

## **Shona Traditional Gatherings**

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[Go directly to the start of the text.](#)

### **Abstract**

This report is about events at Shona Traditional Gatherings as revealed in a study carried out between 2005 and 2009 in Manicaland, Mashonaland Central, and Mashonaland East Provinces of Zimbabwe. People take part in such gatherings mostly in response to problems emanating from mishandling the cow/heifer given to a mother-in-law by her son-in-law (*mombe yehumayi*) or avenging spirits, and *chenura* (soul cleansing). The problems of avenging spirits emanate from murder or ill-treatment of people. Upon death the immediate ancestors present the soul to clan spirits who in turn alert the spirits of *Gombwe*, who contacts the Deity, and judgment commences. A person who has committed serious crimes is sent back to effect restitution through the involvement of living relatives. *Chenura*, a culmination of events to establish cause of death and prevent similar deaths, to rectify whatever may be out of place, to settle debts and credits, and to destroy the unwanted (for example goblins), must be held at least a year after the death of an adult. The end of these events is marked by dedicating beer to spirits and consuming it amid merrymaking into the following morning. The soul is symbolically taken home from the grave, then the property and responsibilities of the deceased are distributed. The celebrations are punctuated by spirits possessing their mediums and advising as needed. Spirits use gatherings to rectify whatever might have gone wrong, and remind people of their obligations. People attend gatherings to enjoy themselves amid fellowshiping with ancestors as opposed to worshipping ancestors. Events at Shona gatherings cannot be generalized because they depend on the problems at hand.

### **Les rassemblements traditionnels Shona**

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### **Résumé**

Cet exposé traite des événements qui surviennent lors des rassemblements traditionnels Shona, tels que révélés par une étude entreprise entre 2005 et 2009 au Manicaland, dans les provinces centrale et de l'est du Mashonaland au Zimbabwe. La plupart du temps, les gens prennent part à ces assemblés le font en réponse aux problèmes résultants de la mauvaise gestion d'une vache ou une génisse donnée à une belle-mère par son beau-fils (*mombe yehumayi*) ou pour venger les esprits, et pour le *chenura* (purification de l'âme). Le problème de venger les esprits proviennent de meurtres ou de mauvais traitements des gens. A la mort, les ancêtres immédiats présentent l'âme aux esprits du clan qui alors alertent les esprits de *Gombwe*, qui à leur tour contactent Dieu, et le jugement commence alors. Une personne ayant commis des crimes sérieux est renvoyée pour qu'elle puisse restituer par l'intermédiaire des parents qui sont toujours en vie. *Chenura*, une culmination d'événements pour établir la cause de la mort et prévenir des décès

similaires, rectifier ce qui n'est pas à sa place, régler des dettes et crédits, et détruire ce qui est indésirable (par exemple les gnomes), doit être organisé au moins une année après la mort d'un adulte. La fin de ces événements est soulignée par une offrande de bière aux esprits et en la consommant également tout en célébrant jusqu'au petit matin. L'âme est symboliquement ramenée de la tombe à la maison, et alors, les possessions et les responsabilités du défunt sont distribuées. Les célébrations sont ponctuées par des esprits qui possèdent leurs médiums et les conseillent si nécessaire. Les esprits utilisent ces rassemblements pour rectifier ce qui peut avoir mal tourné, et pour rappeler aux gens qu'ils ont des obligations. Les gens participent à ces rassemblements pour s'amuser à travers la socialisation avec leurs ancêtres, ce qui est différent du culte des ancêtres. Les événements aux rassemblements Shona ne peuvent pas être généralisés car ils dépendent du problème du moment.

### **Reuniones de la Tradición Shona**

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#### **Resumen**

Este reporte es acerca de eventos en las Reuniones de la Tradición Shona, tal como fueron revelados en un estudio llevado a cabo entre el 2005 y 2009 en Manicaland, Mashonaland Central y Mashonaland de la provincia del Este de Zimbabue. Las personas toman parte en estas reuniones generalmente en respuesta para los problemas emanados de la mala administración de vaquillas (ganado bovino) regaladas a la suegra por el yerno (mombe yehumayi) o espíritus vengadores, y chenura (limpieza del alma). El problema de los espíritus vengadores emana de asesinato o la curación de enfermedades de personas, en cuando sucede la muerte los pasados ancestrales del difunto presentan su alma a un clan de espíritus que en respuesta alertan los espíritus de Gombwe, los cuales contactan a Dios, y el juicio comienza. Una persona que ha cometido crímenes serios es enviada de regreso a pagar restitución con la ayuda de los parientes que ahun viven. Chenura, una culminación de eventos para establecer la causa de la muerte y prevenir muertes similares, para rectificar cualquier cosa que este fuera de lo normal, para ajustar cuentas pendientes y créditos, y destruir lo desagradable (por ejemplo goblins), tiene que llevarse a cabo un año después de la muerte de un adulto. El final de este evento esta marcado por una dedicación de cerveza para los espíritus y consumirla acompañada de festejos que se extienden hasta la próxima mañana siguiente. El alma es simbólicamente llevada a casa desde la tumba, después la propiedad y responsabilidades de difunto son distribuidas. Las celebraciones son puntualizadas por espíritus poseedores de sus médiums los cuales dan el asesoramiento necesario. Los espíritus utilizan las reuniones para rectificar cualquier cosa que haya ido mal y también recordar a las personas de sus obligaciones. Las personas participan en las reuniones para entrar en comunión ellos mismo con sus ancestros lo cual es muy diferente de la adoración sus ancestros. Los eventos en las reuniones de Shona no pueden ser generalizados porque ellos dependen de los problemas que se presentan en ese momento.

### **Encontros Tradicionais Shona / Encontros da Tradição Shona**

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## **Abstrato**

Esse informe é referente aos eventos sucedidos em Encontros da Tradição Shona, revelados em um estudo conduzido entre 2005 e 2009 nas Províncias de Manicaland, Mashonaland Central e Mashonaland no Leste de Zimbabue. As pessoas participam de tais encontros principalmente em resposta a problemas surgidos do mal uso da vaca/novilho dado a uma sogra pelo seu genro (*mombe yehumayi*) ou da vingança de espíritos, e *chenura* (purificação da alma). Os problemas de espíritos vingativos emanam do assassinato ou maltrato de pessoas. Após a morte, os antepassados imediatos apresentam a alma ao clã de espíritos que em contrapartida alertam os espíritos de *Gombwe*, sendo que os últimos contatam Deus e o julgamento então tem início. Uma pessoa que tenha cometido crimes graves é enviada de volta para efetuar a restituição através do envolvimento de parentes vivos. *Chenura*, a culminação de eventos para estabelecer a causa da morte e prevenir mortes similares, retificar o que quer que esteja fora de lugar, negociar dívidas e créditos, e para destruir os indesejáveis (por exemplo, goblins), necessitam ser instaurados pelo menos um ano após a morte de um adulto. O fim de todos esses eventos é marcado pela oferenda de cerveja aos espíritos e seu consumo em espírito de festa até a manhã do dia seguinte. A alma é simbolicamente levada do túmulo até sua casa, onde a propriedade e as responsabilidades do falecido são então distribuídos. As celebrações são marcadas pela possessão de mediums pelos seus espíritos e o aconselhamento segundo requerido. Espíritos usam encontros para retificar tudo o que tenha dado errado, e lembrar as pessoas de suas obrigações. As pessoas participam de encontros para se divertir em meio a confraternização com antepassados, diferente do culto aos antepassados. Os eventos nos encontros de Shona não podem ser generalizados porque dependem das circunstâncias atuais.

## **Shona Traditionelle Versammlungen**

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### **Zusammenfassung**

Dieser Bericht handelt von Ereignissen in Shona traditionellen Versammlungen wie sie durch eine Untersuchung zwischen 2005 und 2009 im Manicaland, und in den Mashonaland-Ost Provinzen in Zimbabwe zum Vorschein kamen. Das Volk nimmt Teil an solchen Versammlungen, groesstenteils um Probleme zu eroern die durch die Mishadlung einer Kuh entstanden sind, die der Schwiegermutter vom Schwiegersohn (*Mombe yehumayi*) gegeben wurden, oder durch rachebewegte Geister, und *Chenura* (Seelenreinigung). Die Probleme mit den raechenden Geistern stammen von Morden oder Misshandlungen von Menschen. Nach Todesfaellen praesentieren die nahverwandten Ahnen die Seele den Stammesgeistern, welche dann wiederum die Geister des *Gombwe* angehen, der sich dann an Gott wendet wonach das Gericht beginnt. Eine Person die ein schweres Verbrechen begangen hat, wird zurueck geschickt um durch Beteiligung der lebenden Verwandten Entschaedigung zu verschaffen. *Chenura*, ein Hoehepunkt der Geschehnisse die zur Ermittlung der Todesursache fuehren und zur Verhinderung aehnlicher Tode leiten, sowie zur Berichtigung von moeglichen Misstaenden, zur

Begleichung von Schulden und Krediten, und zur Beseitigung Unerwünschter (zum Beispiel Kobolde), muss frühestens ein Jahr nach dem Tode des Erwachsenen gehalten werden. Am Ende dieses Prozesses wird dann den Geistern Bier gewidmet, das dann konsumiert wird, während bis in den nächsten Morgen gefeiert wird. Dann wird die Seele symbolisch vom Grabe nach Hause gebracht. Anschließend werden die Besitzungen und Verantwortlichkeiten des Verstorbenen aufgeteilt. Die Festlichkeiten werden unterbrochen von Geistern die von ihren Medien Besitz ergreifen und sie womöglich beraten. Die Geister benutzen diese Versammlungen um das zu berichtigen was fehl geschlagen ist und um die Leute an ihre Pflichten zu erinnern. Das Volk wohnt den Versammlungen bei um sich mit den Ahnen auf gleicher Ebene zu amüsieren und nicht um ihnen zu huldigen. Shona Veranstaltungen können nicht verallgemeinert werden denn sie sind von der Art des Anlasses abhängig.

**Keywords** avenging spirits; cleansing the soul; fellowshiping; spirit medium; traditional gathering

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#### **Introduction**

The spirit mediums (those who are possessed by ancestral, whether they be ancestral, or angelic or mashave spirits), even in their claims of descent from Egypt, do not mention existence of polytheism at any time in the history of Shona tradition. They always talk of God (*Mwari*) in monotheism rather than polytheism as would be expected if they worshiped objects or ancestors. Even modern organizations do not hide the existence of polytheism in some parts of their past.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Shona tradition, even illiterate people talk of *Mwari nevadzimu* (translated “God and ancestral spirits”) and never talk of (Gods and ancestral spirits). In other ancient traditions, different phenomena had different Deities. Egyptians had Gods and Goddesses of Wisdom, of Peace, of War, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> The Shona did not have Gods but angels of these principles. To the spirit mediums, for example, the spirit Chaminuka was the angel of Wisdom and the spirit Nehanda was the Angel of Peace and War.<sup>3</sup> In fact, some people refer to the Deity as *Mudzimu mukuru* (Great Ancestral Spirit). This implies that the word *Mwari* cannot have originated from Christian influence since Christians do not acknowledge the existence of *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits). It also implies that the Shona have always associated the divine with ancestral spirits. Some spirit mediums go to the extent of viewing Christ as a spirit of the level of *Gombwe*. They say that the spirit Christ is the same as the spirit Chaminuka, and add that at one stage, Christ traveled down Africa as far as Malawi where Chaminuka told him not to go further down because he, Chaminuka, was already covering the area. Thus, from the accounts given by spirit mediums, Shona tradition is different from other traditions described on the continent. The *maGombwe* say that the spirits know no boundaries. The same spirit can be in many places, but known by different names depending on the languages spoken.<sup>4</sup> Shona Tradition is complex. This paper is restricted to what happens in connection with Shona Traditional Gatherings.

According to Shona Tradition, the one who was wronged did not necessarily sin but he or she must be compensated for being wronged before he or she can join the ancestors.<sup>5</sup> Even the soul of a toddler must get compensation to be able to join the ancestors. The toddler who may have been killed or may have been ill treated must go back to the killer or the perpetrator of the ill treatment to seek compensation. It comes in the form of *ngozi* (vengeance) which will cause suffering, usually in the form of illness or misfortune on the perpetrator or the perpetrator's family. No amount or type of medicine will cure the illness or end the misfortunes. The only cure or corrective step is compensation. This is different from the way foreigners and Christians treat such cases. Western societies will try and send the guilty to prison and the matter usually ends there.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally the aggrieved parties take the matter to civil courts for compensation. In the Shona tradition, the aggrieved must be compensated or *ngozi* will be devastating. Christians fight for the cause of the dead. However, in Shona tradition the living should not waste time fighting for the cause of the dead since the dead can get even through *ngozi*. All that the living can do for the dead is help them clear the way for *ngozi*. Shona tradition believes that the spirit of the dead will not be able to fight for compensation if it is not clean (referring to the state of holiness of the person, before or after death). All committed crimes must be compensated against before the soul joins the ancestral spirits. It does not matter whether the perpetrator was jailed or not, restitution must be effected<sup>7</sup> since the victim does not benefit from the imprisonment of the perpetrator. The dead person causes his relatives to pay up, after which it may join the ancestral spirits. There it will be tasked to perform various duties as required in its new state. The spirits will be graded according to how the people lived on earth, particularly as regards their state of holiness before they died.<sup>8</sup> The ancestral spirits will then give them duties to:

1. Look after the well-being of the people who are still alive, by taking their requests through their own hierarchy, then through *maGombwe* to the divine.
2. Ensure that the living do things in a way that is pleasant to ancestral spirits and to the divine.
3. Take messages from the divine to people through *maGombwe* and ensure that people please the deity and live in harmony with each other.

### **Misunderstanding by foreign authors**

Foreign authors have often misrepresented information related to traditional activities in Zimbabwe. For example, Griffith and Savage state that the Johane Masowe religious group was founded because of economic and political reasons.<sup>9</sup> But eyewitnesses interviewed in the present study reveal that the organization was formed as a result of failure to find solace in the then existing religious organizations. They report that the founder, Shoniwa Masedza, joined a traditional group in Chiweshe in the hope of finding solutions to his health problems. Failure to solve his problems led him to break off and form his own organization which settled at Nyota, near Gweshe in Chiweshe, for a while.

Similarly, stating that “the ancestor cult is the dominant feature of Shona tradition...the remainder is consumed by the gathering, amid singing and dancing...”<sup>10</sup> does not do any

justice to what takes place at Shona religious gatherings. In fact, both the spirit mediums and members of the audience actively take part in the proceedings.

### **Research questions**

1. What happens at Shona religious gatherings?
2. Are rituals at such gatherings comparable with Christian rituals such as celebration of mass?
3. What are Shona religious views about life after death?

### **Methodology**

Twelve leading spirit mediums were purposely sampled based on their reputation and interviewed between 2005 and 2009 to collect data about Shona religious views and information about what happens at traditional gatherings in Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Manicaland, and Harare Provinces of Zimbabwe. Because of the delicate nature of the information sought, each spirit medium was interviewed, using the interview guide (Appendix 1), at least four times to ensure that data was properly documented and checked.

### **Results and discussion**

Failure to get recurring definite steps which are followed at such gatherings led to the interviews concentrating on two of the most commonly addressed problems in Shona life, *mombe yehumai* and *chenura*, as well as on traditional prayers.

#### ***Mombe yehumai***

This is a cow/heifer given to a mother-in-law by her son-in-law as thanks for bearing him a wife. The beast is given to the mother-in-law but its purpose is to cement the relationship between the family from which the mother-in-law came, her present family, and the marrying family. The purpose for which the beast is given is only achieved after the cow has been killed and enjoyed by all the parties who should enjoy it. It must be killed and enjoyed where the woman was born and raised and by rightful people, including her father. Both the woman and her mother, or their representatives in cases where one is dead, must take part. The rightful people are:

1. The mother of the woman or an authentic representative if the mother is dead.
2. The woman for whom the cow was given or her rightful representatives if she is dead.
3. The father of the woman for whom the cow is paid or his representatives if he cannot be present.
4. The husband giving the cow or his representatives if he cannot be present.

The cow must be killed by the paying husband or his representative who must be a close relative, including his son. If the representative is unable to slaughter the cow, say in the

case of a toddler, the toddler symbolically kills the animal by being assisted to raise the object being used to slaughter it, and on-lookers will then kill the animal. All requirements for the success of the ceremony must be adhered to for the ceremony to succeed. If this is not done properly, the cow will die, people will eat and enjoy themselves, but the required purpose will not be realized.

One of the major requirements for the success of the ceremony is that it must be successfully performed for the mother of the woman in question and all those in her maternal lineage. Spirit mediums lament that “*Mombe yehumai*” has given problems to most families. When one queries about this cow all concerned claim to have done all the required things properly. However, they fail to realize that it must be done properly without resorting to unnecessary shortcuts. If the cow dies before the ceremony is held, then it will be as if the cow was never given.

The problems that may arise include the failure of offspring to do well in life. The offspring may fail to get decent professions or when they have decent professions, they may fail to stay employed. Both daughters and sons may experience problems in marriages and there may be deaths of daughters’ children and daughters’ families may suffer misfortunes which may be difficult to comprehend and thus pinpoint sources. Most spirit mediums fail to give meaningful assistance. Even when the mediums point out that the problems emanate from *mombe yehumai* the victims fail to appreciate how a cow they gave up could still give them problems. When they finally agree to settle the matter, they meet with problems from the people who received the cow. A serious problem about the Shona religious issues is that all people who should be involved in family solutions must concur and be present for solutions to be acceptable to the spirits. Spirits want all people to concur and unite. Such demands for unity by spirits may hamper solutions to problems. Many thorny issues never get settled because of this, but they also ensure that people do not act behind each other’s backs. The spirits will agree to a solution if all those affected are party to the proceedings.

### ***N’gozi* (spirit of vengeance)**

Consider the case of a great, great grandfather who was party to a crime, such as murder, who now needs the help of the living to appease the spirits. All the offspring of the lineage of this guilt ancestor must take part in the appeasement. If any of the off-spring decline to take part in the appeasement, the spirit of vengeance will not cease. If the appeasement is tried without the involvement of some of the members of the extended family, problems with the avenging spirit will not cease. Problems may become better but they will not disappear until all come together and solve the problem together. Many are reported to have been devoured by deaths related to these avenging spirits. It is generally believed that most families suffer from the effects of avenging spirits due to:

1. Murder or ill-treatment of known and unknown victims which took place many, many years ago.
2. Murder of workers in families especially the rich ones.
3. Deaths of workers before they were properly paid for their work.

4. Deaths of creditors before they were paid their dues and the matter was never settled with the survivors.

The spirits of all these hound paternal relatives left behind by the perpetrators. These have to unite and appease the spirits of the victims. It is also believed that some of those who refuse to unite against vengeance might do so because they benefit from/and direct the avenging spirits against their relatives for their own selfish ends. Hence, involving all parties in the attempts to solve the problems sometimes fails and people continue to suffer. Eventually, even those who do not want to see the problems solved suffer as well and a chance to solve the problem may thus avail itself. Such problems are a lot worse in chieftainship families. It is believed that nobody in such families really prospers as much as they should. Things just fail to work. Businesses just go broke. Jobs are lost. Marriages break down. Children become unruly and problems continue.

### **Squandering Mothers' Property**

Problems with avenging spirits will certainly come the way of a child who squanders his or her mother's property, and are stoppable only by restitution and a heavy fine. Nobody replaces what you lose prior to restitution; therefore, it is advisable to keep out of the problems in the first place. The suffering associated with this type of problem is usually unbearable, and the deaths associated with this type of problem are painful. The mother's property usually associated with this emanate from *mombe yehumai*. The mother receives her *mombe* (cow) after the marriage of her daughter. She keeps it and it bears offspring. Eventually she kills the cow and keeps the offspring. The cows increase in number. She consumes some and she keeps some. Eventually she gives them to one of her sons, usually the oldest son, for safe keeping. Problems arise when she dies and leaves behind some of the animals and the son commits them to personal use. His health suffers or other types of misfortune come his way. If he delays rectifying the situation, his children or he himself might die. The matter still has to be rectified even after his death. His children might continue suffering until the matter has been corrected. No type of medication or prayer rectifies the situation. In reality, what one gets when enjoying the proceeds of the mother's property is nothing compared to what one ends up losing. It is always better to stay away from a mother's property and hand over everything to her relatives who are the rightful people to handle such things. The problems do not worry the sons only; even daughters who so misuse their mother's property will suffer.

Mothers are true relatives when they are still alive, but at times behave as total strangers when they have died. Their spirits will gang up with the spirits of their own ancestors. Notwithstanding, they still look after the offspring they left behind and they should, thus, not be ignored. Other problems associated with mothers emanate from ill-treating the mother or failure to cater for her needs. Problems associated with the father are usually restricted to how the sons use the father's property after his death. Issues such as whether a particular son took more than his fair share of the father's property, how he used it, and how he treated other children usually arise and can be a source of considerable amounts of suffering. But *ngozi* from the father's side is not as devastating as that from the mother's side.



## *Chenura*

The living seriously start helping the dead about one year after death when they start looking around for information concerning how to go about assisting the soul to join the ancestral spirits as well as bring it back into the family so that it may concentrate on looking after the living family members. A ceremony known as *chenura* (cleansing the spirit) must be held. All debts, credits, and pending responsibilities of the departed person must be cleared in order for the ceremony to succeed. It is important to establish if all is clear for the success of the ceremony because a lot depends on it. It is believed that only those in the company of ancestral spirits will be happy and capable of properly looking after the needs of the living. Spirit mediums must be consulted to clear the way. If the mediums who are consulted detect that the state of the departed does not allow performance of the ceremony, they advise the relatives on what needs be done to correct the situation.

The public associates this with bringing the soul back into contact with the living. Spirit mediums refer to it as preparation for the soul to be in the state in which the ancestors and the Divine are (i.e., the state in which the soul is in perfect happiness). They say where ancestral spirits are, there is everything that anybody would desire. Christians call this Heaven. When the soul is in that state, it can then find happiness in looking after those who are still alive because ancestors and all other spirits enjoy communicating with the living.

Some people have associated such resemblances between (Shona tradition and Christianity) with the possibility of Christianity having permeated Shona Tradition. However, spirit mediums have different ideas. They argue that the similarities between their tradition and Christianity are the same similarities that exist between their tradition and the stories in the Old Testament. They believe that the Old Testament was based on their communication with the Deity when they were still in Egypt. They add that it was because of such communication and interaction with the Divine that the Egyptians were able to build the pyramids. Details of this are beyond the scope of this paper. There might be need to devote an entire paper to that argument.

The ceremony itself does not cleanse the soul, but what is done in the preparation for the ceremony and after the ceremony, as well as some of the activities during and around the ceremony, will cleanse the soul. The ceremony itself is for public consumption and the real work is done behind the scenes. Different people attend the ceremony for different reasons including drinking, eating, and merrymaking. There are some who attend in order to see how other people do it in case they might need to hold their own. There are still others who attend the gathering to have a chance to consult with spirit mediums in order to have their personal problems solved. The guests are relatives, neighbors and the unknown, i.e., strangers. Spirit mediums repeatedly stated that spirits enjoy seeing people eat, drink, and being merry in their name; so does the Deity. The ceremony must succeed because if it is not successful it will have to be repeated at a later date. This is a thing

anybody would like to do once and forget about because the processes around the ceremony are time consuming and expensive.

There are ways to find out if the ceremony has been successful. The proliferation of happiness and the absence of fighting are some of the signs that indicate the success of the ceremony. Ancestors enjoy watching people happy and in harmony with one another. Anything that threatens happiness destroys the chances of success of whatever is being done in the name of and for ancestors.

### ***Activities around Chenura***

The outsider only witnesses the singing, clapping, ululating, drumming and dancing. He or she will have no idea about the precautions taken in the preparation of the food, the roles of the different people who manage affairs of the gathering, and the significance of the different steps witnessed in such occasions.

### ***Steps involved in Chenura***

The first step in the preparation of *chenura* is to establish the cause of death of the person for whom the ceremony is being organized and what needs be done to prevent other people from dying the same way. This may have been done at the time of the death of the person but it must be revisited at least to check if what was prescribed or suggested at that time was done properly and the problems were rectified. It also gives people a chance to go deep into the solution of the problems surrounding the death of the person whose *chenura* is being held. Besides, mediums must be consulted again in preparation for the day of the ceremony so as to be advised on what to do or not to do and to be advised about which creditors need to be paid and what debts need to be collected so that everything will be in place on the day of the ceremony.

### ***Specific events that must be performed***

A sample of the *rapoko*, which will be used for beer-brewing, is dedicated to the spirits and added to the remaining property of the deceased and the day for the ceremony is announced. The beer brewers (women elders, after menopause, assisted by pre-pubescent girls) prepare the *rapoko* for fermentation, drying and grinding. On the final day of brewing, portions are dedicated to the different ancestral spirits (including *Tategurus* and *Sekurus*; *Machinda*; *Madzimbuya*; *Madzitete*; and *Madzitezvara* ), and *Mashave*.<sup>11</sup> Some people go and clean the grave and around the grave before a delegation brings the beer and pour libations ceremoniously on to the grave.

The night of this day will be spent drinking beer, singing, and dancing. The beer dedicated to the spirits will be drunk by their representatives among the gathering. What is dedicated to *Tategurus* and *Sekurus* will be drunk by clan elders. What is given to *Machinda* will be drunk by the male youth of the clan. What is dedicated to *Madzimbuya* will be drunk by women married into the clan. What is given to *Madzitete* will be drunk by female offspring of the clan. What is dedicated to *Mashave* will be drunk by neighbors

and visitors. Thus, all the spirits will have representatives among the living. Under normal circumstances, there will be enough beer for all present.

Early the following morning, people go to the grave and symbolically take the spirit home amid singing, ululating, and dancing. The property of the deceased and the remains of his or her responsibilities such as allocation of who looks after the family of the deceased are finally distributed.

A beast will be slaughtered to feed the gathering and food will be prepared. The purpose of the beast is simply to feed the people who have gathered for the purpose of *chenura*. It is not given to the deceased. The gathering continues drinking, singing, dancing, and merrymaking throughout the day. In the process, different spirits will possess and talk through their mediums and explain what they have come for. Their reasons usually include one, or some, or all of the following:

1. To show their pleasure or displeasure about the gathering and how the proceedings are being conducted.
2. To warn people of possible dangers during the gathering or later.
3. To foretell other possible events that must be attended to.
4. To show or talk with displeasure about any aspect of the proceedings.
5. To predict possible outcomes of the events of the gathering.
6. Just to reveal that they are present.

Spirit mediums believe that physical health and mental health cannot be separated. Healing involves looking at the disease and its cause, then finding a cure. They say that people are given laws and those who follow the laws will be served. They also believe that peoples' troubles stem from lack of knowledge of how the Divine wants them to live, and failure of people to keep Divine laws. They add that *maGombwe* have been giving out divine messages to people, but people do not keep records with which they could consult for solutions in times of need. They also warn against ignoring *mashave* and against some peoples' belief about *mashave* as wandering spirits of strangers. Spirits of strangers do not behave as *mashave*, but they are more like *ngozi*. Similarly, *majukwa* are not the "spirits of ancestors that no one remembers and honors any more," but these belong to the class of *maGombwe*, messengers of the Divine.<sup>12</sup>

*Mashave* also reveal themselves for the same reasons as described above for the ancestral spirits. *Mashave*, *midzimu*, and *maGombwe* only show anger when there is reason to do so, like showing displeasure about some activity by the people. They use the occasion to teach people what they should do to be at peace with spirits and Divinity. Spirits are pleased to see people gather in honor of them and the Divine. *Mashave* are also happy for the same purpose and they will reward the participants.

*Mashave* are also responsible for the special attributes which cause people to perform different activities in their lives. There are *mashave* for hunting, farming, trading, manufacturing, entertaining, singing, drumming, narrating stories, teaching, leading others, performance of medical activities, praying and causing others to pray, food

gathering, food processing, food preparation and preservation, and so on. At these gatherings, different *mashave* will possess their mediums and display their achievements, for the purpose of entertaining, teaching audiences about their capabilities, showing off, and so on. They also foretell events or how to prevent events from occurring, doing so for the prosperity and preservation of humankind; to prevent illness, disasters, plagues, wars, punishment; to teach people what they can do to please the Divine and ancestral spirits; to get rid of bad behavior such as witchcraft, prostitution, murder, theft, robbery; to prevent attack by pests, to prevent drought, floods, wars, and attack by enemies and wild animals; to prevent destruction of crops and property by wild animals.

Ancestral spirits and *mashave* behave differently at traditional gatherings.

1. Ancestral spirits and *mashave* possess the same medium on different occasions.
2. Ancestral spirits point out things and events; *mashave* explain in greater detail. *Mashave* may be viewed as the “whipping boys” of ancestral spirits and *maGombwe*.
3. The ancestral spirit may introduce points; *mashave* take over and expound.
4. Different levels of spirits (including *mashave*) give each other the chance to partake in the proceedings of the gathering and show off their capabilities.

Each spirit will have its own *mashave* associated with it. There usually is the main spirit together with minor spirits associated with the main spirit possessing the medium. The medium will also have main *mashave* together with other *mashave* all living in harmony on the same medium. Then there will be minor spirits. A minor spirit on a medium may be equivalent in power and capabilities to a major spirit on some other medium. The same applies to *mashave*.

Activities at the ceremonies are punctuated by spirits possessing their mediums. As members of the audience go about enjoying the proceedings of the gathering, some mediums become possessed, the spirits explain whatever they want and disappear. Some spirits do not talk but just reveal their presence and/or engage in some minor performances to demonstrate their presence and to entertain the audience and disappear. Others may demonstrate some major activities, entertain, teach, or explain activities and events. Meanwhile, other mediums may be seated under trees in the shade or in the sun together with one or two people, doing whatever they do best, usually explaining peoples’ problems and complaints or some sociological aspects of life or some health problems including curing illnesses.

Even those who normally charge for their services do not charge at such gatherings. They just help people, all in the spirit of prayer. Occasionally, the leading spirit medium addresses the gathering to explain one or two burning issues. Different spirit mediums may gather in groups or pairs to ponder the issues brought out by the leader. The different mediums consult one another and may approach the leader to check on some aspect or to explain their ideas about the point raised by the leader. All issues will be solved by consensus, in the spirit of prayer.

In Shona tradition, appearing as a ghost means that the person is seeking the help of the living. Hence, such a person will still be on the way to the ancestors. Ghosts terrify the living. Those with ancestors will not do anything that they know would terrify the living. Therefore, the living can tell the state of their departed ones with reasonable certainty. The more vicious the ghost, the more uncomfortable the soul is. Christians know about the state of hell. Shona tradition appears to be silent about hell. What is talked about is the existence of a state consistent with purgatory. There will be suffering but not permanently since the soul can be rescued by prayer and restitution by those still alive. Christianity teaches that one cannot help oneself after death, but in the Shona tradition, you can still help yourself by soliciting assistance towards restitution. When compensation is paid, then your fate improves or is corrected. That is a significant difference from the views of Christianity.

### **Prayer**

The spirit mediums say that when a person dies his or her spirit does not become a fully fledged, effective legitimate ancestral or family spirit until it is judged as being clean. The ancestors look at all of the person's activities, debts, and credits. If one is owed one must claim the debt, and if one owes, one must pay up. He or she is sent back to cause debts and credits to be settled. *Chenura*, the "welcome back" ceremony, is but just part of the cleansing activities required to stop the wandering about of the homeless spirit. Thus, the spirit is a legitimate ancestral or family spirit with or without *chenura*. The slaughtering of a beast at *Chenura* is not in honor of the person for whom *chenura* is being held, but simply to feed the gathered people while real business is being done behind the scene.

In Shona tradition people congregate in different environments for different types of prayer. When they choose a particular environment, they do so not because they believe that the spirits and the Divine live in the chosen places, but because they associate the environments with certain activities. If they choose a particular rock or place of prayer, it should not be taken to mean that they believe that the Divine lives there or that the place or rock is the Deity. They do not go there to pray to the place and they do not pray to objects. It is just like what happens when Christians build churches. They will always go and pray in those churches. They will not be praying to the building, neither do they think that the Divine lives in the building. The same applies to prayers by the Shona traditional religious worshipers. Africans have been accused of not doing much in the way of prayer besides clapping and a bit of jumping at times. The spirit mediums felt that such sentiments were mischievous and added that the Shona people could also charge that Christians do not do much besides sitting and listening to the leader talk or occasionally sing and mumble something in a language they probably do not understand. In fact, Africans do much more than meets the spectator's eye. Wherever the African is, his or her tradition is there.<sup>13</sup>

Africans alert ancestral spirits before they embark on anything they consider to be important. Foreigners mistake this for praying to the ancestral spirits. The spirit mediums are adamant that they do not pray to ancestral spirits but ask them to mediate on their

behalf. Even those spirits who speak through the mediums when the medium is possessed do not claim responsibility for what people ask them to do and what people thank them for. They always inform petitioners that they will pass the messages to those above them who in turn will pass the messages on to the Divine. Petitions are always directed at the immediate spirits such as mothers, fathers, grandparents, and great grandparents. These are ultimately asked to pass messages on to the Divine, and definitely, objects are not part of the prayers. Any ideas and arguments to the contrary are nothing but mischievous. Up to the last century, and to an extent even today, there were places and objects which people would go to and ask for, say, food and the food would be provided ready to eat, just as it would be done in a restaurant. On some occasions, voices would be heard around such places but there would be no person to be seen. The voice would be coming from a spirit which would be communicating requirements and/or intentions of Divinity. The above would be the equivalent of the biblical manna from heaven. This still happens although one is no longer given food as such, but whatever may be used as food or converted to food, usually in the form of money. The money would not be provided at the place, but conditions would be created for the petitioner to come across money, usually as a gift from other people or the person would simply pick it up as he or she goes about his or her normal life.

Consider a situation where someone is in dire need of food, when food is not available due to shortages in the country because of drought, for instance. The person stands around in a supermarket attempting to buy food which will not be sold to him or her, perhaps because of corruption. Eventually, a “Good Samaritan” comes along with two loaves of bread hidden in a small container just as the supermarket workers announce that no one would be able to buy bread because it is sold out. The person holding the two loaves of bread approaches and says, “I know you want bread but they will not sell it to you. Come with me.” In disbelief, the bread seeker follows the stranger knowing very well that the person would not give him or her the bread in public. Since he or she had obtained it illegally, he or she would not be expected to let others know that he or she got the bread. When they get to a safe place, the “Good Samaritan” hands him or her a loaf of bread and insists on giving it to the bread seeker free of charge.

A Christian would thank the “Good Samaritan” and secretly say “Thank you, Jesus, you have answered my prayer for food.” A Shona traditionalist will thank his or her spirits and the Divine for leading the person to give him or her something to eat. This has been witnessed happening to some Shona traditional religious believers. Some Christians claim to have witnessed similar events as well.

When something unbelievable happens to an African, the onlookers, particularly if they belong to the Western school, will interpret it as being due to magic. Many times it will not be magic, but the work of spirits.

Some spiritual powers are closely similar to magical powers and the difference between the work of spirits and magical powers may be impossible to notice.

In Shona tradition, even medication requires the intervention of prayer to work. Even the most powerful medication will have no effect on a spirit medium unless the spirit possessing that medium is first asked to allow the medication to work. For example, in a Trial by Ordeal, suspects are given herbs to consume. If they regurgitate the substance and remain well, they are deemed innocent. If they do not do so, and become unwell, they are considered guilty. They must confess to survive. The same herbs used in a Trial by Ordeal will have no effect on a spirit medium if the spirit does not permit. The medium will simply consume the substance as if he or she were taking food. While other recipients of the medication are suffering from the effect of the medication, the spirit medium will be behaving as if he or she had not taken the medication. That will not be magic, but the work of spirits.

The spirit mediums accuse some foreigners to Zimbabwe of writing as if they were champions of Shona tradition. Their interpretations are not in congruence with the teachings of the spiritual leaders who are experts of Shona culture and belief. They probably quote their respondents out of context or the respondents misinform them, dismissing them as intruders who have no business asking about details of their lives. It is said that after the colonialists had silenced Africans politically, missionaries, employing Christianity as a universal tradition that wins its converts only when the converts have firstly been dispossessed and made desolates, socialized Africans to their urgent program aimed at uprooting African traditions. Africans decided to behave “conveniently” i.e. not telling the missionaries or whites what they believed Europeans would regard as heathen. This is in agreement with Mazambara<sup>14</sup> and might explain why some reports by acclaimed researchers of the likes of Bourdillon<sup>15</sup> may appear shallow and boring to some knowledgeable Shona traditionalists. Their informants probably deliberately pretended to cooperate with them.

### **Life after Death and Spirits**

In African religious concepts, death is the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation, the complementing of life, and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. The goal of life is to become an ancestor after death and assist those who are still alive. The spirit mediums state that to be cut off from the community of the ancestors after death is the closest equivalent to the Christian concept of hell.

African tradition does not believe in reincarnation, but the spirit of one who has died may find a medium. Most spirits of the dead never establish a medium and some may have a medium only temporarily for a special purpose, for example, to communicate a need. However, it is believed that everyone who dies will have a spirit which may occasionally appear in peoples' dreams as need arises. The dreamer does not see the spirit, but an image of what the person looked like before death.

Spirit mediums believe that spirits are pleased to see the living in happiness. Animals which are killed at funeral rituals and *biras* do not accompany the dead, they simply provide food for those gathered. The food will be eaten by relatives, representing

ancestral spirits and non-relatives, representing *mashave*. The dancing and merriment associated with traditional rituals occur because spirits and the Divine are pleased to see people express happiness.

Spirit mediums believe that when a person who has committed crimes, such as murder, dies, his or her spirit is sent to some “holding” state of existence until he or she becomes clean. The dead person cannot do anything for oneself but may cause the living to help him or her get things done to enable him or her to join the ancestors who are believed to be in a state of happiness (similar to heaven in Christendom).<sup>16</sup> The spirit will appear in the form of a ghost or spook as long as he or she is serving the “jail term.” The person will be in hell. Spirit mediums say that only those who have committed serious crimes, like murder, will come back as spooks. Shona tradition does not believe in the existence of hell in the sense that Christians do. To them, hell is not necessarily permanent. To Christians, hell is forever.

### ***Judgment after death***

The Shona do not believe that heaven is somewhere up there in the skies.<sup>17</sup> They believe that the ancestors live here on earth, looking after the interests of those they left behind, and they enjoy doing so.<sup>18</sup> Shona tradition teaches that the dead remain in contact with the living. It is believed that when the soul leaves the body it moves towards the ancestors and stops just before it reaches them and judgment commences.

Shona tradition teaches that on the day of death the ancestors pass judgment on the soul of the dead person. They do not mean that the Divine does not take part in the proceedings. The immediate ancestors of the dead person will be the first to meet the soul. These are the spirits of the parents, the grandparents, and the great grandparents. These are always in contact with the spirits of the clan who in turn are always in contact with the spirits of the *Gombwe*, who in turn is in Divine contact.<sup>19</sup> Thus Divinity is always in touch with the proceedings of the judgment and possibly with the Divine refereeing the whole thing. The proceedings are not human, but spiritual, and no mistakes are expected. If the activities of a possessed medium can be anything to go by, the judgment by ancestors is bound to be perfect since their memory is perfect. If you hold a discussion with a possessed medium about events some years old, you will be surprised when the medium goes bang-bang as if reading from somewhere. A human being would spend some time trying to remember how events occurred. Thus, the memory of a spirit medium under possession may be considered as being “perfect,” and spirits are not likely to be lied to on judgment day. The divine memory can only be better. Thus, no detail of the activities of the dead person will be hidden from the ancestral spirits since they witness every activity as the keepers of the person in and after life.

When Christianity says that the Divine will judge souls, Shona tradition says the angels of Divinity and their assistants, the ancestral spirits, judge souls (just like the chief does not try offenders but presides over the trial by his or her jury). The spirit mediums believe that the Divine probably presides over the judgment by the ancestral spirits and the angels. Christian tradition believes that children will go straight to heaven soon after



death because they have not had the chance to sin. Shona tradition teaches that freedom from sin is not enough to enter the state of ancestral spirits. The soul that enters that state must be free of any type of debt, not just sins. Even a person who was wronged must be compensated for being wronged in order to share in the state of the ancestral spirits. Even if it be the soul of a toddler, the soul must get compensation and then try again to join the ancestors. The toddler may have been killed or may have been ill treated before death. Its spirit must go back to the killer or the perpetrator of the ill treatment to seek compensation. It goes in the form of *ngozi* which will worry the perpetrator's family until compensation is given to the family of the toddler. The suffering of the perpetrator(s) and/or their families, usually in the form of illness or misfortune, will not end until compensation is made. No amount or type of medicine will cure the illness. No trials will end the misfortunes. The only cure or corrective step is compensation.

The spirit mediums would say, "Foreigners will try and send the guilty to prison and the matter usually ends there; or occasionally the aggrieved parties take the matter to civil courts for compensation." In the Shona tradition, the situation is straight forward. The aggrieved must be compensated or *ngozi* will be devastating. Christians and people from the West fight for the cause of the dead.

However, Shona tradition teaches that the living should not waste time fighting for the cause of the dead since the dead will fight for themselves through *ngozi*. All that the living can do for the dead is help them clear the way for *ngozi* to succeed. *Chenura* is part of the cleansing steps to free the soul from obstacles into the state of ancestral spirits. Shona tradition believes that the spirit of the dead will not be able to fight for compensation if they are not clean. If the dead person committed crimes before death, those must be compensated against before the soul joins the ancestral spirits. The dead person causes his relatives to pay up after which it may join the ancestral spirits where it will be tasked to perform various duties as required in its new state. In this state spirits are graded according to how the people lived on earth, particularly as regards their state of holiness before they died. They will be given duties to:

1. Look after the well-being of the people who are still alive by taking their requests to the Divine through the *Gombwe*.
2. Ensure that the living do things in a way that is pleasant to the Divine and ancestral spirits.
3. Take divine messages to people through *maGombwe* and ensure that people please the Divine.

### ***Relationships Between Spirits***

Spirit mediums have a hierarchy in which the *Gombwe* is at the top, then *Sadunhu*, *Tateguru*, the *sekurus*, and *mbuyas*.<sup>20</sup> Each level will also have its own hierarchy of spirits complexly stratified according to their seniority when they were still alive and the state of holiness both when alive and in death. These will have been freed of their crimes, but just as one piece of cloth that was once dirty will not look as clean as one that has

never been dirty, one who has been a criminal will never be as holy as one who has never been a criminal.

Those at the top will direct the activities of the members below them. Those below will be doing duties as directed by those above. They will be assigned duties in different areas of the clan and will still have to look after the interests of their descendants. The Shona believe that each person has a spirit associated with him or her to look after him or her. Some of the spirits may belong to the *Gombwe* classification and others to the ancestral lineage. Together these will be *mashave*. The association is permanent whether the person likes it or not. If he or she likes the one assigned to him or her, the association will be healthier and more beneficial to the person. More than one person may be assigned the same spirit.<sup>21</sup> Thus the spirits will spend more time and exert more effort where they are accepted. It is not likely to be true that spirits do not hate and they are not cruel. Even spirit mediums believe that some dead people may be cruel. However, it is certain that some are more approachable than others are. Spirits help all, good and bad. Nevertheless, the help to the good is likely greater than that to the bad. The difference is not a result of hatred or favors, for spirits do not favor anybody; they do their job because if they exercise favoritism, they will be required to answer for their actions in the assembly of ancestral spirits. Spirits enjoy being attended to and being recognized.<sup>22</sup> They enjoy watching people gather and enjoy themselves in their recognition and their honor. The honor given to the spirits is at the same time extended to the Divine. When the master of ceremonies announces the intention to gather people in honor of spirits he asks the immediate spirits to pass the message to those with such spirit, those above him or her, and ultimately to the Divine. The spirits are united with the Deity. Whatever is done to and for the spirits is done for divinity. In Shona tradition, people fellowship with ancestors and do not worship ancestors.<sup>23</sup> People consider themselves as so low as to be unworthy of talking or interacting directly with the Divine. They rely on the mediation of the spirits. Similarly, the Divine does not communicate with people directly, but through the spirits.<sup>24</sup> One does not hear of those claiming to have dreamt of the Divine saying this or that. Instead, there are claims of voices of spirits communicating the Divine's wishes, either in dreams or in real life.

### ***Relationships between Spirits and People***

Spirit mediums concurred that Spirits do not hate and they are not cruel. They help the good and the bad, but they are difficult to understand. They allow people to get into problems even when they could spare them the resultant suffering. They said that spirits do not favor anybody; they just do their job because if they exercise favoritism, they will be required to answer for their actions in the assembly of ancestral spirits. Spirits enjoy being attended to and being recognized. They enjoy watching people gather and enjoy themselves in their recognition and honor. The honor given to the spirits is at the same time extended to Divinity. For instance, when the elder announces the intention to gather people in honor of spirits he asks the immediate spirits to pass the message to those around them, those above him or her and ultimately to the Deity. The elder, or anyone for that matter, will know the identity of the spirit in whose honor the gathering is being assembled. The spirits are united with the Divine. Whatever is done to and for the spirits

is done for Divinity. In Shona tradition people pray to the Divine through the spirits. People consider themselves as so low as to be unworthy of talking or interacting directly with the Divine. They rely on the mediation of the spirits. Similarly, the Divine does not communicate with people directly, but through the spirits. Foreigners mistook (and many still mistake) this for praying to the ancestral spirits. The spirit mediums are adamant that they do not pray or worship ancestral spirits but ask them to mediate on their behalf. They fellowship with ancestors as opposed to worshipping ancestors. Even those spirits who speak through the mediums when the medium is possessed do not claim responsibility for what people ask them to do and what people thank them for. They always inform petitioners that they will pass the messages to those above them who in turn will pass the messages on to the Divine. In all prayers, petitions are always to the immediate spirits such as mothers, fathers, grandparents, great grandparents and so on. These are ultimately asked to pass messages on to the Divine, and definitely, objects are not part of the prayers. Any ideas and arguments to the contrary are nothing but mischievous.

### ***Labeling***

Spirit mediums state that it is an insult to the Zimbabwean culture to address *n'angas* as witchdoctors because *n'angas* are not witchdoctors. The term witchdoctor is a colonial creation and Zimbabweans have never been known to be associated with cannibalism. The mediums castigate foreigners who claim to be champions of tradition.<sup>25</sup> They claim that Shona tradition tolerates other traditions and would expect other traditions to respect it. They wonder why the foreign traditions charge them of honoring their *vadzimu* and yet they themselves honor theirs and even declare some days of the year as public holidays in honor of their *vadzimu*, citing colonial holidays such as Pioneer Day, Rhodes, and Founders Holidays, etc. They warn people against abandoning their own ways in favor of foreign practices which they are unable to master, because they will be left with nothing in the end.

They castigate insinuations by evangelists who claim that most Shona people did not know the word *Mwari* before the advent of Christianity. They say that the Shona have always known about *Mwari* and creation. At first, there were twelve *maDzinza* under *maGombwe*. They were under the rule of *Mambiri* and *Murenga* when they were in *Guruuswa Rekutanga* (Egypt). *Murenga* is *Muringi*, i.e. the founder of everything. *Mambiri* and *Muringi* had their own roles as *maGombwe*. The two were hunters, *Mambiri* being the older and *Murenga*, the younger but the stronger. He is the one who talked with *Musiki*. Through the increase of *madzinza*, as a result of wars and marriage coupled with the ensuing language confusion, the name *Musiki* was corrupted to *Mwari*, and not through the influence of missionaries.

The traditional Shona person's future with ancestors, the coming back of the soul for cleansing, the role of the deceased in looking after the family left behind, and the existence of *ngozi* indicate that the funeral ceremonies are not performed to take a dead person away from the community and to keep him or her away, as some authors

suggest.<sup>26</sup> Bourdillon says that after the funeral ceremonies the spirit of the deceased can influence the lives of its descendants in a friendly way.<sup>27</sup>

### **Difference between Spirituality and Magic**

When something that cannot be understood happens in the presence of an African, the onlookers, particularly if they belong to the Western school, will interpret it as being due to magic. Many a time it will not be magic, but the work of spirits. If a person in need of something asks ancestral spirits for help and they oblige and the person gets whatever the thing is in a manner that is not humanly possible, people usually rush and conclude that it is the work of magic. Some spiritual powers are closely similar to magical powers.

To a person who does not have the inside information, the difference between the work of spirits and magical powers may be impossible to notice. The case of Nohoreka, his “magical” hoe, and Makate could be interpreted as magical power. Sometime in the nineteenth century, battles raged between the Nohoreka people and the Makate people in an area to the northeast of Harare, close to the northeastern border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. When Nohoreka felt he was losing, he took a hoe and dug into a rock. The hoe pierced into the rock as if it were going through soil. It was stuck there in the rock and it still cannot be pulled out, centuries after the event. Makate disappeared into the rock and nothing has been heard of him and his soldiers who were running away with him. The spirit mediums attribute the event to magic, adding that there was no way of differentiating magical and spiritual work, except that a spirit will be able to notice the difference.

### **Conclusion**

The events that take place at Shona gatherings cannot justifiably be generalized. The beer brewing, preparation of food, consumption of the beer and the food, and merrymaking may be standard but those are only vehicles for the important job of getting things right. Getting things right will depend on the impediments which may be involved in specific circumstances. The interactions between *Gombwe*, *Sadzinza*, and other ancestral spirits and *mashave* will depend on the nature of the problems which have caused the gathering to be assembled. The gathering may be assembled to celebrate an event or to solve a problem but may end up being the center of suggestions leading to solutions of problems unrelated to the original purpose. The events that take place at the gathering and the nature of the deliberations by the spirit mediums depend on the nature of problems of people at the gathering and these cannot be generalized.

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## Interview Guide

1. How does Shona tradition differ from Christianity?
2. Do you have anything similar to the Ten Commandments in Shona culture?
3. What is the difference between Shona spiritual activities and magic?
4. When Christians gather to pray, there are set activities which are followed. For example when Catholics gather to celebrate mass they follow definite set steps. Do you have anything like that in Shona tradition?
5. What happens at Shona religious gatherings?
6. Can we then choose one or two examples to illustrate the activities?
7. What is *mombe yehumai*?
8. What dangers are associated with it?
9. What is *chenura*?
10. What are Shona religious views about life after death?