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SHARED LEGACIES OF THE WAR:
SPIRIT MEDIUMS AND WAR VETERANS IN
SOUTHERN ZIMBABWE¹

BY

JOOST FONTEIN
(University of Edinburgh)

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the nature of ongoing relationships between war veterans and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe, as well as the continuing salience of a shared *chimurenga* legacy of co-operation by these two groups, and how it has been put to use, and acted out by both in the context of Zimbabwe's recent fast track land reform project. In emphasising this continuity, the paper also considers whether a corresponding disparity between the ideology of the ruling political elite and the practices, experiences and performances of guerrillas, spirit mediums and others acting on the ground, which materialised during the liberation struggle, has re-emerged, despite or alongside the recent collaboration of some war veterans with the ruling party's rhetoric of 'patriotic history'. Engaging with Lambek's work on moral subjectivity and Mbembe's 'logic of conviviality' of postcolonial states and their subjects, it argues that war veterans and spirit mediums sometimes share a 'moral conviviality' which appears during *bira* possession ceremonies, in the shared demands for the return and reburial of the war dead from foreign countries, or for 'national' ceremonies held at Great Zimbabwe and elsewhere to thank the ancestors, as well as in the similar way in which spirit mediums and war veterans subject their agency to that of the ancestors in their narrative performances. It concludes by suggesting that although many war veterans have undeniably been closely complicit in the violent 'authoritarian nationalism' of the state, in this shared war legacy of spirit mediums and war veterans lies the opportunity for radical alternative imaginations of the state.

Introduction

In this paper I explore, if only tentatively, the nature of ongoing relationships between *masvikiro* (spirit mediums) and war veterans in the Masvingo area of rural, southern Zimbabwe. Whilst war veterans have recently received renewed academic attention (Kriger 2003, Alexander & McGregor 2004, Alexander 2003, Hammer 2003, McGregor 2002, Marongwe 2003, Chaumbe et al. 2003a & 2003b), as befits their emergence (or re-emergence) onto the political scene since the late 1990s,

a focus upon their relationship with spirit mediums has been largely absent. This is all the more remarkable given the prominent celebration of the relationship between the two groups that characterised early studies of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle (e.g., Lan 1985, Ranger 1985), before Kriger's important work reminded scholars that this wartime relationship was not always as rosy as had been suggested (1988 & 1992).

Kriger (2003) has now timed her contribution differently by initiating debate about the role of war veterans in postcolonial Zimbabwe, and arguing that, despite some significant changes (in the social, economic and political environment, and in the internal structures of both the ruling party and war veteran groups), 'a comparison of the two different time periods [1980-7 & 2000-1] underscores how ZANU (PF) and the war veterans have shown remarkable consistency in their power-seeking agendas, their appeals to the revolutionary liberation war, their use of violence and intimidation, and their abuse of state resources' (2003: 208). 'The ruling party and veterans', she tells us, 'have manipulated and shaped each other as they have pursued their distinct and overlapping agendas' (2003: 208). Other writers have emphasised not so much the continuities of recent events with those of the early 1980s, as the disparities. While Ranger depicts how current 'patriotic history' differs from the ruling party rhetoric of the early 1980s by its inclusion of ZIPRA's war record and the exclusion of a 'modernising, reconstructing and welfare agenda' (Ranger 2004: 220), the 'war stories' outlined by Alexander and McGregor reveal not only the differences between civilian experiences of the war and those narrated by ZIPRA war veterans in the mid-1990s, but also how this 'gulf... was translated into practice as veteran politics were transformed by ZANU (PF)'s decision to grant them material benefits and to embrace them politically' (2004: 96).

A similar tension between continuity and discontinuity has emerged in writings about the land issue (or rather issues—Hammer & Raftopoulos 2003: 18). Sam Moyo (2001) has sought to demonstrate that the 'essence' of land occupations has remained largely the same over the independence period, while Alexander has stressed that, unlike the 'grass roots nationalism' of the early 1980s, behind the occupations of 2000 lay a 'far narrower nationalism' that 'severely undermined the longstanding popular aspirations for a "good" state' (Alexander 2003: 99). Marongwe finds himself somewhere between these positions, highlighting the different roles played by 'peasant' communities in the land occupations of 1998-9, and those of post-February 2000. While the former were 'community-

led', those of 2000 were instigated by war veterans as part of ZANU (PF)'s 'official campaign strategy' (2003: 163 & 165). Although 'this does not negate the sense of empowerment that some occupiers experienced during the process', he also gives a well-judged warning that this often later reversed in reaction to the lack of transparency of the controversial land committees, and 'the direct involvement of the militarised arms of government' (2003: 187).

In this paper I seek to contribute to the debate initiated by Kriger by exploring the continuing salience of a shared *chimurenga* legacy of co-operation by war veterans and spirit mediums, whether 'real' or 'imagined', and how it has been put to use by both in the context of Zimbabwe's recent fast track land reform project. In emphasising this continuity, however, I also explore whether a corresponding disparity, between the ideology of the ruling political elite and the practices of guerrillas, spirit mediums and others acting on the ground, that materialised during the liberation struggle (Fontein forthcoming: ch. 7, Chung 1995, also Bhebe & Ranger 1995 and McLaughlin 1991), has re-emerged, despite, or alongside, the recent collaboration of some war veterans with the ruling party.

Spirit mediums, war veterans and the performance of the past

Elsewhere (Fontein 2004 & forthcoming: ch. 3) I have examined the way in which *masvikiro* and other 'traditional' leaders in southern Zimbabwe establish their authority, and the legitimacy of their narratives, claims and positions, through what I called the *performance of the past*. While references to 'tradition' and the spiritual authority of the ancestors are a key part of this process, of equal importance is the ability of actors themselves to perform their narratives convincingly, and appeal successfully to the concerns of their adherents (cf. Spierenburg 2004: 172-3). This is particularly true for *masvikiro*, who, unlike chiefs and village heads, are not recognised in local and national state structures, receive no formal recognition or government allowances, and have never been wooed by the ruling party in the way that chiefs, headman and village-heads, and indeed war veterans, have been.² These circumstances accentuate the need for spirit mediums to perform convincingly as liminal, ambiguous characters situated between the world of people and the world of spirits.

On a day-to-day level the performances of spirit mediums are not intended to create the illusion that they are the ancestors themselves, as Lan (1985: 68) argued, but rather to emphasise the ambiguity of

their agency, as an entanglement of the ancestors' and their own. *Masvikiro* often narrate the events of their own lives in terms of the spirits who later possess them, blurring their own agency with that of the ancestor, and so deflecting responsibility onto the ancestors, whilst simultaneously keeping separate the personhood of the medium and the ancestor. Only during possession ceremonies, when the distinction between the two is perhaps most clearly defined, are mediums seen to become the ancestors themselves, and it becomes crucial for them to convincingly deny their own agency through credible performances.

Apart from the importance of demonstrating the authenticity of their mediumship through convincing performances during possession ceremonies, the authority of spirit mediums is also based on their alliances and allegiances within and beyond their own clans. While wider allegiances may be based on the underlying support of their own clans, such support can also be buttressed and empowered by the 'multiplicity of projects' with which spirit mediums are sometimes engaged. In the Masvingo area, Ambuya VaZarira's links with the *Mwari* shrines of the Matopos have strengthened her authority within the VaDuma clans for whom she is a major spirit medium. In turn, the strong support she has from these clans empowers her in the pursuit of her wider agenda to promote the role of the ancestors in land reform, to regain the *mapa* of her ancestor Zarira on Mt Beza and to be recognised as custodian of Great Zimbabwe (Fontein forthcoming: 2005; 2004). But the wider projects and allegiances of spirit mediums can also threaten their authority, and sometimes even their lives as exemplified by the killing of Muchetera, a medium in Makoni who claimed to be possessed by the legendary Chaminuka (cf. Ranger 1982). Ambuya VaZarira has herself, on occasion, received warnings from government agents about her activities, and the murder of the spirit medium, Takatukwa Mamhova Mupawaenda, in Zvimba South in 2002 (*Daily News* 07/03/02) suggests such warnings should be taken seriously. Certainly, the *masvikiro's* wider allegiances, and the multiplicity of their projects, make demands on their performances during possession ceremonies, often requiring a delicate juggling of alliances with those whose support is depended upon. Clearly the performances of spirit mediums are not limited to perfecting a *cultural* practice; they also involve responding to, and engaging with, the social, political and moral expectations of those around them.

Finally, a spirit medium's authority can be invigorated and reified through references to the role that the medium and, more importantly perhaps, his/her spirit played during the second *chimurenga*, the war of

liberation, supporting the freedom fighters. Like many spirit mediums (cf. Daneel 1995 & 1998), both Ambuya VaZarira and her spirit Murinye often made references to the roles they played during the struggle. Indeed VaZarira claimed that Murinye, the *mhepo yehondo* ('wind of war'), had in the early 1960s predicted the outbreak of war (Interview 19/11/00). At a *bira* ceremony I attended at Ambuya VaZarira's homestead in July 2004, her husband emphasised the role played by the medium and her spirits during the war:

he refers to the war, and the work that Ambuya's spirits did during that time with the guerrilla fighters and how it is important that people return to the rules of the soil, and respect the ancestors, because otherwise the people will suffer. That is why they are suffering now.

(Field notes, Visit to Ambuya VaZarira, 24/7/04)

Indeed in the backgrounds of many *masvikiro* lie their experiences of the war of liberation. For example, Daneel has discussed at some length (1995: 133-165, & 1998: 53-56) how, at the age of 16, Lydia Chabata became a spirit medium after her discovery by guerrillas, sent to find her by another medium, at the Chimoio training camp in Mozambique. Similarly, Ambuya VaZarira told me that it was during the war that 'they came to believe me and the whole country accepted it' (Interview with Ambuya VaZarira et al., 17/02/01) and she was acknowledged among the Duma clans as the *svikiro* for ancestors VaMurinye and VaZarira (cf. Daneel 1998: 52, 149-153). Her son, Peter Manyuki, described how she worked with the guerrilla fighters:

... if some of the comrades had been injured in a battle ... or if they had been poisoned, they would come to see Ambuya VaZarira, and they would camp for several days, to be healed with fodya [snuff]. Some would have their bases some distance from Masvingo and Ambuya VaZarira would be invited there, to work there and help.

Ambuya VaZarira used to help them by foretelling what was going to happen, to see if a battle was going to be successful, or if there were soldiers coming and so on. And to organise biras, to brew beer and slaughter cattle or goats for them to eat so that they could carry on with the battle.

(Interview with Ambuya VaZarira et al., 17/02/01)

Such narratives of the war are often used by spirit mediums, and those around them, to justify their authority in the present. It is also well known that guerrilla fighters themselves often became mediums whilst in training camps abroad, or operating in Zimbabwe, in what Daneel describes as 'a kind of spontaneous war-mediumship' which 'emerged as large numbers of fighters became hosts to ancestral spirits' (1998: 52).

I know of at least one influential war veteran in the Masvingo area who claims to have become a spirit medium during the war. In

2000-2001 Mai Macharaga was on the Masvingo district land committee and deeply involved in the land occupations and fast track resettlement programme. She explained how she joined the struggle:

I first went to join the *chimurenga* in 1974, in Zambia, with ZANLA . . . I was trained in medicine in 1974 and in military, also, in 1974. And I came from Zambia to Mozambique in 1974 or 1975. I went just because of the war. At our home there was a big battle, and my father was killed at which point I decided to join the war. . . . After training in medicine I went to Tempwe, and then from Tempwe to Chimoio, and then from Chimoio to Maroro, from Maroro to Operation Chitepo Secretary . . . Yes I was a *svikuro* during the war. I used to dream what would happen. I was good at foretelling what would happen, when a battle would occur. Others used to laugh, but later on they saw that the battles happened.

(Interview with Mai Macharaga, 13/03/01)

The cultural nationalism of the 1960s, the revival of 'traditional' beliefs it provoked (Fry 1976), as well as the now famous, even mythologised, co-operation of war veterans and spirit mediums during the struggle, has been widely reported and discussed in the academic literature on Zimbabwe (Lan 1985; Ranger 1985; Daneel 1995 & 1998; Maxwell 1999; Alexander 1995). The initial academic enthusiasm for highlighting the role of spirit mediums in garnering the support of rural people for guerrilla fighters has since been aptly tempered by other writers' focus upon guerrilla coercion (Kriger 1988 & 1992), regional varieties (Ranger & Ncube 1995) and the role played by Christian churches and missions during the struggle (Linden 1980, Bhebe 1988, McLaughlin 1991 & 1995, Maxwell 1995 & 1999, Daneel 1995 & 1998, Bhebe & Ranger 1995). This tempering has resulted in a remarkably deep and 'ethnographically thick' understanding of the regional and temporal disparities and complexities of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, revealing what Ortner called 'the ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance itself' (1995: 190). I will not repeat these arguments here but will consider the current potency of this legacy of co-operation during the war, whether real or imagined, for relations between spirit mediums and war veterans in rural Zimbabwe today.

If spirit mediums do invoke a war legacy to assert their authority today—just as war veterans must do, almost by definition—then perhaps we should also consider whether war veterans similarly make use of a legacy of co-operation with spirit mediums to establish their 'traditional' credentials and local legitimacy, particularly in rural areas and on resettled farms. If, as I would suggest, war veterans have emerged in some rural areas as a new kind of 'traditional' player, alongside spirit mediums, chiefs and other actors such as *manyusa* and *munyai* (*Mwari* cult messengers—Daneel 1998: 305 & 307) and as the term *vana vevhu*

(children of the soil) implies, then to what extent is this a result of a deliberate and cynical effort to co-opt 'traditional' leaders, spirit mediums and other members of rural constituencies into a ZANU (PF)-led land reform agenda, as has been implied in some recent work?

Chaumbe et al. (2003b: 599), for example, have argued that, although war veterans and land occupiers in Chiredzi 'were at pains to consult local chiefs, elders and traditional leaders on the location of graves and sacred areas', to hold rain ceremonies or for the observation of *chisi* rest days, ultimately it was still war veterans who 'called the shots' on resettled farms. Similarly, McGregor has argued that in their 'assault on local authorities', war veterans in parts of Matabeleland North 'also depended on the exploitation of local grievances' for legitimacy (McGregor 2002: 23), implying, therefore, that war veterans are simply, and cynically, trying to co-opt 'traditional authorities' and their local grievances into their own agendas. I do not deny the importance of other factors highlighted by Chaumbe et al. (such as party politics, factionalism, personal loyalties, local chieftaincy disputes and so on) nor do I mean to suggest that war veterans across Zimbabwe have not often exploited local grievances for their own purposes, either recently or during the struggle. But I would argue that it is important to acknowledge that for some war veterans invoking a shared legacy of co-operation with spirit mediums, ancestors and other 'traditional' authorities is more than simply an effort in co-optation. Chaumbe et al. themselves describe how, when a rogue elephant tormented newly established villages on resettled land in Gonarezhou, the leader of the district war veterans association concluded 'that the ancestral spirits of the area must be very angry because there was something about the occupation which was not done correctly—causing offence' (2003b: 601).

On a different level, we also need to ask whether the appeals of war veterans to such a legacy of co-operation with the ancestors and spirit mediums during the war are merely part of what Primorac (2005: 2) has recently called, following Mbembe (2001), Zimbabwe's 'whole, coherent and self-perpetuating' postcolonial 'master fiction'? Alternatively, if war veterans have invoked a shared war legacy of co-operation with spirit mediums and the ancestors, then to what extent does this reflect genuine beliefs about the importance of recognising the ancestral ownership of the land, guidance for the struggle and the provision of rain? Do war veterans share with spirit mediums what I call elsewhere an 'ancestral language of water and land' (Fontein 2005) through which grievances about the present are articulated alongside moral imaginations of the way things could or should be? In other words, to what

extent do war veterans and spirit mediums share a discursive framework, a 'language of community and contention' (Roseberry 1996: 84) which lies outside, or at least at the margins of, the dominant political discourses in Zimbabwe? Or is the invocation of a common legacy of co-operation during the struggle in local, rural political arenas merely a result of the emergence of the new, state-driven historical discourse that Ranger has called 'patriotic history' (2004), part of Mbembe's 'master fiction', which constantly harks back to a drastically narrowed history of the liberation struggle?

It is possible, indeed likely, that such a common invocation of a shared war legacy is the result of both the demands of patriotic history's 'master fiction' and the lived experiences and shared perspectives of war veterans and spirit mediums on the ground. This distinction may be false, or at least misleading. I have argued elsewhere (forthcoming: ch. 7) that during the liberation struggle there were important differences between the ideologies and experiences of the nationalist elite and those of guerrillas fighting in the bush. Whilst the former may have invoked the history of the first *chimurenga* and the role of great 'national ancestors' such as Nehanda, Kaguvi and Chaminuka in their nationalist imaginings in order to recruit rural support, for many guerrilla fighters on the ground this theology of nationalism was not so much propaganda as lived experience. In other words, what the elite may have used as nationalist ideology became for many fighters more than simply a practical means of politicising the masses; it became a way of being, living and fighting with the guidance of the ancestors.³ It was in this way that Great Zimbabwe became imagined as a national sacred site, thoroughly associated with the ancestral legitimacy of the struggle (forthcoming: ch. 7).⁴ Guerrillas were able to carve out for themselves a political and religious subjectivity that was not merely a result of their political education, but rather a creative response to such 'education' and to their experiences and engagements with spirit mediums and 'traditionalists' on the ground in Zimbabwe, as well as in training camps abroad.

VaKanda, then deputy chairman of the Masvingo War Veterans Association, described to me how it felt when Ambuya Nehanda's celebrated prophecy that *mapfupa edu achmuka*—'our bones will rise'—allegedly uttered by the spirit medium before she was hanged for her part in the 1896-7 uprisings, were related as 'political education' to young recruits in training camps in Mozambique and elsewhere.

When we were in the camps in Mozambique, we were given political education. And the starting point was how this country was colonised, and how the people suffered. How they were driven to violent areas by the first settlers, and how our forefathers resisted and fought the white colonisers during the first *chimurenga*. And we were told about how Sekuru Kaguvi and Ambuya Nehanda led the struggle to fight against these new colonisers, and the heroics they performed. How they were overcome, because they were not adequately armed, the colonial settlers had superior weapons. And how they were captured and hanged. So to us it instilled a very big sense of admiration. If these people who were poorly armed could resist people who were armed with guns, whilst they were armed with spears. You know it actually inspired us, because they were very brave, and for the simple reason that they were fighting for their country. So there was a phrase that she [Ambuya Nehanda] said, when she was being hanged. 'Our bones will rise, you can kill me now, but our bones will rise against you' As I speak that phrase it sort of gives you an inexplicable feeling of wanting to take it from there and go forward, you see? So the inspiration was that, 'My bones will rise', and we were told that we were the bones, the very bones that Ambuya Nehanda was saying. So that inspired us to say, what ever happens, we will fight till the end.

(Interview with VaKanda, VaMuchina, MaDiri, 16/3/01)

Clearly, the political theology of the first *chimurenga*, taught as education in training camps abroad, took on a differential experiential and practical dimension for guerrilla fighters in the camps, the bush and on the battlefield. This argument is only further strengthened by the numerous, diverse accounts of the daily assistance of the spirit mediums and the ancestral spirits themselves, during the struggle; ranging from those that describe the personal inspiration derived from visions or dreams of relatives, ancestors or larger 'national' spirits, to the miraculous intervention of ancestrally inspired *chapungu* eagles (Lan 1985: 157-8), or from the advance warning of Rhodesian air attacks on training camps abroad (Daneel 1998: 59-60), to the extensive use of the 'sacred landscapes' of groves, caves and mountains, access to which, though normally restricted, was made available to ancestrally guided freedom fighters. Comrade Nylon, a war veteran who operated in the Masvingo district area, part of the 'Gaza' war zone (for map see Daneel 1995: xiv) in the late 1970s, described how they used to build their bases in such places because it was very difficult, even dangerous, for others to go there.

There are quite a lot of places, especially mountains. There is one on the way to Ngundu, just before Ngundu, on Beitbridge road, which could actually burn sometimes, and you could see as far as Nyajena. I myself, and the other comrades, we could go into those mountains, and put our bases up there. But it was difficult for anyone else to do so, which symbolised just how much of a relationship we had with the ancestors. So if anybody else would go into those mountains, they would get lost or if anybody would try and climb there, even the enemy, if they tried to come, they would fall off, which just shows the connection between us and the ancestors.

(Interview with Comrade Nylon 8/8/01)

A plethora of such stories about how the ancestral spirits, especially those associated with the first *chimurenga*, inspired and guided the fighters of the second *chimurenga*, have themselves become part of the ‘master fiction’ of the third *chimurenga*—fast track land reform—and in the process the ‘telling of war stories’ has shifted (Alexander & McGregor 2004: 97). But this heightens, rather than negates, the need to explore the ‘telling of different war stories’, as indeed Alexander and McGregor point out (2004: 97), and urges us towards a new understanding of the relationship between the deployment of a political rhetoric of national liberation, such as the political theology of the first *chimurenga*, and now of ‘patriotic history’, with the practices, experiences and creative subjectivities of people on the ground. In this light it becomes clear that, in order to consider properly the questions raised above about the nature of ongoing relationships between spirit mediums and war veterans in Zimbabwe today, we need to (re-)conceptualise subjectivity and agency in a way that allows us to focus on people’s actions as both a result of individual interest and creativity, and the effects of larger structural and discursive influences acting through or on the person.

Moral agency, subjectivity and conviviality

Agency, as Lambek (2002: 37) has recently put it, ‘is a tricky subject’. ‘Leave it out’ he writes, ‘and you have a determinist or abstract model, put it in and you risk instrumentalism, the bourgeois subject, the idealised idealistic individual, etc.’. The solution to this problem must lie somewhere between these extremes. In his fascinating account of Nuriaty, a spirit medium in the ‘postmodern colony’ of Mayotte, Lambek traverses this problematic terrain, arguing that:

Agents are always partly constructed through their acts—constituted through acts of acknowledgement, witnessing, engagement, commitment, refusal and consent. In assuming responsibility and rendering themselves subject to specific liturgical, political and discursive regimes and orders, people simultaneously lay claim to and accept the terms through which their subsequent acts will be judged (Rappaport 1999). People are agents insofar as they choose to subject themselves, to perform and conform accordingly, to accept responsibility, and to acknowledge their commitments. Agency here transcends the idea of the lone, heroic individual ostensibly independent of her acts and conscious of them as objects.

(Lambek 2002: 37-8)

Most importantly, perhaps, Lambek overcomes the common complaint against analyses of agency that portray the individual as motivated only by an all-pervading self-interest, by emphasizing instead the very moral nature of how people see themselves, and their quests, and, conversely,

how they are seen by others. Indeed, as he puts it (2002: 36-37), referring to Mauss (1966) and Aristotle, ‘that people act from self-interest does not prevent them from acting simultaneously with disinterest . . . virtuous action is not selfless, but rather straddles the mean between self-interest and self-abnegation’. And recognising the moral nature of individual interest and action immediately places the agent in a relationship with those around them. People do not invent themselves out of nothing, but out of the constantly changing *bricolage* that already exists, and which they and their contributions are already part of. As Lambek explains, ‘Nuriaty did not invent an idiosyncratic response to circumstance, rather she deployed the means to address circumstance imaginatively, yet in such a way that made sense to those around her’ (2002: 38).

In this context, the purpose of this paper is to venture into that space between the extremes conjured up by the problem of agency, in order to investigate the idea of ‘moral agency’ in relation to spirit mediums and war veterans in southern Zimbabwe. Importantly, in terms of the *performance of the past* of spirit mediums, the vision of performance that I employ is neither that of a pre-determined theatrical script subsequently ‘acted out’, nor of that of self-interested invention, but rather performance that imaginatively engages with, but is always situated within, the shared and conflicting historical perspectives, languages and rhetoric, actions and concerns of both performers and audience. This is performance as a moral practice through which subjectivity is produced. In this respect, analysing the narratives of spirit mediums, war veterans and others in terms of performance is not to underplay their content, or the serious nature of the context, but rather to illustrate the creative ‘intertwining of the personal and the public, the moral and the political’ (Werbner 2002: 4) which constitutes the postcolonial subject.

In his influential book, *On the Postcolony*, Achilles Mbembe focuses much attention on the way in which the vulgar excesses of postcolonial African ruling elites—the ‘potentate’—are represented in satirical newspaper cartoons. He questions the extent to which such satire, and the amusement it can provoke, really represents a ‘speaking back’ to power; what James Scott called a form of ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott 1985). For Mbembe,

the laughter of those crushed endeavours to respond, striving to humiliate ‘the thing’ utterly. But this second violence, far from signing the ‘thing’ in death, rather intensifies its presence by enclosing the subject in a mixture of fascination and dread, as a sort of consciousness whose peculiar feature is to be hallucinated. . . . to the extent that it is the autocrat who offers speech, commands what is listened

to and what is written, and fills the space to the point of still being talked of even as the act of creation is claiming to debase him.

(Mbembe, 2001: 165)

Pessimistically therefore, Mbembe rejects, as one reviewer notes (Adeeko 2002), Bakhtin's notion of 'subalternity as resistance', offering instead a Foucauldian vision of all-encompassing power, in order to understand 'the African potentate's long tenure'. For Mbembe, postcoloniality 'is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can best be characterised as convivial, a relationship fraught by the fact of the commandment and its "subjects" having to share the same living space' (Mbembe 2001: 104). The analytical challenge is to explore this 'logic of conviviality' and the 'dynamics of domesticity and familiarity' that inscribe 'the dominant and the dominated within the same episteme' (Mbembe 2001: 110). Therefore, the satirical cartoons that emphasise the grotesqueness of the 'potentate' are 'an integral part of the stylistics of power' (Mbembe 2001: 115) and part of an imaginative complicity between ruler and ruled. Satirical depictions of the excesses of the political elite do not undermine their authority or check their power, so much as reinforce their omnipotent presence.

Although, like Adeeko (2002), I am sceptical of any argument that excludes the possibility of resistance and denies that anyone can stand outside 'the circus tent of power', there is something important about this notion of 'conviviality'; of a relationship determined neither by resistance nor collaboration, but rather of sharing 'the same living space', of being inscribed 'within the same episteme'. Although Mbembe is primarily concerned with the relationship between 'rulers' and ruled', dominant and dominated, this logic of 'conviviality' seems to parallel my argument about a common understanding or 'ancestral language of water and land', between spirit mediums and war veterans, based on a shared (if sometimes invented) legacy of co-operation during the war (Fontein 2005). There are also strong echoes of Lambek's argument that virtuous action 'straddles the mean between self-interest and self-abnegation' (2002: 37); that agency and subjectivity are produced through performances that imaginatively engage with, but are always situated within, the shared and conflicting historical perspectives, languages and rhetoric, actions and concerns of both performers and audience. In this context, my aim is to import into Mbembe's notion of conviviality the idea of performance and moral agency, so that the 'shared living space of war veterans and spirit mediums', while implying an imaginative complicity between ruler and ruled, also creates space for alternative, moral visions of the past, present and future. This 'moral conviviality'

may involve similar 'stylistics and spectacles of power' to those discussed by Mbembe, but rather than reinforcing the inexorable presence of the ruling elite, these invoke the omnipresence of the spirits, revolving around the ambiguity of their earthly manifestations as spirit mediums, ancestrally inspired eagles, or the dangerous, safe havens provided by the sacred places on the landscape.

Convivial beer, conservation, land restitution and dead comrades in closets

I would suggest that the crucial features of this 'moral conviviality' within which some spirit mediums, war veterans, chiefs and other 'traditionalists' are located, includes more than simply a shared appreciation of or belief in the ancestors and *Mwari* as the owners of the land and the guardians of the soil. Rather, this relationship centres on shared understandings, memories and experiences of the guidance of the spirits during the first, second, and now third, *chimurengas*, which far exceeds the often hollow political rhetoric of 'patriotic history'. In other words, it is not so much about shared belief or ideology, as the shared practices, experiences and performances through which these beliefs are articulated and made real. Indeed, where the relationship between war veterans, spirit mediums and other elements of the 'traditional' rural leadership is perhaps most 'convivial', in the conventional sense of the word,⁵ is exactly in those ritual practices associated with belief in the ancestral spirits, when contact is made between the people, and the ancestral spirits.

The 'moral conviviality' of war veterans and spirit mediums, I would suggest, emerges most profoundly during *bira* possession ceremonies organised in rural areas and on re-occupied farms, where personal rivalries are played out alongside or within the broader contests and disputes. These are 'minor theatres of power' (Worby 1998: 185), where 'contradictory identities are enacted and performed, embodied and experienced', negotiations are carefully and diplomatically acted or performed *convivially*. People drink 'traditional' beer and eat meat cooked from freshly slaughtered and sacrificed animals; they sing, dance and clap in time to the rhythms of *mbira* (thumb piano), drums and *hosho* (shakers). People are possessed, spirits 'come out', personal and group agendas, whether merging or clashing, play out under a banner of consensus, or at least agreed understanding or reciprocal politeness, and only occasionally punctuated by drunken outbursts of enthusiasm or indignation. Unlikely people find themselves sitting and conversing together. For example, at one event I attended at Ambuya VaZarira's homestead

(Fontein 2005: 23-24), one group of pro-ZANU (PF) war veterans and settlers from neighbouring occupied farms sat alongside other war veterans from the *Liberator's Platform* (see Harold-Barry 2004: 31-42, also Sithole 2001, *The Masvingo Mirror* 31 August-6 September 2001), who oppose the ruling party and have publicly dissociated themselves from 'inauthentic' war veterans' support of the land occupations (Kriger 2003: 193, Alexander & McGregor 2001: 514, *Financial Gazette* 25/05/00, *Daily News*, 11/08/01). At another similar event, related but competing VaDuma chiefs sit alongside each other and find agreement on shared concerns, making speeches in a courteous and polite manner which hides underlying disputes and tensions. Later one of them tells me that he does not bring up some issues in those circumstances and I reflect on this in my field notes:

What strikes me about these improvised speeches, these addresses to everyone present, is that while everyone is given the opportunity to discuss, and raise issues that concern them, the issues that are raised are not necessarily the ones that most concern the speakers. Or in other words, issues are raised within a kind of agreed, conscious framework—in this case the primacy of Duma, and Ambuya VaZarira. Everyone is very polite etc. Hence on our journey home, later, VaHaruzvivishe and I again discuss issues about Chikwanda claiming Mugabe land, and VaHaruzvivishe himself states that at the *bira* at VaZarira's homestead he does not bring that up, instead he is very polite and courteous to Chikwanda people present. Similarly one of VaZarira's sons, younger brother to Peter, told me later that for a long time the Chikwanda people, especially Chief Chikwanda, did not do anything with or for Ambuya VaZarira. But now they come and raise their issues and ask for help from VaZarira, but they will go away again. This, says Ambuya's son, is one of the problems that Ambuya has to deal with, because she is trying to 'promote peace', but everyone has their own agenda, and sometimes they come for help, and sometimes they don't. The same is true with different war veteran groups that she works with. They have their own issues, and often try to co-opt Ambuya into their divisive projects, but she is trying to promote understanding across groups, and does not want to be co-opted by anyone.

(Field notes, visit to Ambuya 24/07/04)

Similarly, tensions between chiefs and spirit mediums are measured; concerns are voiced but muted, strained through a filter of respect and mutual tolerance; shared agendas predominate, differences emerge but are restrained. On one occasion the spirit Murinye, possessing Ambuya VaZarira, turned to speak to Chief Masungunye, head of all the VaDuma Chiefs:

Turning to Chief Mazungunye, the spirit asks the chief about recent problems in Bikita, referring to the violence that surrounded the recent by-election. And then the spirit asks the chief, 'Wakabika doro rebira randakakuudza here?' [did you cook the beer for the ceremony that/as I told you to do?]

Chief Mazungunye looks a little stunned, taken aback and admits he did not arrange the *bira* as told previously, because all his brothers who should work with

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him, are Christians. The spirit then tells him that should not matter, he should still have cooked beer as told.

Chief Mazungunye is very quiet now, so much so that the spirit even demands to know why he is so quiet and is not talking.

(Field notes of *bira* at Ambuya VaZarira's home, 26-27/1/01)

On another occasion the spirit of Murinye both criticised and yet was reconciled with war veterans present, appealing to the shared war legacy of ancestors and guerrillas, whilst admonishing subsequent neglect, yet offering more support:

Referring to the ex-combatants as '*Vana vesango*' [children of the bush], the spirit Murinye encourages them to work under the guidance of the chiefs and the *masvikiro* in the fast track resettlement program that is now happening across the land.

'Why neglect me after we worked together during the war? I healed the wounded by removing the bullets. I helped the poisoned. I worked with the *masvikiro* from other regions, such as those in Chipinge, I even went to as far as Mozambique. I gave hope to the comrades, and asked them to take their guns and go and fight. But why is it that you are now forgetting me? Because you have money, because you are driving cars, you forget about yesterday, what service I offered during the war.'

(Field notes of *bira* at Ambuya VaZarira's home, 26-27/1/01)

On such occasions a kind of 'moral conviviality' is played out between war veterans, chiefs and spirit mediums, regardless of any tensions and disputes that exist between these groups and individuals. In these moments the authority of the possessing ancestor is almost absolute,⁶ as peoples' beliefs and ideological commitments—however uncertain, duplicitous or pragmatic on other occasions—are played out and realised through their actions; through participation in the performances and spectacles that act like Mbembe's 'stylistics of power', entrenching the omnipotent presence of the spirits in a kind of fetish of *chivanhu chedu* ('our tradition'). To some extent divergent perspectives and concerns are addressed and a deliberate consensus constructed, but otherwise disputes are subsumed under an overarching sense of shared understanding, of shared 'living space', under the authority of the possessing spirits. Mbembe's 'logic of conviviality' applied in this context does not necessarily imply the lack of disputes, but it does suggest shared language, understandings and practices, as well as often shared values and interests. Most importantly, this *moral* conviviality implies shared vision or understanding of how things could or should be, based upon ideas and practices that evoke both the past and 'tradition', and alternative futures.

Ambuya VaZarira was herself ambivalent about her support for fast track land reform, but she was adamant about the central role that

chikaranga or *chivanhu* ('tradition') and the ancestors should play in it (Fontein 2005: 25). In common with what Chaumbe et al. have reported in Chiredzi (2003b: 594), her concern, and that of her closer associates, like the war veteran/medium Mai Macharaga, has been focused on 'land restitution' rather than equitable land re-distribution, and in this context she has attended clan ceremonies on occupied state land around Lake Mutirikwi, and continues to pursue her own aim of reoccupying the *mapa* of her ancestor Zarira on Mt Beza (Fontein 2005: 7-11). During *bira* ceremonies I attended, she offered her support to war veterans, and invited them to events at her home and visits to Matonjeni, and was named (in a separate interview) as a spirit medium assisting land reform by the then Masvingo provincial war veteran leader VaMhike. In turn, war veterans engaged with and shared in her agendas, agreeing that a national ceremony at Great Zimbabwe was long overdue, and offering to assist her to regain the *mapa* (grave site) of one of her spirits, Zarira, on Mt Beza. But this not merely some kind of 'political' transaction, and, when it was presented as such by an overly enthusiastic war veteran, Ambuya VaZarira responded with outrage; 'And who does Mt Beza belong to?' (Field notes 29-30/6/01, see also Fontein 2005: 24) reaffirming that it is shared moral conviction, and not only, or as well as, pragmatic politics which underlines the 'moral conviviality' of spirit mediums and war veterans that I am trying to describe.

Although this shared 'moral conviviality' of spirit mediums and war veterans draws upon the shared legacy of co-operation during the war, it is clear that it revolves around very contemporary issues, and in this respect the ruling party's rhetoric of 'patriotic history' should be recognised as being well judged, at least in political terms. But equally important is the recognition that such invocations of a shared war legacy, and particularly the practices that go along with it, easily predate 'patriotic history' and the land occupations of 2000. Just as some commentators have emphasised the continuities involved in the intricate and multiple complexity that is 'the land issue' in Zimbabwe, so we need to recognise that there is continuity in the way in which this shared war legacy has been available for invocation. Indeed Daneel's *African Earthkeepers* (1998) provides a good example of how this legacy was deliberately and practically utilised by war veterans and spirit mediums in Masvingo province for the creation of a new and original, yet 'traditional' and indigenous approach to environmental conservation in the early 1990s.

My own research around Great Zimbabwe indicates that this legacy of co-operation between war veterans and spirit mediums is often invoked in both the localised claims of particular clans over Great Zimbabwe

and much broader and widespread calls, dating back to the period immediately after independence, for a national ceremony of reconciliation at the site to settle the spirits and thank them for their assistance during the struggle.⁷ One good example was Chief Mugabe's request for permission to hold a ceremony at Great Zimbabwe with both spirit mediums and war veterans in October 2000, which was denied by NMMZ for fear of bringing them into disrepute (Fontein forthcoming, chs. 5 & 8). Another more recent example was the public attempt of a medium from Zaka, Dickson Marufu, supported by war veterans and local political leaders, to hold an event at Great Zimbabwe in May 2003 (*The Herald* 10/05/03, 14/05/03; *Daily News* 13/05/03, 14/05/03). This too was thwarted by NMMZ at the last moment (Fontein forthcoming, ch. 10). A third example illustrates how the shared legacy and 'conviviality' of spirit mediums and war veterans can combine in one person, and for a local concern, and when tempers are brought to the boil, lead to direct confrontations with local political authorities. This occurred when Mai Macharaga angrily confronted and 'heavily censored' (*Masvingo Star* 2-8 March 2001) the, now former, Provincial Governor of Masvingo, Josiah Hungwe, both in person and in the local press (*Masvingo Star* 9-15 March 2001) about her demands to be allowed access to carry out a ceremony with Ambuya VaZarira at Great Zimbabwe. On the day her grievances were published in the local press, Mai Macharaga explained to me her concerns about Great Zimbabwe:

Macharaga: Great Zimbabwe, I had been shown in the form of a dream. First I was given the spring, and I made it sacred. Then I was given the place where they are keeping things and tools, and we made it sacred again. Then I was given the Ninga [underground passages] but right now they are arguing. . . .

That's why I appeared in the newspaper saying the Governor doesn't want to do a 'traditional' at Great Zimbabwe.

JF: Is that today's paper? The *Masvingo Star*

Macharaga: It's this week's

He wants to make Great Zimbabwe sacred for himself, instead of giving the title/role to the masvikiro.

I was told in my dreams that I was going to make sacred the sacred graves of dead people. I was told by a *sekuru* who came out of the spring. I was told that 'you will make sacred the Zimbabwe bird. Do you see the Zimbabwe bird here? It has not yet come here into Zimbabwe'

JF:
So you did that?

Macharaga: They are argumentative, they are not willing to give me permission. They are not happy that we do a *biru* at Great Zimbabwe with the *masvikiro*. They don't want that. They act towards us as if we are children.

.....

There is a conflict between the governor and the *masvikiro*, so that he does not want to give us the chance to do the ceremonies. The first time I tried to go in, they refused. The second time they also refused and the third time they are still refusing. So I decided to go, at this point, and publicise it in the newspaper. I think it will be better.

..... the government gave us the go-ahead, to Ambuya VaZarira, but the governor is refusing. He doesn't want to see anyone in Great Zimbabwe.

...

(Interview with Mai Macharaga, 13/03/01)

Apart from illustrating how the moral and political agendas of particular war veterans and spirit mediums can combine to the point of challenging the authority of significant local political figures, Mai Macharaga's angry confrontation with Governor Hungwe also carries a shared sense of alienation from the political processes of the state, at whatever level. Indeed, what I call the 'moral conviviality' of spirit mediums and war veterans relates in part, I suspect, to a similar and shared experience of marginalisation from the state processes since independence. Although Kriger argues that war veterans and the ruling party 'have manipulated and shaped each other as they have pursued their distinct and overlapping agendas' (2003: 208)—and certainly since their violent demonstrations of 1997, they have been increasingly courted and rewarded by the government—spirit mediums I spoke to were sometimes able to identify a commonality of their experience with that of war veterans. As VaZarira put it:

Even the comrades have not got their rewards. The mistake has been made by the government, which has thrown away everyone who was helping during the struggle. It has forgotten everything. The government did not give rewards to the comrades or to the *masvikiro*.

(Interview with Ambuya VaZarira 17 February 2001)

Much more problematic for spirit mediums has been the government's recent wooing of chiefs and headman,⁸ which continues, and indeed accelerates, a pattern set unexpectedly (see Ranger cited in Alexander 1995: 185; Bratton 1978: 50) after independence.⁹ The government's earlier efforts to 'define the *mhondoro* out of any political role' by 'allocating an exclusively healing role to them' through ZINATHA (Bhebe & Ranger 1995: 24), have been complemented by the Traditional

Leaders Act of 1999, and more recently by the exclusion of spirit mediums from the 'land committees' engaged in land reform, something that spirit mediums and elders often complained about.¹⁰ While chiefs and headmen now receive salaries, hold courts, allocate land and have access to a car loan scheme, spirit mediums receive no formal recognition from local or national government. Spirit mediums often claim to be surprised about this¹¹ and it is obviously a major grievance, perceived to cause the anger of the ancestors and thereby drought and disease (Fontein 2005: 14).

But although this has sometimes caused tensions between spirit mediums and chiefs,¹² it has not so far led to a consistent split between the two parties in Masvingo. Reflecting Alexander's point that 'the spirit medium is more accurately seen as part of the traditionalist faction in ruling areas' (Alexander 1995: 186), many spirit mediums I know have continued to work closely with their chiefs, except in places where other, deep-rooted historical disputes exist.¹³ Although the government's disregard for spirit mediums has been mirrored recently in the public comments of two leaders of Zimbabwe National Council of Chiefs about the existence of 'lots of greedy and bogus spirit mediums' (*The Herald*, 8/03/05), it is not yet clear what the longer term effects of this policy will be, and past experiences warns against making premature predictions (see Alexander 1995). Chaumbe et al. (2003: 585 & 604) are right in emphasising that recent land reform in Zimbabwe has 'dramatically altered the landscape' and brought about a complex 'new political terrain', and consequently much research remains to be done in this area.

While Mai Macharaga's angry outburst against the provincial governor in support of Ambuya VaZarira's claims over Great Zimbabwe demonstrate how the 'shared legacy' of spirit mediums and war veterans can emerge in the context of quite localised issues and alliances, these issues themselves also often take on a much wider, even national dimension. This is evident in the way in which the demands of local individuals and clans to carry out ceremonies at Great Zimbabwe are often articulated in 'national' terms as responding to a need to thank the ancestors for independence. Another related issue, which has at least as much potency across Zimbabwe, concerns the reburial of war remains from anonymous, solitary and sometimes mass graves in Zimbabwe and in foreign countries. Although the burial of 'national heroes' and state commemoration has been contentious for much of the independence period (cf. Kriger 1995; Werbner 1998), this issue

has recently been revived across Zimbabwe, and become the focus of more attention from the ruling party and different arms of the government, as well as the national media,¹⁴ and now academic interest (see for example Cox 2005 & 1998: 230-232, also Daneel 1995: 3-35).

Located at an intersection of interests ranging from the deeply personal to those of broader kinship-based family and clan groups, and yet reverberating powerfully within national contexts, the issue of the reburial of the war dead is one that exists at the very centre of the shared moral agendas and 'conviviality' of war veterans and spirit mediums, as the events narrated to James Cox by war veterans and a CIO agent in the Mt Darwin area profoundly demonstrate (2005, also 1998: 230-32). Ambuya VaZarira described how war veterans often approach her, troubled and haunted by the unsettled spirits of fallen comrades still yearning to return to the land of their ancestors.

VaZarira: Some comrades came to me here, telling me that some of their fellow comrades who died in Mozambique are continuously giving them problems, harassing them, saying that they should be collected from Mozambique. Some comrades say they see them in their wardrobes, telling them their names, asking us to take our guns and come and fight. We tell them that our country is already in our hands but they refuse to believe that we have taken the country. They are saying 'we are having problems in Mozambique, we want to come back home'.

So the masvikiro said 'just put down one pot of beer and buy a goat and then tell your others that you have heard what they are saying'. We agreed that we will work with all the *masvikiro* and we will see how they can collect these dead from Mozambique.

JF: Was that the group of comrades led by Machingura?

VaZarira: Yes, and the local comrades were here too.
(Interview with Ambuya VaZarira and VaMoyondizvo, 16/08/2001)

Although this is a personal issue for those affected, the need to repatriate the remains of war dead from mass graves in Mozambique and Zambia also reverberates powerfully within broader discourses across the country involving larger national players, including ZANU (PF), NMMZ and some churches.¹⁵ In June 2005 the National Council of Chiefs, now presided over by Chief Charumbira, agreed to 'hold traditional ceremonies countrywide in honour of the fallen heroes of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and to thank the government for giving back land to the black majority' (*Daily Mirror* 17/6/05; *Herald* 18/06/05). These were held in chieftaincies across the country in late September 2005. Indeed, the issue has also taken on an international dimension, with the Zambian and Mozambican governments becoming

involved.¹⁶ Even a controversial ‘cultural gala’ (see Fontein forthcoming: ch. 10) was held at the site of the Chimoio camp in Mozambique in August 2004 (*Mail & Guardian*, 25/10/2004), illustrating how this issue has manifested itself in the populist brand of ‘patriotic history’ purveyed by Jonathon Moyo, before the turn of his political fortunes saw him thrown out of ZANU (PF) at the end of 2004.¹⁷

Yet despite this kind of blatant politicking, within Zimbabwe it is also an issue that has seen remarkable co-operation and mobilisation between spirit mediums and ‘traditionalists’ from different areas.¹⁸ Indeed, on the day of the interview above, Ambuya VaZarira was visited by a *svikiro* called Moyondizvo, who had been sent by colleagues in Murewa to consult with other spirit mediums around the country about this very issue. As Ambuya explained:

VaZarira: Now this is the case that Moyondizvo has just brought, because we have to find a way and find people who we can send to Mozambique to collect our children. Because people were already sent and these people went and stayed in hotels, and started showing off. Now do they expect the heroes in Mozambique to be happy? So they are very angry.

VaMoyondizvo: Maybe I can say some more.

They included priests in that group that visited Mozambique, so in our culture we do not do that. We use *svikiro*, who were supposed to, first of all, visit and consult *masvikiro* of that country. After which they would collect the soil, which they would bring to Zimbabwe. That was done because they used a priest. And right now they don’t know what to do with the problem.

VaZarira: The problem is that these dead that are in Mozambique, are under the custody of the Mozambican *masvikiro*, and that is why we say we should go and do it, because they are under the custodianship of the *masvikiro* there. We should probably do a kind of handover/takeover the local *masvikiro*, from this country, and the *masvikiro* from Mozambique and Zambia.

(Interview with Ambuya VaZarira and VaMoyondizvo, 16/8/2001)

As with the ‘new political terrain’ of chiefs, war veterans and land occupiers created through the land redistribution programme, so also much research remains to be done on the subject of the reburials of the *chimurenga* war dead, and the role of war veterans, spirit mediums, ZANU (PF) and the state in this process. Cox has suggested that ‘ancestral traditions’ risk being ‘high-jacked by a party political agenda’ as the ‘deeply embedded customs of settling the dead on their ancestral lands has been seized by war veterans to apply pressure on the government to implement its longstanding commitment to land redistribution’, which has, in turn, ‘responded opportunistically’ (Cox 2005: 43). My

experience of witnessing the relationship between spirit mediums and war veterans in Masvingo district leads me to a more optimistic view that often ‘ancestral traditions’ are not so much hijacked or seized by war veterans, as practised in a context of shared legacies and moral agendas, even sometimes in a more ‘convivial’ fashion. This is not to smooth over differences and divergences between war veterans’ complex interests and those of spirit mediums, but rather to recognise a certain commonality of experience, practice and performance.

Bones and narrative performances

Part of the shared legacy of spirit mediums and war veterans is visible in the manner in which the *performance of the past* of war veterans can mirror that of spirit mediums, particularly in the way they subject their agency to that of the ancestors. The narratives of war veterans that I have heard and that others have described certainly suggest that guerrillas were often intricately involved in the *performance of the past* of spirit mediums with whom they fought in the struggle.¹⁹ Individuals do not just become mediums by themselves (Fontein 2004: 21). In order to be accepted, they need the support of their close kin, other members of their clan and, importantly, the mediums of other ancestors of that clan. Furthermore, as there is always room for doubt at any particular possession ceremony and for any spirit medium, *masvikiro* must constantly perform convincingly and maintain their allegiances with elders within and outside their clan to ensure their popular support upon which their authority, in practice, depends (cf. Spierenburg 2004: 172-3). Conversely, witnesses to, and participants in, the *performances of the past* of spirit mediums—both dramatic possession events but also the subtler narrations of their own life histories—are to some degree complicit in the localised ‘stylistics and spectacles of power’ involved in these events. This includes guerrillas and now war veterans, alongside chiefs, elders and the occasional anthropologist.

More than being simply complicit in the performances and narratives through which spirit mediums subject themselves to the agency of the ancestral spirits, in some ways guerrillas and now war veterans also mirror these performances themselves. As spirit mediums do when they are possessed or in their narrative accounts of their own pasts, guerrillas—and now war veterans—seem to have subjected themselves to the ancestors during the struggle. Taking on both their *chimurenga* names, and more general terms like *vana vevhu* (children of the soil), working closely with chiefs and spirit mediums, and following their prescribed

rules (such as taboos against sex and some foods) fighters creatively subjected themselves and part of their agency to that of the ancestors, sometimes to the extent of raising the ire of their own political leaders.²⁰

In their narratives of their own pasts there is often, like spirit mediums, a certain blurring or ambiguity of their agency. This is apparent in many war veterans' narratives about how they came to fight in the struggle. They were often inspired by the experience of Rhodesian violence, discrimination and cruelty, or by lack of opportunity, and in response to political and economic inequality, but also by 'the spirit of war' or 'enthusiasm for fighting' (Alexander & McGregor 2004: 85). VaMhike described what he believed had motivated or 'inspired' people to join the struggle, and how this played itself out in the conduct of the war:

In as far as the purpose, or how we viewed the spirit mediums in our War of liberation, I understand now, and I firmly believe that all those who left during the armed struggle were inspired somehow by the fighting spirit of war. In Mozambique we did undergo political education. It was that orientation which brought to light to the recruits, made us understand why people had to fight the Regime and even to understand that it was not a war of liberation without guidance. The first heroes, Sekuru Kaguvi, Ambuya Nehanda and Chaminuka actually left the war as an incomplete battle. And it was thought and believed strongly that the sons of Zimbabwe should complete the war. And so we were in a situation whereby we had spirit mediums who we had to contact in order to get a way forward. Even in battle, in the field, in different areas where we were operating we had to consult the spirit mediums. Each Chief in Zimbabwe has got a *svikiro* whom you consult when you operate in the area. And these used to tell us, or instruct us, or to order us to say when you are in this area, you don't do 1, 2, 3 things, you do this, that & that. Like you have to listen to the instructions from the spirit mediums, to say you occupy such type of hills or areas, and then you can go and operate in this way. We had things like birds of the spirit mediums which we believed were associated with the spirits, like the Chapungu [Bateluer eagle]. It would come, whilst we were camped, waiting for the enemy, it would come and even give us directions for retreat after the battle. Or it could signal that there is an enemy within the area you are operating and we would be made alert, and within minutes, there would be a battle. And you would now understand that even if helicopters or bomber planes would come, the Chapungu would come and intervene. Yes, to give the warning and even interfere with the aero-planes, and they would disperse, and we move out free. So we strongly believed that the spirit mediums played a role; even now we still believe. Consultations tell us that we still have a role to play as war veterans.

(Interview with VaMhike 26/6/01)

Alexander & McGregor have noted how the war stories of ex-ZIPRA fighters are often told as a 'series of progressive steps, a rite of passage or initiation, an enlightenment or descent into hell' (2004: 80). Although this 'journey' involved recruits subjecting themselves to the nationalist movement and its leadership, as well as political discourses, socialist ideologies and military training—'guerrillas were soldiers but they were

also nationalists and, over time some became socialists' (2004: 80)—often they 'also invoked supernatural signs of encouragement, often fusing biblical and traditional religious symbolism' (2004: 81). Through the training involved in this 'journey', they created a new identity for themselves, and part of this process involved 'learning the art of "bushcraft" and the practical and spiritual relationship with nature this involved', which was subsequently transformed 'from threatening to benign' (2004: 88). In this way, creating a new identity for themselves involved, in part, a kind of subjecting themselves to other agencies—of the nationalist leadership, social ideologies, military trainers, but also, importantly, to that of the ancestral spirits. This, I would suggest, is similar to the narratives told by spirit mediums about their own pasts, in which they often emphasise the blurred entanglement of the agencies of the medium and the ancestor (Fontein 2004 & forthcoming: ch. 3). Perhaps the clearest indication of this came from VaKanda's comment about the '*inexplicable feeling*' of being told '*that we were the bones, the very bones that Ambuya Nehanda was saying*'. Towards the end of the same interview, the discussion turned to land, and VaKanda made it clear that as far he was concerned, the same motivation inspired war veterans to initiate Zimbabwe's recent fast track land reform:

We are not ashamed of expressing our views on the land. From what we have discussed, you know the political aspect of how we were deprived of our land, which led us to the two *chimurenga* wars, and where we are now. We see that, one, we have not yet finished the war of taking back the land. And two, we have not yet fulfilled the mission that was left by our ancestors. When Ambuya Nehanda said 'my bones will rise', you see, we haven't yet accomplished it. That we, the bones, we were tasked to fulfil, we were tasked to finish. Because yes, we are in government, but we haven't actually finished the task. And the task is to liberate all the land that we were given by our ancestors. The land of our ancestors must be free.

So we still have that task that is why you see that this present stage of going into the farms is still headed by the war veterans. You see the thing about African culture that you must bear in mind is that some of these things you have no control over them. Sometimes you have no control over what you do. They are controlled by the powers that be, you see?

So to tell you that, who actually . . . what made you go and occupy the farms? No one will tell you that we were just sent by someone; it was just an intuitive feeling. No, you can't do that when you are normal. Some kind of invisible possession happens that forced us to do the farms. And that is the spirit that actually sent us to war. The same spirit that made us go across the border.

You see, when you decided to go and join the liberation struggle, no matter what happened, no one could have stopped you. My own mother told me 'No, no, no. Three of your brothers have gone, and we want you to help us. Why don't you stay behind? Then I said No. When that spirit, that wind, actually gets hold of you, you cannot control yourself. You cannot actually tell what you are going to

do. You will be directed to a certain action that sometimes you cannot explain why you did that action. You see?

So unless we fulfil this task that we were given, then there is not going to be any peace in this country. We are not going to rest. Even our comrades in arms, who died beside us when we were fighting the war, they are now the spirits that are driving us forward you see. So we have got a lot of pressure from behind. We have got a lot of pressure that we cannot resist, to do these things to liberate our country, to go forward, for our people.

(Interview with VaKanda, VaMadiri and VaMuchina, 16/03/01).

By stressing the continuity between the three *chimurengas* in attributing the motivation of war veterans occupying farms to the same ‘invisible possession’ that persuaded recruits to join the armed struggle for liberation, VaKanda substantiates my argument about the way in which the narrative performances of war veterans can, like spirit mediums, involve a denial or subjection of their own agency, to that of the ancestral spirits. Like VaMhike’s belief about recruits having been ‘inspired by the spirit of war’ as well as ‘political education’,²¹ what VaKanda said also forces us to reconsider the relationship between formal ‘education’ and ‘ideology’, and the interpretation and acting out—the practice of policy—on the ground. And in this context it becomes much more problematic to interpret the land occupations of 2000 as merely the result of war veterans acting out the political will of the ruling party, or responding to its beleaguered need to harness rural support.²²

In the denial of their own agency (to that of the ancestors, or at least ‘the spirit of war’), VaKanda therefore asserted a complex subjectivity that ‘renders itself subject to’ whilst ‘simultaneously laying claim to and accepting the terms of’ (Lambek 2002: 37) both the rhetoric of ‘patriotic history’ espoused by the government, but also the war legacies and ‘conviviality’ shared with spirit mediums and other ‘traditionalists’. In a sense, some war veterans have therefore actively and creatively implicated themselves in the ‘stylistics of power’ operating at both these levels. And in this context there is continuity in the relations between spirit mediums and war veterans in rural Zimbabwe today and during the struggle. Taken further, this could also suggest that the disparity, which I have argued arose between the ideologies of the exiled and educated political elite and the practices and experiences of guerrilla fighters and rural folk acting on the ground during the struggle, may indeed have continued or re-emerged, as has the relationship with spirit mediums (in some areas) in the context of Zimbabwe’s third *chimurenga*. Evidence for this disparity lies in what I have discussed above, the sometimes angry demands of war veterans for the reburial of the war dead left in other countries, or for the restitution of ancestral lands, or

for national ceremonies to be held at Great Zimbabwe. It is also apparent in statements of war veterans that Cox recorded in Mt Darwin that the ‘spirits of dead war fighters are now rising up and forcing the government to act’ (Cox 2005: 43). A similar sentiment is also clearly apparent in VaKanda’s response to my question about the role of spirit mediums in post-independence Zimbabwe and the ongoing land reform programme.

JF: Given the fact that the *masvikiro* aided the comrades, as you said, the ancestors of the past giving guidance to the present. To what extent has this continued after independence? Do the *masvikiro* still provide guidance? Do the leaders and the people who work for them, do they still consult the ancestors for guidance?

VaKanda: That’s a tricky one, because there used to be not that direct involvement in consulting the *masvikiro* at the national level. It’s a bit difficult now to discern whether there is that plan to consult the *masvikiro*. And we as war veterans we have actually started to initiate something like that by going to Chinoyi . . .

JF: Where Ambuya Nehanda stays?

VaKanda: Yes, by going to Chinoyi and by trying to organise a *bira* at a national level at Matonjeni and at Great Zimbabwe, you see. But we don’t seem to get as much support from the national leaders as we would like, you see. To tell you frankly, my opinion is that when we came to independence, there were a lot of forces that wanted to dilute us, as it were, to dilute our revolution. You know from the West. Remember we had a lot of people who had been educated in the West, in America and Britain and so on, who didn’t quite have a league with what we had, our experiences during the war. So that when they came to positions of power and authority, they didn’t seem to realise that this was important you see. So they didn’t take up this issue of linking up with the past. They didn’t actually see the significance and importance of reaching out to the past. So processes of assimilation, in certain instances actually happened, where people would say, well this is not Christian, these are not Christian principles, and that sort of thing. So it has not been very clear. It is not as we would have wanted it to be.

(Interview with VaKanda, VaMadiri and VaMuchina, 16/03/01).

And if, therefore, at the core of the relationship between war veterans and spirit mediums lies a shared legacy of ancestrally guided struggle, then perhaps this sense of ‘moral conviviality’ between war veterans and spirit mediums also has the potential to represent more than just a ‘local re-shaping’ and reworking of some of the themes of the ‘patriotic history’ (Ranger 2004) which now descends from the dominant circles of ruling party and government. Perhaps we can consider this process in reverse. Thus not only is some of the language and rhetoric of the dominant party located within the same episteme, as war veterans,

chiefs and spirit mediums who are variously co-opted or not into the project of 'patriotic history', this shared conviviality also enables the conditions for the production of radical and alternative moral and historical narratives and practices; other imaginations of the way the state should be—perhaps what Hansen and Stepputat (2001) have called 'other languages of stateness'. In this sense the government-sponsored national ceremonies held recently (September 2005) in chieftaincies across Zimbabwe to 'settle the spirits of the war dead' might be seen as a kind of response, in kind, to the 'stylistics and spectacles of power' involved in the 'shared living space' of war veterans and spirit mediums. Unlike Mbembe's 'logic of conviviality' then, the kind of 'moral conviviality' that I am trying to describe does offer some opportunity for creativity, subalternity and resistance.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has not been to 're-habilitate' war veterans, or to paint a rosier picture of their role in Zimbabwean politics and society. Nor have I sought to trivialise the political violence and civil disruptions that they, and the ruling party, have been associated with. Anyone regularly reading newspaper and human rights reports from Zimbabwe would be very hard pressed to do that.²³ It is clear that some war veterans, particularly those with ZNWLA, have been involved in a great deal of state-sponsored violence, and have played a key part in the ongoing 'politics of inclusion and exclusion' (Dorman 2003) that characterises the emergence of a new bent of 'authoritarian nationalism' (Raftopoulos 2003) and is part of the complex 'multiple origins and emerging trajectories of crisis in Zimbabwe' (Hammer and Raftopoulos 2003: 3).

I do not deny Kriger's argument that the relationship between war veterans and the ruling party has, since 1980, been characterised sometimes by 'mutual manipulation' and 'often simultaneous conflict and collaboration' (Kriger 2003: 191) in a way that almost seems to resemble the 'conviviality' of spirit mediums and war veterans that I have described here. Nor would I suggest that war veterans have not manipulated their relationship with spirit mediums and capitalised upon the 'tolerance' that Cox marks as 'one of the identifying characteristics of the adaptive, adoptive, non-missionary and kinship-based traditions . . . at the core of Traditional Religion in Zimbabwe' in order to provoke the 'increasing levels of political intolerance in society' needed by the ruling party to maintain its grip on power (Cox 2005: 35 & 47).

What I have sought to stress, however, are some of the continuities between the mythologised and romanticised relationship of spirit mediums and guerrillas during the war of liberation, and the re-emergence of that relationship in some parts of postcolonial Zimbabwe more recently. In particular I have sought to show that the invocation of this shared war legacy is sometimes not just a response to the shallow ideological and political needs of the ruling party, but rather reflects a commonality of experiences, practices and performances between war veterans and spirit mediums, that defies the pragmatic and cynical politicking of the political elite, either during the struggle or since. In doing so, I have sought to suggest that it is from these sometimes 'convivial' relations between war veterans and spirit mediums—particularly as they are acted out on the margins, during *bira* ceremonies on re-occupied land, or to return the spirits of the war dead to their ancestral homes (Cox 2005)—can emerge shared 'moral agendas' which point to profoundly alternative and radical imaginations of the way the postcolonial state should operate. In the spectacles and performances that form part of 'stylistics of power' of the 'shared living space' of spirit mediums and war veterans, are created other ways of understanding the past, the needs of the present and hopes for the future, to which the ruling party must at times respond. Although this response may amount to threatening visits from CIO agents, they can also take much more 'constructive' forms as with the national *biras* held recently, or the reburial of war remains that Cox describes. In a bleak, post-parliamentary election (2005) context, with destructive 'urban clearances' and attacks on the informal sector marking the most recent stages of the Zimbabwean state's violent exclusions, this provides only a small shimmer of hope of an alternative.

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NOTES

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2. Contrary to expectations at independence (see Alexander 1995), it is chiefs and headmen, not spirit mediums, who have been increasingly courted by the ruling party, especially since the Traditional Leaders Act of 1999, which has been seen by many as part of the government's efforts to co-opt chiefs and 'extend its hegemony deeper into rural areas at a time of political discontent' (Chaumbe et al. 2003b: 599). This act has been complemented more recently by increasingly strident measures (see footnote 7). Similarly, since their violent demonstrations of 1997 war veterans have also received increasing benefits from the ruling party, although Kriger insists this marks not a change but rather a strong continuity in the relations between veterans and party since independence (Kriger 2003: 191).

3. Evidence for such a divide comes from interesting and diverse places. Fay Chung (1995: 146), who worked in the ZANU Education Department in Mozambique during the war, has described how 'tensions constantly existed between these groups', though her emphasis has remained on the ideological, and not the practical. In her thesis, focused mainly on the role of the Catholic Church, Janice McLaughlin, another ZANU educationalist, has described some of the splits within ZANU and particularly ZANLA (especially after the emergence and later the collapse of ZIPA) between guerrilla elements and more educated political commissars (1991: 572, 580, 582, Bhebe & Ranger 1992: 12). Robert Mugabe himself was sceptical of spirit mediums, and is quoted as telling Father Traber in 1979 'there are just too many *midzimu* . . . far beyond the traditional Shona belief. It's all too much for my liking' (McLaughlin 1991: 20, cited in Bhebe & Ranger 1995: 24).

4. Consequently, Great Zimbabwe later became subject to many continuing demands for access by spirit mediums, war veterans and others wanting to carry out cleansing rituals or 'national' ceremonies there (Fontein forthcoming). The refusal of the museum authorities to acknowledge, for so long, Great Zimbabwe's popular emergence as a sacred site during and after the struggle merely accentuates the differences between the ideology of the exiled and educated nationalist elite, and the experiences of fighters and rural people on the ground. In an interview in 2001, the late Eddison Zvobgo reiterated this when he explained that 'clearly it was a place of worship, there was a religious element to it. And the nationalists did not perceive it in that way, but many *masvikiro* and so on did . . . as practical politicians we did not worry whether it was linked to religion or not. We had found a rallying point, a very useful one, and everybody then accepted that' (Interview dated 18/8/01).

5. As in the Oxford English Dictionary definition: '1. of or belonging to a feast or banquet; characterized by feasting or jovial companionship; such as befits a feast, festive'. (<http://dictionary.oed.com/>).

6. Spirit mediums and the authenticity of their possession or possessing spirits is always questionable, and this is why so much often depends upon the narrative, cultural and social performances of spirit mediums, and their ability to engage with their audiences. Spierenburg (2004: 172-3) emphasises the role of adherents in the pronouncements of spirit mediums possessed by ancestral spirits, in what is an appropriate tempering of some of the structuralist excesses of David Lan's book (1985). Elsewhere I have described circumstances where the authority of a medium has been challenged by participants, both through subtle, indirect means and much more directly (Fontein 2004, forthcoming: ch. 3). Even in the context of such direct challenges to the possession of particular mediums, however, participants (through being participants) are still complicit in a shared understanding or appreciation of the authority of the ancestors, however sceptical they may also be.

7. Most famous is the case of Ambuya Sophia Muchini, who moved back on to Great Zimbabwe after the ceasefire of 1979, with an entourage of ZANLA guerrillas, calling for a national ceremony of reconciliation to be held there (see Fontein forthcoming: ch. 7, and Garlake 1983). She was subsequently violently removed, imprisoned and sentenced to death, amid accusations of instigating the murder of two white farmers in the area. This was later reduced to a life sentence, and in the early 1990s she was released, and now lives some distance from the ruins. Although her claims are now discredited, and she has none of the local support she once held, the issues she raised have continued to be of great salience among local clans and 'traditionalists' from all over the country.

8. The most recent stage in this ongoing co-optation of the 'traditional leadership' was a 150% rise in the allowances and salaries of headmen, village heads and messengers, announced in February 2005 (see 'More Zanu PF "Bribes" for Traditional Leaders', *The Standard* 07/02/05; see also '1400% Pay Hike for Zim Troops', *News24* (South Africa) 06/02/05, and 'Headmen Grumble Over Allowances', *Financial Gazette* 13/01/05). The year before, during the National Assembly of Chiefs held at Great Zimbabwe in May 2004, the chiefs announced their support for the government's land distribution programme, and President Mugabe's continued leadership of the party and government. At the same assembly the chiefs were also promised higher allowances and a new vehicle loan scheme (*The Herald* 6/5/04, 8/5/04 & *Zimbabwe Independent* 14/5/04, see also *The Masvingo Star* 23-29 July 2004).

9. As one reviewer very helpfully pointed out, the re-emergence of the chief's role since independence is surprising if one considers their treatment by guerrillas during the liberation struggle, but less so if one takes a longer perspective and considers their role in 'defending the peasant option, shaping ethnicity and in inventing traditions' (see, for example, Ranger 1999 & Maxwell 1999).

10. VaHaruzvivishe complained about the lack of representation of spirit mediums in land committees in July 2004, which explained 'why the rain is not falling as it should' (field notes 24/07/04).

11. 'We were amazed, shocked, because we were expecting that our government... would appreciate our work, but we were not' (interview with Ambuya Vazarira, 27/12/2000).

12. In one interview, Ambuya Vazarira described the chiefs as 'like snakes on the ground' (interview with Ambuya VaZarira, 27/12/00).

13. Such as in the Charumbira clan, where a very long running chieftaincy dispute has caused deep rifts between the chief and some spirit mediums (see Fontein forthcoming: ch. 13).

14. See for example 'Remains of Liberation War Fighter Exhumed', *The Herald* 10/07/04; 'State to Probe Discovery of Mass Graves', *The Herald* 16/07/04; 'Mysterious Deaths Rock Kanyemba' *Sunday Mail* 3/06/01; '56 War Vets Reburied' *Daily News* 25/10/01.

15. During fieldwork in Masvingo in 2000-2001, both Chief Charumbira and the

executive director of NMMZ stated that plans for a national ceremony to mark the return of remains from war graves in Mozambique and Zambia, to be held possibly at Great Zimbabwe, were at an advanced stage of preparation, though no details were available, and by 2004 no event had taken place at Great Zimbabwe at least (see Fontein forthcoming; chs. 7 & 10). NMMZ has also been tasked with creating and maintaining memorials at the sites of former guerrilla camps in Zambia and Mozambique, and details of some of these efforts are displayed at the Gweru Military Museum.

16. During an International Conference on Heritage Management in Southern and Eastern Africa, convened in Livingston, Zambia in July 2004, the former executive director of the Zambian National Heritage Conservation Commission, N.M. Katanekwa, delivered a paper that discussed SADC-wide efforts to co-manage 'Joint Freedom War Heritage', particularly the ongoing efforts of Zimbabwe and Zambia (Katanekwa 2004). He later confirmed (pers. comm.) that official delegations of chiefs, spirit mediums and others had come to Chimurenga sites in Zambia to carry out certain rituals to appease and settle the spirits of the war dead.

17. See for example 'Mugabe Purges "Rebel" Officials', 1/12/04, ZWNNews.com.

18. The scale of such efforts is hard to gauge, but may be similar in scale and form to that involved in the (possibly related) conservation efforts of Daneel's ZIRRICON and AZTREC (1998), and its splinter AZTREC Trust, in which Ambuya VaZarira herself was involved. Certainly, the events and procedures described by James Cox's informants suggest quite an organised and sophisticated approach in which not only spirit mediums, but also church prophets and even the CIO are involved (2005).

19. Likewise, where guerrillas sought legitimacy (rather than merely material support, see Bhebe & Ranger 1995: 17-18) from priests at missions and churches, I suspect they were similarly implicated in the practices and performances of these religious 'experts', particularly in areas where there emerged a creative popular African Christianity such as around Elim Mission (Maxwell 1995 & 1999), or among the Zionist churches Daneel describes (1995: 165-194, 1998).

20. Janice McLaughlin's work has focused on some of the tensions between guerrillas working with spirit mediums, and the ZANLA and ZIPA high commands. In one example she cites, women guerrillas were reproached by a political commissar because they followed an instruction by a spirit medium not to carry weapons during menstruation: "We are not under the rule of spirit mediums . . . no spirit medium has ever liberated this country . . . You want to create your own Medium Spirit Policy instead of the Party" (McLaughlin 1991, cited in Bhebe & Ranger 1995: 12).

21. VaMhike also stated that although 'we went thorough a number of battles . . . our main task was actually to politicise the masses' (Interview, 26/6/01).

22. When I naively suggested that this was the perspective of many observers of Zimbabwe's recent land reform programme, VaKanda responded 'Some people may think this is a political issue, people may think that the ZANU (PF) government is actually taking advantage of the land situation to help its political gains and so on. That is not true, very very untrue, it means quite a lot.' (Interview with VaKanda, VaMadori and VaMuchina, 16/03/01). This point is further supported by recent press reports that some war veterans who were active supporters of the ruling party are turning away in disillusionment. See 'War Veterans Ditch Zanu PF' (*The Standard* 20/03/05) and 'Clean up Splits ZANU PF' (*The Standard* 19/06/05).

23. See for example, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum Political Violence Reports: December 2001 (January 2002), October 2002 (21/11/02), August 2003 (22/09/03), December 2003 (28/1/04), January 2004 (1/03/04); 'Torture by State Agents in Zimbabwe, January 2001-August 2002'; 'Teaching Them a Lesson; A Report on the Attack on Zimbabwean Teachers', 20/09/02. Also AMANI Trust 'Organised Violence and Torture in the June 2000 General Election in Zimbabwe. A Report prepared by the Mashonaland Programme of the AMANI Trust' 28/02/2002. 'Rights Abuses Unabated since Zimbabwe Poll—Amnesty' Reuters, 9/05/05, ZWNEWS.com.