of by some Nyandoro people. For example, Mr. Zinyama's children are taking care of medium's cows. They discuss and decide which cattle and sheep to use. After discussing, decided person goes to the place where someone is taking care of medium's livestock.

(2) In 2010 the medium of Biri NaGanire fell down because of the serious sickness. It was rumored that the medium died at once. Then Musanyange cured the sickness. The brother of the medium was doubted as the suspect. When medium and the believer went to Chinoyi to pilgrim, her brother gave her a fruit called “*damba*”. After eating the fruits, the medium started feeling bad, so people thought that the brother put poison in the fruits. At the ritual, people and spirit mediums interrogated the suspected man.

(3) Spirit mediums and the believers were planning to go to Chinoyi to solve some problems. In Chinoyi there is a sacred place called “*Chirorodziva*”. This place is famous as “*Chinoyi Caves*”. I don't know why, but this place is thought of spiritual place. They wanted to go there for two reasons. One is to cure the medium of Biri NaGanire. I guess they hold a

ritual for treatment of Biri NaGanire. The other reason is to set Chitsachegore's spirit. The medium of Chitsachegore is not possessed well. So they want to solve those problems.

After mamuko ritual, we were given food. Spirit mediums were given soft porridge of milled finger millet. They ate it with wooden dish and wooden spoon. They were allowed to eat only traditional food in the traditional way. Ordinary participants ate bread and had a cup of tea.

In the noonday they had nothing to do. They spent a day drinking beer and talking. Mediums enjoyed drinking and talking with other participants. In the Shona society spirit mediums were sacred, but they were spirit of forefathers. People didn't feel nervous talking with them.

In the evening at 4 to 5 p.m. nyamai called people "Maswero, maswero, maswero, ngatipinde mukati" (Maswero, maswero, maswero, let's get inside the shrine). Spirit mediums entered the shrine. mbira players entered the shrine and started playing the mbira. Other participants entered the shrine singing ngondo. They greeted in the same way as during mamuko ritual.

The chief introduced new visitor to Ganire. Then they discussed again about three issues for a short while. After the greetings and short discussion, mbira players played mbira for hours. Spirit mediums and ordinary participants danced with the mbira music. I also played mbira with other mbira players. When we were playing mbira deep in the night, Mr. Murevanhema, an mbira player, told me "Look at ambuya (the medium of Biri NaGanire), she was sleeping but now wake up, because she is enjoying our music. She is the muridzi (the owner) of the mbira music". mbira players check the authenticity of their music watching the reaction of Biri

NaGanire. They think the mbira music is owned by Biri NaGanire. If they play well, Biri NaGanire enjoys. The music which entertains Biri NaGanire is the very traditional mbira music.

3.4 The Third Day (16th, Fri. Sep, 2011)

Mamuko and Maswero ritual were repeated until the end of the rain making ceremony. The third day started with mbira playing early in the morning. After the sun rise, they had mamuko ritual. On that day, they discussed about the same topic as the day before. Maswero ritual was held in the evening.

3.5 The Fourth Day (17th, Sat. Sep, 2011)

Mbira players start playing mbira before sunrise. After the dawn they held mamuko ritual. They decided that Mr. Zinyama, the chair of ceremony, went to Ringa village to take the cattle of Biri NaGanire. Zinyama's sons living in Ringa were taking care of the cattle.

After Zinyama left Masasa, the maswero ritual was done without the master of ceremony. Mr Zinyama didn't come back on schedule.

3.6 The Fifth Day (18th, Sun, Sep, 2011)

Zinyama was absent, so other mbira players, Murevanhema, Kanengoni and I played mbira early in the morning. Mamuko ritual was led by Biri NaGanire's nyamai.

Mr. Zinyama came back after the maswero greetings. He brought two cows. Two heads of sheep were taken from Masasa village. Zinyama reported the process of bringing the cow in the shrine.

3.7 The Sixth Day (19th, Mon. Sep, 2011)

They organized the rain making ceremony after the *mamuko* ritual. *mbira* players started playing *mbira*. Musanyange wore blue cloth. Then Biri NaGanire's *nyamai* brought a sheep into the shrine. Musanyange took it to the center of the shrine. Musanyange touched the sheep and spoke some sentences. Men clapped hands and women ululated. I did not hear Musanyange's words because of the sound of *mbira*, shakers, hand clapping and ululation. *Nyamai* took the sheep outside after Musanyange spoke words. The sheep was not killed.

Nyamai brought another sheep into the shrine. Musanyange spoke some sentences in the same way while touching the sheep. This sheep was not killed as well.

These two sheep are messenger. Sheep (*hwai*) is called "bird of the heaven" (*shiri yedenga*). When people want to send message or wishes to the God, they send sheep to the sky. Musanyange's blue color cloth represents "sky blue". The words spoken by Musanyange are prayer to the God in the sky.

Each sheep has different message. The first sheep is called "*hwai yesuko*". This sheep is sent to cleanse (*kusuka*) Biri NaGanire's disease. Another sheep is sent to tell the God that they needed rain. They believe that messages are sent from people to the God through *madzitateguru*, *mhondoro*, and *mhepo*. Messages never be transmitted skipping any ancestors. It was unbelievable that it rained a bit in the night.

They killed a cow in the afternoon. The meat was distributed to the participants. Those who worked for the ritual received much meat than ordinary participants. The meat was not for spirit mediums but for people because spirit mediums

were not allowed to eat meat. The distribution of meat was controlled by *samusuwo*. Another cow was killed on the following day. *Samusuwo* had to keep the food not to be stolen and not to be poisoned. *Maswero* ritual was taking place regularly.

3.8 The Seventh Day (20th, Tue, Sep, 2011)

Mamuko and *maswero* were held. People concentrated on the discussion about pilgrimage to Chinoyi and sickness of Biri NaGanire. This discussion showed that the main problem of the Nyandoro clan was the health of Biri NaGanire's medium. After the discussion, Ganire's medium said that she would go back to the spiritual world (*mhepo*) on the following day

3.9 The Eighth Day (21st, Wed, Sep, 2011)

Ganire said "I am going" at *mamuko* ritual. People sang *ngondo* and played *mbira*. Then Ganire shook the body and left the medium. Other spirits and people went out of the shrine and walked around the shrine. Musanyange led other participants and he waved his hand to the East, the North and the West in farewell. This was spirits' good-bye to this world (*pasi*). Mediums went towards *rushanga* (East). People were not allowed to see where they were going. People bended knees and look down not to see the direction where mediums were going. After some minutes, mediums came back without wearing black and white clothes. Ancestors were gone. Mediums were back as human beings. They entered the shrine again. Ritual finished when they reported the end of ritual to the medium of Biri NaGanire.

Mediums were possessed for seven days and lost their conscious by the way; they did not

have memories during a week. Their conscious as human beings was out of their body. Ordinary participants greeted with mediums, "How are you? It is long time to see you." Mediums asked people what happened in the week.

People went back home on the day or the following day. I heard that mediums went to pilgrimage to Chinoyi after holding a small ritual at Musanyange's shrine in Murehwa.

Conclusion

The rain making ceremony has two factors. One is religious factor. Most people are farmers in the Nyandoro area. Their subsistence is from agriculture. They pray for good rain, not too much and not too little. People cannot control rain, so to hold the ceremony and pray for rain become the only way to have good harvest. This ritual is led by Nyandoro people, but for all people living and farming in the Nyandoro area. I can say Biri NaGanire is the regional spirit which is prayed by any peoples.

Another factor of the rain making ceremony is the politics of the Nyandoro clan. During seven days of the ritual, they hold only one special rite for praying rain which Musanyange uses sheep. Other days and time is spent for discussing some issues concerning about the Nyandoro clan, for example, illness of the medium of Biri NaGanire and pilgrimage to Chinoyi. Of course, the life of the medium of Biri NaGanire is important for any people in the Nyandoro area, but who follow mediums to go to pilgrimage is mainly the Nyandoro people. These issues are for the limited people. Biri NaGanire is not only the rain maker but also the traditional leader of the Nyandoro clan. Discussions held during the rain making ceremony seemed to be local politics in the clan level. The way they discuss shows their

traditional parliament. The king is Biri NaGanire. The chair is the chief, the scribe is *nyamai*, and members of parliament are spirit mediums. Before the colonization, chiefs might be appointed in the rituals such as rain making ceremony.

Comparing the two factors, rain making is for unlimited people while discussions are for the Nyandoro people. Biri NaGanire has two aspects, the spirit for the Nyandoro people and the spirit for all people. I think that Biri NaGanire tried to adjust her function to match the situation of post independence Zimbabwe.

At the independence of Zimbabwe, what was important was "reconciliation". People live together in a country but they had fought against each other supporting different parties. In 1982, two years after the independence, Biri NaGanire possessed a Nyandoro woman in a resettlement area. The woman was a Christian. In the resettlement area all people started new life with unknown neighbors. People's beliefs were also different. Some believed in Jesus and the others believed ancestors or Islam. Biri NaGanire's possession at the church might unite people who came from different places and who had different beliefs. I can say that spirit possession in a resettlement area was "polarization of the ancestor worship". The appearance of Biri NaGanire made people unite through the cooperative work such as building the shrine, and holding rituals. Work for Biri NaGanire was possible because of the cooperation with new neighbors. Biri NaGanire distributed to start new life of resettlement area.

Today, over thirty years after the independence of Zimbabwe, is her work finishing? Nowadays the medium of Biri NaGanire is sick. This situation seemed to be an urgent need for a new leader who matches with today's Zimbabwe.

End Notes

- ⁱ Lan, David. (1985) *Guns & Rain Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*. University of California Press.
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- Beach, D. N. (1979) 'Chimurenga': *The Shona Rising of 1896-97*. The Journal of African History, Vol.20, No.3, pp.395-420
- ⁱⁱ Lan 1985: 136-137
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bourdillon, M. *The Shona Peoples*. (1987. p.58)
- ^{iv} Brouner, S. *A Grammatical Sketch of Shona*. (1995. p.7)
- ^v Gelfand, M, "The Shona Religion", *Zambezia*, vol.1, No.1, 1969
- ^{vi} Interview with Samson Bvure, in Seke district
- ^{vii} Some other people say that the spirit called "Chaminuka" inspired people to make *mbira*.