



**Midlands State University**  
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**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

**HERITAGE AND ALLEGIANCE: A HISTORY OF NJELELE SACRED  
PLACE IN MATOBO HILLS FROM THE 1960s TO THE PRESENT**

**BY**

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**GWERU, ZIMBABWE**

**JUNE 2015**

**DECLARATION**

**This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my work .Each significant contribution to and quotation in this dissertation from the work of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.**

**Signed.....**

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**Date.....**

**Supervisor.....**

**DR T. MASHINGAIDZE**

## **DEDICATION**

Edi Mapiki, I dedicate this thesis to you my mother .For the time that you have been with me thanks for your hard work, encouragement and love. Rest in peace my darling.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONONMYS**

NMMZ.....National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe

MDC.....Movement for Democratic Change

ZANU PF .....Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front

## **ABSTRACT**

**This thesis was an investigation into the conflicts at Njelele sacred place. There had been intense conflicts between various stakeholders over the control and management of the shrine from at least the 1960s to the present. This thesis therefore argue that even though there are many causes of conflicts at Njelele like quest for political control over the shrine, attempts by the post –colonial government to politicize the shrine, ethnicisation or tribalisation of the shrine, cultural transformation of the shrine over the past years, scarcity of resources, interdependence of people who wish to achieve different goals the contests over the control of the shrine can largely be attributed to colonialism. Most of the causes can be traced back or had their roots in the colonial period. There were both direct and indirect impacts on the shrine and these impacts fuelled conflicts at the shrine.**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Njelele is a holy and sanctified place. It is a sacred mountain which stands high above the ground and is located in the interior of the Matobo Hills range. Matobo Hills was nominated as a World Heritage Site in the year 2003 and is situated 100 kilometers from Zimbabwe's largest city which is Bulawayo. Njelele is also known as *Matonjeni* in Ndebele and *Mabweadziva* in Shona.<sup>1</sup> *Mabweadziva*, thus a name coined from rocks of water. A sacred place is an area which is referred to as holy due to the uniqueness it holds. The difference from other places makes it sacred. Njelele as a sacred shrine is part of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage.<sup>2</sup> Cultural heritage can simply be explained as invaluable things to certain or different communities.<sup>3</sup> These things include tangible and intangible aspects which are sites, landscapes, objects, music, legends and myths and the intangibles are usually expressed by the physical objects. Culture therefore can be described as a collection of unique brain, material, mystical as well as emotional features of a certain society or community. Peterson argue that culture is at least made up of four elements which are ethics, norms, values, beliefs and also communicative symbols. Norms can best be explained as the way in which a certain community behaves, beliefs therefore constitute their way of thinking and how they view things, values denotes morals and ethics of a given society and usually communicative symbols are representations. Therefore expressive symbols often depicts ethics, norms, values and beliefs of a certain social group and due to that Njelele sacred shrine acts as an expressive symbol of people's culture. Therefore the management of Njelele cultural heritage site without recognizing how the past human societies have influenced as well as shaped the existence of the site becomes inexperienced.

Competition over the control and supervision of heritage sites had led to acute or dangerous conflicts in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. These contests to be in charge of

heritage sites had led to dangerous conflicts between individuals who compete to be heritage custodians, families, government officials, government heritage departments and the local communities. Sometimes such competitions had led to heritage obliteration in various places in Zimbabwe. A site with an empirical evidence of how these conflicts had culminated into heritage devastation is Domboshava hills a sacred place in Domboshava growth point which is situated 35 kilometers away from Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe.<sup>4</sup> The rock art paintings in one of the cave at Domboshava had been vandalized by the local communities.<sup>5</sup> Njelele as one of the cultural heritage sites in Zimbabwe has been assaulted on various times as a result of contestations over the priesthood and custodianship of the shrine.<sup>6</sup> It also ought to be taken into consideration to facilitate that Njelele is not the only shrine or a sacred place which had culminated into serious contests over the supervision of the site but there are also other places which had become sources of conflicts. These places include Shavarunzi sacred place in the Mazowe area which had been the stronghold of Mbuya Nehanda, Chitungwiza which was also the stronghold of Chaminuka which is also known as *Chitungwiza ChaChaminuka*. Thus according to F.M Chabata et al, Chitungwiza sacred place can be attributed to one of those sites legendarily recognized not because of its artistic and visual or physical appearance but its vital and crucial intangible.<sup>7</sup>

Njelele is designated as a scared place because the Shona people who constitute the Bakalanga, Korekore, Karanga, Ndau, Ndebele and Zezuru in contemporary Zimbabwe alleged that Mwali lived at the shrine.<sup>8</sup> Daneel argue that the Bashona viewed Mwali as the uppermost authorization after the living dead.<sup>9</sup> Mwali is said to have spoken from the rock and the rock was Njelele sacred place. The last well known authority over the control of the shrine is the Rozvi state. It is difficult to understand the shrine without understanding the history of Rozvi state.<sup>10</sup> The Ndebele

state when they come to the south western part of Zimbabwe they embraced the concept of the Mwari cult at Njelele .Mzilikazi was loyal to Njelele and he also sent ten herds of cattle to Njelele for thanksgiving. Njelele therefore emerged as a major rain shrine.<sup>11</sup>

Njelele had become a contested landscape between different stakeholders ever since the colonial period. Even though there had been conflicts over the control of the shrine during the period before colonialism towards the end of the colonial era the contests over the control and supervision of the shrine intensified. This study therefore seeks to explore, explode and unpack the reasons for the contests between different stakeholders to control the shrine. Njelele having emerged as a major Mwari Cult shrine during the Iron Age period it later become vulnerable to changing culture in Zimbabwe during the colonial era which culminated into its various political and social uses and abuses in post colonial era shifting from its main purpose and at the same time fuelling conflicts on the shrine. This research's major argument therefore is the fact that conflicts at Njelele can be largely attributed to the impacts of colonialism. This is despite the fact that some historians and scholars have overruled that there had been conflicts even during the pre-colonial so conflicts and that there even from antiquity however after a critical analysis of how colonialism impacted on the shrine as well as on Africans or indigenous people it is justified to conclude that effects of colonization were the major contributing factor to conflicts. The greatest effect which exacerbated conflicts at the shrine remains the impacts of colonialism. Thus the vulnerability of the shrine to political and social uses in modern Zimbabwe resulted from the effects of colonialism notably Christianity and on the other hand this had fuelled conflicts at the shrine. This study therefore sought to look into the impacts of colonialism on the shrine and how this fueled conflicts at the shrine between different stakeholders. However, these conflicts had

been exacerbated by the fact that the shrine had been manipulated by different individuals as well as politicians to meet different political power as an instrument to economic ends, the fact that Shona government had tried to politicize the shrine several times, ethnicisation or tribalisation of the shrine, the need by the local communities to protect their own shrine because they viewed it as their own shrine, the government's elimination way of protecting heritage sites, political quest for power, interdependent of parties who pursue different goals, scarcity of resources. This in its sense had caused what can be termed as continuous defilement, sacrilege and discretion of the shrine.

At the Njelele shrine there had been individual contests over the custodianship and control of the shrine. These contestations had been recorded as having intensified in the 1960s even though they started during the early period of colonial conquest.<sup>12</sup> There had been contestations over the control of the shrine by different people notably Sitwanyana Ncube, Ngcathu Ncube and the Ndlovu brothers namely David, Sili and Mayabu Ndlovu on the other hand.<sup>13</sup> This study therefore focuses on exploring these conflicts among individuals over the control of the shrine. Sitwanyana Ncube was thus evicted from the shrine for at least three times as the shrine priest but he kept on returning to the shrine. The reasons for wanting to become the priest custodian therefore becomes questionable basing on the wrath and resistance he faced from the local people of the Matobo district and the guerillas as well as the dissidents who once put his homestead on fire. Government officials also had been directly or indirectly involved in the politics of the shrine one way or the other. Joshua Nkomo remains the major politician who remained closely linked to Njelele shrine. This thesis therefore look also into the reasons why the government officials had kept on involving themselves in the politics of the shrine exacerbating the conflicts at the shrine.

This research also sought to unpack the conflicts between the colonial government heritage departments and the local communities .The thesis will unpack how the Government heritage departments had tried to proclaim and control the shrine and how this has resulted in serious conflicts between the local communities and the government heritage managers and in this case the NMMZ.This also can largely be attributed to the effects of colonialism. The attempt by the government to make Shona spirit mediums as custodians at the shrine also shows some kind of conflict which emanated at the shrine between the ZAPU and ZANU over the control of the shrine. This thesis will also focus on the origins of the sacred shrine .There are so many myths surrounding this place and this thesis will also unpack the origins of the shrine. The last chapter of this thesis focuses on the expedition of the Gukurahundi ex-Zanla war fighters who forced their way into Njelele sacred place. This chapter therefore focuses on the factors that shows the vulnerability of the shrine to various abuses and uses in post-colonial Zimbabwe. It is important to highlight the fact that all these uses and abuses of the shrine had their roots in the colonial period.

## **2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **RSEARCH QUESTIONS**

- a) Why Njelele a rain making shrine in Matobo Hills which is part of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage had become a contested place between different stakeholders which include

colonial government and the local communities, individuals, families, post-government heritage departments and the local communities, the government officials as well as political parties?

- b) Why Njelele as part of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage sites has become vulnerable to various political and social uses which had led to its defilement continuously?
- c) When did the voice at the shrine seized to talk?

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- a) To show that the conflicts that transpired at the shrine can be largely attributed to colonialism.
- b) To show how the conflicting demands between traditions and the modern ways of preserving and conserving cultural heritage had resulted into serious conflicts at the shrine.
- c) To show how colonialism had opened gaps for the vulnerability of cultural heritage in Zimbabwe to the political and social uses this in turn had led to sacrilege of Njelele shrine.

The main argument of this research therefore remains the fact that even though there are other reasons for the conflicts at the shrine ,the colonial impacts remains the greatest cause behind the conflicts at Njelele shrine .

### **4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Various scholars do not concur on the origins of Njelele shrine. Ranger allude that Tredgold believed that the Matobo Hills were used for rainmaking ceremonies even before the establishment of the Mwali Cult in Matabeleland.<sup>14</sup> Ranger also believe that even before the

establishment of the Cult in Matobos the rain dances were conducted by various people in the surrounding area of Matobos.<sup>15</sup> Even though these scholars agree on the fact that rain dances were conducted before the establishment of the shrine, the establishment of Njelele as a rain shrine had a powerful and well- positive effect on the whole environment. With the establishment of the shrine the people of Matobos benefited so much from the shrine. The rain dances or rain ceremonies conducted at the shrine become more important and effective after the establishment of the shrine. It becomes so influential in the lives of many people because after the seeds were blessed at the shrine people were destined to have bountiful harvests. That is how Njelele become so important in the lives of many people. Mazarire, Ranger, Daneel, L.S Nthoi and Schoffelers concur on the fact that Njelele was not the only shrine established in the Matobo Range. When the Mwali Cult oracular established itself in the Matobos various shrines were also established for various purposes. Njelele was established as a rain shrine responsible for fertility on the land and fertility on humans also. Thus the rain making roles of the shrine complimented the peace giving roles because people also consulted the shrine during problems like pests that seek to destroy crops ,community problems as well as individual problems .Those who seek to be blessed also consulted the shrine for blessings. Njelele dealt with sustaining human life and the goodness of all the people. It was not associated with blood.<sup>16</sup> The Mwali Cult might have been a deity of war and other things but the shrine was not a war shrine and was not associated with central politics of the state and war but with rain, peace and sustainability of human beings. Other shrines were also established which are Dula,Zhilo ,Wirirano to mention but a few.

Even though there is substantial evidence to support the fact that Njelele was a rain shrine and an important shrine during the ancient times it is difficult to obtain the actual time when the shrine was established because information on the ground do not concur. Different scholars have come



up with various dates in their bid to trace the establishment of the shrine which are conflictual. The time frame available ranges from 14th century to 19th century. The oral traditions of the Barozvi postulate that the genesis of the shrine can simply be traced from at least 14th century when a particular ethnic group migrated from Lake Tanganyika and lastly settled at Dzimbahwe a certain settlement which existed during the period 1280-1480AD.<sup>17</sup> At the same time Garlake and Daneel argue that the oracular might have been established at Great Zimbabwe prior to its movement to Matobos. Daneel further argued that the establishment of the shrine might have been happened at the same time with the transfer of the Rozvi central government from Great Zimbabwe to the South west.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand oral traditions argue that the oracular was established at Great Zimbabwe before a dispute occurred which led the other priests to move to Njelele and establish a shrine there. Ngwabi Bhebhe on the other hand believed that the shrine was established in Matobos during the time of the Rozvi Dynasty.<sup>19</sup>

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A lot of literature on the history of Zimbabwe has been generated by various scholars and historians but the conflicts at Njelele had not been given greater length. In his book T.O Ranger Voices from the rocks he explained explicitly the clash of beliefs and interests between the white colonialists and the Banyubi, Ndebele and the Kalanga in the Matopos. He described how the white colonialists viewed the Matopos as an empty landscape with no humanity whilst the indigenous people viewed the same place as a place full of humanity and as a spiritual world. He went on to describe the contests over the custodianship and priesthood of Njelele between different individuals namely Sitwanyana Ncube ,Ngcathu and the Ndlovu family on the other

hand .He mentioned the conflicts in passing and he actually did not mention the causes of the conflicts of which this thesis is going to focus on in great depth. T.O Ranger did not cover the conflicts between the government heritage departments both the colonial and the post –colonial government and the local communities in the Matobos which include Chief Masuku and Chief Malaba, the elders and their people.The thesis therefore sought to unpack these conflicts between various stakeholders.

S.Makuvaza focused on the reason why Njelele besides being one of the most important cultural heritage site in Southern Africa the government had failed to declare the shrine as a National Monument .He analyzed the conflicts that occurred between the colonial government and the local communities in the colonial period and also the conflict that occurred in post colonial period between the local communities and the government as the reason why Njelele was not proclaimed as a cultural heritage site and why it was not declared as one of Zimbabwe’s National Monument. Whilst he explores the conflict between these two groups Makuvaza become silent on the contestations by several people who claimed to be the shrine custodians. So this paper focuses on the causes of all the conflicts that transpired on the shrine between all the people who claimed to be the shrine custodians, the government, the local people, between the political parties especially ZANU and ZAPU soon after independence. The thesis will also explore how the politician’s involvement in the politics of the shrine exacerbated the conflicts over the control of the shrine.

L. S. Nthoi in his thesis analyzed the God of Matonjeni. He analyzed on whether the Mwali Cult is of War or He is a God of Peace.After conducting various interviews with shrine priests, the politicians and the secondary sources he concluded that Mwali at Matonjeni can be a God of War or He can be a God of peace depending on the context and perspectives of how people viewed

him. Some people believed that He is a God of War whilst others believed that he is a God of peace. The conclusion therefore is based on the context in which people approached the Mwali cult in Matobos. The people who lived on the south western part of Zimbabwe concluded that God of Matonjeni is the God of war because during the liberation struggle they consulted the Mwali Cult for guidance and protection. At the same time the people on the north eastern part of Botswana contend that the Mwali cult is of peace. The Mwali cult was established on different shrines when these shrines were established each shrine with its specific purpose .Therefore in this dissertation the author contend that even though Mwali cult was of peace or of war Njelele shrine was not established as a war shrine. War related issues were therefore taken to other shrines like Dula shrine but not Njelele shrine. If anyhow the shrine was used for war related issues it means that the shrine was defiled .Njelele is not a war shrine.

S.Makuvaza,T.O Ranger and L.S Nthoi in their papers focused on different aspects about Njelele shrine. In their bid to document the issues surrounding Njelele they never unpack the origins of Njelele shrine. S.Makuvaza just give an overview,whilst L.S Nthoi never focused on one shrine but on different shrines and T.O Ranger focused more on the history of the people in Matobos and the various shrines more than the Njelele specific shrine whilst not being taking into consideration the historical evidence surrounding the origins of Njelele shrine, how it emerged and its purpose as a shrine. Even though Ranger had attempted to describe the importance of Njelele as a shrine even the people who used the shrine he was silent on the people who established the shrine and the main purpose of the shrine. Therefore this thesis is going to unpack the various myths on the origins of the shrine and also trace the custodians of the shrine based on empirical evidence.

T.O Ranger in his works of 1967, 1989, 1991 and 1992 continuously argued about how the Mwali shrine priests organized and mobilized the first liberation war during the 1986 to 1987 uprisings. He spearheaded the notion that the Mwali Cult was influential in mobilizing the first Chimurenga. M.L Daneel and Schoffelaers also concurred with the same view of how the shrine messengers played a significant role in the liberation struggle. However, J. Cobbing and D.N. Beach largely rejected this notion. J. Cobbing argues that the Ndebele 1896-7 was planned and guided by Ndebele people with no collaboration from the Ndebele cult priests. He dismisses the role played by Mwali Cult as myth. Cobbing further illustrates that this coordination by the leaders of Ndebele people was possible because the Ndebele civic, political as well as military structures survived the 1893 defeats by the BSA Company. He also observed that the role played by Mwari was exaggerated by T.O Ranger as a way of trying to make a link of the 1896-97 African resistance and the second liberation struggle. But whatever the uncertainties there are about the role of this cult it is important to highlight the fact that the shrine was a peace shrine. Therefore in this thesis the role of the shrine had been explicitly explored and various political and social uses of the shrine in modern Zimbabwe had been pointed out which continues to defile the shrine.

In his book where he documented his own auto biography Nkomo unintentionally coined the story of how he visited Dula shrine a sacred place in the Matobo range. It was during the genesis of the nationalist period when J. Nkomo and his party members namely William Sivako and Grey Bango visited the shrine. This was just before the nationalist struggle intensified. He explained about how they invoked the voice of Mwali and how Mwali acknowledged how the land was going to be brought to them after a long struggle and loss of land in thirty years which were to come. The visit of Nkomo therefore to Dula shrine, a shrine capacitated to deal with war issues

shows how each shrine was established in the Matobo Hills with a specific purpose. Therefore this thesis brought much substantial evidence to support the fact that Njelele was a rain, fertility and peace shrine and never in the pre-colonial history was Njelele used in the politics of war. Substantive evidence had been brought forward to support the argument and the view that Njelele was a rain shrine responsible for the sustainability of human life, fertility in both humans and crops for human consumption. I have therefore argued that these political uses in the colonial and post colonial Zimbabwe had fuelled conflicts at the shrine.

### **SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

The time factor and resources available greatly influenced the sources and methodology used. This research makes use of qualitative research methodology because it is the research which brings out the best result in insights and information with better depth. Sources such as newspapers, interviews, group discussions as well as secondary sources were consulted as the information tools to acquire the best results.

In this study both structured and unstructured interviews were used to obtain the necessary data that was needed to answer the research questions. Interviews being one of research methods were distinctive in the fact that they allowed the assortment of data in the course of direct verbal interaction between individuals. The main advantage of the interviews was its suppleness. Various interviews were conducted around the local communities surrounding the Njelele shrine. Some interviews were also conducted at the Bulawayo Museum of Human Sciences as well as different individuals who also in their own way understand the Njelele cultural heritage.

Newspapers as a source of data collection are known for their sensational weakness but I have used them because they are rich and efficient in reflecting history, social and cultural values of

people .They are also unique as they contain information that can be hardly found at other places .The newspapers were also crucial as they helped in giving insight about Njelele as well as equipping me with the background information. Online newspapers as well as various files with newspaper cuttings were used in order to discuss the subject at hand.

Focused group discussions become important in accessing information and insights for the writing of this thesis. Group discussions were an important tool conducted by the author to obtain important information. Group discussions were conducted at school with classmates as well as at the national museums and monuments of Zimbabwe as a way of obtaining a greater depth of information as well as insights.

Various secondary sources were also consulted in the writing of this dissertation. Textbooks from various scholars had been used for substantial evidence. The journals were also used as part of the sources in this thesis.

## **DISSERTATION LAYOUT**

### **CHAPTER ONE (1)**

#### **UNPACKING THE MYTHS SURROUNDING THE ORIGINS OF NJELELE**

This chapter sought to explore the origins of Njelele sacred mountain in Matobo Hills. Various explanations had been proffered by various scholars in a bid to trace the origins of the shrine but the origins remains had remained unclear due to conflictual accounts proffered by these scholars. So the aim of this chapter is unpack all these myths which surround the origins of Njelele sacred place. The chapter will also focuses on the main purpose why the shrine was established and

explore different people who used the shrine. This chapter will also focus on exploring the purposes and uses of the shrine in the and what it was utilized for by different groups of people .In trying to identify the guardians of the Njelele shrine, this chapter will also unpack the historical evidence which will help to understand if the sacred shrine was a contested area in the pre-colonial era.

## **CHAPTER TWO (2)**

### **THE COLONIAL IMPACTS AND THE CONFLICTS AT NJELELE**

This chapter focuses on the genesis of conflicts during the colonial period between the colonial heritage managers departments and the local communities. It therefore explores why these people conflicted .It also goes on to explore the impacts of colonialism on the shrine and how this led to serious conflicts on the shrine. The chapter also focuses on the different individuals' quest for power over the control of the shrine. It also explores how the families contested over the control of the shrine and the causes of the conflicts.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE POLITICS OF SHRINES AS HERITAGE SITES**

This chapter has focused on the politics of Njelele shrine as a heritage site in Zimbabwe. The chapter aimed at unraveling how the Government of Zimbabwe had dealt with heritage places in post colonial Zimbabwe. It therefore seeks to explore the contradicting methods of preserving and conserving heritage between the government heritage departments and the traditional intelligence and how this had led to conflicts between different these people. It therefore

analyzed the NMMZ ACT of how they viewed the heritage. It also looked into the conflicts that had their roots in the colonial period that occurred in the post –colonial era and how the government officials had exacerbated conflicts at the shrine .

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **NJELELE SHRINE IN THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL HEALING**

This chapter has focused on the uses of the shrine in post colonial Zimbabwe. The shrine had become vulnerable to different political and social uses in the post colonial Zimbabwe .Njelele sacred place is perceived as a national shrine capacitated for everything by different people. Njelele therefore as a shrine some purposes become vulnerable when used for contradicting purposes. This therefore had led to the continuous sacrilege and defilement of the shrine .One of the major purposes Njelele had been turned to ever since the attainment of independence is cleansing ceremonies. Ever since 1980 Njelele had been used as a place for ritual purification with the people who had killed people in the liberation struggle, the dissents era in the Matabeleland, the war veterans who during the 2008 bloody elections, as well the ex-Zanla war guerillas of the Gukurahundi period. This leaves a lot to be questioned because if the shrine is not capacitated for cleansing people who are being haunted by the spirits of those they had killed were they cleansed after they visiting the shrine. At the same time it is surprising why the cleansing ceremonies are being conducted at a wrong shrine when the traditional brain is their? Is it that they are ignorant about the purposes of the shrine? Substantial evidence had been brought forward from various scholars to support the view that Njelele is not a shrine capacitated for cleansing ex-war soldiers, neither is it a shrine for war related issues. The chapter also focuses on the Gukurahundi ex-war veterans who visited the shrine in 2012, their motives, and



the conflicts they caused at the shrine and why the traditional intelligence reacted to their weird visits.

### **END NOTES**

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **UNPACKING THE MYTHS SURROUNDING THE ORIGINS OF NJELELE SHRINE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Njelele consecrated site is a mountain located in Matobo Hills. Matobo Hills is a World Heritage Site to be found 100kms South of Bulawayo which is the Second largest City of Zimbabwe. The idiom Njelele might have been derived from Bakalanga name for an eagle. It is also alleged that the term might have come from the founding priest of the sacred place known as *Njenjema*.<sup>1</sup> Njelele is well recognized as *Matonjeni* in Ndebele and *Mabweadziva* in Shona. *Mabweadziva*, thus a name coined from rocks of water. Njelele is consequently considered a sacred place because the Shona and Ndebele people understood that Mwali the Most High God lived at this holy place. The presence of Mwali at the shrine was heard in the course of His tone of voice which conversed through the rocks.<sup>2</sup> Information from Ranger's book *Voices from the Rocks* be evidence for the fact that, there were many shrines in the Matobo Hills specifically Dula, Zhilo, Wirirano and Nswatugi and many other shrines Njelele included. The Mwali Cult was not set up on one shrine as there were other shrines. Mazarire also asserts that Njelele was not the only shrine in Matobo as there were other shrines for different purposes from that of Njelele shrine.<sup>3</sup>

A variety of explanations has been proffered by different scholars and historians such as Cobbing, Daneel, Ranger, Nyathi, Makuvaza, Cockcroft, Bhebe and many others in a bid to trace the origins of Njelele sacred place. Some of these explanations are conflicting or else confusing if not fictitious. Throwing a consideration on the actuality that, the beginning of Njelele place of worship can be marked out back in the direction of the setting up of the Mwari Cult at Njelele is

of great magnitude because the most imperative thing of all is that Njelele emerged as a powerful shrine after the cult was established on the mountain. The chief aim of this chapter therefore is to investigate various explanations that have been proffered to account for the origins of the shrine. This chapter also, goes on to focus on exploring the purposes and uses of the shrine and what it was utilized for by different groups of people. Identifying the people who were accountable to the shrine is also one of the major aims of this chapter. In trying to identify the guardians of the Njelele shrine, this chapter will unpack the historical evidence which will help to understand if the sacred shrine was a contested area in the pre-colonial era.

Njelele proved to be one of Mwali places which were of great significance in the whole part of Southern Africa. P.Nyathi argues that Mwali might have been a deity or spirit which once lived on this earth and an ancestor who had descendants.<sup>4</sup> The people who believed in Mwali at Njelele lived in the South Western part of Zimbabwe and the North –Western part of Botswana.<sup>5</sup> Mwali was alleged to be the creator of Human beings and because of this Mwali was believed to be of great value by the people who worshipped and respected Him. According to Daneel quoted in Makuva he was the, “final authority” behind the Bashona ancestors.<sup>6</sup> In simplicity the voice of Mwali transformed Njelele mountain into a special place and it became a holy shrine.

T.Malaba believes that, “the Njelele worship system was a highly mobile one” and it was not in point of fact centred on one site and Njelele became important because it is the last well known place where the voice of Mwali manifested itself.<sup>7</sup> According to T.Malaba the voice of Mwali was always on the spot that the priests pitched their tent. So according to him the voice of Mwali started talking at the shrine when the tent was pitched by the founding priest of Njelele, known as *Njenjema*. Mwali was known to be the Creator of heaven and earth as well as the Creator of

everything on earth. Mwali was alleged to be omnipresent and immanent and was also known as the peace –bearer, concerned with the well being of people through providing rain, food and health for everyone. He was the final helper of human beings responsible for their health and food provision and for the world to exist it solely depended on rain and Mwali was the only controller of rain. Mwali had numerous names and according to Murambiwa, He was known as, “Dzivaguru, Sororenzou, Nyadenga, Muvumbapasi, Musika and also Nyadenga.”<sup>8</sup> These metaphors were developed within the context of how various people viewed Mwali. So owing to this force which Mwali had upon people when Mwali manifested at Njelele it emerged as an important shrine. It was treated with so much respect as the mouthpiece of Mwali hence its sacredness.

### **THE GENESIS OF NJELELE SHRINE**

Njelele shrine emerged as a major rain shrine, a place where the rain making ceremonies were conducted. The antiquity of Njelele sacred place is problematic given the time specified by different scholars. The time ranges from at least the 14th century to the 19th century. Tredgold is of the view that Njelele shrine have been in existence for more than 500 years.<sup>9</sup> J.Cobbing suggest 19th century as the only time when the shrine was established in Matobos.<sup>10</sup> T.Malaba argues that the cult might have been in existence probably since emergence of Great Zimbabwe and also during the thriving of Mapungubwe and Khami states.<sup>11</sup> The oral traditions of the Barozvi postulate that the genesis of the shrine can simply be traced from at least 14th century when a particular ethnic group migrated from Lake Tanganyika and lastly settled at Dzimbahwe a certain Iron Age settlement which existed during the period 1280-1480AD.<sup>12</sup> At the same time

Garlake and Daneel argue that the oracular might have been established at Great Zimbabwe prior to its movement to Matobo Hills. Daneel further argued that the establishment of the shrine might have been happened at the same time with the transfer of the Rozvi central government from Great Zimbabwe to the South west.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand oral traditions argue that the oracular was established at Great Zimbabwe before a dispute occurred which led the other priests to move to Njelele and establish a shrine there. N Bhebhe on the other hand believed that the shrine was established in Matobos during the time of the Rozvi Dynasty and can easily be traced to Vendaleland in South Africa.<sup>14</sup> Cockcroft also believes that the shrine come from the Transvaal.<sup>15</sup> It seems like in Matebeleland there is a general agreement that the Mwali Cult came from Vendaleland .One interviewee called Sibanda argues that there are other similar shrines in the South just like Njelele and the Njelele shrine was first of all established in the South before being transferred to Matobos.<sup>16</sup> S.Khumalo also argues that the shrine can be traced from the Transvaal and there are so many stopovers where the shrine was established before being fully established at Njelele. T.Malaba also plainly argues that, “the last well known trek of this Cult is from Vendaleland.”<sup>17</sup> According to him the shrine was established by the Malaba or Lubimbi Clan. He argued that this was the Bakalanga group of people which brought the Cult in Zimbabwe and several breaks in the journey had been proffered as evidence of the fact that the shrine can simply be traced to Vendaleland which they stopped before fully established at Njelele. Werbener, Mothibi and Gwavabvu also share the same view. On other hand P.Nyathi strongly believe that:

The Mwali Cult was originally from Great Zimbabwe even though some people believe that it came from Vendaleland. It is difficult to establish evidence how it migrated from Great Zimbabwe to Matebeleland but it is originally from Great Zimbabwe.<sup>18</sup>

Basing on the above arguments it is justifiable to argue that it might be possible that the Mwari Cult was first of all established at Great Zimbabwe before migrating to Njelele shrine. This is because archaeological evidence postulates that Great Zimbabwe was one of holy places and very religious. Even though there is no substantial evidence to support how the cult migrated from Great Zimbabwe to Matobos there is also substantive evidence to support the treks of the shrine from Vendaland. Whilst this had been characterised with re-emergence and re-imaginings of how the cult had moved from Great Zimbabwe it is important to note that the Venda- Kalanga people who are said to have established the shrine had once lived at Great Zimbabwe .According to MK Rodewald the Kalanga ancestors are believed to have occupied Great Zimbabwe from at least 13th to 15th century.<sup>19</sup> He clearly described how these groups split into two groups after the demise of the Great Zimbabwe and how the other group went to the south –western part and formed a state known as Butua and the other one was formed at the northern part of Zimbabwe .He also mentioned about the group of Venda-Lemba people who become united at the demise of the Great Zimbabwe and formed the Mapungubwe state .This group of the Lemba people is said to have been lived in Vendaland and the Lubimbi people who are said to have established the cult in Matobo were the descendants of the Lemba clan. Njenjema of the Ncube clan who have been acknowledged as the founding priest of Njelele was of Ncube clan.<sup>20</sup>The Lemba were also part of the people who claimed to have build the Great Zimbabwe dry stones as all the Shona groups in contemporary Zimbabwe. Some scholars have alleged that the shrine can be traced the from the east . It might be possible that the people might have been also from the east because the custodians Ncube people who are regarded as the sole custodians of the shrine in contemporary Zimbabwe are of Monkey totem which means *Soko Murewa*. The people of this type of totem are said to be originally from Malawi and Zambia which is part of the East African



region. In Malawi also there is also another cult which had similar attributes like that of the custodians of the Njelele shrine.

### **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SHRINE**

There is a general belief that the Rozvi State established Njelele shrine. There have been misrepresentations of historical facts and fabricated myths about Zimbabwe's pre-colonial era. In actual fact it is true that the Njelele shrine cannot be understood outside the Rozvi rulers. MK Rodewald argues that the view that the Mwali cult entered with the Rozvi in Matobos is a weak argument.<sup>21</sup> This becomes clear especially after reading Machiridza who traced the history of the so-called Rozvi rulers. Some historians had claimed the Rozvi as being the Karanga ethnic group. It is fascinating to highlight the fact that the Rozvi was a distinct group which was different from Karanga, Kalanga, Venda, Nambiya, Ndau and Tonga but it managed to manipulate every section of these ethnic groups and became rulers of all these groups and people. They manipulated all the sacred and religious places to suit their own ways. There is a general belief that the Rozvi had a strong background but historical evidence proves that these people were a small ethnic group who originated in the north east of Zimbabwe in the contemporary Murewa in Mashonaland east. These people were of the Moyo Clan who had a poor background and were only commoners but because of their skills they managed to rise and control every ethnic group from the 17th to at least 19th century. These Rozvi people believed in the Mwari religion which was different but with many similarities to the Mwali cult in the Matobos. So when they went to the South-west it was easier for them to adopt the Mwali worship system of in Matobo Hills. The cult was already established at Njelele shrine when the

Rozvi ethnic group moved from north-east to south-west .The important thing and the reason why the Rozvi had been credited as being the sole authority over Njelele is that they managed to control this shrine. They managed to interweave the cultural-religious institution of the Kalanga with their political power. They managed to transform the shrine into a way that suited their own style of living. The Rozvi succeeded into manipulating the shrine into their political purposes and sometimes they used it as their own private provision. This is because after they conquered the Kalanga in the south west they became the custodians of the land and manipulated all the sacred places in the area. Sekuru Musarurwa argued that:

*(Kumabweadziva ndokwakanga kwakanyorwa mutemo yese yevarozvi uye ndopakanyorwa zvakare mutemo yenyika ino)* The laws of the Varozvi were ascribed at Njelele and that is also where the laws of Zimbabwe are ascribed.

Njelele was not the only shrine which was manipulated by the Rozvi people as all the sacred places were controlled by the Rozvi people and that might be the reason why some people believed that the Mwali cult was of the Rozvi rulers. Howman quoted in Ranger thought that:

was basically the god of the Warozwi, making himself heard through the medium of the Dombo re-Mwari ,or the Boulder of God ,from which his voice proceeded....For many years the Mambos [Rozvi kings] were in practice of sacrificing to Mwari at the rock.<sup>23</sup>

This is because the Rozvi people had authority over the cultural-socio political lives of many people and as such they become closely linked to the shrine. The Rozvi who rose from being commoners to chiefly posts had the final say on who would be a vassal chief and this office would need conformation through ancestral consultation of the Mwari priests. Even though the Rozvi were not the priests of the shrine as this was done through spirit possession and some tests conducted by spirit mediums they remained the highest authority over the Mwali shrine because they had a fashionable way of manipulating the sacred sites. The custodians of the Njelele shrine

remained the Venda people .Bhebe argued that the nomination of the priests was done from priestly families as in people who are from one family. This family tends out to be of Venda origin because so far the Njelele shrine priests had been of Venda stock. The shrine had been manned by the Ncubes and the Ndlovus all of Venda origin. This is substantial evidence to support the fact that the shrine was established by the Venda Kalanga people. This is because history has it that the Venda people were the ones who were well equipped with the traditions and culture of the Njelele shrine and who were closely associated with the shrine ,thus the priests at the site since antiquity to this period have been of Venda origin. It is only that when the Rozvi conquered the Venda-Kalanga people they became part of the Rozvi state and because of that the Rozvi rulers become loyal to the shrine as they also paid offerings to Njelele in the form of cattle .However P.Nyathi had argued that all these people might have been of the same origin because they are not different.<sup>24</sup> There are features are the same. The Venda, Kalanga, Karanga and the Rozvi are the same even though people have tried to distinguish these people.

### **NJELELE THE RAINMAKING SHRINE**

When the Mwali religious sect was established at Njelele, the shrine emerged as a powerful rainmaking and thanks giving shrine. Even though Matobo Hills were known as the hills of rain dances before the establishment of Njelele shrine it is important to throw a consideration on the fact that due to the set up of Njelele as a shrine it had great influence on the whole landscape basing on the elaborate rain making rituals conducted at the shrine. According to Malaba the process was two way whereby during the August –September the supplicants went to Njelele with thanks giving gifts and made their requests for rain. Sibanda who lives in South Matabeleland argued that:

In the ancient times people used to visit Njelele for rain making rituals and all problems affecting people in their lives were reported to Njelele and they were solved there. Every community was welcomed at the shrine and every kind of problem was solved at the shrine. The shrine was responsible for making rituals for the rain to fall. It had the power to make the rain to fall or withheld rain. It was responsible for the fertility both for the people and the crops. Njelele was not used for war issues.<sup>25</sup>

The quotation above shows that Mwali was concerned with peace, fertility, happiness of the people of his land. Muringaniza and Chabata also confirm this argument. It is important to note the fact that even now the whole Matobo landscape represents fertility. In the pre-colonial period there was no ethnicization of the shrine. The Shona referred to this deity as *Dzivaguru* and the Bakalanga as *Dziba le vula*. These expressions referred to Him as the rain giver. He had many praise names and songs which depicted him as the deity of rain and water. Rain was very important during the pre-colonial period since many people depended on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Since Njelele was not the only shrine in Matobos the main purpose of Njelele was for rain making ceremonies and thanks giving and the other shrines were responsible for other things like local politics and war for example Dula shrine was related to war issues and T.O Ranger argued that another shrine emerged during the uprisings of 1896 which was also war shrine .He quoted Thenjiwe Lesabe who argued that Mtuwane Dlodlo was called and he was given the power of war and as such he represented a shrine.<sup>26</sup>

This simply implies that Njelele shrine was not the only shrine in Matobo Hills but what makes it unique or distinguishes it from the other shrines is that it was arguably a rainmaking shrine as well as the mouth piece of Mwali .Unlike other shrines that served other purposes like war issues and politics Njelele shrine emerged as a shrine capable of sustaining people by bringing rain. P.Nyathi argues that, “Mother Earth is barren until fertilised.”<sup>27</sup> So the rain was important for

the fertility of the soil and that was important for good harvests. Njelele shrine became a shrine responsible for sustainability of people in the pre-colonial period because agriculture was one of the bases of the economy during this period. Njelele was responsible for the rain, crops' well being and good harvests thus the rain making ceremonies were conducted at Njelele as I.G Cockcroft argued that:

....I frequently heard of Njelele and the rain making ceremonies .During September-November of each year many elders from various parts transversed our farm en route to Njelele, to deliver offerings to the priest and to ask for rain.<sup>28</sup>

Besides being a rainmaking shrine it was also responsible for fertility in human beings. When couples fail to conceive they approached the shrine. For the sake of spiritual intervention and guidance the shrine was visited for instructions and precautions. Some were easily healed at the pre-eminent shrine and others were advised to visit a gynaecologist. P .Nyathi also confirms this as he argued that, "I have witnessed a scenario when one of my relative who was barren approached Njelele and after that he conceived a baby boy."So the shrine emerged as a rain and fertility shrine responsible for sustaining life by providing rain to all the people a pre-requisite for good harvests thus food provision for good health. Njelele was a peace shrine and rain making shrine. It is important to note that the Mwali Cult was established on several shrines namely Njelele, Ntogwa, Dula, Manyangwa and other shrines. There was no any kind of restriction for any ethnic group to the shrine and supplicants came as far as Gutu, Chivi, Southern Manicaland ,Botswana, some parts of South Africa and Mozambique and some parts of Zambia.

## **CONSULTING MWALI AT NJELELE**

It is essential to note that the cult at Njelele was not consulted or invoked in short supply of the priest. The sanctuary was open to officials and people were not allowed to consult the voice of Mwali at the shrine at the absence of the shrine officials. These officials were the guardians of Mwali's place and people who were well knowledgeable about the laws and regulations of Mwali. There were also gifted linguists who translated the voice of Mwali. These people and the elders were the only people who were allowed to consult the shrine. It is important to note the fact that the set up of Njelele was informal and congregational rather than hierarchical. Being the guardians of the Njelele the priests also interpreted the voice of Mwali to the people who consulted the shrine. The selection of the priests was done through spirit possession and tests conducted by spirit mediums. Njelele as a sacred place was not visited by all the people. There were some people who were not allowed to visit the shrine. Among the people who were allowed to visit the shrine were the priests, messengers and the dancers. The young girls of pre-pubescent stage and the old women who were post-menopausal were always welcome to the shrine and other people. Witches, wizards and thieves were not allowed at the shrine and if any one of these people visit the shrine he or she was stoned to death. People were also not allowed to visit the shrine in large numbers

## **CONCLUSION**

Even though various explanations has been proffered by different scholars in a bid to explain the origins of Njelele shrine but after assessing various traditions and accounts it is valid to believe that the only time Njelele shrine was established in Matobos could only be after the end of Great Zimbabwe State in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This is because the Venda people who established the shrine can be traced to Great Zimbabwe state even though their movement from Great Zimbabwe is difficult to trace. Njelele emerged as a rainmaking shrine responsible for the upkeep of human beings on earth by providing rain for good harvests.

## **END NOTES**

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **IMPACTS OF COLONIALISM ON NJELELE SHRINE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The explanation why Njelele as a shrine had developed into a contested area during the 1960s onwards between the government, the local communities, politicians, individuals and families can be traced back or had their roots in the colonial period. The effects of colonial machinations had regrettable impacts on the African continent as a whole and Zimbabwe in particular. The African beliefs and worldviews then became twisted to suit that of the colonial masters. The contests were first of all between the colonial government and the people surrounding the Matobo Hills. This chapter therefore first of all explore these contests between the colonial government and the local communities. The struggle was between the contradicting views of how nature must be dominated or used. The colonial government was concerned with the tangible aspects of monuments in Rhodesia whilst the members of the local communities surrounding sacred places or shrines were much worried about the intangible aspects of these shrines that is why the local communities around Matobo Hills they strongly resented the aspect of proclaiming Njelele as a national monument. They opposed the fact of taking care of Njelele by modern acts and legislations. This led to conflicts between the colonial government and the local communities. They also knew that the government was going to make use of the top down approach in conserving and preserving the shrine hence Njelele became a source of conflict between the colonial Government and the indigenous people.

The aim of the colonialists to destroy the African belief system and religion and convert them to Christianity impacted on Njelele shrine so badly .In their endeavour to annihilate the African

religion and all the practises associated with it because they perceived it as primitive and conservative to suit their own desires they tries all means possible to destroy the spiritual importance and significance of Njelele shrine. Even though this was a total failure because the local communities strongly resented this colonial scheme, it actually affected Njelele shrine negatively and it is the reason why Njelele became a source of conflict between different stakeholders in the 1960s. The impacts of colonial machinations on the shrine ranges from direct to indirect effects. Muringaniza strongly believes that the effects of colonialism were indirect whilst Nyathi, Khumalo and Sibanda on the other hand believe that the impacts had direct effects on the shrine but after a critical analysis it is justifiable to conclude that the effects had both direct and indirect impacts on the shrine. The colonial masters killed the priests who were the custodians of the shrine, they removed sacred objects at Njelele, they violated all the rules, taboos, laws and practises of the shrine, they defiled the shrine, forced people to neglect the shrine and as a result the shrine loses its value as it was no longer respected the way it was supposed to be respected. It is important to even through a consideration on the fact that even their presence on the shrine might have defiled the shrine because they were ignorant of the restrictions and prohibitions of the shrine.

These negative impacts on the shrine were the reasons why Njelele later became a source of conflict between different people and groups. The other aspect is that when Njelele was revitalized towards the end of the 20th century this was made possible with a progression of ancient time re-imaginings. The shrine came to be thought as an indispensable part of the Ndebele political order. The shrine's main function was shifted from rain making to politics and war. This is where all the problem started ,the colonialists having created the void ,actually the silencing of Njelele shrine when it was revived in the 1960s the people shifted the main purpose

of the shrine to politics and war. Having been established and emerged as a major rain making shrine during the genesis of the nationalist movement in Zimbabwe the shrine was approached by various people for spiritual and guidance which had fuelled its modern day use by ex-war veterans for cleansing ceremonies. This led Njelele shrine to represent interests of various groups and for this reason it became a source of conflict. The politicians like the late vice president Joshua Nkomo became interested in the shrine as he viewed it as a source of political power. At one point Joshua Nkomo once claimed that the shrine belonged to him and it was his duty to control the shrine. There is substantial evidence from Ranger, L.S Nthoi and Alexander et al to prove that he was not the only politician who was interested in the shrine but there were others like Thenjiwe Lesabe, Grey Bango amongst other politicians. Individuals also contested to control the shrine. Sitwanyana Ncube and his ex-wife Ngacuthu Ncube as well as Ndlovu brothers who were all of Venda extraction contested to control the shrine. So the shrine became a source of conflict between individuals who claimed the priestly posts, the politicians who viewed the shrine as a source of spiritual guidance for political power which would in turn unlock the door to economic anxieties and the local communities in their endeavour to administer the shrine with the customary laws as they opposed the management of the shrine with the modern laws and legislations which would in turn eradicate the sacredness of the shrine.

### **THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE COLONIALISTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES OVER NJELELE DURING THE EARLY COLONIAL CONQUESTS**

Prior to the country's attainment of independence, the colonial government through its heritage management departments had made various efforts to take over and be in command of Njelele shrine. They met resistance from the local communities and as such they failed to proclaim Njelele as a national monument. <sup>1</sup>The conflict resulted from the fact that the local communities

have long back opposed the conserving and preserving of the shrine with modern laws and legislations. The *raison de tre* for resistance ranges from the phobia that this would open Njelele to tourist attractions which would eradicate the sacredness of the shrine to poor involvement of the local communities in planning and managing the shrine whilst they were the real owners of the intangible heritage. The colonialists were also much concerned about the physical aspects of the shrines they had proclaimed as monuments not the metaphysical which was the most invaluable heritage at Njelele .This led to the conflict between the people in Matobo Hills and the colonial government during the early colonial conquests. Due to these conflicting views Njelele throughout the colonial period it was never declared as a national monument.

They viewed the African ways of being in harmony with nature as backward hence the implementation of 1902 ancient monuments protection ordinance. This act was aimed at protecting all the heritage sites Njelele included .The interest of the Government in protecting the shrine means modernization, to the African people this modernization implies the politics of exclusion and inclusion whereby the heritage managers at Njelele would not allow indigenous people to continue with their cultural rituals or ceremonies at Njelele. This legislation was not founded on the grounds that it would protect the African people's cultural heritage but to serve the interests of the few colonialists. <sup>2</sup>On the other hand the local people in the Matobo Hills area perceived Njelele as their invaluable cultural heritage site which they strongly believed that it should be controlled and managed by them with their own traditional laws and regulations. This was the kind of the conflict that transpired between the colonial government and the local communities due to different views and interests at Njelele during the early colonial period. The local communities knew that if the shrine came under the control of whites this would result in

their alienation from the shrine whilst they strongly believed that it was their own shrine to manage using the traditional customary laws and use it hence Njelele became a source of conflict between the two groups. The 1902 Ancient Monuments Ordinance was later improved and developed to the 1912 Bushmen Relics Ordinances .The monuments were selected on basis of rock paintings and archaeological remains. This was an issue of physical aspects at the expense of intangible aspects of some places. This is the reason why the local communities in Matobo Hills contested to control Njelele from the foreign managers because they were ignorant of the importance of the shrine as well as the laws and taboos of the shrine. The Bushmen Relics Ordinances was later expanded to the Monuments Relics Act of 1936.<sup>3</sup>This was the effort of the colonial government to manage Njelele and other heritage places during the period of 1912 to 1936 but unfortunately they failed to control the shrine but impacted badly on Njelele shrine.

### **THE IMPACTS OF COLONIALISM ON THE SHRINE**

There were many colonial impacts on the Njelele shrine, the missionaries, travellers, hunters and traders were among the other people who came across the shrine. Colonialism as compared to other forms of imperialism like the Atlantic Slave Trade was mainly besieged at eliminating and alienating the indigenous people's religions, cultures, values as well as norms. The colonialists were aimed at replacing these belief systems with their own way of living such that those belief systems which did not suit their own beliefs were referred to as pagan, repugnant and uncivilized. Colonialism therefore was intended at dehumanising the indigenous people in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. Once these people started to interrelate with the shrine they reduced the sacredness of the shrine. They came with Christianity and modern education which preached against African Traditional Religion. The missionaries' main aim was winning souls to Christ and as a result it reduced pilgrimages at the shrine, certain taboos vanished and Njelele lost its

value.<sup>4</sup> Christianity worked closely with the Western perceptions and conflicted with the African religion. The conflicting ideologies resulted in the submission conquered. The white men killed and took into custody priests at Njelele who were the custodians of the shrine and as a result the shrine was left without anyone concerned with its upkeep. Malaba argue that there were allegations that *Njenjema* who was the shrine priest during the early colonial period took a leading role in the 1893 uprisings and was later killed by, “Cullen Raid”<sup>5</sup> whilst Nyathi et al alleges that *Njenjema* was arrested during the widespread uprisings of 1896-1897 and some white men claimed to have killed Mwali at Njelele.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand Ranger allude that various oral traditions in South Matabeleland assert that the oracular led the liberation struggle in 1896.<sup>7</sup> Ranger did not mention Njelele as the shrine which was involved in the war but Mwali and in terms of the war he was accessed on Dula and the Red Axe shrines. However, no matter the uncertainties the fact remains clear that some of the shrine priests were shot dead and some taken into custody. Ranger further argue that in their endeavour to encourage the people in the Matobos to exploit the land in an appropriately progressive way the men become active in the 19th century and early 20th century riding from end to end in the hills tracking down rebels ,implementing disarmament, collecting brains on the Mwali shrines and recruiting forces. Some of the priests at Njelele were killed and the whites claimed that they had killed god. This in it sense affected the functioning of the Njelele sacred place because the intelligence or the priests/guardians of the shrine were eliminated and this reduced pilgrimages at the shrine. This is because the main purpose of the priests at Njelele was to interpret the voice of Mwali to supplicants and because they were killed and arrested everything became complicated. At the same time the Africans were restricted from the shrines, their interaction with the shrines were controlled as well discouraged .The major way in which their interaction with the shrines were



minimized was through the eroticization of sacred places. These were denounced as places of evil spirits and as a way to halt their use the missionaries established their churches right in front of these shrines. Ranger argued that soon after the 1896 uprisings the Native Commissioners in the Matobos could not even find vigorous Mwali shrines.<sup>8</sup> Njelele priests were detained in the aftermath of the 1896 rising. Some of the Mwali priests were tried and sent to the detention centre. Even though the shrine was said to have been involved in the modern agricultural production it was difficult because the priests were removed from the shrine and as such people made offerings to the priests who were not on the shrines. This resulted in the 1905 drought. It is important to italicise the fact that the arrests of the priests at Njelele shrine by the colonial intruders is one of the reasons why Njelele as a cultural heritage site later became a source of conflict amongst individuals because due to this break in the Njelele priesthood it is easier said than done to obtain details of the priests of Njelele hence people contest for this post which results in conflict over Njelele. P.Nyathi contends that;

Once these people [the whitemen] were in Matobos exploiting the place the spirituality of Njelele dies. It is well known that because of them the voice at Njelele ceased to talk and that is the time Njelele lost its respect as well as its value up to the present time.<sup>9</sup>

There had been also some uncertainties on the issue of the voice of Mwali at the shrine. This issue had been characterised by different myths in the bid of various people to explore the reasons behind the seizing of the voice. Some scholars believe that the voice was once heard during the colonial period whilst some people in Matebeleland believe that the voice was last heard when Robert Mugabe was elected as the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe.<sup>10</sup> Nkomo in his book *The Story of My Life* argues that when he came out of the war restricted prison in 1974 the voice had already ceased talking at the shrine.<sup>11</sup> He argued that as more people embraced the Western ideologies the voice wished farewell and ceased talking. Thenjiwe Lesabe interviewed

with both Ranger and L.S Nthoi had been recorded as having heard the voice soon after independence. The latest time when the voice could have seized talking is 1980 which means that it could valid to argue that the voice seized talking during the colonial period.

This illustrates how much Njelele was impacted by colonialists during the early colonial period. Rhodes' intentions and aims were not only limited or restricted to transform Matobo Hills as a place for memorial and vacation. He assigned instructions for a dam to be constructed and also an area for tree plantation. Scientific forestry also qualifies as one of the major uses of the land. Surveyors were then recruited for cutting up Matobo Hills into farms. As they were measuring the farms for cultivation they violated the laws of Njelele shrine. Michael Ncube quoted in Ranger argues that;

‘Njelele was always very sympathetic with the people .It let them use the veils but advised them how to do it and controlled them. For example, it would not permit cultivation too close to the rocks.<sup>12</sup>

This clearly explains the fact that growing of crops or cultivation of the land near the shrine was not acceptable thereby the surveyors violated the laws as they put their metal trig positions on Njelele shrine. Ranger also confirms this point that metal trigs were placed on the hill as he argued that;

In the Matopos, too, surveyors set up their metal trig points on sacred hills, even on Njelele –‘the outmost corruption and disrespect’ say the Mwali priests. The surveyors began to carve out estates.By 1908 the hills had been entrenched upon on all sides by the squares and oblongs of farms.<sup>13</sup>

This was a violation of one of the laws concerning the shrine which clearly illustrates how the Njelele shrine was impacted by colonialism.

## **INDIRECT IMPACTS ON THE SHRINE**

There was dogma and philosophy war between the Mwali shrine priests and the catechists who were responsible for spreading Christianity during the first twenty years of colonialism in Matobos. As soon as the missionaries had learned the Ndebele language they engaged into the village evangelism. Although the Christians constituted a small number in the hills they managed to make the shrine priests look distrustful in the eyes of the Africans. The London Missionary Society was one of the first missionary churches which tried to convert Africans in Zimbabwe. To convert the people in Matobos several missions were situated in the way of major shrines like Njelele. Several missions were also set up in the Matobos and among them were Empandeni, Hope Fountain, Matobo, Mtshabezi and Embakwe. The Njelele adepts could not stop the development of a centre of African Christians initiative to the White waters. Christianity itself was thus treacherous unfaithful as it was used as major toll for the colonisation of the indigenous people in Zimbabwe. The African beliefs and practises were viewed or regarded as pagan, odious, rubbish and obnoxious which ought to be rot alone. Even though the way in which Africans received Christianity was ambivalent as a result Njelele shrine was neglected and such neglecting of the sacred place cannot be pointed as respect of the shrine.

In less than some years the missionaries in the hills had converted many souls to Christ and this only implies that the culture of the African people also changed. As people became Christians modern education was introduced to them as well as Western medication. Boarding schools were also introduced for the converted Christians. The holy days changed from Wednesday (the resting day) to Sunday. Many things changed which in its sense affected the whole set up at Njelele. People no longer paid much attention to Njelele for example the young girls who had not yet reached puberty who looked after the guardians at Njelele spent their time at school.

Since Christianity was against traditional religion this reduced pilgrimages at the shrine, certain taboos vanished and Njelele lost its respect. This means that the introduction of Christianity in Matobos affected the shrine so much as S.Makuvaza et al also argues that some African independent churches were later established as time goes on in Matobos.<sup>14</sup> Some of the people fasted and prayed in the hills outside the National Park. This affected the shrine so much because Njelele was just a few metres away from the National Park. This is the other reason also why Njelele in 1960s became a source of conflict between various stakeholders because due to forced change of culture people paid little attention to it and as such when it was revived in the 1960s it shifted its main purpose from rain rainmaking to issues concerning politics and war which led it to become a breeding ground for conflict between different stakeholders.

In the pre-colonial period there were certain people who were supposed to visit the shrine. These people include the guardians of the Mwali shrine and a few individuals. When the colonial intruders got into the hills ignorant of African ways they defiled the shrine as they severely visited the shrine exploiting the landscape. Measuring the farms for scientific forestry the surveyors walked around the Njelele landscape. This defiled the shrine. On the other hand the other whites removed consecrated stuff from the Njelele shrine. A white man named Artfield Trooper is said to have got rid of some important consecrated stuff in the shrine. The shrine continue to be defiled as people continue to visit the shrine with political and war issues which was not the main function of the shrine.

## **CONFLICTS AT NJELELE IN THE 1960S**

After many years of abandonment, desertion and resentment, Njelele shrine was opened by Nkobambwe who was of Venda/Kalanga origin. This was during the late 1940s. He worked on glade the grass at Njelele which made it impossible or difficult to access Njelele shrine and replaced many things at Njelele. The shrine was invigorated during this period but this time with a new dimension. The competition or contestations is said to have been strongly became in full swing during the 1960s between Sitwanyana Ncube and Ngcathu Ncube as well as the Ndlovu family brothers.<sup>15</sup> It is important to take into consideration the fact that all these people were of Venda origin which supplied the priests during the time before colonialism which according to Bhebe and Rodewald were well endowed with the values and traditions of the Mwali cult.<sup>16</sup> It is due to the effects of colonialism that these people contested to become Njelele custodians. I.G Cockcroft who published his book in 1972 argued that, “Owing to the present break in the Njelele priesthood it is extremely difficult to obtain details of priests of this shrine.”<sup>17</sup> This shows that after the shrine priests were killed during the early colonial conquests the priests were forced on the guilty whilst the shrine was left without any guardian and when it was revived in the 1960s it became a source of antagonism between these people of Venda origin who contested to become the shrine priests. P.Nyathi suggests that Ngcathu Ncube descended from Mayezane Ncube who looked after the cattle sent to Njelele as offerings and gifts by Mzilikazi whilst Sitwanyana was from Mbikwa Ncube who was the guardian of the shrine during Mzilikazi Khumalo’s era. So after the death of Nkombogwa who was also a claimant to the priestly post Ngcathu Ncube installed herself as the shrine priest. Sitwanyana was his husband and worked closely as the shrine priests of Njelele. Ngcathu Ncube had went to Njelele after she claimed that the voice from Dula had been transferred to Njelele.

As the spirit of nationalism increased in Zimbabwe in general and Matobos in particular the shrines of Matobo Hills Njelele included regained their importance once again. During this time of nationalism all the Africans became united, the literate and the illiterate, the Christians and the traditionalists, the progressive and the non-progressive and Njelele was seen as the uniting factor behind these people.<sup>18</sup> There was in fact transformed regional sense of the importance of the shrine and as the spirit of nationalism intensified in the Matopos the shrine become more important to the war guerrillas especially the ZIPRA guerrillas and in particular the ZANLA guerrillas. These guerrillas used this shrine during the 1970s. The ZAPU politicians also used the shrine during the liberation struggle notably the late Vice President of Zimbabwe Nkomo, Thenjiwe Lesabe and Grey Bango. Since the shrine was later revived in the 1960s with a new dimension Njelele become contested with competing priestly families and individuals taking opposite posts.

Sitwanyana Ncube and Ngcathu Mayazane Ncube when they were at Njelele they competed to become priests at Njelele. They both claimed strong spiritual connections to Njelele shrine. Sitwanyana was a very intelligent man who mixed history with culture and was a supportive member of the ZAPU which only implies that he was politically health. Joshua Nkomo and Gray Bango both politicians and nationalist leaders supported Sitwanyana as the priest of Njelele against Ngcathu because they believed that this would be advantageous and valuable to ZAPU. Sitwanyana had strong connections to ZAPU and as such he worked closely with the ZIPRA guerrillas. According to Ranger the assessment of Sitwanyana by two different chiefs led him to be installed as the priest of Njelele shrine as he was seen as a suitable candidate and then his ex-wife Ngcathu left in 1960. It is important to take into consideration the fact this conflict between Sitwayana and his wife Ngcathu was mainly caused by the priestly gap which was created by the

colonialists when they conquered Matobos. When the colonialists killed the priests and arrested some of the priests the shrine was left without any priest to take care of it. So due to this disruption of priesthood at Njelele when the shrine was revitalized it became difficult to conduct some tests for the determination of rightful priests and as such these people claimed the custodianship and priesthood. According to some people in Matebeleland Sitwanyana and Ngcathu were married and Sitwanyana showed some signs of infidelity and because of the infidelity they battled and their conflict went to the shrine about who was the true custodian of the shrine. Khumalo confirms this accession. Each competitor consequently engaged in diametrically attempts to become an acknowledged guardian and priest of the shrine.

After Sitwanyana was accepted as the rightful custodian of Njelele in the 1960s Ngcathu left the shrine in the hands of Sitwanyana but just earlier than her moving away there were also other claimants to the priestly post of Njelele. So it is important to note that besides these individuals of the Venda/Kalanga origin there were other people who also claimed to be in control of the shrine. When Ngcathu had left the shrine Sitwanyana become the shrine priest but within a short space of time he was competing with another contestant. It was a contest between the Ndlovus and the Ncubes. The war was between Sitwanyana Ncube and the Ndlovu brothers who were Sili and Mayabu. These families both contested to become the custodians of Njelele shrine. Even though Sitwanyana Ncube was expelled from the shrine in 1968 he later returned to the Halale village claiming the custodianship of the shrine and led supplicants from the other side of the shrine whilst the Ndlovu brothers notably Mayabu who were situated to the other side of the shrine led the supplicants using the side of the Kumalo road.<sup>19</sup> This to another extent shows some kind of conflict that emanates from a cultural heritage that represents interests of various people. This is also the time when the ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrilla fighters were desperate and wanted

protection and guidance from the shrine and the time when Njelele was frequently visited by many people. It is also important to note that scarcity of resources is another factor which led to this kind of conflicts. Even though these two families descended from Venda priestly family it is important to highlight the fact there are no two families can claim one spiritual connection.

According to Muringaniza the Ncube of Wudo totem were the real custodians of Njelele not the Ndlovu family who claimed and alleged the priestly posts at Njelele were not the real custodians of the shrine. P.Nyathi who compiled the names of those who had been custodians of Njelele came up with names from Ncube and Ndlovu family. What remains clear therefore is that both families supplied priests at Njelele.

The *raison de tre* for the eviction of Sitwanyana in 1968 was mainly attributed to his request of money from supplicants and the fact that he allowed his pregnant wives to visit the shrine which was a violation of Njelele taboos. This was in its actual sense an abuse of the shrine. Colonialism having created a gap in the priesthood of Njelele and the indirect effect of the spreading of Christianity which led to continued defilement of the shrine led to Njelele's lost of value. The changing of culture which led to scarcity of resources led to different individuals to look onto Njelele as a source of income. This is actually evidenced by the fact that Sitwanyana charged people for consulting Mwali at the shrine. This is also evidenced by the fact that when people visit the shrine they brought presents and offerings to the priests. I.G Cockcroft also argues that;

As a child at Kezi from 1909-1922,I frequently heard of Njelele and the rain making ceremonies .During September-November of each year many elders from various parts transversed our farm en route to Njelele ,to deliver offerings to the priest and to ask for rain.<sup>20</sup>

This shows that people did not visit the shrine without offerings and gifts. An interesting argument came from P.Nyathi who argue that;



It is an obvious case why individuals at Njelele contest to control the shrine. Njelele can simply be compared to T.B Joshua's church in Nigeria ...do you think you can go there empty handed [referring to the author]. People go there with a lot of presents and money and that is the same with Njelele as people who consult the shrine come with presents and that is the reason why people contest to become shrine priests.<sup>21</sup>

So basing on the above arguments it is valid to conclude that the reason for the contests over the control of Njelele by individuals is the endeavour to acquire wealth and enrich themselves.

Sitwanyana was thus evicted from the shrine three times but he kept returning to the shrine .His forced claimant as the shrine priest became questionable and problematic especially looking on the fact that he faced a lot of resentment from the local elders and chiefs in Matobos.

On the other hand there had been controversy between the local people and the colonial Government over the control of Njelele. The reason why the colonial Government attempted to proclaim Njelele as a National Monument was correlated to first demonstrations of priesthood arguments and control that were at stake. The Government argued that these people lacked the capacity to manage their own heritage therefore they attempted to proclaim it as one of Zimbabwe's national monument. Cran Crooke who was the Secretary of the department of Natural and Historical Monuments Commission during the time of early contests at the shrine then sent a letter to the imperial rural administrators signifying that Njelele might be preserved and protected by the Rhodesian government based on the archaeological remains on the shrine which were the potsherds. <sup>21</sup>Njelele was therefore going to be proclaimed as one of Zimbabwe's monument as it was viewed as one of archaeological place.

It is important to note that Cooke even accredited in the same note that some few years back when they tried to proclaim Njelele as a National Monument they failed due to the opposition they faced from the local communities which led them to drop the whole issue.

In 1961 when the colonial regime failed to declare Njelele as a one of Zimbabwe's National Monument they had sought another alternative. They thought the shrine could be preserved, protected and conserved with the act of the National Parks. They viewed this as the most alternative way because at that time Njelele was within National Parks range. This sparked conflict between the colonial government and the local communities in Matobos.

This is because some shrines in Matobos notably the Silozwane and Nswatugi which were proclaimed as national monuments under the 1936 Monuments and Relics Act due to some rock paintings at the shrine had lost its sacredness. Makuvaza argued that these shrines as important as they were they become opened to tourist attraction which later transferred the shrines from being sacred to a place where the whites played. This was one of the reasons why the local communities strongly resented the protecting of Njelele through modern laws and Act because they knew that it would lose its sacredness which was important to them.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the conflicts over the control of Njelele have their roots in the colonial period. This is due to the gap of priesthood which was created by the colonialists. In their bid to destroy the spiritual concept at Njelele shrine they affected Njelele so much and that is the reason why in the 1960s there were various contestations over the priesthood and control of Njelele. This is because the individuals perceived Njelele as a source of income whilst the politicians were influential because they viewed Njelele as a source of power. On the other hand there were contests between the colonial government and the local communities because the local people resented the management of the shrine by modern laws and acts which would eradicate the sacredness of the shrine.

## **ENDNOTES**

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **POLITICS OF SHRINES AS HERITAGE SITES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Shrines just like Njelele are distinctive, unique and very important places. Shrines are usually embodied with intangible heritage values. Intangible heritage is simply cognitive, a result of collected information, knowledge or originality conceded down from age group to age group.<sup>1</sup> Intangible legacy comprises of reminiscences, memories, languages, oral customs, habitual rituals and arts, knowledge systems, values and know how to preserve and pass to forthcoming generations.<sup>2</sup> The spirits and the traditional leaders symbolize policy makers of intangible heritage in monuments and as such the chiefs, elders and traditional leaders are responsible for upholding the politics of the shrine and the intangible inheritance in monuments and as such management of shrines ought to be left to them because they knew and appreciate the intangible values passed on to them by their forefathers. However, due to the effects of colonial machinations and globalization in Zimbabwe Njelele shrine as a heritage site has become a source of rivalry, conflict and animosity. It is important to note that during the post colonial period Njelele could barely be kept out of Zimbabwean politics

This chapter therefore explores how the government of Zimbabwe have dealt with Njelele shrine in independent Zimbabwe and how the government's inheritance of the colonial ways of preserving and protecting heritage sites had caused conflicts at various shrines which still

attaches important connections with the local communities like Chitungwiza chaChamunika, Chinhoyi caves, Chigara Hills as well as Matonjeni. It is also aimed at exploring how the post – colonial politicians had complicated the politics of the shrine and led the shrine into a serious battleground between different stakeholders by backing some self proclaimed priests at the shrine. This chapter will also explore and unpack the conflicting ideologies that emanated between the government heritage departments focusing on National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and the local leaders at the shrine and how that had led to conflicts between them in post – colonial Zimbabwe. The chapter therefore highlights the fact that the involvement of the political leaders in the politics of the shrine had affected the shrine and argues that everything that transpired at the shrine can largely be attributed to the effects of colonialism. This chapter will also focus on how Joshua Nkomo had manipulated the shrine in order to meet his political ambitions which fuelled the shrine into becoming a serious contested area. This chapter therefore will be rounded up by looking into the effects of the nomination of Matobo Hills as a World Heritage Site.

### **CONFLICTS IN INDEPENDENT ZIMBABWE**

When Zimbabwe finally gained its independence in the 1980s the government and people of Zimbabwe become targeted on modern development of the country. Nyathi et al argue that economic activities in Matobo hills and the area around Njelele increased.<sup>3</sup> Schools were built and children were spending most of their time at boarding schools. Hospitals and clinics were opened up and tourism boomed.<sup>4</sup> The new societal services, together with the establishment of other churches, brought new understanding and value systems and their acceptance by the

community. Economic performance turned out to be totally at liberty from religious leaders, orders and directions, combined with mounting populace of “emancipated Africans” to challenge the power of the sacred shrines. The power and influence of sacred places became questionable and untrusted and that only implied the shrines were disregarded. This is what Bourdillion calls the changing of culture in Zimbabwe. However, it is important to note that even though some people paid less attention to the shrine it is important to highlight the fact that there were some who were still loyal to the shrine and that is the reason why the government failed to get hold of the shrine from the local communities because in post colonial Zimbabwe due to the changing of culture the shrine was now used to make private ends meet rather than public issues.

The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe a government organization under the Ministry of Home Affairs responsible for the preservation, conservation as well as protection of heritage sites was formed from the basis of the National Museums and Monuments Rhodesia Act of 1972. It is important to note that there was no difference between the aims of the colonial organisations and acts and the independent governments’ organization NMMZ. The issues recurring organizations aimed at looked after W. Ndoro notes that during the colonial period the major shrines were turned into scientific sites and were protected due to tangible aspects of the shrines and this led to the eradication of sacredness of different shrines notably the Silozwane shrine in Matobos .5 This also opened these shrines to tourists attraction which was not the main purpose of these shrines and led to the isolation of the local communities from the heritages places which they viewed as their own shrines. The colonial heritage managers were more interested in the tangible aspects of the shrines which violated the rules of the shrines. The local communities who were usually the custodians of these shrines were excluded from the politics of



these shrines. In post colonial Zimbabwe the heritage managers inherited the same colonial concepts of managing heritage sites. The case remained the same because whenever a sacred shrine was proclaimed as a national monument in independent Zimbabwe the top down approach was used which meant that the local communities were consulted in theory not in practice.

In the post-colonial Zimbabwe the government adopted the colonial ways of managing the heritage places and had led to nothing but conflicting views between the local people and the government which resulted in the governments' failure to protect the shrine. The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe were aimed at preserving, 'the ancient, historical and natural monuments, relics and other objects of historical or scientific value or interest.'<sup>6</sup>

Katsamudanga postulate that the dilemma with the NMMZ legislation, "(CAP 25/11)" is that it pays a blind eye on the significance of intangible inheritance.<sup>7</sup> The endorsement of the legislation in 1972 remained questionable in preservation of intangible heritage. Protecting, preserving and conserving of intangible heritage at heritage sites require a clear explanation of the values and traditions to be preserved and protected. These values and traditions are components of the community so the conservation of these values and traditions at heritage sites and shrines calls for the regeneration of the background in which they are accomplished or used. Whilst analysing the Zimbabwean legislation I came to know that it is the qualified heritage manager who is responsible for defining the value of heritage sites. This becomes questionable and problematic in the sense that what a professional heritage manager knows about the intangible heritage of a different community. This implies that the NMMZ is aimed at protecting tangible aspects of heritage sites. So this is different from the intangible values embodied in Njelele shrine for the people who live around this shrine and the nation at large because to them

the importance of the shrines is beyond the monuments. This is the reason why the government of Zimbabwe failed to protect Njelele as a heritage site .

Due to the above fact the Njelele shrine has remained managed by the traditional custodians and traditional chiefs and the National Museums and Monuments Zimbabwe has remained only as a board which gives advice and guidance of the shrine. However, it is important to note that this did not stop the government officials to intervene into the politics of the shrine. This was mainly in a bid to seek political power and meet economic ends. It is important to note that even though the shrine was left to be managed by the traditional managers in the 1980s the government officials intervened in the decision making of the shrine politics and as such the traditional leaders remained questionable to government leaders and cannot manage the politics of the shrine without the consent of the government officials. The government officials have consistently backed priests favourable to satisfy their ambitions as custodians of the shrine.

P.Nyathi and Ndiweni argued that;

“Without any legal mandate for the shrines, NMMD staff has their hands tied. The perceived political power of the shrines has not helped the situation either. The political influence of the shrine is seen as an opportunity for unlocking the door to economic power.”<sup>8</sup>

This shows that even though the government heritage managers were kept out of the management of Njelele shrine as a contested landscape the management of Njelele is often inseparable from issues of power and ultimately from local and national politics. This is because Njelele is taken as a manifestation of power and everyone who needs power, either as a national politician or even one who needs to control a small community came to Njelele for guidance. This is also the reason why Njelele was not kept out of

Zimbabwe's politics which in turn affected the politics of the shrine. This resulted into the defilement of the shrine. Due to the continuation of politicians' involvement in the politics of Njelele shrine taking sides of the shrines' custodians it puts Njelele on a compromised position. Government officials were never kept out of the politics of the shrine;

“Chiefs and government officials from Matebeleland South will convene an urgent meeting in the provincial capital Gwanda this week to seek ways of resolving the dispute at Njelele rain making shrine.”<sup>9</sup>

S. Makuvaza also describes the fact that he was selected to represent NMMZ at one of the meeting to resolve the priesthood conflicts between the two candidates and on this meeting there were government officials too which were the late vice president Joshua Nkomo, the former minister of Home Affairs Dumiso Dabengwa and the governor of Matebeleland.<sup>10</sup> This explains the fact that even though Njelele shrine was left in the hands of the traditional heritage managers the government intervened in the politics of the shrine. This impacted negatively on the politics of Njelele shrine because by taking sides the government officials actually worsened the conflicts between the individuals quest for power.

It is important to note that the Njelele during the post colonial period could hardly be kept out of Zimbabwean politics. This to another extend shows how Njelele become an important shrine to different individuals to meet various economic ends. The use of the shrine become more private than public as many people become involved in the politics of the shrine to meet different interests. Fresh contents re-emerged between various individuals over the control of the shrine. When

Ngcathu Ncube returned to Njelele after independence she viewed herself as the correct and right custodian of Njelele and as well condemned Sitwanyana and David Ndlovu her rival candidates as unfit for the role. The traditional chiefs viewed Ngcathu as the rightful candidate and as such they supported her. Ngcathu demanded that her rival candidates should be eliminated from the shrine before she accepts the role of becoming the custodian of the shrine.<sup>11</sup> The Matobos Chiefs favoured Ngcathu Ncube and at the same time Joshua Nkomo favoured Sitwanyana .Sitwanyana had been forced out of the shrine three times by the war guerrillas and the dissidents. The reasons for his eviction are not explicit but Ranger argues that it was because of the way he handled issues at the shrine, he had started charging a fee to consult the shrine and his corrupt and illegitimate ways. The supportive role played by Nkomo to Sitwanyana becomes problematic because this raised suspicion from the Matobos chiefs. The Matobos chiefs had for a long time opposed Nkomo's support of the wrong candidate Sitwanyana. This turned Njelele into a sour and unpredictable battleground. The continual support of Nkomo's to Sitwanyana as the shrine keeper after evicted for three times shows how the government officials manipulated to shrine for their own needs and how the interdependence of individuals with different interests lead to conflicts within the shrine hence violating the politics of the shrine and defiling the shrine.

The actual difference between the two political parties in Zimbabwe soon after independence has got its own role on the politics of Njelele shrine. By independence at 1980 due to various candidates claiming custodianship and control of Njelele according to L.S Nthoi the politics of the shrine could be viewed as evidence of the division between ZANU and ZAPU as the two political parties contested to have power and authority over the shrine.<sup>12</sup> Soon after independence when Sitwanyana comes back to Njelele there was another candidate who was installed by the chiefs and

elders in Matobos. The war over the control of the shrine was waged between the two villages of Dewe and Halale. Halale was the power base for Sitwanyana Ncube whilst Dewe was the power base for David Ndlovu. The river that separates the two villages marked the division of the ZANU supporters of David in Dewe village and ZAPU supporters of Sitwanyana on Halale villages. This backing of the shrine claimants over the control of Njelele affected the politics of the shrine.

### **POLITICIANS AND CONFLICTS AT NJELELE**

When the nationalistic politics intensified during the early 1950s Joshua Nkomo and his colleagues visited the Dula shrine. The visit is well documented in Nkomo's biography the story of my life when he approached Dula shrine in 1953 with members of his party notably Jason Moyo, Grey Bango and William Sivako. In his book Nkomo unintentionally explains how they invoked the voice of Mwali at Dula.<sup>13</sup> An important point to note is that Dula shrine was the shrine which dealt with any issues relating to politics and war. Njelele is not a war shrine but a peace shrine. Ever since the shrine started being used as a war shrine it becomes a contested sacred place. According to Ranger Ngcathu Ncube popularised the shrine and this is attributed to the fact that she opened the shrine during the nationalist rise and claimed that the voice at Dula had transferred to Njelele as the senior shrine.<sup>14</sup> From this time onwards people started using the shrine as a war shrine. This defiled the shrine because any issues relating to politics and war must be taken to Dula shrine. P. Nyathi also strongly believes that Njelele shrine is not a war shrine<sup>15</sup> and T. Malaba also argues that Njelele shrine is a peace shrine.<sup>16</sup>

Joshua Nkomo who was the vice president of Zimbabwe who died in 2000 is one of the politicians who were known to have been strongly associated with Njelele shrine. It seems as if there is a general belief that Nkomo was a spiritual human being. P. Nyathi argues that Joshua Nkomo was a

spiritual person<sup>17</sup> and at the same time Ranger and Nthoi argues that the birth of Nkomo was divinely appointed and as such his connection with Mwali started long back even before his birth. Therefore ever since the day Joshua Nkomo visited the shrine during the colonial period he constantly used the shrine and as such he continued to intervene into the politics of the shrine. He becomes interested in the shrine as well as going far as portraying Njelele shrine as the founder of Zimbabwe nation. The visit of Nkomo to Dula shrine is well documented in his biography in which he never mentioned about the spiritual guidance which he was promised by Mwali and also he never talked about his divine birth which was the myth popularised by Thenjiwe Lesabe. He never talked about his involvement in the politics as divinely directed which makes it problematic to portray Nkomo as a spiritual human being. Leslie Nthoi argued that when he wanted to interview Joshua Nkomo he referred him to Thanjiwe Lesabe who he said knows everything about Joshua's involvement in Njelele.<sup>18</sup> Thenjiwe gave an account which was different from Nkomo's own book where she portrayed Nkomo as a spiritual human being and lamented about his spiritual birth. I would like to believe that this myth was only propagated to justify Nkomo's involvement in the politics of the shrine.

In 1980 Joshua Nkomo conducted a political rally at Njelele. The rally was conducted six kilometres away from the shrine but the fact that it was within the area of Njelele makes everything questionable. The rally was conducted in the month of February and according to Ranger 300 000 people attended the shrine.<sup>19</sup> Nkomo's endeavour to control Njelele as his source of political power and indulge in the politics of shrine makes him conduct his rally at the shrine. This was a violation of some of the laws and taboos of the shrine because Njelele did not allow such a large crowd to settle on this shrine. At the same time there were some people who were not welcome at the shrine

no wonder why during the rally there was thunderstorm which left people stranded whilst he was taken away by a helicopter. This rally was not just an ordinary rally as it was actually made to win the support of the people in Matobos so as to gain control of Njelele. Nthoi argues that at one point Nkomo is said to have punished David Ndlovu for allowing photographers to take him pictures which was one of the shrine's taboo.<sup>20</sup> This actually evidenced his quest to control Njelele shrine. His own support of Sitwanyana shows how Nkomo have manipulated the shrine's politics in order to fulfil his political ambitions. In 1980 after the liberation struggle has ended Nkomo visited the shrine together with the war guerrillas and they were welcomed by Sili Ndlovu but there was no cleansing of the war guerrillas which was done. Later in 1982 he visited Sitwanyana Ncube who he viewed as the proper shrine keeper of the shrine and organised the cleansing of the war guerrillas. This fuelled the serious conflicts at the shrine between these two contestations. This also shows how the politics of the shrine at some point has hindered progress. The cleansing ceremony was supposed to be conducted in 1980 so that the war guerrillas could be freed but it was delayed just because of the politics of the shrines. This simply implies that if the politics of the shrine is not well managed this will hinder progress on the shrine.

In 1980-1983 Joshua was solely concerned with making Njelele a large shrine or an international pilgrimage. He really wanted to make Njelele shrine a national shrine. This drew attention of the ZANU PF who had on several times tried to be in charge of the shrine. They really wanted to take the shrine from the ZAPU because they were afraid of Nkomo's involvement in the shrine and as such they tried to put to halt Nkomo's efforts at Njelele. In a bid to win control of this shrine according to Ranger there were different spirit mediums who were sent and backed by ZANU as the right custodians of Njelele. The first candidate sent by the Mugabe regime was Ravatatu who was a

traditional healer. Ravatatu was sent to Njelele during the period of Gukurahundi when Nkomo escaped in to Botswana .Ravatatu claimed that he was the spirit medium of Chamunuka who was one of the Shona ancestors. Ravatatu made an effort to resurface Njelele as a nation’s rain making shrine. Ravatatu, ‘boasted that he had demonstrated his rain-making capacity to police officers in Ganda and Kezi and that he had certificates from these Shona –speaking officials attesting that he was ‘a Man of God’.<sup>21</sup> Politics of Njelele become continuously impacted badly due to the involvement of the government in the politics of this shrine. The evidence produced by Ravutatu so that he could be the shrine priest did not qualify him to be the priest of the shrine. Certificates meant nothing to Njelele shrine because only tests could qualify anyone who claims to be the shrine keeper. Ravutatu was not the only claimant who was backed by Mugabe regime as the right candidate to control Njelele as Sipoyana was another claimant who had official backing. Sipoyana claimed to be the spirit medium of Mbuya Nehanda.Nephas Ndlovu quoted in Ranger says that;

“At the height of it all when we were talking about building rest rooms and all that type of planning,putting water ,there came a lady who was called Sipoyana Shoko .She was sent from Harare to Kezi and sent to my office.She was claiming to be a rain medium,a hosana.She was sent by the administration in the name of the then Minister for Home Affairs ,Ushewokunze. So she came and claimed priestly powers and she wanted to go over there to take over from Sitwanyana ....She was guarded by police .She had about six policemen guarding her,and we were feeding her out of our drought relief food.We took it politically’.<sup>22</sup>

The government impacted badly on the politics of the shrine .In the endeavour of the Mugabe regime to take control of the shrine from Nkomo they worsened the conflicts at the shrine. Whilst



conflicting over the control of the shrine they affected the politics of the shrine. They caused war between Sitwanyana and various candidates. This shows that after independence Njelele shrine could not be kept out of the Zimbabwean politics which actually worsened the situation at the shrine. This also simply characterised the division that was there between ZAPU and ZANU and that affected the politics of Njelele shrine. It is however important to note that politics of shrines as places which are embodied with interest of various people and groups cannot be kept out of state politics. If there are any divisions within the state, this will also affect the shrine politics because as a living religious heritage everyone would want to get connected to the shrine since all problems are solved at the shrine. This resulted in the government of Zimbabwe trying to politicize a cultural issue. It was unfortunate that Sipoyana never succeeded maybe this is due to the fact that she didn't have an idea about the shrine's laws and taboos and she might have violated the taboos which resulted in her being unfortunate because she is said to have been disappeared after she entered the cave. The conflict between ZAPU and ZANU PF over the control Njelele during the early years of independence have culminated into a serious competition to be in charge of the shrine. The ZANU army is said to have assaulted the shrine in 1982 and broke the sacred clay pots at Njelele.<sup>23</sup>This was nothing but only a desecration and defilement of the shrine. This was disrespect in its outmost way.

With this blunder in 1982, the war continued in 1983 to get the shrine off the hands of Nkomo. The government attempted to finally wrestler the shrine from ZAPU influence. They see the shrine as a Shona shrine therefore they did not want it to go under the influence of the Ndebele people. In a bid to control the shrine they used ZINATHA a department of herbalists, spirit mediums and traditional doctors which was established by Ushewokunze who was the then Minister of Home Affairs.

Ushewokunze announced publicly that the organization of Zinatha sought to transfer the so called speaking stone from Njelele to Great Zimbabwe.<sup>24</sup> May be this is because in Great Zimbabwe there were many Shona speakers there and because of this the transferring of the stone would meant that the shrine would be under the control its rightful heirs. However, this failed as the Masvingo committee denied this arguing that Great Zimbabwe was not a place for conducting rain making ceremonies and in 1985 when the rival priest, Sitwanyana was chased away from Njelele the government received this as a great relief.<sup>25</sup> S.Makuvaza also argued that the then executive director, Matipano in 1983 directed the then inspector of the monuments in Bulawayo to confer with Zinatha so that the organization would at least clear the spirituality associated with Njelele shrine so that it will be proclaimed as a national monument.<sup>26</sup> This was resented by both the government officials and the public. The reason why the local people in Matobos opposed the proclamation of Njelele as a national monument was that when Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980 the Matobos area become a playing ground for tourists. Other shrines which had been proclaimed as national monuments notably the Silozwane shrine the proclamation led to its desecration and loss of sacredness. Tourists were charged some amounts which benefited the NMMZ .So by this the local people did not see any way they will benefit from the proclamation of Njelele as a national heritage. They also knew that by allowing the declaration of the shrine they would lose control of the shrine which they viewed it as their own shrine. This shows the kind of conflict between this government department and the local communities in Matopos.

Interference of Nkomo in the politics of Njelele had been problematic and questionable. His willingness to be committed to Njelele becomes problematic. Nkomo's plans for the modern development of Njelele and the construction of a township around the shrine found so much

opposition from the chiefs and the local elders. Many people condemned Nkomo's plans as they argued that would it was aimed at bringing Western culture at Njelele a traditional shrine. Joshua sought permission to build some modern houses at Njelele for chiefs and spirit mediums.<sup>27</sup> This was made him faced with strong opposition as the chiefs and elders of the Matobos viewed this as against the laws of the shrine. The construction of artificial buildings would mean cutting down of trees which was a taboo on Njelele sacred place. This was only done in a bid to be in control of the shrine no wonder why Joshua Nkomo allowed Thenjiwe Lesabe to popularise the myth that he was a spiritual being. People in Matobos viewed Nkomo as someone who was interested in trumpeting his own glory and as such his involvement at Njelele was not for the benefit of everyone but it was for personal purposes.<sup>28</sup> His support for Sitwanyana was actually on the belief that he would be helpful in the ZAPU politics and for political powers.

Grey Bango was also a friend of Joshua Nkomo and he was also a member of ZAPU political party. When Joshua Nkomo visited the shrine in 1953 they were together. Grey Bango had known about consulting the Mwari cult at a tender age and he had knowledge that Mwari can intervene in life problems and hard situations. Nthoi argues that Grey Bango had at one point attempted to take control of Njelele, 'through a sangoma kinswoman'.<sup>29</sup> He strongly believed in the Mwari cult and he consistently visited both Njelele and Dula shrines during the liberation struggle and even after war. Whenever he had problems he visited Njelele shrine and whenever Nkomo was out of the country or in prison Grey Bango usually consulted the shrine. Grey Bango also consulted the shrine during the period of Gukurahundi with Nkomo. Grey Bango was interested in the shrine because he knew that it was a source of power. However, by using his sangoma to wrestle power from the

shrine he was only exacerbating conflicts at the shrine which compromised the situation at the shrine.

Thenjiwe Lesabe was also one of the member of the Ndebele based ZAPU political party. She was a Christian and one of Nkomo's great supporters. Thenjiwe played a major role in the second liberation struggle as she was based in Zambia where she was responsible for the recruitment of ZIPRA female guerrillas. She had consulted the Mwari cult both at Njelele and Dula. She strongly believe that the Mwari Cult played a major role in both the first and second Chimurenga .She argued that the second Chimurenga was just a furtherance of the first Chimurenga and these wars were sanctioned by the Mwari cult. She together with Nkomo visited both the Njelele and Dula shrines before and after the liberation struggle. Thenjiwe had been very open about how she and her party have tried to get power from Njelele shrine. Her intention was to manipulate Njelele shrine in pursuit of her political goals. She had gone to Njelele to ask for power for her ZAPU party soon after independence to overpower ZANU the Shona dominated party. The last time Thenjiwe Lesabe visited the shrine was soon after the death of Sally Mugabe and soon after that she was elected as the minister of Women Affairs. This shows that Thenjiwe's involvement in the shrine was mainly centred at achieving her political ambitions. In these politicians' endeavour to use the shrine to achieve their political ambitions they affected the politics of the shrine. The ZAPU politicians supported Sitwanyana who was a rival of other candidates. The local people in Matobos hated Sitwanyana for his corrupt and illegitimate ways and favoured Ngcathu Ncube who they viewed as their right candidate .This exacerbated conflict at Njelele shrine as the politicians backed Sitwanyana who they used as their tool to gain political power whilst on the other side the local

people in Matobos backed Ngcathu Ncube who they viewed as legitimate candidate to be the custodian of Njelele.

Due to the resurface of the conflicts of at Njelele between Ngcathu Ncube, Sitwanyana Ncube and David Ndlovu over the control of Njelele in 1995 the government of Zimbabwe attempted to proclaim Njelele as a national monument. This again resulted into conflict between the local chiefs and elders in Matobos and the government which forced the government to dump the issue in 2000. The problem with the government of Zimbabwe is that it viewed the shrine as belonging to the Shona people and as such they thought that it is under wrong influence of the Ndebeles so they wanted it to be under their influence through proclaiming it as a national monument. This was a false assumption because the shrine is managed by the Ncubes and Ndlovus who are of Venda origin. The Venda people constitute the Shona people in contemporary Zimbabwe.

### **SELECTION OF MATOBOS HILLS ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST IN 2003**

The primary reason why Matobos was nominated on the World Heritage List was because of the notable living religious cultural heritage which is the Mwali Cult in Matobos. Through the representative democracy the site management committee chaired by a ZANU PF local politician and deputized by National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe as the secretary was elected into office. The problem with representative democracy according to Chirikure et al, which is usually favoured by modern states and traditional systems as opposed to participatory democracy is that it prefers working with representatives, which may not necessarily represent the interest of the local people.<sup>30</sup> According to

the Matobos Hills Heritage Site Management 2004-2009 Plan two organisations are bound by the legal instruments to manage Matobos Hills World Heritage Site.<sup>31</sup> The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe under the chapter 25/11 is mandated to manage cultural and natural heritage within the landscape. The Zimbabwean Parks and Wildlife Management Authority manages parks and wildlife through the Parks and Wildlife Act. The 2004 -2009 Management Plan stresses that traditional management systems implemented by local communities contributed to the sustenance of the integrity of Matobos Hills. However, given that shrine custodians, Chiefs, the Rural Districts Council, Conservation Committees, National Officials are the main custodians the role of traditional custodians today is not the main management system for sacred sites.

## **ENDNOTES**

- 1.S.Katsamudanga,The Dilemma of Preserving Intangible Heritage in Zimbabwe, page 1
2. Ibid 2 page 2
- 3.P.Nyathi and C.B Ndiweni ;A Living Religious Shrine Under Siege;The Njelele Shrine / Kingg Mzilikazi's Grave and Conflicting Demands on the Matopo Hills Area of Zimbabwe page 64
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- 11.T.O.Ranger, The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 215
12. L.S Nthoi,A God of War or A God of Peace,Alternation Special Edition 2 (2005) page 61
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14. T.O.Ranger, The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 21
15. Interview with P.Nyathi,13 March 2015
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19. T.O.Ranger, The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 217
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21. T.O.Ranger, The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 217



22.Ibid 2 page 215

23.Ibid 3 page 216

24.S.Makuvaza, “Why Njelele, a Rainmaking Shrine in the Matobo World Heritage Are ,Zimbabwe,Has Not Been Proclaimed a National Monument”,Heritage Management,Volume 1 ,Issues2,fall 2008,page 169

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28.Ibid 2

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **NJELELE SHRINE IN THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL HEALING**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Njelele shrine is a rain, fertility and peace shrine.<sup>1</sup> History has it that the shrine was used for sustainability of human life. Rain was important for the continuation of human life. Soon after the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe ex war combatants as well as dissidents had visited the shrine in an attempt to get cleansed from the war atrocities and everything that transpired during the liberation struggle. Unfortunately the efforts by various ex war veterans had turned into conflicts between the traditional healers, Matabeleland chiefs and various stakeholders. Recently different groups of Gukurahundi ex-guerrilla fighters have visited the shrine .The last visit by the Gukurahundi war veterans indeed irked various people in Matabeleland. Every shrine has got its taboos which are usually unstated and followed by people who use the shrine for instance Njelele as a shrine has got its own taboos. Failure to follow the shrine's taboos will lead to the sacrilege and defilement of the shrine which would later affect the whole environment. Politics is also another thing which needs to be considered and is not something which can only be found in a state but in churches as well as holy places like Njelele shrine. When visiting the shrine the political dimension to the shrine is something which needs to be considered rather than ignored. The fact that Njelele shrine was shifted as a shrine for many purposes during the liberation struggle never changed the primary purpose of the shrine but it only brewed into

becoming a contested area. Njelele emerged as a powerful rain, fertility and peace shrine and as such the shrine remained as like that even though people had manipulated it in different ways.

War is not a good thing, neither is it something which brought good memories to be remembered because war only brought nothing but loss of life. War is usually characterised by tremendous collective destruction, aggression and high mortality. During the liberation struggle war guerrillas faced many challenges and sometimes they lived like animals. In the liberation struggle, the Gukurahundi period and the dissidents' era in Matebeleland gruesome murders were committed by war guerrillas which later haunted them.<sup>2</sup> The primary aim of this chapter therefore is to unpack efforts by ex war combatants after the liberation struggle to get cleansed at the shrine and unravel the reasons why they wanted to get cleansed as well as unpack and explode the recent visits to the shrine by the so called "Gukurahundi perpetrators".<sup>3</sup> The other aim of this chapter is also to unpack and unfold the motives of the ex war veterans who visited the shrine, how the Chiefs and elders in Matebeleland reacted and the reason why those people reacted.

### **GUKURAHUNDI IN MATEBELELAND**

*Gukurahundi* is a Shona word which refers to first rains of the summer season which washes away chaff. According to historians Gukurahundi in Matebeleland a place on the south –western part of Zimbabwe was a period of terror, destruction, mass killings, violence and anarchism. Grotesque violence was also used during this period. During this period the fifth brigade army burnt people alive and some innocent civilians were killed by the army. This period was

characterised with cruel incidents displayed by the army as sometimes the civilians were forced to dig their own graves before being burnt alive. The use of *pungwe* as one of the mobilization criteria of the Gukurahundi guerrillas in another way shows its domination of the ex-Zanla guerrillas. The Gukurahundi ended in 1987 with the signing of the Unity Agreement between Mugabe and Nkomo. At the end of Gukurahundi many people had been killed .

In the African worldview a human being's body is sacred and as such the killing of an innocent person would result in returning of the spirit of the killed person and this time would be known as avenging spirits.<sup>5</sup> These spirits would not be good spirits but evil spirits which would haunt those that killed the innocent person and in this case it might lead to madness of the killer.<sup>6</sup> So if a person killed an innocent person he becomes unclean and for him to be clean it is a must that a cleansing ritual must be conducted. According to Muringaniza all those people in Zimbabwe who had participated in liberation struggle armies, gukurahundi massacres or killings, who were the dissidents in Matabeleland and the war veterans who killed MDC supporters and innocent people during the 2008 elections were unclean and were supposed to conduct some cleansing rituals to be clean so that they could not be attacked by avenging spirits. This in another way is called the demilitarization of the soldiers as well as counselling. Ranger argued that some cleansing rituals had been done at Njelele.<sup>7</sup> In chapter one of this thesis substantive evidence had been brought forward to explain the fact that Njelele emerged as a major rain making shrine concerned with sustaining human life by providing rain as well as bringing peace for the continuation of human life. Njelele was a shrine which dealt with issues concerning productivity, fertility, healing and human happiness. Even though, later during the 19th century the shrine was later used as political shrine as well as during the liberation struggle that never

changed the primary purpose of the shrine. People in Matobos continued to use the shrine as a rain shrine.<sup>8</sup> The fact that people abused the shrine to suit their political ambitions never shifted the primary purpose of the shrine but it actually worsened the conflicts at the shrine because it created many stakeholders. When the oracle was established in Matobo it was centred on various shrine some of which were Njelele, Dula, Zhilo to mention but a few each of the shrine with its specific role or purpose.<sup>9</sup> Mazarire argue that there is nothing more special about Njelele because there are various shrines in Matobos which serve different purposes.<sup>10</sup> Chabata also believe that the geographical location of some of the shrine near Njelele never meant that they served the same purpose.<sup>11</sup> Njelele remained a peace, rain, production and fertility shrine and not a war shrine. Issues relating to war and politics were taken to other shrines not Njelele because Njelele was not associated with war issues.

In 2012 a group of people who were reported to be ex -ZANLA veterans visited Njelele shrine.<sup>12</sup> These people are said to have forced their way into Njelele sacred place but they were halted before they reached the shrine.<sup>13</sup> This group comprised of various Chiefs and various spirit mediums.<sup>14</sup> They caused hullabaloo in Matabeleland which resulted in conflicts between the people.<sup>15</sup> The people who went to the shrine were estimated to be about 600.<sup>16</sup> They are said to have gone to Mozambique and Zambian war bases and picked some grave stuff which comprised bones and stones.<sup>17</sup> Evidence on the ground show that they had first of all visited a traditional healer who instructed them to collect these materials and visit Njelele shrine.<sup>18</sup> So the primary reason for visiting the shrine was to conduct some undisclosed rituals at the shrine .They argued that they had seek permission from some Government officials to conduct some rituals at Njelele shrine.<sup>19</sup> When they visited the shrine the traditional leadership in Matabeleland were not aware

of their visits. They are said to have bathed in the nearby river at Njelele and forced the shrine custodian to perform their rituals.<sup>20</sup> The motive of these ex combatants was to get cleansed at the shrine because some of their members were said to be sick and mad. Since the people during the period of Gukurahundi killed civilians who never committed anything wrong the spirits of those who died came back were haunting the ex combatants. Njelele therefore was chosen on account that it is viewed as a national shrine.<sup>21</sup> The Njelele shrine have been popularised as a shrine which is capable to restore everything .Ex war veterans were suffering, the spirits of the people they killed during the period were haunting them so Njelele was chosen as a place where their problems could be met at a higher level. Njelele is believed to be a national shrine.<sup>22</sup>

The Gukurahundi ex Zanla war veterans were not the only people who had visited the shrine for cleansing purposes .The liberation war fighters had also visited the shrine in a bid to be cleansed of the liberation war atrocities. L Nthoi well documented the efforts by the war veterans to be cleansed after the liberation struggle soon after independence.<sup>23</sup> Jocelyn *et al* had also documented some of the events when the liberation struggle visited the shrine for cleansing ceremonies.<sup>24</sup> This shows that even though Njelele emerged as a rain shrine the shrine meant different things to different people. Whilst there is substantive evidence which proves that the shrine was a peace, rain and fertility shrine which was readily available to bless people, some people believed that the shrine was the only place to get cleansed. So since 1980 the ex war veterans had been visiting the shrine for cleansing rituals. Some are said to have been successfully cleansed even though some had fallen foul of the politics of the shrine. For instance in 1989 some ex war veterans visited the shrine in an effort to be cleansed and during this time

there was factional conflict over the control of the shrine by two custodians which are Sitwanyana Ncube and David Ndlovu.<sup>25</sup> Ranger argue that:

In January 1989 ex-guerrillas serving in the National Army were driven mad by *ngozi* spirits of people they killed during the 1970s; ‘their spirits told them they must come to Njelele’; they reported to the District Administrator, Esigodini, and asked to be sent to Sitwanyana. The District Administrator’s office in Kezi ‘persuaded them to go to David.’<sup>26</sup>

This created chaos between the two shrine priests as the District Administrator referred them to David not Sitwanyana. It resulted in conflict not only between these two self proclaimed priests but between local elders and politicians. This halted the programme and the ex-war guerrillas were never cleansed. So this shows how sometimes the conflicts over the control of the shrine had hindered progress at the shrine and at this instance it disadvantaged the ex war guerrillas . Alexander *et al* quoted one of the ex war veterans who said that because nothing was done for them to get cleansed it only implied that they were still at war, they had not rested and some of them were having nightmares and they were having clear pictures of how they killed civilians and they really wanted to be cleansed.<sup>27</sup> They even blamed the Government for failing to organise a national cleansing ceremony at Njelele for them.<sup>28</sup> Some of the ex war veterans were reported to have been mad because of the haunting spirits. In some instances the cleansing ceremonies were successful. For instance the 1995 cleansing ceremony which was done by the Ngcathu Ncube, a shrine priestess who was recommended by the local chiefs as their own priestess was successful even though there were some little problems caused by the conflicts over the priesthood at the sacred shrine. Alexander *et al* described so well the process of the event. They exploded and unpacked how Ngcathu Ncube led the cleansing ceremony willingly and how she worked closely with a traditional healer. On the other hand Muringaniza who was working at the Bulawayo Museum in 1995 at the current period who worked closely together with Ngcathu Ncube as he represented the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe

during this cleansing ceremony argue that Ngcathu Ncube opposed the conducting of purification rituals at Njelele because she knew that the shrine was not a shrine for cleansing purposes.<sup>29</sup>

Jocelyn et al argue that four beasts were provided for the ceremony. The beasts were slaughtered and the blood from the cows was mixed with some herbs and the ex war veterans were cleansed with the blood. After they were cleansed they spent the whole night on the shrine they left the place in jovial mood satisfied that they had been cleansed. In 2011 again there were some people who participated in the reign of terror during the 2008 bloody elections and they killed at least 200 MDC supporters.<sup>29</sup> They sought permission from Chief Masuku who the shrine is said to be in his area and got his approval to get cleansed at the shrine. They were cleansed and everything was successful. It is important to note the fact that Ngcathu Ncube one of the contestants for priesthood at Njelele shrine was noted by Muringaniza to be knowledgeable about the fact that Njelele was not the right place for people to be cleansed .

### **AN ANALYSIS: 2012 VISIT BY THE GUKURAHUNDI EX-ZANLA GUERRILLAS AT NJELELE**

In this world each and every culture had stories of the bad, evil and also good spirits that roam the earth. This continuous in human civilization and development leaves no room for uncertainty on the attendance of the deceased coming back to the human plane as a ghostly survival. According to all oral traditions and testimonies of people who witnessed this world is full of tormenting spirits. Evil spirits usually of people who were murdered, executed, massacred or assassinated brought outrageous fear and extreme nuisance and annoyance to the haunted people. This spirits are called avenging (*ngozi*) spirits who seeks to revenge the way they were killed.



These spirits usually lead to madness or abnormal sickness .This was the state of affairs with the people who went to Njelele shrine in 2012, amongst them were ex war veterans, traditional healers, leaders and chiefs from Mashonaland . The people were reported to be Gukurahundi ex –Zanla cadres who bulldozed their way into the Njelele shrine who allegedly wanted to perform cleansing rituals for them to be cleansed and freed from the spirits which had been haunting them. These people are said to have visited the shrine after having been directed to the shrine by a certain Sangoma or Traditional healer in Mozambique for them to be cleansed .They are said to have descended on the shrine without notified the traditional intelligence in this case the local chiefs and locals notably Chief Masuku who rule the territory which Njelele is located. Prior to this visit, groups of anonymous people who have been estimated to be 750,650 and 150 respectively went to Njelele the same way and bulldozed their way into the shrine and performed some cleansing ceremonies lacking the knowledge and endorsement of the confined traditional leaders.<sup>31</sup> This in another way describes how the ex war combatants had been tormented and suffered by avenging spirits of the civilians and innocent people they killed during the liberation struggle and the Gukurahundi period as well as the 2008 bloody elections. Ever since the period Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980 there had been groups of people descending to the shrine to get cleansed. The shrine has a well established network of custodians or priests who look after the shrine and accessing of the shrine is strictly through the traditional leadership. The group is said to have went to Njelele for their cleansing rituals and they failed to inform the traditional brains about their visit .This caused conflict between the traditional chiefs, leaders, ex –Zipra veterans and the group that had visited the shrine. The visit is said to have ended as a war of words between these two groups.<sup>32</sup> What caused conflict between the two groups is that the war veterans are said to have been disrespectful of the procedure for them to conduct some

cleansing ceremonies at Njelele .The fact that they forced their way into Njelele shrine without the consent of the traditional leadership in Matabeleland led to the condemnation of the group by Chiefs, the Government, war veterans leaders as well as the villagers who argued the group lacked respect and was also accused of causing conflicts between people. It seems like there is unanimity between different people that the group had shown disrespect about how they acted when they went to the shrine.<sup>33</sup> This is due to the fact that the group ignored the political dimension of the shrine's spiritual factor. They failed to consider the politics of the shrine. It is important to note that this is not the local or central government but the traditional leadership and in this case are the custodians of the heritage both cultural and natural. This is what caused conflict between the war veterans and the traditional leadership in Matabeleland.

Njelele is a sanctified place and there are protocols or procedures that the war veterans violated when they approached the place. The group dishonoured the traditional protocol of conducting rituals at the shrine. The custodian of the shrine was the one who was supposed to take up the group to the mountain instead of forcing their way into the shrine. Instead they forced him to conduct their rituals instead of him leading the rituals. This was a violation of the traditional protocol of conducting rituals at the shrine. There is also time of the day when people are allowed to visit the shrine not anytime during the day and also the custodian was supposed to be notified about the cleansing ceremony. This is the reason why most of the traditional leaders reacted which led to the cleansing rituals being unfruitful. This violation of simple traditional protocol led to the cleansing rituals unsuccessful and because they were later denied access to the shrine ever since that period they are still being haunted by the avenging spirits because of a simple protocol. This group is estimated to have visited the shrine in a number which was estimated to be 600. Dube and Ncube who are the villagers of Matobos area argue that during the

ancient period people who were sexually active were excluded from visiting the shrine for purity purposes and that never changed.<sup>33</sup> The elders especially the post menopausal women and the aged men were the ones who were usually welcome at the shrine and as such the young people were usually excluded from trips to the shrine. Since the group visited in such a large number it leaves no doubt that such ritual purity was difficult to achieve. Sibanda also argue that;

People used to come to the shrine accompanied by the shrine keeper and perform their rituals under the guidance of the keeper. Even during the liberation struggle, some politicians visited the shrine to seek guidance but they did so in the company of the keeper.<sup>35</sup>

This means that the shrine was defiled no wonder why P.Nyathi referred to the group as a confused group of people .This goes a long way to explain the fact that in Zimbabwe there as an existing ideology of both Christianity and African Traditional Religion and African Traditional Religion is usually remembered when people are faced with challenges, problems, droughts and pestilences because this group showed much ignorance of the African cultures, values and in fact failed to follow the traditional way of approaching the shrine .Chief Masuku also argued that it is real that the rain making god no longer brings rain mainly because people no longer respected him.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed there is overwhelming evidence which proves that the Njelele shrine was a Shona shrine before Mzilikazi conquered the Shona people but over the past years the shrine had been transformed from being a Shona cultural heritage to Ndebele intangible cultural heritage. Most Ndebele people who reacted to the visit of the Moshanaland pointed out to the visit as a violation of the Ndebele culture not of both the Bashona and the Ndebele people .They referred to it as a disrespect of the Ndebele culture not of both the Bashona and Ndebele people. Ngwenya who is part of the Ndebele ethnic group in Zimbabwe argued that the Shona people ought to value other

people's culture and went on to suggest that culture and politics must not be mystified since it would result in troubles.<sup>36</sup>

“This is not good at all as these people are bent on fuelling conflict .How can they come all the way from their area to tell us what to do? We cannot do that in their territory because our cultures are different. Lokhu yikudelela sibili (They are disrespecting).”

This in other words shows that the shrine had become a source of conflict between the Ndebele and Shona people. Whilst the Ndebele perceived it as part of their own cultural heritage the government also viewed it as a Shona shrine. The leaders of this group which bulldozed their way into Matobos in a bid to proceed to Njelele shrine claimed that they had been blessed by senior Government officials before embarking on their journey and in this case Francis Nhema and Kembo Mohadi were mentioned.<sup>37</sup> Nhema was claimed to have given the group meat for utilization at the period of cleansing ceremony.<sup>38</sup> David Mhlabinyana alleged that the visit had some components of politics.<sup>39</sup> This in another way shades more light on the fact that the government had attempted to politicize Njelele sacred place because they viewed the shrine as a Shona shrine. This is one kind of conflict which emanates when the shrine is tribalized or ethnicised .The shrine used to have a large vast catchment of people from most parts of sub Saharan Africa who visited the shrine for rain making ceremonies .The shine was never ethnicised in the ancient times so that by the time Mzilikazi came into Zimbabwe he embraced the God of Matonjeni. Even though the Shona people had political problems with the Ndebele people in the pre-colonial period Njelele shrine was not tribalised by any of the group because they knew that it was a cultural issue and they respected it.

The reasons why the group visited the shrine were not really disclosed but the motive which remains specific is that the war veterans wanted to get cleansed at the shrine .The real motive

which remained disclosed to people is that this group of war veterans wanted ritual purification .This is because the people have split blood and this was haunting the people and the journey is because they wanted spiritual cure. Muringaniza who have also took part on some of the ex-guerrilla ritual purification at Njelele argue that Njelele is not the place for cleansing rituals associated with war spiritual pollution.<sup>40</sup> He argued that when you are associated with splitting of blood and you want spiritual remedy Dula is the shrine which is capacitated for that .Njelele is a peace shrine and war related issues should be taken to other shrines like Dula .Muringaniza also allude that people cleansed because they had been associated with blood and evil spirits and Njelele is not associated with blood and if the custodian is well knowledgeable about the taboos or issues of Njelele would not entertain that .P.Nyathi also confirmed this view when he argued that Njelele shrine does not deal with war issues and the shrine capacitated for cleansing rituals is Dula shrine.<sup>41</sup> At the same time Mazarire also believe that Njelele is a rain shrine and there are various shrines in Matobo Hills for different purposes. However, some people think that the shrine is capable of cleansing people. This is evidenced by the fact that the shrine have been used for cleansing ceremonies, notably the ritual purification of 1982 by Sitwanyana Ncube,<sup>42</sup> the 1995 ritual cleansing by Ngcathu Ncube,<sup>43</sup> the 2011 cleansing ceremony of the 2008 bloody elections.<sup>44</sup> Some traditional chiefs and elders like Chief Masuku have also approved the ritual purification of the people being haunted by the spirits of the people they killed during the liberation struggle, the dissidents period in Matabeleland ,2008 elections which are all war related issues.<sup>45</sup> Jocelyn Alexander *et al* also argue that even though Njelele was not the right venue for conducting cleansing ceremonies Ngcathu Ncube who conducted the ceremony was very sure that the shrine was the right place to conduct the cleansing ceremony. She is said to have been quoted as saying;

What I was doing there was cleansing .I went in with the ex-fighters, reporting to the ancestors, here are the children .....You remember the sprinkling of blood –that was to open the way for all ex-combatants to have success in whatever they were doing ,to cleanse from sickness .Remember in Mzilikazi’s time when soldiers came from war they went into the bush and got some herbs and mixed them up into a concoction to treat those who came from war .At war they met death, killing .Take those guerrillas ,those who used to kill innocent people .Some used to kill people because they were rich ,to take their clothes .So many lost their senses. So I was asking for Njelele to open their way, to forgive them because it was war.”<sup>46</sup>

What Ncube was doing was not wrong but she was doing it on a wrong place because there is substantive evidence that Njelele does not deal with war related issues. The conducting of cleansing ceremony at the Njelele a wrong place had also exacerbated conflicts at the shrine. People who consult the shrine for cleansing ceremonies came in their numbers and because people do not visit the shrine empty ended but they brought with them gifts for the priest.

## **ENDNOTES**

1. Interview with P.Nyathi ,13 March 2015

-Interview with S.J Muringaniza ,13 April 2015

2 T.O.Ranger, *The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 217

3.The Standard, 03 September 2012

4.Jocelyn Alexander *et al* *Violence and Memory;One Hundred Years in the ‘Dark Forests’ of Matebeleland*.Weaver Press,Harare,2000,page 273

5.Interview with Makhumalo, 26 March 2015

6. Interview with S.J Muringaniza ,13 April 2015

7. T.O.Ranger, *The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 27

8. Interview with S.J Muringaniza ,13 April 2015

9.Interview between Chabata and Musarurwa 27 September 2015

10. . T.O.Ranger, *The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 217

11.Discussion with Mazarire , 03 April 2015

12.Interview with Chabata , 13 April 2015

13. The Newsday , 11 December 2012
14. Bulawayo 24 News, 03 October 2013
- Interview with P. Nyathi 13 March 2015
15. Bulawayo 24 News , 03 October 2013
16. The Chronicle, 12 September 2012
17. The Newsday, 11 December 2012
18. Interview with P. Nyathi 13 March 2015
19. Zim Eye , 11 August 2011
20. Bulawayo 24 News, 3 October 2013
21. Zim Eye , 11 August 2012
22. Interview with Chabata , 13 April 2015
23. Interview with Chabata , 13 April 2015
24. L. S. Nthoi, A God of War or A God of Peace, Alternation Special Edition 2 (2005) page 63
25. Jocelyn Alexander *et al* Violence and Memory; One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matebeleland. Weaver Press, Harare, 2000, page 273
26. T. O. Ranger, The voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, Indiana University Press, Harare, Baobab, 1999 page 217
27. Ibid 2 page 215



28. Jocelyn Alexander *et al* Violence and Memory; One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matebeleland. Weaver Press, Harare, 2000, page 273

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30. Bulawayo 24 News ,26 April 2011

31. The Chronicle ,12 September 2012

32. The Chronicle ,12 September 2012

33. Interview with P.Nyathi ,13 March 2015

-Zim Eye, 11 August 2012

34. Interview with Dube and Ncube ,7 April 2015

35. Interview with Sibanda ,7 April 2015

36. The Chronicle ,4 November 2013

37. The Chronicle ,4 November 2013

38. The Chronicle ,4 November 2013

39. The Newsday , 11 December 2012

40. Bulawayo 24 News ,26 April 2011

41. The Chronicle,25 September 2013.

42. Interview with S.J Muringaniza ,13 April 2015

43. Interview with P.Nyathi ,13 March 2015

44. Discussion with Mazarire , 03 April 2015

45.L .S Nthoi,A God of War or A God of Peace,Alternation Special Edition 2 (2005) page 63

46. Jocelyn Alexander *et al* Violence and Memory;One Hundred Years in the ‘Dark Forests’ of Matebeleland.Weaver Press,Harare,2000,page 273

47.Bulawayo 24 News 26 April 2011

48. Jocelyn Alexander *et al* Violence and Memory;One Hundred Years in the ‘Dark Forests’ of Matebeleland.Weaver Press,Harare,2000,page 273



