

***A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PATTERNS OF
RESEARCH IN THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF
SHONA TRADITIONAL RELIGION,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO METHODOLOGICAL
CONSIDERATIONS***

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SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL, 1997.

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Declaration

Except where explicitly indicated to the contrary, this study is the original work of the author. This thesis has not been submitted in any form to any other institution.

Abstract

This thesis is a critical examination of patterns of research in the academic study of Shona traditional religion, with special reference to methodological considerations. I analyse the methods and approaches used so far by prominent writers in the study of Zimbabwe's Shona traditional religion so that we may be able to develop better ways of researching it. I then discuss ways that ought to inform and direct the research methods that are most likely to yield adequate empirical studies of the Shona people.

I analyse works of the "early writers", as well as those of Michael Gelfand, Gordon Chavunduka and Michael Bourdillon. Where relevant, I explore the connection between the researchers' religious, cultural, academic or professional "baggage" and how this relates to their research. Discussing methodological issues such as: the "insider-outsider" question, the "emic-etic" issue, value-judgment as well as the questions of reductionism, "subjectivity" and "objectivity" in scholarship, I examine these writers' attitudes to, and the ways they wrote about Shona traditional religion and cultural practices. I assess their approaches and research methods in relation to those from various disciplines such as history, phenomenology, theology, anthropology and participant observation. I analyse the extent to which these writers, for example, utilised the historical approach or presented insider perspectives in an endeavour to reach an adequate and thorough understanding of Shona religion and culture.

In view of the fact that Shona traditional religion is a polyvalent and polymorphic community religion, I argue that no one approach and method can be said to be "the" only method so as to attain a comprehensive understanding of the meanings veiled in Shona religion and culture. Furthermore, given the nature of Shona traditional religion, it is essential for researchers to exploit as much of oral history as possible.

Thus, researchers also need to learn the Shona language, live in the community for a long period of time, attend and observe every bit of Shona life so as to see, hear and understand how these phenomena fit together. It is suggested that methodological conversion and agnostic restraint need to be forged into a multi-disciplinary and poly-methodic science of religion in the quest of a research model to be used in order to attain a better understanding of Shona religion, culture and society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to thank Patrick Maxwell and Professor Jim Kiernan for advising me and working with me throughout this research. I would also like to thank Professor Ronald Nicolson and the Lutheran Church for arranging my funding. Thank you to Doctor Jan Platvoet for reading my thesis drafts and offering helpful comments on its content.

Thanks to Professor Michael Bourdillon, Professor Gordon Chavunduka and others who spared a lot of their precious time in order to discuss various aspects of my research with me. I value Bourdillon's discussions on methodology development in the academic study of Shona traditional religion. I also want to express my gratitude to the many writers whose documentation I have made use of in my thesis. To Doctor James Cox and Professor Martin Prozesky thanks for your concern, kind words and encouragement throughout my research.

I also thank my parents and family for their patience and love. Annette Kalettka von Oltersdorff, thanks for the typing and for your unwavering support at all times.

INTRODUCTION

The critical examination of the methods by which religions have been studied in the past is one means by which better ways for their research may be developed. In order for us to map out better ways of academic study, the way research has been done on Shona religion in the past (methods, approaches and writers' attitudes to Shona religion) must be understood. This thesis focuses on the development of the documentation and the academic study of Shona religion, culture and society, as well as a critical analysis of the approaches and research methods used by a number of authors prominent in the study of this religion. I also seek to discuss methodological issues relevant to achieving a comprehensive understanding of African indigenous religions, specifically Shona traditional religion. One of my goals is to examine various ways of collecting information and interpreting it, and how this can be used in the study of the Shona. I also look at a few examples of language and translation, and how this brings about interpretation problems in research. Among the important issues that I discuss in this thesis is the exploration, where applicable, of the connection between the cultural, religious, and academic backgrounds of researchers and their researches. I explore how writers' goals influence their research and how certain academic theories, religious interests or political ideologies sometimes impinge on research. This thesis should in the end, enable us to gain insights into what researchers do and how they carry out their work.

After describing who the Shona are and presenting some of their religious beliefs and cultural practices, this thesis critically examines these issues and other methodological matters in the works of some of the "early writers", as well as in those of recent writers on Shona traditional religion, culture and society. The "early writers" who are discussed in detail include David Livingstone (1813-1873) and Rochefort McGuire (1924-1969). David Livingstone was an explorer and a

Christian missionary, and Rochefort McGuire was a Native Commissioner. The term "early writers" is used to refer to them because they were the first to record aspects of Shona religion and culture. I sometimes refer to these "early writers" as "Eurocentrics" because of their general Western European perception of phenomena. They were of varied professions, something which was surely to influence what they wrote about and how they wrote it. My discussion also includes a small section where I discuss some "early writers" who were hunters, explorers, traders, etc.

I included the "early writers" in this thesis because, in my opinion, they contributed towards an elementary documentation of Shona traditional religion and culture. Although most of their contribution is distorted information about Shona religion and culture, these writers indirectly initiated research on it. In addition, directly or indirectly, their works challenged and encouraged later writers to work in the same areas, but with a much more serious goal of presenting accurate and much less subjective results within a well-articulated methodology. Even today some of these "early writers" are referred to more as "historical" examples than as authorities. If an academic study concerned with investigating the historical development of Shona religion excludes the works of the "early writers", that study would be lacking an important historical component. Much of this thesis is centred on the critique of recent scholars who are considered to be the major writers on Shona traditional religion.

Besides the "Eurocentrics", I also critically examine three recent authors: Michael Gelfand (1912-1985), a medical doctor, Gordon Chavunduka (1931-), a sociologist and traditional healer, as well as Michael Bourdillon (1942-), a social anthropologist. This analysis proceeds according to the historical chronology of these writers.

I included Michael Gelfand in this study because he has produced more literature on Shona religion and culture than any other writer. Furthermore, his publications are of an interesting character in as much as he combines a study of the development of Western medicine and healing in relation to Shona culture and religion. I believe that it is necessary to study Gelfand because his books are widely used by students of Religious Studies, medicine and anthropology.

Gordon Chavunduka is an interesting case for me because he is one of the most prominent Shona writers on the religious beliefs of his own people. Moreover, he is a traditional healer who writes about traditional healing methods from firsthand experience. Chavunduka has been involved in the active teaching of some of the Shona religious and cultural aspects that he practises as a traditional healer.

Chavunduka's works are regarded as important by contemporary communities in as much as they deal with contemporary values and ethical issues such as witchcraft beliefs and witchcraft accusations. He is also consulted on such topics as the role of diviners and traditional healers in modern communities. As I study his publications, one of my interests is to find out ways in which his approaches and works differ from those of non-Shona writers.

Michael Bourdillon is important in this study because he has written on both the anthropological materials of Shona religion and culture as well as on research methods to study them. Bourdillon's works on Shona culture and religion seem to me to be of incomparable stature and furthermore, he is currently actively involved in the actual teaching of these issues.

This research is part of the ongoing quest for an adequate methodology in the academic study, particularly of Shona traditional religion, and of African traditional religions in general. I therefore seek to make a careful study of the

important publications of these authors. This involves in particular those works or passages where these different authors state their objectives, interests, methods and approaches to the study, as well as the contexts which reflect their personal involvement in the research. I look at the importance of relevant biographical information about the researcher's assistants and informants, and I also examine how writers' relationships to the informants during research influenced their researches. Some aspects of the writers' own biographies are essential in that they enable us to gain a fuller understanding of the writers in relation to their works. Studying the biographical information about these writers is important because the researcher is sometimes an integral component of the research, and is the lens by which the phenomena that they write about are reflected and interpreted. I also discuss how this problematises the idea of "objectivity" in scholarship. It is therefore, necessary for us to know the cultural, religious, social, academic, economic, political or ideological dynamics which shaped the authors' minds, in relation to the "world" of the people who are the object of their research. This may help us to see how these researchers worked with certain points of view and vested interests which influenced what they saw and affected how they saw it.

In most cases good methodological approaches are a gateway to the attainment of accuracy and reliable knowledge about the objects of academic investigation. Jacob Olupona (1990:175) has argued that the search for an adequate methodology in the study of African traditional religions has been hampered partly by the assumption that African traditional religions are so radically different from the so called "world religions" that they require a different approach. Olupona (1990:175) argued against this assumption because it has been taken to imply that African traditional religions can only be studied anthropologically because they are ethnic in origin and preliterate. But traditional religions, as I shall later

discuss in detail, are complex, poly-morphic and poly-functional community religions. I seek to argue in this thesis that the study of Shona traditional religion should therefore, not be limited to one particular discipline, but should be multi-disciplinary and poly-methodic. In chapters six and seven I will discuss in detail the methods and approaches that are most relevant and suitable for the study of the Shona.

The methods and approaches used by the scholars who are discussed in this thesis differ in validity, approach and power to "illuminate" Shona traditional religion. At the end of this research, in chapter seven, I hope to be able to tell which of these scholars has examined Shona traditional religion or its parts most adequately. I should also be able to present discussions that suggest ways in which researchers may avoid the pitfalls of the "early writers".

Some of the relevant questions which can be related to this research are: which research tools can be used to carry out worthwhile research on Shona traditional religion? Which approaches and methodologies deal adequately with religious meanings which are veiled in the cultures of specific traditional religions? Whose information is more reliable; that of the ordinary "insider" (the believer), the insider academic (like Chavunduka who is both a healer and an academic) or that of the "outsider" (a non-Shona, a non-believing member of the studied community) who does not subscribe to the beliefs and practices of the Shona community? By exploring the strengths as well as the weaknesses of different methods of research, I seek to discuss ways through which researchers can or cannot provide adequate descriptions, in-depth analysis and accurate interpretation of Shona religious phenomena.

My abridged biography

For methodological reasons I have found it important to discuss and analyse the autobiographical details of some of

the writers in question. It is necessary that I summarise the relevant biographical information about myself, that is, my academic background, religious orientation, and any other information which may have brought my discussions to certain angles of perception.

I grew up in a Shona cultural context and some of the things which I now study for academic purposes, I had been widely exposed to at home (the Mberengwa District, Chingoma area) through socialisation. I did my Advanced Level Secondary schooling at Chegato, a Lutheran institution. The regulations of the school required every student to go to the school church services every Sunday morning as well as Wednesday evenings, a rule that many students, including myself, did not solemnly adhere to. My mother is a serious Lutheran church-goer and my late grandmother was a strict orthodox Lutheran. My father is a traditional chief and so were his forefathers. At home various types of traditional rituals are conducted as a matter of course. These are some of the tensions and paradoxes in my own upbringing from which arose my zeal to study these religions so as to learn more. I also developed an interest in exploring methodologies with which Shona traditional religion and society have been researched.

At the University of Zimbabwe I was taught by lecturers whose books, views, theories and methodological positions I am now grappling with here. These scholars include James Cox, Jan Platvoet, Michael Bourdillon, Gordon Chavunduka and Ambrose Moyo. At the University of Natal I met with Patrick Maxwell, Jim Kiernan and Pratap Kumar whose ideas and methodological viewpoints considerably influenced my understanding and appreciation of researchers and how they do research. In addition, the way I understand and perceive the world has also been influenced, to a limited degree, by ideas and arguments of writers such as Ursula King, Ninian Smart, John Mbiti, E-Bolaji Idowu, Geoffrey Parrinder, Inus M. Daneel, Jacob Olupona, David Westerlund and Okot p'Bitek, as well as Mircea

Eliade. I should state that, to some extent, this affected the way I originally understood the Shona world. My Honours thesis was on the function and status of the traditional healer (*n'anga*) in the modern Shona society, and my Masters thesis was based on Mircea Eliade's conceptualisation of myths and rituals, and its applicability to the Shona context. I now turn to the methods which I have employed in this study.

Methodology

Various methods have been employed in this research. Because of the theoretical nature of this thesis, most of the information has been obtained from secondary published sources, that is, the works of the writers in question, as well as comments from critical reviews on these writers. Various approaches and research methods were summarized from books, journals, periodicals, etc. so as to have a broad base with general methodological discussions on whose basis I analyse the writers in question.

I attended, in many cases, as an observer most of the rituals discussed in this thesis. In order to enhance my understanding, I read about some of these rituals in several works including those of the writers studied in this thesis. The fieldwork was conducted in my home area, Mberengwa district, Zimbabwe. An advantage was that the people in this area knew me and therefore readily volunteered most of the information for which I was looking. This was extremely helpful because of the kind of *trust* these people soon showed in me. Most of the details about the rituals were already known to me before the fieldwork, but the research enabled me to collect greater detail which I would otherwise have omitted. I did not have to struggle to cultivate "empathy", a technique often used by sociologists and anthropologists who strive to comprehend "the other". The fieldwork also helped me to achieve a clearer understanding of some of the concepts and meanings of which I had previously had an imperfect grasp.

During my fieldwork among the Shona of Mberengwa District in Zimbabwe, I had opportunities to conduct interviews and to be a participant observer in some of the rituals conducted by these Shona people. I was not a mere observer because I joined in the rituals and took part in the proceedings. Thus part of this thesis has drawn on my own "hands on" experience, a fact which provokes questions like, does this make me a *more sensitive and competent* researcher? I claim to have firsthand information about most of the things which were happening at most of these rituals. One of my problems was that I did not have a research assistant to observe and record some of the occurrences which I was not able to see or hear because I was busy with other commitments at the time of the rituals. Another problem was that at times I could not concentrate on my mission because I was delegated duties as well as sent to do small errands because the people knew me and considered me to be part and parcel of the whole process. The question as to how much is actually "observed" and how much is "heard" during research is an important issue that I also discuss in this thesis.

Personal interviews enabled me to listen to oral descriptions of some events which I had not been able to observe. This method also enabled me to have firsthand information about how the people understand their various religious phenomena. The language barrier was non-existent as it was my own culture and people that I was studying. I also interviewed competent scholars in this field.

This thesis is in a way, a comparative study in that different scholars are compared with one another with regard to their methods, approaches, descriptions, interpretations and attitudes to their object of study.

It should be stated, however, that the inclusion of historical accounts and the use of so-called scientific methods in the search for information here does not imply any pretence of

special expertise on my part, since my studies in Religious Studies have mostly been of a non-specialist nature. In my efforts to cope with this handicap I have availed myself of the advice of experts in various disciplines during the different stages of inquiry. I would like to emphasise the fact that this research is not so much a direct study of Shona religion as it is "a study of the study of Shona religion".

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS A GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF SHONA TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Basic aspects of African traditional religions

In this initial chapter I will move quickly from a consideration of African traditional religions in general to religious beliefs and cultural practices of the Shona in particular. The issues discussed in this chapter are: the place of Shona traditional religion within the wider scope of African traditional religions, a brief summary of who the Shona people are and some central features of Shona traditional religion.

Platvoet says that the term "African traditional religions" embodies all the religions which developed as African "community religions" within the more than 1,000 indigenous societies of the continent since palaeolithic times (1995b:13). The word "traditional", though disliked by some scholars, is used here to connote that the religions are indigenous. These religions, unlike other religions such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, do not have one known founder. In my opinion, and as current research shows, calling African traditional religions "animism" is a distortive mystification and falsification of their realities. Animism is one aspect of many religious and cultural phenomena of African traditional religions. Furthermore, it is a misnomer to use the term "traditional" as implying an "archaic" or "fossilized" religion because African traditional religions are not dead religions. These religions are transmitted from generation to generation through oral literature and rituals (Idowu 1974:19). African traditional religions are living religions which are practised in contemporary rural and urban areas with their own contextual dynamics.

African religiousness has been described by Mbiti (1975:12-13) as "part and parcel of the African heritage" and as an essential part of the African way of life. I assume that what he means is that all the members of an African society practise the faith of their community. Mbiti's argument concurs with that of Thorpe when she says that these religions pervade most of African traditional society's institutions. Not all, but most aspects of life such as agriculture, sex, eating, politics, birth and death have a religious dimension (Thorpe 1991:107). Platvoet (1995:14) also argues that African traditional religions are not organised into a separate institution (as the church in modern European life), as they can hardly be distinguished from culture and life in general.

Whereas Christians use the Bible as their authority, Muslims the Koran, Hindus the Gita and so forth, African traditional religions are not characterised by fixed canonical scriptures in which beliefs are retained as unique, exclusive and revealed. Beliefs and practices are largely transmitted from one generation to the next by word of mouth and by ritual practices.

African belief systems are embodied in actions, rituals and symbols. Some sources of information of African traditional religions include the following: myths, rituals, proverbs, names of people and places with religious meanings, idiomatic and aphoristic expressions, artistic expressions and sacred places, religious objects and personalities (Mbiti 1975:75). These are some of the phenomena in which the religious lives of African traditionalists are anchored. It should be noted that some of these phenomena as well as the African kinship networks are important in that they relate to systems that impart wisdom, morality, ethics and customary understanding.

Mbiti, Idowu and others have argued that, unlike in major world religions, in most African traditional religions, there is no room for individuals to choose whether they want to be

religious or not. Biological ties bring Africans together in traditional religious and cultural circles. To be, means to belong to a patterned religio-kinship system (Thorpe 1991:107;111). By virtue of being born into an African family one automatically becomes integrated into the religious beliefs and practices of one's forefathers. One thereby naturally participates and shares in its socio-religious life. However, in modern communities Mbiti's assertion that all individuals in African community are religious is not necessarily correct. I maintain that both in traditional times and at the present day, not all Africans are religious; many are lax and non-observant as fortune allows. Some are generally resistant to or critical of the cultural practices and religious beliefs of their communities which they regard as undesirable or as backward. These practices include rituals where a deceased man's wife is inherited by one of his brothers. Research shows that those Africans who have been converted to Islam or Christianity or other faiths have not entirely shaken off some of the traditional beliefs and practices of their progenitors (Mbiti 1969:5). Though some Africans in urban areas continue to privately practise rituals as taught by their forebears, it has been noticed that this is gradually changing because of modern secular life (Platvoet 1995a:103-104).

It is also interesting to note that though it is generally agreed that African traditional religions are non-missionary religions, it is possible that some phenomena of African traditional religions in one community can be propagated to another. This "importing" or "exporting" occurs within a religious milieu of constant change through the religious creativity of the participants, who adopt and adapt religious ideas and practices. In other cases institutions are brought in from far and near by visitors who travel, or those who marry into other groups (Platvoet 1995b:14). When a woman gets married outside her community (exogamy), she introduces to her new family and society, the beliefs and practices of her

community of origin. Another example of a way in which traditional religious phenomena can be spread to other places is when misfortune strikes, and a healer from another traditional community is consulted. He or she prescribes religious practices of his or her own community of origin. These may be accepted or rejected, but though different from "missionary work" in the so-called world religions, these are some of the ways by which beliefs and practices may be transmitted from one African community to another.

Most African traditionalists maintain a cultic attention to spiritual beings like ancestors, gods and lower spiritual beings. Setiloane (1986:77-86) has argued that the idea of a *deus otiosus* was merely a missionary misinterpretation of the African traditional conception of the Supreme Being. In contrast Kiernan (1995:76), has hypothesised that the very concept of a Supreme God was introduced by the Christian missionaries. This may be true because throughout Africa today, God is known by different names and praise attributes which are not very different from those found in Abrahamic religions. Regardless of this debate, it is clear that African notions of "God" are both rich and diverse. In some communities this God is regarded as male, in others she is female, and in other communities the Deity is both male and female. In his book *Concepts of God in Africa*, Mbiti presents various views concerning the nature and attributes of God which he researched in more than 200 African ethnic groups. The Akan of Ghana believe in a multiplicity of gods who can be consulted easily, by anyone and at anytime (Platvoet 1990). This belief is different from the southern African context where certain groups believe in a God so great that he cannot always be approached directly. He is mostly approached indirectly through elders of a clan, rain-priests, spirit mediums and ancestral spirits. This conceptualisation does not apply to the West African traditional religions which are thoroughly polytheistic.

The complex and indirect means of communication between the people and the spiritual beings is also reflected in how discussion is sometimes conducted between the young and the elders in African communities. For example, for one to discuss marriage plans with a bride's father one has first to go through the bride's aunt, her brothers to the mother and thereafter the father's brothers before actually being able to meet the father. The same applies to the spiritual world, communication with God is in most cases done through mediators. Many African traditionalists believe that ancestral spirits and divinities carry out the day-to-day running of the world on behalf of God. Together with the religious practitioners they may punish wrong-doers so as to maintain order in society. These spiritual beings are custodians of the land, culture and well-being of the community. Together with the diviners, rain-priests and healers maintain a desirable balance between the spiritual and physical worlds. On the one hand the healers, diviners and rain-priests are the epitome of good. On the other hand the witches, sorcerers and their familiars are viewed as the embodiment of evil. They are believed to disrupt the harmony which is safeguarded by religious practitioners. Scholars like Platvoet have argued that this "good versus evil" concept, as presented by scholars now, has been developed more distinctly than it was in pre-colonial traditional societies, and this is a consequence of Christian theology (Platvoet: Personal communication, 1995).

The functions of traditional religious practitioners include that of relaying messages to and from ancestors. They are believed sometimes to govern the mundane world on behalf of God. It is acceptable that in some cases the institution of religious practitioners, within the cultural bounds, can and should dispense divine justice on behalf of God. Religious practitioners exist to deal with and eradicate evil forces. When misfortune strikes, these practitioners are consulted and they prescribe remedies and solutions so as to restore order to the community. Religious practitioners are thus respected

and often feared because of their supernatural power. They are held in very high esteem by their communities because of the power and authority inherent in their position. This office is regarded as positive and of beneficial value by the believers. Religious practitioners very often assist their folk in coping with the realities of their immediate environment and the mysteries of the spiritual world. They also help them to easily establish harmony with the two worlds, for example, by interpreting the meaning and significance of dreams, visions and omens which they experience in their daily lives. This is partly how "salvation" is achieved in traditional African contexts.

In its totality, "salvation" becomes a reality when there is material prosperity, harmony, well-being, integrity and good health in society. This phenomenon of salvation is inextricably linked to African socio-moral tenets. Each person must live according to the norms of his or her society. Elders must be respected and one's ancestors need to be remembered and rituals are performed for them from time to time as a sign of respect. It is this norm which makes one's specific set of ancestors act as guardians responsible for one's life. The "Do's and Dont's" of the community must be observed by all so as to ensure the "salvation" of the community as a whole. An individualistic type of "salvation" is not perceived as real. Individual life and happiness in isolation and apart from other people is viewed with contempt and scorn. Nondo (1991:35) summarises this notion in this saying, "I am because we are; since we are therefore I am". In Harriet Ngubane's view, the African approach to life is that of sharing burdens, blessings, joys, sorrows, cares and responsibilities (1977:28). The individual's life and happiness are not possible in isolation and apart from other people. It is this approach which highlights the African perception of a harmonious and coordinated universe. This description sounds romanticized but ethnographic substantiation shows that in most of the African societies, good health, harmony, order,

integrity and continuity are all key words which summarise the African beliefs in a life-affirming and life-sustaining religious society. Thus, "salvation" in African traditional religions is perceived to be an ongoing process which starts in this world when people are still alive. The present community is a religious arena for human and divine interaction; an arena where punishment, justice, reconciliation, forgiveness and reward are executed.

Comments on some of the literature on African traditional religions

In this section I will make relevant comments on some of the existing literature on African traditional religions. Before the colonisation of the African continent, traders, Christian missionaries, explorers and hunters were already writing on African traditional religions. Though scholars like Harold Schneider (1981:180) argued that these writers believed that Africans had no significant religious beliefs about the nature of the world and that these writers saw no point in looking for such beliefs, I want to emphasise that some of these "early writers" like Livingstone were surprisingly quite perceptive compared to some of the "early writers". Such writers contributed to the preliminary documentation of some aspects of African traditional religions as they saw them then.

More recent scholars, who write from their own African religio-cultural backgrounds in most cases contradict and correct the findings of these "early writers". p'Bitek, Chidester, Thorpe, Olupona, Bourdillon, and others are some of the scholars who are currently working towards exposing and reversing the mistakes of the "early writers". A historian of religion, Ngwabi Bhebhe has made an important observation which has contributed to our understanding of some "early writers'" approaches and methods. Bhebhe (1979:2), stated that the majority of the early missionaries *required* the African to

break with traditional social and cultural patterns. The point of interest here is that the above stated objective, played a major part such that most of the "early writers" wrote on African traditional religions merely confirming their preconceived opinions. I shall explore this issue in detail in the next chapter.

In his book *African Traditional Religions* (1981) E.G. Parrinder has a good collection of quotations from monographs, diaries, manuscripts and personal letters of some "early writers". From these quotations, terminology which derides African traditional religions can be found. For example, the reference to African traditional religions as "fetishism", "slave religions", "savage religions", "heathenism" or "pagan religions" illustrate the prejudice and bias of these writers. They labelled African traditionalists as "uncivilised", "irreligious". Traditional healers and diviners were stigmatised and labelled as "witches" and sometimes as "witch doctors". These are some of the examples that illustrate the fact that the "early writers" depreciated the reality of African traditional religions through their use of confusing and pejorative terminology, inadequate descriptions and faulty interpretations. Some of these writers' descriptions were very superficial and were characterised by exaggerations and distortions. Interpretation of religious symbols and actions seem to have been inexpertly made, out of their proper contexts, and with the intention of ridiculing the described subjects. I argue that these improper descriptions and indecent naming emanated both from biased perceptions as well as from poor methods of research. This shows that without using well articulated approaches and good research methods, good results are difficult to achieve. Specific examples will be furnished in the next chapter where the works of some these "early writers" are discussed in detail.

The different and sometimes contradictory conclusions by scholars on African traditional religions indicate that these

writers had intrusive motives and interests. The fact that they conducted their research at odd times and under difficult conditions influenced, to some extent, their research conclusions. As stated above, my concern in this thesis is to explore the trends of academic research into Shona traditional religion and especially to examine research approaches of the scholars in question, that is, how they obtained information and interpreted it. In addition I also explore whether the writers' backgrounds or attitudes to the object of study regulated their approaches. The above general overview of African traditional religions gives us an idea of African traditional beliefs and will enable us to picture how Shona religion and culture are one particular instance of African traditional world.

A summary of the history of the Shona people

The term "Shona" is central in this study, and it will be used frequently in my discussions, so it would be best for me to devote a short section to explaining what is meant by this word. A historian, David Beach (1980, 1984 and 1993), in my opinion constitutes a reliable source of information on the history of the pre-colonial Shona. According to Beach (1980:18), the word "Shona" was apparently used by the Ndebele. Thorpe has argued that the Ndebele used this word as a derogatory term to mean that the Shona were cowards because whenever the Ndebele invaded them, the latter fled away to hide in the forest and hills like a sinking sun. *Ukushona* is a Ndebele word which means to sink or to hide. Thorpe's research informs us that the first people to inhabit the land known today as Zimbabwe were the Khoisan hunters who led a semi-nomadic life (Thorpe 1991:52ff; Sicard 1950:138-143). Prior to the 19th century there were large-scale migrations of Africans moving southward over the continent. The first of these probably reached Zimbabwe in about the 2nd century CE. The invaders of the early Iron Age were Bantu speaking people who settled on the high plateau between the Limpopo and the

Zambezi rivers. These Bantu speakers were agriculturists and cattle owners. Because of the Bantu invasion, the Khoisan gradually drifted out of this region (Thorpe 1991:49ff). Though not giving much historical and ethnographic evidence, Beach agrees that the word "Shona" was later used even by these Bantu as a term of distinguishing themselves from the other language groups. This term defined them as a peculiar group sharing a certain cultural and historical link (Thorpe 1991:52). Another historian, T. O. Ranger in Samukange (1969:2), supports this argument when he says that the term "Shona" is a linguistic term used to describe a group of dialects spoken throughout what is now known as southern Zimbabwe and in parts of the adjacent territories. Ranger's formulation supports Beach's argument as well as the Thorpe hypothesis. From David Beach (1980:18) we gather that it was probably around 1450 that the word got extended bit by bit to cover the central Shona and then the rest of the people to the south of the Zambezi plateau. Beach further argued that the Shona history in that period may be analysed in terms of four major political units: namely, (i) the loosely knit states around great Zimbabwe prior to the 16th century; (ii) the Torwa state that dominated the south-western area from the late 15th century to the late 17th century; when it was superseded by (iii) the Changamire-Rozvi state which lasted until the 1840s; also present in the north was the (iv) Mutapa state which existed concurrently with the Zimbabwean culture from the 15th to the 19th century (Thorpe 1991:50). These analyses seem to have been done in retrospect and are characterised by speculation. It is possible that throughout the pre-Ndebele invasion period the "Shona" may have had no awareness of their "Shona-ness" and used no common name as they experience it now.

Versions of the origins of the Shona people vary considerably from one Shona community to another. The general consensus in most of these communities is that the Shona originated somewhere to the north of the Zambezi river or roughly to the

north (Bhariko: Interview, 1995). These traditions reflect a conclusion reached by Shona oral historians who argued from the general geography of Southern Africa that they have come from the North (Beach 1984:57). From myths and legends of some Shona people, the place of origin is often specified as Tanganyika. The word "Tanganyika" literally means "beginning country" or "first country". The myths and legends of other Shona people state their origin to be near a plateau from which the ruling group then migrated to other places. Reasons that this place is often thought to be Tanzania are unknown. *Guruuswa* is another place which is mentioned as their place of origin. This word means "big grass" and this place hypothetically could be somewhere in the Savanna region (Beach 1980:56-57). Other Shona myths and legends do not mention any specific location as their place of origin. Beach however, argues that although none of these traditions reflect historical reality with certainty, at the same time, none can be dismissed as fictitious. As the question of the origin of the Shona is not indispensable to this thesis, I should perhaps best terminate this section by arguing that whatever is claimed in these myths and legends remains unproven.

Contemporary location of the Shona and their identity

The current Shona community consists of the following groupings: the Zezuru who are located in the Mashonaland Province of Zimbabwe; the Karanga who are located in Masvingo Province, Midlands and Matabeleland South; the Manyika in Manicaland; the Ndau in Manicaland areas; and the Korekore who are located in the Darwin area. It should, however, be noted that these areas are not exclusive regions for the stated dialect groups. Here and there one finds an intermixture of various Shona dialect groups in a continuum or mixed settlements of Shona and Ndebele people. These Shona groups are also found in areas bordering Zimbabwe and parts of Mozambique, Botswana, South Africa and Zambia. The scholars whose work I am critiquing use "Shona" to refer to the Shona

who reside between the Zambezi and the Limpopo rivers, Plumtree and Mutare regions.

As indicated above, "Shona" as a linguistic term describes a cluster of dialects. The principal dialects of the Shona language are Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Korekore and Ndau. The other dialects which are phonologically and morphologically related to the Shona language include the Budja, Venda and Kalanga dialects. Thorpe (1991:52) argued that the Shona people use it only as a means of distinguishing themselves from other language groups. While primarily a linguistic classification, it is also a convenient term to designate a people who not only share a language, but also have certain cultural and, to some extent, historical links. Besides using the Shona language as a means of identification, most Shona people also identify themselves by way of totems (*Mitupo*). Every Shona person identifies himself or herself with a totemic animal along patrilineal lines. The totemic name combines several functions because it is both a symbol of identity and a safeguard against incest. As at a dynastic level the totem indicates descent from one man, many Shona extend this principle to the entire Shona group and assume that all Shona of the same totem must necessarily be related. (It is interesting to note that some totems used by the Shona are also used by other Bantu speaking people in Africa (Beach 1980:329)). It is partly by virtue of this totemic identity system that some Shona people feel obliged to play a part in Shona culture and religion.

Shona traditional religion: Some central aspects

In the above summary I briefly described who the Shona are, and where they are located. I will now discuss some specific aspects of Shona traditional religion. Parts of my descriptions in this section of the thesis are based on information that I obtained from secondary sources such as Daneel, Zvobgo, Bhebhe, Bucher, Schoffelleers and others. The

data from these writers was supplemented by information that I gathered through experience when I lived in my own community as well as when I went to conduct fieldwork in Mberengwa. In this presentation I will point out aspects, where applicable, that have been controversial in the study of Shona traditional religion, and I will try to relate them to my interests in this thesis.

I should begin by pointing out that the boundaries between religion and culture are not always clearly discernible. As such, writers like Mbiti (1969:1), Idowu, Westerlund and others have argued that Africans are "notoriously" or "incurably" religious, and that, Africans, "in all things are religious" (Westerlund 1985:6).

This view has been criticised by, among others Kudadjie (1976:74) and Amponsah who argue that there are people without a religion in traditional communities. In my discussions with a colleague, David Kaulem, at the University of Zimbabwe, he expressed the same sentiment by arguing that writers such as Mbiti fail to place traditional religion in its social, political and economic context. Kaulem argued that Africans make distinctions between the sacred and the profane. As an example, he argued that when young boys are herding cattle, or when adults are working in the fields, they are obviously not talking to their ancestors and there is nothing religious about these aspects (Occasional discussion: University of Zimbabwe, 1995). Contrary to Kaulem's convictions, one of my informants maintained that young boys herding cattle in the pastures do so within the religious-cultural regulations of the people of that area. As an example, it is a religious ruling that no one is allowed to herd cattle in places that are regarded as sacred (*kumarambakutemwa* or *kunzvimbo dzinoera*). Furthermore, young boys herding cattle are told by the elders not to bother themselves by looking after the consecrated bull (*ngunzi yemusha*) because such a bull is no longer an ordinary bull, because of its religious

significance; unlike the rest of the cattle, it is treated with respect (Kileff Clive & Peggy 1970:67; Gumbo:Personal Communication, July 1995). Thus, there is a religious element in this aspect of the Shona people.

During my research I observed that when adults work in the fields, their working times and the ways in which they work are regulated by religious and cultural conditions such as sacred days (*zvisi*), rain-making rituals (*mitoro*) and cooperative work (*humwe*) all of which are connected to Shona religion. Furthermore, I observed that the "joy" or "anger" of ancestral spirits is readily linked to various activities, "successes" or "failures" of the Shona people. It is necessary to do further research on this issue so that we ascertain whether there are any aspects of a Shona person which do not have a religious dimension.

Shona religion, like most traditional religions, has practices and beliefs which flourish as living realities rather than the systematic abstractions promulgated by some scholars and condemned by others. As I have already stated, basically scholars write about concepts, and the Shona believers are oriented more to practice and experience. In my summary of Shona religious beliefs, though it is difficult, I will try not to allow these systematic categories to dominate the dynamic and living traditions. My summary contains the following divisions that are translated from Shona language: (i) Beliefs about God and other spirits (*Mwari, midzimu nemashavi*). (ii) Beliefs and interpretations about the nature of human beings (*Vanhu nemamiriro evo*). (iii) Well-being and harmony of the society (*Upenyu nemagariro akarurama*), sometimes called salvation. (iv) Beliefs and interpretations about the nature of the universe (*Kufunga kwavanhu maererano nemamiriro epasi rose*) and (v) Social-religious codes and rules of conduct (*Tsika nemagariro*).

I am avoiding using terms like "numinological", "soteriological" and "cosmological beliefs", etc. because, in my view, such categories attempt to bring a systematic order to the world of experiences of believers in a way that does not accurately depict the actual contexts. Furthermore, the use of these terms makes scholars lose sight of the actual living experiences of the religion and culture of the Shona. Such terminology, though not wrong, is often criticised as distorting traditional religions because, in their living contexts, these religious aspects tend to be concrete and not abstract (Platvoet 1995: Personal communication). I should however, state that in a thesis such as this, some systematisation and expression of these beliefs in articulate terms is obviously unavoidable. Where possible I tried to avoid using these categories because I believe that it is important for methodological purposes to try and resort to original Shona terms or nearest possible translations. When I conducted my research in Mberengwa I found out that there are no Shona expressions with meanings equivalent, for example, to such terms as "salvation/ soteriology". In such cases, I think that it is much better to derive terminology from the observed contexts and according to the practical experiences of these people. Daneel (1971:79) has observed that efforts to systematise the different aspects of traditional religions have often obscured the meaning of component parts within a composite picture. Researchers should present the verbatim responses or the jargon that is employed by the Shona people themselves to describe how they perceive their practices.

Earlier on I mentioned that there are controversies, for example, between Setiloane and Kiernan as to whether belief in a significant Supreme Being was part of African traditional religions. Though this debate cannot be resolved here I would like to point out a few arguments that relate to the concepts of God among the Shona. First of all, currently the Shona people believe in *Mwari* (God), one singular supreme deity hence they have been described by scholars as "monotheists".

This God is believed to be omnipotent (*Samasimba*), omniscient and omnipresent and is normally perceived to be male. He is believed to be the creator, *Musiki* (creator) and founder of the entire creation, (*the originator*) *Chidzachepo* (Zvobgo 1991:8). This God is not viewed as a God exclusively for the Shona but as a God for humankind. He is generally believed to dwell in the skies (*Mwari wokumusorosoro*) hence his name is *Samatenga* (owner of the skies).

However, this Shona conception of God should be understood in relation to their belief in God of Matopo hills who is known as *Mwari wekumabwe* or *Mwari weZame* (Daneel 1971:84). The information that I obtained from Daneel's research was supplemented by the interviews that I conducted with Juliana Chokoto, a female messenger who is currently travelling in Zimbabwe spreading messages from the God of Matopo Shrine. Daneel (1971:74-82) argues that the Shona conceptualisation of fertility and how they relate it to the Matopo God makes them give this God female attributes hence called by names such as *Dzivaguru/ Chidzivachopo* (Great pool), *Mbuya* (grand mother) and *Zendere* which generally represent the female aspects. Rain-priests, traditional leaders, and ordinary people from all over the country regularly go to Matopo hills where they consult the oracle of this God in order to ensure rain, fertility, good health, prosperity and personal favours. This belief is authenticated by the religious activities which take place at the Matonjeni *Mwari* cave-cult. Daneel (1971) also points out that during the liberation struggle the guerillas, political leaders, and business people today go to consult the Matopo God for advice.

My point here is that this God is presented as close to humans, not only in geographical terms, but as one who is concerned with individuals and their welfare (Daneel 1970:5). It is important to note that this conceptualisation is different from that of some Shona when they talk of a God of skies (*Samatenga* or *Mwari wokumusorosoro*). *Samatenga* (sky God) is

perceived to be a remote God who is indifferent to humans and is unconcerned with individuals and their problems, for he is considered to be far removed from the earth (Bullock 1927:123). Unlike *Mwari wekumabwe* (the God of Matopo hills), *Samatenga* is not localised but is the owner of the skies. In my interviews with Juliana I found out that there was a revival of the Matopo God cult who is approachable and concerned with the religious, social, political and economic conditions of the Shona people. There is a need to do intensive research so as to ascertain whether the Shona acknowledge the existence of more than one God.

Finally, I am interested in Zvobgo's account that the Shona believe that God created everything that exists, and this God was not approached directly but only through Chaminuka (a great spirit medium in the MaShonaland territory). According to Zvobgo though the identity of Chaminuka is uncertain, it is generally agreed that he was the great messenger of God who liked God and the people (1991:8). Zvobgo further argues that according to oral history, the Chaminuka spirit came directly from God. Before it selected a man as its spirit medium it revealed itself to people as a voice emanating from trees and telling people of its presence (1991:9; Daneel:1971:81). This raises questions such as, was this God viewed as universal god? If there were twelve Mwari shrines (Schoffelleers 1972) can it be that each of these shrines had its own God or were they all under one Supreme God? Is it possible that before the missionaries Shona people were polytheists?

On another level, scholars such as Klaus Nuernberger (1975:196) argue that there is no adequate ethnographic data to show that in Africa, rituals are directed towards God and not to the ancestors. Furthermore, it has not been ascertained whether, or to what extent, the concept of the sky God existed before the arrival of the Christian missionaries. Thorpe (1991:54) argued that if the Mwari cult, which is firmly entrenched in the southern part of Mashonaland, is accepted as

representative of beliefs in the deity throughout the territory, the concept of a remote God (*deus otiosus*) must be viewed with some reservation in spite of the fact that *Mwari* is approached indirectly by individuals through designated spirit mediums and that few rituals are actually directed to him.

Ancestors are an important element in Shona spiritual beliefs. Being more powerful than human beings, they are believed to affect and influence natural events as well as the lives of their progeny. Writers such as Mbiti (1969:9; Idowu (1974:182) and my own research (1993) maintain that ancestors are not worshipped but they are honoured and addressed in ritual. It is difficult to find equivalent translations to the Shona phrase "*kupira midzimu*" which in my view refers to remembrance and symbolises communal-hood rather than the "worshipping" of ancestors. Scholars such as Shoko (1991:68), Westerlund (1985:29,88) and Berglund (Personal communication:1995) prefer to use the terms veneration, propitiation, communion, thanks giving, remembrance or appeasement, indicating the different types of rituals performed for the ancestors.

In 1995 I attended a thanksgiving ritual after bumper harvests. I will summarise the relevant aspects of this ritual so as to illustrate that the Shona do not worship their ancestors. During the ceremony the headman (*sabhuku*), addressing the ancestors, expressed the message that the community was grateful to God for fertility, rains and bumper harvests. He also thanked the ancestors (*mhondoro*) for conveying their requests to God. During the ritual the ancestors were invited to enjoy the ritual with the people who were attending the ritual. This headman poured some beer on the ground as libation, and sprinkled some snuff on the ground for the ancestors to enjoy. He asked them to convey their request to higher spirits, for bumper harvests in the next season, and for protection and for prosperity. From my observations of this ritual there was nothing indicative of

the fact that these people worshipped their ancestors. The ancestors are regarded as departed elders who need to be respected and remembered through ritual. It is generally understood that Shona people do make requests to ancestors, but God is thought to be the final authority. *They worship God through their ancestors.* *Midzimu* (ancestors) are believed to be less powerful than God; they can possess human spirit mediums; they are not all-knowing hence it is believed that during the rituals they can be coaxed, cajoled, scolded, manipulated and it is believed that they can easily be misled by devious human beings like witches.

In normal circumstances the institution of the ancestors is regarded with respect. Sometimes some Shona people believe that misfortune, sterility, disease or poverty are a means through which ancestors, with permission from God, castigate their progeny for immorality or for disobedience. As an example, in 1988 there was a drought in Zimbabwe. Traditional diviners and spirit mediums were consulted and they attributed the drought to the ancestral spirits who were angry. Their anger was due to the fact that after the war no traditional rituals were conducted so as to cleanse the land of the blood spilled during the war. The ancestors were angry because no ritual had been conducted to thank them for their support during the liberation struggle (Gumbo: Personal communication, 1996). Shona people believe that generally, if ancestors are venerated and remembered through ritual, they are bound to provide protection and facilitate prosperity and success of their righteous descendants in all their undertakings. According to Schoffelleers (1979:15), Shona traditional believers regard ancestral spirits as guardians of the land.

Below the supreme spiritual being and the ancestors, there are other lower and less powerful spirits in the spiritual world. These include: (*magoritoto*) ghosts, spooks (*zvituphwani*), avenging spirits (*zvikwambo* or *ngozi*), evil spirits (*bvuri*) and alien spirits (*mashavi*). Though these invisible beings

belong to the lower strata of the spiritual realm it is believed that they can affect and influence the lives of people. They are however not believed to be all-powerful because they can be manipulated by diviners and witches.

A spirit is regarded by the Shona as a (*goritoto*) ghost in the case where a person dies and is not given proper burial; he or she has not been ritually brought back home as an ancestor and has nowhere to "settle". The ghost then loiters in the neighbouring forest and haunts the area where the death actually took place. The ghost is identified by the flames of fire which it emits at night. Those who have actually seen it describe it as a huge snowy white figure (Shumba: Personal communication, 1995). *Shavi* (alien spirit) is a spirit which seeks to possess a medium which is not an offspring of its lineage. For example, when the a spirit of a snake, like a python, possesses a human being or when that of a European possesses an African, then this spirit is called an alien spirit. In one ritual that I attended in 1992, one participant claimed that he was possessed by a baboon spirit. He ate raw maize, danced and climbed trees jumping from branch to branch like a baboon. Different *shavi* (alien) spirits are said to bring different talents, for example, the python spirit is believed to bring to its host hunting, divination and healing talents. Scanty descriptions and analysis of these spiritual powers have been done. In my research, I have not come across a person who has given adequate and clear illumination on how powerful these spirits are and the ways in which they relate to God.

When I grew up I was taught not to do bad and wicked things such as stealing and murder because this could cause an avenging spirit (*ngozi*) to invade my family. The "*ngozi*" (avenging spirit) is the most feared spirit among the Shona. These people believe that this spirit comes about when a person dies in a grieved state of mind, when the deceased is a victim of murder or when an ill-treated servant deprived of

his or her rightful recompense dies (Bucher 1980:69). The relatives of the deceased ritually invoke and summon up the dead person to hunt and haunt the culprit and his family and take revenge by causing all forms of affliction, misfortune, lunacy, and even death, until the injury and injustice done to the deceased is redressed (Thorpe 1991:57; Gumbo 1994: Interview). Though seen in a negative light, the *ngozi* spirit is a spirit which is demanding its dues. Rather than a *ngozi* spirit being regarded as an evil spirit, in normal contexts, it sanctions a strict moral code. On the basis of the research on *ngozi* done by scholars such as Daneel (1971:96), Thorpe (1991:57) and others, I am of the view that documentation on this topic not only lacks detail but also lacks insider perspectives. This is one example of topics about which it is not easy to get accurate facts regarding what actually takes place. The people involved in it do not disclose information in fear of being accused of witchcraft or probably because of the traumatic experiences that they suffer because of this spirit. These people have fear and are always suspicious of "outsiders" who interview them about the issue hence they rarely reveal the truth of their experiences. Most of the events that happen to the families attacked by avenging spirits are treated with great confidentiality. In such cases, the methods of research chosen by the researcher are very important because they determine the kind of information that is obtained from the respondents.

All these lower spiritual beings are not worshipped. They are related to God in the sense that they belong to the same spiritual and invisible world. This invisible world is believed to be geographically located in the physical realm where human beings live and interact. They are all believed to have superhuman powers which can affect and influence the lives of humans, even though in some cases these spirits are believed to be manipulated by sinister individuals for personal malevolent ends. I would like to point out that the way the Shona perceive the hierarchy in the invisible world is

reflected in their visible world which we see every day; there is the Chief at the top, then the religious practitioners, and then the elders who are followed by the ordinary people.

There is scanty information about the Shona beliefs about their nature as human beings. Some of the points that I would like to briefly explore include that among the Shona there is a very close family bond between the living members of a descent group. This family bond extends beyond the confines of the visible family to embrace those still to be born and, even more significantly, those who have passed from the visible to the spiritual realm, thereby becoming ancestors (Lan 1985:20-22). Shona beliefs about the nature of humans are as follows: Humans are composed of a mortal body and an immortal soul. The deceased is believed to continue to live as an ancestral spirit after the decomposition of the body hence the proverb, "*nyama inowora bva nyama haiori*" (the body perishes but the spirit does not). Most Shona believe that they are not completely self-adequate by themselves and have a restricted functional capacity in power and knowledge. They believe that the human being is a relatively powerless creature who depends on God and other external powers for harmonious existence.

Furthermore, the Shona believe that although the universe was created full of order and harmony, it contains devious human beings who are responsible for disunity, chaos, misfortunes and death. The perception of the concept of evil is understood to be incarnated in the following personalities: witches, sorcerers, thieves and adulterers. These people epitomise evil, disorder, hatred and jealousy. Whenever there is tension, misfortune, disease or death in the society, the Shona are always suspicious that the source of the trouble is the witch, sorcerer or some evil-minded person. In view of this notion of "evil" it would be interesting to do research which explores whether the Shona people have a concept of "sin".

Whenever any of the above listed problems arise, the first refuge for the Shona believers is one of the following: diviner, spirit medium, healer, rain priest or elders of the village who establish the causes and prescribe solutions to the problems. Religious practitioners are an embodiment or a personification of order, justice, structure, good and love (Dziva 1991). This is one way in which Shona people perceive the existence of good and evil, order and chaos. Order and harmony in Shona society are maintained by adhering to Shona socio-moral values. Shona traditional religion's moral codes and ethics are transmitted and inculcated in both the youth and elders through myths, legends and proverbs and cultural rituals. The legitimation of these moral codes and ethics is anchored in the belief that they originate from the ancestors. From the foregoing, we can deduce how Shona people interpret themselves as human beings in relation to their beliefs about the world in which they live as well as in relation to the beliefs and convictions of the people who researched and wrote about them. It is a pity that descriptions and analysis of Shona values, morality and ethics have been neglected by researchers.

I now turn to the Shona beliefs about the world (universe) in which they live. This takes into consideration both the spiritual world and the physical world. I have already pointed out that the physical/ visible world is influenced and affected by invisible beings. It is believed that there is a close interaction between these two worlds which is often more noticeable at calendrical moments and in times of misfortune. Some of the rituals that I attended showed that the Shona people realise that the two realms are somehow dependent upon each other. This is so because it is believed that the spiritual beings expect ritual sacrifices from their descendants and, in return, the Shona expect material prosperity and well-being in their society. The Shona people also understand the world to have a tripartite structure. For them the universe comprises three realms, namely, the sky

realm, the earthly realm and the underworld. The sky world (*kudenga*) is believed to be full of life and is comprised of God as the supreme spiritual being, ancestors (*vadzimu*), lower spiritual beings and then visible bodies like the sun (*zuva*), the moon (*mwedzi*) and the stars (*nyeredzi*). Cloud formation (*makore*), thunder (*mpande*), lightning (*mheni*), shooting stars (*nyenyedzi*), comets, rainfall (*mvura*) and the eclipse of the moon or the sun are believed to be some of the activities of the beings in the sky world (Bhariko: Personal communication, 1995).

Below this sky-world there is the earth, the mundane world (*nyika*) which is believed to be the centre of creation (Mbiti 1975:17). Just like in the skies, the earth is replete with life. The human beings, animals, plants and spiritual beings ecologically mingle on the earth. It has already been noted how humans who reside on this realm relate to the beings in the spiritual realm.

At the bottom of these two realms is the underworld (*kwamupfiganebwe*). The Shona people believe that under the earth there is a world. Parts of this world include the deep pools and seas. These are also full of life; the fish, crocodiles, spiritual beings, plants, sea animals, etc.

All the three worlds are ecologically linked and interdependent. From the skies the earth receives rainfall, heat and light, and from the underworld it receives fish, water, medicinal plants, etc. The sky world receives the upward spirituality of the people that is symbolised by the smoke of their ritual sacrifices. Spiritual beings are believed to flow freely from one world to the other.

During my research I observed that among other things, Shona people regard well-being in their community as a central aspect that regulates how they relate to one another. They are happy and content when generally everyone in the community is

healthy and prosperous. The Shona believe that though external sources such as God, ancestors and religious practitioners are also consulted so as to facilitate the consummation of well-being in the society, they themselves should play an active part in bringing about good fortune, harmony, communalism and unity in their society. Well-being in society is interpreted in tangible terms in as much as, for instance, it is perceived partly as protection by ancestral spirits from malicious machinations of sorcerers and witches. It is also interpreted as encapsulated in safety in all undertakings (Shoko: personal communication, 1995). It involves peace and harmony and the general positive existence of the society and material prosperity whose corollary is the growth of a communal spirit. Unlike in most European communities, well-being among the Shona is defined in terms of collective affairs rather than in terms of the affairs of distinct individuals (Shoko: 1995, Personal communication). The whole community is expected to conform to Shona socio-religious codes and ethics so as to facilitate salvation (Shoko: 1995, Personal communication). These socio-religious codes and ethics include things such as cooperation in communal activities, respect for elders, propitiation of ancestral spirits, and living according to customary laws set out by progenitors. The desired harmonious existence of the society is not futuristic, it is a process experienced in day-to-day natural and socio-historical contexts. Wrong-doers are punished in this time and here on earth and good people are believed to be compensated in this world and at this time. This belief is different from that of Western Christian thought patterns where it is thought that the wrong-doers will be judged and punished by God at the end of time. When I did my fieldwork, in most cases it was not easy for me to tell from the responses of the people, the extent to which their perception about such concepts as that of God has been influenced by Christianity and modern Western life. However, it is worth noting that most of the traditional religions and cultural beliefs and practices that were held in the remote past have been dropped and replaced by new values.

There is a need to do intensive research so that we attain a deep understanding of Shona religion and culture in different historical contexts. There is also a need to focus on the dynamics of change and the meanings these changes have for the Shona people.

Discussions show that there are many controversies regarding both the significance and the understanding of some of these topics. It is therefore necessary to conduct intensive research about some of these issues as well as on the neglected aspects of Shona religion, society and culture. The publications of the writers whom I will discuss from now on are an important hallmark in our understanding of the development of the knowledge and academic study of Shona traditional religion. (The appendix following the Bibliography is an inventory of some of the documentation by students on Shona traditional religion). The next chapter is a critical examination of some of the "early writers" on Shona traditional religion.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY WRITERS ON SHONA TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with an analysis of various "publications" by some of the "early writers" on Shona traditional religion in relation to methodological and theoretical issues. The phrase "early writers" is used to mean the early 19th century explorers, traders, hunters, slavers, military officers, native commissioners (colonial administrators) and Christian missionaries. I sometimes use the term "Eurocentrics" to refer to those writers whose writings reflect a European orientation and mind-set.

To understand the present as well as to speculate about the future, it is necessary to know something about the relevant past. Future researchers on Shona religion, society and culture need to turn the clock back and examine who, where and how the early records of Shona traditional religion were collected. It is not anachronistic and fruitless to engage in a critical analysis and scrutiny of the historical contexts of these so-called archaic and unreliable "early writers". Some of these writers recorded details which would otherwise have been irretrievably lost. As an example, from accounts by "early writers" such as Baker (1924), Bazeley (1940) or Murphree (1969:16), we get certain clues, for example, that in the 1940s among the Shona, Manyika people, there were female chiefs who could, albeit very rarely, wield direct political influence. Furthermore, the continued usage of words such as "witch-doctor", fetishism, etc, show that some of these writers' works exerted a conceptual influence on the ways some of the subsequent writers described and analysed Shona religion, culture and society.

In the following chapters it will be shown that the content, judgements and conclusions reached by these "early writers" have in some ways influenced and affected the beliefs and

opinions of subsequent writers on Shona religion. It is generally agreed that their writings on Shona traditional religion, culture and society were often very partial. Provided they are submitted to critical analysis, some of these works may be of value for our historical knowledge of African communities, cultures and religions (Westerlund 1993:57-59) despite their glaring faults. Each of these writers added in his own way to the discovery of Africa.

As the "early writers" were not academics, it would be unfair for anyone to measure their work against modern stringent academic standards. I however, maintain that we must investigate the reasons why these writers wrote the way they did. I try to analyse and understand these writers within their own context and I compare the quality of their works amongst themselves, and within their historical contexts. I also analyse the "early writers'" works looking at the value of their writings to contemporary academic interests. By analysing concrete cases, I now seek to illustrate where possible, that research methods and other factors such as: cultural backgrounds, particular religious concerns, slanted interests, biased attitudes and professional commitments influenced and affected these writers' writings.

Historical background and context of the "early writers"

In order to attain a proper understanding and analysis of the works of the "Eurocentrics", it is necessary that I first discuss the background information about the contexts in which they lived.

At the time when the "early writers" arrived in Africa, there existed some religious and cultural beliefs and practices most of which are no longer practised today. These practices include such things as the ritual killing of one child in the case where twins were born (Kuimba 1975; Zvarevashe 1970). One of the twins, the first to come out, was ritually scarified in

the belief that this ritual would avert the bad omens brought about by this event. Furthermore, when "Eurocentrics" arrived, witch hunting cults were rife and the killing of witches and sorcerers was commonplace (Lan 1985:142; Basil 1969:123). When a husband died, an inheritance ritual was performed so that one of the brothers of the deceased inherits the widow. So as to salvage their families in famine times, young girls were forced to marry rich old men. Even though some women such as Nehanda wielded social and political power (Lan 1985:147, 217), generally women were considered to be less powerful and inferior in this male dominated society. When a chief died many rituals were performed which included ritual murder by way of burying alive the chief's wife and his servant so that they continued to serve him in the next life (Gumbo 1995: Personal Communication, Mberengwa). A person was born into a particular ethnic group and was taught the religion of that group along with the rest of the tribal culture.

These are some of the beliefs that formed part of the Shona religious and cultural context in which the "early writers" found themselves. It is a pity that these "Eurocentrics'" writings tended to highlight mainly these bizarre and negative aspects for readers at home. I shall illustrate how most of these writings about the Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices are characterised by exaggerations, misinterpretations and misinformation. The journeys of exploration, missionary work and colonisation by the early Europeans in the African interior went together with the introduction of European perspectives. The place was quickly given the name "the dark continent" (Pieterse 1992:64). Many people in Europe had a general image of Africa and its people mainly on the basis of selective perception, expedience and second hand information mingled with reconstructed biblical ideas that were current at that time (Pieterse 1992:10).

The exploration of the continent began in 1795 with the Niger expedition of Mungo Park, and modern missionary work in Africa

started around the same time. The journeys organised by the Royal Geographical Society in search of the source of the Nile, those of David Livingstone and of the journalist Henry Morton Stanley in search of the missing Livingstone, met with enormous interest in the popular media of the day, in the newspapers and the illustrated magazines of the middle class (Pieterse 1992:64). The personal correspondence and books from these heroic European explorers venturing into the mysterious interior of Africa aroused a lot of interest to the readers at home. Some of these journeys did not simply produce "knowledge" but they became large-scale operations in myth-making, which culminated in European colonialism (Pieterse 1992:64; Bourdillon 1976a:2). Pieterse (1992:65) argues that the stories from explorers ignored the fact that the African continent had for centuries been criss-crossed by trade routes. He further states that the explorers did not "simply ask for the way", they largely depended on the natives for information about important trade routes, directions and other relevant advice. But while on the home front the explorations were celebrated as fantastic triumphs of European knowledge and daring, with Africans as dumb-founded bystanders, in reality the success of the journeys was owed to African help, not only as porters (as the iconography suggests), but as guides, intermediaries, interpreters and so forth (1992:65). This is part of the background information about some of the "Eurocentrics" that I will discuss in this chapter.

Regarding the context of the world view of the missionaries generally, many of the missionaries were from servants' and rural artisans' backgrounds and therefore came from poor economic circumstances (Siemensen 1986:27). They went to missionary schools for advancement into higher education and ordination. The missionary schools trained these recruits in matters which include love of learning and adventure, urge towards heroism, hope of gaining salvation through sacrifice, Christian duty and service to Christ (1986:32). Autobiographies of these missionaries show that some of them

came from families who practised a living faith, and gave children a strict upbringing including warnings against worldly pleasures. Siemensen (1986:32) further states that most of these missionaries believed that they had received a "calling" from God. Zvobgo's research (1991:2) shows that some of the missionaries such as D. Shropshire were convinced that they were God's chosen instruments to execute a redeeming mission to the African heathen societies. The primary goal for these missionaries was that of evangelising and converting the "natives" to Christianity. It is therefore partly as a result of such goals that they wrote about Shona religious practices in denigrating terms. But later on some of the early missionaries doubted their mission because they took a very long period before they converted a single person. Others mentioned in their autobiographies that they wanted to know the needs of the heathens so that they could help them attain the same bliss as they had (Siemensen 1986:32).

One of the forgone conclusions was that the world was divided into the Christians and the heathens. Some of these stereotypes are contained even in the writings of some later writers, as an example, the descriptions in the pamphlet distributed by the Ministry of Information and Tourism, written by Senator Brendon (1969). Brendon's brief collection of sketches that purport to introduce the whites of Rhodesia to the customs of the black people distort Shona cultural practices. "Early writers" such as Leaver described Shona people as "Kaffirs" without a religion, and their culture as "savage". Writing about the pioneers of Mashonaland, Adrian Darter (1977:160-161) presented very negative descriptions and perceptions about the Shona people that were common at that time. His accounts described how the white races were urged to guard against their being swamped by the native barbaric kaffir race. This shows the general mentality of some of the writers during these early times. This is more or less the case with many other "early writers" who included early Christian missionaries such as Shropshire, John White, Samuel

Baker and others. It is unfortunate that works of some of these writers are taken by some readers as an authoritative and informative study. Popular missionary tracts of that time tended to concentrate on abhorrences in African cultures, largely based on selections of sensational extracts from explorers' reports (1986:37). Though ideas and attitudes of missionaries varied among missionaries, the general claim was that the continent was haunted by a general state of helplessness from which only Christianity and Western civilisation and commerce could provide deliverance (1986:37).

Generally, the "early writers" naturally shared with their contemporaries a belief in Europe's cultural superiority and civilizing mission in the world. Many aspects of this world view obviously brought them into conflict with local beliefs, customs and political orders. It is probably because of this that from about 1859-89 the London Missionary Society in Zimbabwe did not win a single convert in Matabeleland for thirty years (Zvobgo 1992:2). Zvobgo also says that the experience of the Jesuits was similar to that of the London Missionary Society; in spite of their efforts, they did not win a single convert. This is part of the context in which some of the missionaries wrote about Shona religious beliefs and practices.

In view of the summarised religious and cultural background of the Shona people, it is obvious that missionary religion was revolutionary. The "doctrinal" and "ideological" world of the missionaries was opposed to most of the above summarised beliefs and practices such that Shona traditional religion and culture would be condemned so as to become marginally relevant or utterly irrelevant. The Christianity preached claimed to be superior to traditional religion. There were obvious clashes between Shona culture and Western culture especially as the missionaries evangelised and built missionary schools. The friction worsened as attendance at school often exempted children from the traditional initiation. These children were

baptised and given new Christian names (Shorter 1973:81). Schools and catechumenate were one means of escape for girls who wished to avoid marrying a suitor they disliked, for young men avoiding bride service, for widows and other women whose independence was threatened in a male dominated society, for the physically deprived, for sorcerers and anti-social persons who wished to start a new life. The churches offered a new form of security and a new identity (Shorter 1973:81). This kind of friction between African cultures and Christianity is also illustrated by the Kenyan novelist Ngugi waThiongo in his novel *The River Between* as well as by the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. An analysis of this kind can only establish general correlations as to background factors, and general tendencies and factors of the contexts of the early explorers, missionary and colonial administrators.

I will analyse a few individual writers according to three categories: firstly, the early missionaries; then explorers and traders; and thirdly, the native commissioners. This examination is undertaken bearing in mind the fact that the "documentation" of these writers was not intended to be subjected to critical academic analysis, let alone to intellectual scrutiny in relation to methodology and theoretical issues.

Early Christian missionaries

Many missionaries wrote essays, manuscripts and books on aspects of African culture and religion. These missionaries include David Livingstone, Father G. da Silveira, D. Shropshire, K.D. Leaver, H. Brubaker. It is not feasible to quote from all the early Christian missionaries of all denominations. Excerpts from A. Abraham's and D. Livingstone's missionary bulletin articles, books, memoirs and personal letters will therefore be used to substantiate my arguments. There is nothing outstanding about these writers except that

they seem to have prepared more thoroughly and presented reasonable documentation of their accounts on Shona society, culture and religion more than other Christian missionaries some of whom I briefly referred to as having presented a disparaging picture of Shona religion and culture.

A. Abraham informed us of his preparations for his missionary work in Southern Rhodesia:

I had undertaken a month's intensive Shona course at Ranche House College, Salisbury. This had shown me that I was not going to learn enough Shona to be able to conduct interviews on my own, given the limited time. I decided to carry on [the research] in spite of this (Abraham 1939:iv).

By doing an intensive Shona course, Abraham was on the right track towards a fruitful learning expedition. That he did not have adequate time to learn the Shona language in detail so as to enable him to conduct interviews by himself is a methodological problem. In spite of this problem he proceeded to conduct his research. I am not arguing that a researcher investigating a foreign religion needs to be first thoroughly trained as a philologist or a linguist. But one needs to be reasonably competent in the knowledge of both the various cultural actions and the language of the Shona people. David Beach has argued that some of these writers were not capable of fairly and adequately dealing with Shona society, culture and religion because they were not linguistically equipped. The researcher who does not comprehend the peculiarities of the linguistic and symbolic expressions of the people he is describing is in a way removed from the materials which he is studying (Shoko 1991:64). To study religion without understanding different kinds of expressions of the believers is like studying painting with the handicap of being colour blind.

Abraham (1939:xv) briefly told us about his method of carrying out research:

The method of carrying on fieldwork was as follows: I would visit each of the seven areas chosen some time in

advance, and select a mission from which to operate, choosing a local guide-interpreter in advance. I revisited each area and tried to interview as many informants as possible in a long working week, recording each interview from start to finish in English and Shona, before returning to Salisbury for fresh research and re-orientation ... This method broke most rules for fieldwork but it was the only possible method in view of the large area to be covered and the limited time at my disposal.

Several important points can be noted from this excerpt. The writer indicated that his study was limited to seven specific chosen areas. This means that his descriptions are not based on hearsay but on fieldwork and interviews. The fact that Abraham operated from a missionary station has several implications which one may relate to methods of conducting research. The missionary stations were a base from which Shona traditional people were ruthlessly lambasted as heathenistic. In these missionary stations anyone who sympathised with Shona cultural practices and religion was regarded as a traitor and betrayer of the gospel and civilization. We should, however, note that this was not the case in every situation because valuable research was undertaken from some missionary stations for example, by later writers such as E.W. Smith, B.A. Pauw, J.M. Schoffeleers, Christaller, etc. The fact that he chose a local guide-interpreter shows that Abraham felt that alone, he would not be able to do competent research. His choosing of a local guide is a good sign that he was interested in producing accurate and reliable research.

Abraham admitted that his approach broke most of the rules of fieldwork when he wrote that he had limited time to learn the Shona language for the purpose of the research, and worse still he had little time to stay in the Shona community so as to do thorough research. One result of this was the production of inadequate descriptions as well as faulty and superficial interpretations. As will be shown in the case of Livingstone, other "early writers" had enough time, and often had a good command of Shona language. One is led to conclude that some of the "early writers" were probably simply not interested in

engaging in a serious study of Shona language, culture and traditional religion.

I should state that though some of these "early writers" had ample time for research and were proficient in the Shona language, their goals, prejudices and preconceptions seem to have overtaken the need to present carefully, impartially and coherently what they saw and heard. Another point about these writers which relates to research methodology debates and research conclusions can be found in the following quotation from A. Abraham (1939:xiv):

There was a danger that the government would try to control my research and writing. Since I was determined that whatever I wrote should benefit the Shona natives as a whole, and since I dislike control anyway, this was definitely a danger.

The above quotation shows that the government controlled research findings because it is the one that financed these research projects. Gerrie ter Haar (1991:134) states that, through the 1899 British Education Ordinance, some funding was made available for what was known as "African Education". This "African Education" was entrusted to the Christian missionaries who received small government grants to that end. Since the government shouldered part of the financing of missionary expeditions, the financed persons were expected to dance to the tune of the sponsors. As Abraham indicated, accounts of early missionaries were often deliberately tilted and misrepresented for the colonial boss's ear. Peadar (1970:1) also recorded that in 1890, missionaries accompanied the European settlers into Mashonaland and were encouraged by the British South African Company which gave large grants of land for mission purposes and sometimes financial support for missionary personnel. It is partly because of this that their work and writings were expected to support colonial activities.

To argue that all the "early writers" employed disastrous methods of collecting and interpreting information would be a

fallacious postulation. There are some writers of this time whose methods of collecting information and interpreting it were quite good. David Livingstone, one of the early missionary explorers, appears to me to be much better than many of the other "early writers". He came to Africa as a missionary, geographer and explorer. I have chosen David Livingstone because there is a lot of documentation by him and about him. Furthermore, I think, he is an example of a liberal Christian European missionary whose records on Shona society, culture and religion are fairly reliable.

David Livingstone, the explorer-missionary was born in 1813 in Blantyre, near Glasgow, Scotland. His father earned a living as a peddler of tea, and was also a propagandist for an independent congregation which had broken away from the church of Scotland and established its own place of worship at Hamilton. Livingstone trained at the London Missionary Society at Ongar, near London. At the same time he graduated as a medical doctor in 1840, the year after he was ordained (Holmes 1992:30).

Part of Livingstone's religious background is that he belonged to the tradition of Christianity, elaborated by the French reformer John Calvin and his Scottish follower John Knox. This tradition adheres to the doctrine of predestination: God knows long before the time of conception which of his human creatures is destined for heaven and which for hell. In life not even believers and practising Christians can be sure of salvation, while non-Christians are damned no matter how virtuous they may be (Bunnett 1970:50). A believer, however can obtain some assurance of salvation by being consciously filled with trust in Christ. Apart from this consolation, a further sign of salvation is the achievement of wealth and success - a sign of God's blessing (Holmes 1992:xvi). The love for and trust in Christ which Livingstone felt throughout his adult life may possibly have assured him that he was one of the chosen, but the apparent lack of success which marked his

last year could have caused serious concern about his ultimate destination (Holmes 1992:xvii). I will discuss whether Livingstone's exclusive Christian theology influenced him in his writings.

Livingstone was first posted to Kuruman in South Africa where Robert Moffat, whom he had met in London, had established a mission in 1821. Around 1841 when Livingstone arrived, South Africa was in a state of turmoil especially because of the continuous state of war as Africans resisted European encroachment (Holmes 1992:xvii). Livingstone was in contact with many African ethnic groups including the Shona Lemba (Lymbai) people in the Zambezi area as well as the Ndebele people who went North to Zimbabwe after being defeated by the Boers (Holmes 1992:3). Livingstone was disillusioned with orthodox missionary work and was questioning the policies of the London Missionary Society because he managed to get his first convert, Sebitwane, only after twelve years. Livingstone was at the Victoria Falls in 1855, and the Inyati Mission station was founded by his missionary society near Mzilikazi's capital as early as 1859 (Daneel 1971:26). At this time, he was also beginning to develop the thesis that "Christianity, commerce and civilisation" were inseparable (Holmes 1992:4). The letters that he wrote to his cousin James Young show Livingstone's interest in business (Holmes 1992:159,83-86,138). Among other things, two frequent motifs in Livingstone's letters are his dedication to Christ and his determination to see an end to slavery.

Like many other missionaries at that time, Livingstone was often a passionate advocate of an expansionist policy. For the church, just as for colonial enterprise, it meant a new territory. The so-called missionary road from the British Cape colony moving North towards the interior was kept open by the missionaries (Pieterse 1992:69). Years later Cecil Rhodes would proceed via the same route when he established Rhodesia. Pieterse further states that some of Livingstone's journeys

were sponsored by the British foreign office, which gave him the rank of honorary consul (1992:69). During this time, missions occupied an important place in the colonial ensemble, since the church was the civil side of the empire and could penetrate more deeply into society. Where the seed of Christianity fell, the will to resist was weakened.

Some sections in David Livingstone's works that show that he, at times shared the belief that the Anglo-American race was the hope of the world, liberty and progress. In his instructions to an assistant on the Zambesi expedition he explained:

We come among them as members of a superior race and servants of a government that desires to elevate the more degraded portions of the human family. We are adherents of a benign holy religion ... and may by consistent conduct help this distracted and trodden-down race (Coupland 1928:107).

From quotations such as this one, one sees a combination of Christian and racial arrogance that typified the era of the mission civilisation. Such a quotation shows that some early missionaries played a role in creating the images of the fallen African heathen and the ignoble savage, stereotypes which colonialism would build on and elaborate.

Some of his works are partial because they show that he sometimes subjectively criticised certain Shona traditional modes of dress and religious practices such as facial decoration. He is also said to have made such remarks:

... and then there was so much in the people which called for observation. They are said to be revengeful and have little regard for human life. I believe it is true ... were it not of that hateful rebellion against God, this place would be paradise (Bunnett 1970:9).

In his other accounts we see that Livingstone too was a child of his own age. He sometimes regarded the "natives" as culturally degraded. What he testifies to here seems to be his own personal beliefs and convictions which are not based on empirical observation. He wrote:

Thus when rescued from degradation and superstition of heathenism ... the African evinces improvement in an eminent degree (Bunnett 1970:9).

These seem to be characteristic attitudes and approaches influenced by the times.

His religious background may be interpreted as already casting some aspersions on Shona traditional religion. An excerpt from one of his letters in the Zambebian Collection reflects his religious and cultural orientation:

We cannot fairly compare these poor people with ourselves, who have an atmosphere of Christianity and enlightened public opinion, the growth of centuries, around us, to influence our development ... (Young 1970:122).

This religio-cultural conviction also prejudicially influenced his attitude to racial differences. In one of his letters, he claimed that it is probable that there will be a fusion or a mixture of the black and white races in this continent, the dark being always of the inferior or lower class of society. Such a kind of approach and attitude mars the researcher's capacity to carefully observe, analyse objectively the object of observation. The quotation above from Young (1970:122) shows that his approach was sometimes deficient. It is implied in this quotation that the African beliefs and practices are inferior.

One of his letters to Catherine Ridley (Livingstone's cousin who lived in Britain) informed us of Livingstone's attitudes and interests:

Now that I am on the point of starting on another expedition into Africa, I feel quite exhilarated! When one travels with the specific object in view of ameliorating the condition of the natives every act becomes ennobled (Waller 1930:13).

It appears that his primary interests and goals were focused on ameliorating the condition of the natives. In later letters to Catherine he beseeched her to give him a hand by looking for missionaries who would be interested in joining him on his

crusade. It is possible that Livingstone believed that he was on a God-sent mission to spread the gospel and save the African "natives" by converting them to Christianity (Bunnett 1970:50).

After reading through a number of his letters, and works about him, one observes that Livingstone was of an ambivalent character. It is noticed that Livingstone was not wholly contemptuous of the Shona, he realised that in the face of hostile and aggressive attitudes by the Eurocentrics, these Shona showed counter attitudes as well as a "withdrawn attitude". This seems to have had a paralysing effect on accurate observation and detracted researchers from attaining a comprehensive understanding of Shona society, culture and religion.

When Livingstone sent his writings to different journals in the later years he greatly improved the quality of his descriptions. This improvement is substantiated by the fact evident in several of his letters to Oswell (his friend who was a hunter). In one of the letters Livingstone wrote:

Today I send pages 69-80 and 81-92 for your correction. If you can let me have them back again by Tuesday or Wednesday I shall be glad as I wish to send them as soon as possible. I have gone over them once - have not yet gone over your last which came this morning. The contents are very good but I want please a great deal more of them. They are to be at the top of the chapters. I have not gone over with your last corrections yet ... (Holmes 1992:106).

This shows that at this time, Livingstone was concerned with the quality of work that he sent for publication. It can be argued that the papers that he wrote for publication embody his considered views, and are not the sort of hasty compositions that his early letters sometimes were. Livingstone's ventures into authorship were at their most intense in the period around 1849-1853. Apart from the hundreds of letters to relatives, friends and acquaintances, the London Missionary Society, the Royal Geographical Society,

and various learned bodies, he wrote articles for publication in newspapers and other periodicals and kept what in the end became an extremely big journal (Schapera 1974:preface). We thus see a sense of development in the documentation of various aspects about African beliefs and practices.

What makes his books particularly reliable is that their contents can be checked both against what appears in his private letters during the same period and also against what he published after his return to England (Schapera 1974:preface). From Schapera's point of view, much of what Livingstone wrote can be accepted as a basically reliable source of historical information. Most of it is confirmed by independent sources. Schapera, however points out that in writing about the Boers, Livingstone wanted to satisfy a personal grudge; he therefore tended, at times, to distort and even falsify, nor was he always careful about simple details of bare facts (Schapera 1974:preface). In this regard, Schapera (1974) draws attention to inconsistencies in Livingstone's versions of events. Despite his many misrepresentations and errors on African beliefs, Livingstone cannot be dismissed as a wholly untrustworthy source. If used with due caution, his writings inform readers about the practices of the people he wrote about, more than do many of his contemporary writers.

At times Livingstone took a different approach from that of the majority of the "Eurocentrics" so as to win the confidence of the African people and to create a healthy atmosphere for inquiry and understanding. He settled in the Shona community for a long time. This enabled him to learn their language and to empathise with them, combat his prejudices and preconceptions, and put himself in a position to look, listen and understand.

One of the comments made by Bunnett on Livingstone sheds some more light on his attitude and humane disposition to the communities in which he lived:

Livingstone had little personal impact. He must have appeared as a gentleman, perhaps even a holy one, who met Africans with friendliness and then puzzled them and bored them with incessant talk of religion, rivers and lakes (Bunnett 1970:60).

Thus his mutual co-existence with the Africans gave him an opportunity for easy association with Shona people. Through such a procedure, he put himself in a much better position to investigate and translate, not merely the words and phrases, but the thoughts and feelings that lie far deeper than words. Livingstone therefore contributed positively towards proper descriptions and meaningful interpretations of Shona beliefs and practices.

The difference between Livingstone's approaches and that of most of the "early writers" is apparent when we examine his methodological procedures, attitude, description and interpretation of the materials which he observed. One may say that this difference between Livingstone and the other "early writers" is bound to variation of belief, intelligence, capacity to empathise, etc. As an example, let us examine his attitude, method of observation and interpretations after his description of a Shona death ritual.

There was a great beating of drums, we went to see them. It was a mourning for a boy who died yesterday. In one place were the musicians with drums of three kinds. First the bass drums, then the kettle drums of this form (drawing of a kettle drum), then a long trunk of a tree one and a half feet diameter and about five feet long, hollowed out. The performer was astride this thing, like a child with a wooden horse. They all beat on the skin with the hand. Where they strike is coated with a mixture of India rubber oil. The skin membrane is sometimes of an antelope, at others of an alligator's belly.

While these fellows hammered away, the boys and girls had a dance which consisted in gliding and turning about after a certain specific rule which was quite as intelligible to me as that of ballroom in England. The motions too were quite as elegant and had the great advantage that the people seemed happy, no confounded

white chokers or stiffness about them. They clapped their hands which might with great advantage be added to the European style. The dance of the older people was not so elegant.

The mourning women were at the side and at times two of them came up, one walking on hands and knees, passed through among the dancers, then rolled on her back. The other had hair covered with raw cotton, carried in her hand a bow and a few arrows with the poison and iron points withdrawn. In the other hand, she carried a bottle, a gourd and a drinking cup. Having passed through, they returned weeping. One woman fainted and was carried off. What was the meaning of the ceremony I could not tell. The mourning of the women or at least of a few of them who either really mourned or were told off for that purpose, was evident but the mysteries of the crawling, rolling about, carrying bows and arrows and drinking cup, I do not know. Why were the youngsters so merry, and the old folks too in their dance, did not seem to mourn? It may be to dispel the grief which may be thought proper for relatives only. We returned to the chief's house (and) had a long talk with him regarding matters of our own concerns and things in general ... (Foskert 1965:173-174).

From this we can see that, unlike the other "early writers", Livingstone did not rely on hearsay. His descriptions are based on personal observation. It is evident here that the merit of eye-witness reports is the production of reasonably adequate descriptions. The strange and bizarre phenomena are acknowledged without being blown out of proportion. What he disliked he tried to understand and what he liked he praised. It seems that most interpretations were made in their proper religious perspectives and cultural contexts. The writer tried to carefully and impartially describe things which he saw and heard, and in this we see strains of scientific research.

Another example of a fair and bias-free description of an historical record from Livingstone was when he, a medical doctor, presented a description of his interview with an African rain doctor. He reports the rain-doctor as saying:

I use my own medicines, and you employ yours, we are both doctors, and doctors are not deceivers. You give your patient medicine. Sometimes God is pleased to heal him by means of your medicine: sometimes not - he dies. When he is cured, you take the credit of the charm. When a

patient dies, you do not give up trust in your medicine, neither do I when rain fails. If you wish me to leave off my medicines, why continue your own? (Ray 1976:4)

Livingstone is often thought to be the most sympathetic and informed early missionary (Ray 1976:5). His portrayal of an "argument with a rain doctor" shows an unusual degree of fairness and impartiality when compared to descriptions of that period. He was equipped with a reasonable knowledge of the Shona language and had a good attitude to the community in which he worked (a condition for a healthy methodological approach). Much of Livingstone's "fieldwork" results, in my opinion, are reasonable and more unbiased than those of most of the "early writers" who viewed things uncompromisingly through European spectacles.

There are several other Christian missionaries who wrote about Shona culture and religion but they cannot be discussed here due to lack of space. I will now describe briefly another set of "early writers" who were in a small way different from the early Christian missionaries. These writers were more casual visitors to Africa and whatever documentation they produced, was in most cases based more on occasional observation than on careful and impartial descriptions.

Traders, explorers, hunters and travellers

The early 19th century European explorers, hunters, traders and travellers can be described as occasional visitors who wrote on some aspects of Shona society, culture and religion. Whatever the similarity, in content and quality, between the early Christian missionaries and that of these writers is, in my view, partly explained by common context in which they worked and the corresponding attitudes as well as the methods of gathering the information at their disposal.

These writers belonged to the West European cultural context and many of them subscribed to Christian beliefs. These aspects of their backgrounds appear to have played a part in

determining how they viewed the African communities. There is evidence in some of their works that some of them believed themselves to be destined to open up the African continent to civilisation. This involved areas of commerce, Christianity and civilisation. Bourdillon (1976a:10) highlighted the fact that the accounts of some of these writers reflect a perpetuation of the myth of white superiority and Victorian dogmatism about the insignificance of African cultures. This preconception had a negative impact on the way in which they recorded and analysed information on Shona traditional religion. Generally, these writers were more subjective and more superficial than some of the missionary writers because at most, they were casual observers of rituals in places where their voyages led them, and at worst they sought to confirm their preconceptions and they recorded hearsay information characterised by unfair caricatures of Shona society, culture and religion.

My examples will be limited to an examination of some of Knight-Bruce's records on the Shona. Wyndham H. Knight-Bruce was born in England and was educated at Eton and New College, Oxford. In 1876 he was ordained and from 1878 to 1884 he worked as curate of several places in London. In 1886 he went to Bloemfontein where he was consecrated as Bishop. He is described by Zvobgo (1991:3) as the Anglican Bishop of Bloemfontein who arrived in Rhodesia in about 1888 to explore the possibilities of establishing an Anglican mission in Mashonaland. Knight-Bruce's cultural background generally fits well within that of the "early writers" summarised above. Knight-Bruce was determined to extend Christianity to people "who had not received the light of Christ". In May 1888 he travelled northwards as an explorer-missionary. His explorations took him to various parts of the country (Rhodesia) and he sometimes travelled with the pioneer column of which he served as a chaplain during its 1893 march into Matebeleland (Gelfand 1953:17-18). Knight-Bruce settled among these people and wrote about how he lived as well as about

Shona religious and cultural beliefs. Though the context in which he worked has a lot of resemblances to that of the rest of the "early writers", his was rather hostile because no journey to Mashonaland was possible without Lobengula's consent. When Knight-Bruce sought this permission, at first Lobengula refused because he feared that the Shona ethnic groups whom he raided upon, would be taught better defence mechanism. After prolonged negotiations Knight-Bruce was eventually allowed to visit Mashonaland. From his experiences in Matebeleland Knight-Bruce concluded that the only hope, "humanly speaking", that he could see for the Ndebele nation was the establishment of a British protectorate so that "the better element, if there be any in the people, may be allowed to have some influence" (Zvobgo 1991:3).

With respect to the Shona, he concluded that they were a degraded people who greatly needed Christian teaching (Zvobgo 1991:3). Further more he wrote that:

To have seen these people, and to have had dealings with them is to have seen fallen humanity untouched by the regenerating influence of Christianity ... (Fripp & Hiller 1949:17).

It was during his explorations that he decided to start mission work. He felt that the overthrow of Ndebele power would probably ensure the success of such missions, but thought that the probable evils resulting from that at present would be greater than the benefits (Fripp & Hiller 1949:18). Knight-Bruce accompanied the British South Africa Company forces in the occupation of Mashonaland in 1890. When in his explorations he saw the possibilities in Mashonaland, he resigned from Bloemfontein to become the first Anglican Bishop in Mashonaland in 1891.

Knight-Bruce (1970:12) described the practices of the Shona residing in the Zambezi valley in biased and negative terms:

... nothing can be more repulsive than the custom of wearing the lip-ring by the women of one tribe - the Basenga. No culture or religion that I have seen

practices any of this hideousness ... I am afraid they were conscious that I thought them odd.

Like the other writers in this category he generally dismissed with disdain most of the Shona religious phenomena:

These people must be lifted from the state of savagery, that is to say of sloth, improvidence and laziness. They must be led practically to feel the benefits of Christianity (1970:23).

There is no substantiation of the writers' claims in his writings. Furthermore, his moral judgments take sides on Christianity. The danger of such an approach is that it hindered such writers from achieving a more careful and fair understanding of Shona culture and religion. Some of the Shona people reciprocated this attitude by concealing or falsifying information about their religion in interviews so as to match these writers' protracted superiority and standards (Zvobgo 1991:2).

Knight-Bruce sheds some light on the method he used to get materials from the sources:

When I got to the Zambezi, the villagers were few and far between ... I saw on the bank a group of men who stood there singing. Isaac had earlier on told me about their primitive rituals. The men were praying to their dead fathers for protection in the hippopotamus infested waters ... The boatman never rowed except to sing; and the Zambezi boat songs seem to belong to the Zambezi ... Its a pity that I cannot remember the words of the song now (but it is sounding in my ears as plainly now as the day I first heard it) ... (1970:14).

One problem with such haphazard methods of research is that the descriptions lack elaborate and accurate detail. A ritual such as the one described above involves a lot of activities like dancing, clapping of hands, drumming. Many religious objects are used in these rituals, these include axes, walking sticks, snuff, musical drums. In my view, a good description is one which includes most of the things which are seen, heard, smelt and felt. This would enable the describer to depict a full picture of the ritual. Peculiar words or phrases which are repeatedly uttered during rituals may also be

described. All these details may inform us what the ritual means to believers. Furthermore, detailed descriptions would help to replace premature conclusions as in cases where describers swiftly inform readers that such and such a ritual or religion is "primitive".

Knight-Bruce's description of a ritual above did not furnish readers with all the information which the writer saw and heard, and it shows some bias against some of the Shona beliefs. The word "primitive" is value laden and has therefore exacerbated distortions. The other problem highlighted in this quotation concerns the actual writing of the information and the writer's dependence on memory long after observing the rituals. Bruce stated that he could not remember the words of the song and this posed the problem of inadequacy and of inaccuracy in his descriptions. In order to present a comprehensive picture, Knight-Bruce should have presented greater details about the context of the singing as well as the content of the song. If he had recorded the words of the song, it would have been easy for him to understand the significance of the song or its meaning in relation to the ritual and Shona traditional religion.

Most of these "early writers" wrote their accounts following sporadic and random incidents of observation. Knight-Bruce often acquired information from the native informants:

One of my black servants, Isaac told me stories about how the maShona rely on witch doctors to know about tomorrow. ... they worship their dead fathers for protection. I did not believe most of his tales which I think only exist in the make-believe world (1970:34).

Throughout his book, *The Pioneers of Mashonaland*, Knight-Bruce referred mostly to two of his servants as his sources of information about African life. Most of the interpretations which we find in his accounts seem to have been made out of their proper living contexts and historical perspectives. It is possible that they were regulated by the factor of the "master-servant" relationship which existed between him and

them. The information from the servants sometimes appears to me to have been twisted so as to accord well with the master's expectations (Knight-Bruce 1970:30-45). It is therefore necessary that in academic studies we critically analyse these sources so as to be able to attain information which is of academic use. I will describe and analyse various methods of research which may be useful in the critical analysis of the information from the "early writers".

Native commissioners

The records left behind by missionaries were in some cases supplemented by manuscripts written by the native commissioners. Native commissioners were also known as colonial administrators or colonial agents (Zvabva 1991:94). The term refers to the officials who were working in the Rhodesian Native Affairs Department, later known as the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Some of these colonial administrators of the Rhodesian government who worked in the Midlands province include Rochefort McGuire, Charles Bullock, W. Baker, von Sicard, John Smith and Friedrich Posselt. Their backgrounds, attitudes and documentation are not greatly different from that of the other "early writers" discussed above. Some documents that describe or make reference to Shona religion and culture written by the native commissioners are found in the Native Affairs District Departments. The information is found in form of charges reported to the District Magistrate, and some of it was compiled by native commission researchers to produce a volume called NADA (Native Affairs Development Annual). I will briefly outline the general historical context in which native commissioners worked.

Much of the native commissioners' writings that I describe are from the period around 1920s to the 1940s. The context in which they worked has some resemblances to that of the other "early writers". Native commissioners worked in circumstances

different from each other hence they often presented different perceptions of Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices. The Native commissioners were tasked by the colonial government to deal with problems and issues affecting Africans. In the preface of *The Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Development Annual* (NADA), the Chief native commissioner, H. Taylor wrote:

The efforts of the officials of the Native Affairs Department, of the missionaries and others interested in the native, in contributing articles on matters affecting native interests, their laws, customs, native life, for publications in the Annual will greatly assist in promoting harmonious systems of administration (Wilson 1972:preface).

Thus, in many cases, writings of native commissioners centred around laws, customs and institutions of the Shona people (Posselt 1978:foreword). Though native commissioners such as Charles Bullock and Posselt wrote books, most of the information that I read at District Administration offices in Mberengwa and Gweru is contained in the magistrate's court files.

A general perception and attitude of most of the native commissioners at that time may be summarised in the statements by the chief native commissioner who wrote:

The natives are in what may be termed the early and elementary processes of human development. It is our responsibility to enlighten them. A great task lies ahead of teachers and missionaries. Time has arrived when we should create a policy of deliberate development, making the most of the economic possibilities of the situation (Wilson 1972:Preface).

One of the questions in this thesis is to determine how contemporary students of Shona traditional religion may sift the information from these writers so as to attain insights on Shona beliefs and practices at that time. The general negative mentality of these "masters" had a great impact on the people of that time as well as on some later writers such that most of the information in these writers hardly contains substance about details of Shona beliefs and practices.

The Ugandan poet, anthropologist and atheist, p'Bitek (1971:1) has sharply criticised the wave of Western studies on African traditional religions as the handmaiden of colonialism, whose purpose was not to inform with accuracy but to justify the colonial enterprise and to serve Western colonial interests. It appears that the negative attitudes of most of the native commissioners to Shona religion was based on their colonial interests. The prefabricated hypothesis that Africa was a dark continent with savage people, cultures and religions was more of a prejudice than a fact substantiated by ethnographic details. In the Native Affairs District Office files such as that of Native commissioner R. McGuire in Gwelo, contain bits of information about Shona traditional beliefs and practices.

It should be noted that like the other native commissioners, McGuire did not purposely set out to produce systematised information on Shona religion. Most of the information which we now analyse was "recorded" accidentally when the native commissioners were dealing with reported court cases that were tried by the Native commissioner officers.

In the District Commissioner's files I could not get much biographical information about McGuire. However, in these files it is noted that he was a native commissioner in the Lower Gwelo area and he worked under the supervision of chief commissioner H. J. Taylor, one who freely expressed his conviction that the race of the natives was inferior to that of the whites (Wilson 1994:Preface). The area under McGuire's jurisdiction consisted of both the Shona and Ndebele people who were often engaged in ethnic skirmishes. This situation meant that McGuire and his officers, on a regular basis, went out to the "reserves" (rural areas) to resolve cultural and political disputes between these groups. These visits were occasional such that it was impossible for him to get to know well the Shona language, beliefs and cultural practices. However, one may legitimately argue that it was not within his

interest to learn much about Shona culture, religion and language. Describing life in the "reserves" McGuire wrote:

The older men themselves only look forward to three things, which are: cattle, kaffir beer and polygamy ... As long as they get on well with the three things mentioned, they do not worry; they are quite content, and they will only plough small fields so as to get their daily sadza (porridge) to keep them alive (McGuire 1950:7).

In my view, this description is rather condescending. It does not accurately depict life of the Shona people. One thing that appears to have escaped McGuire's notice is that the central concern of the Shona is well-being as their core concern, that is, sound health, good relations and social harmony (Shoko 1996). McGuire's statement implies that polygamy among the Shona was commonplace. This was not the case because it was mainly the successful farmers (*hurudza*) and the chiefs with whom the society was happy for them to have polygamous families because they could maintain large families (Gumbo: personal communication 1996/8/24). Moreover, contrary to what the excerpt implies, those who were polygamous ploughed large stretches of land and thus were more associated with hard work and productivity than with laziness and poverty.

The following is another excerpt from McGuire where he described some Shona taboos:

These savages do not have a slight idea about God. They worship their ancestral spirits, vaguely known to them as the "mhondoro" or lion spirit. When stricken with illness these people seek to atone their ancestors. In their heathen parties they gratefully attribute benefits received, especially collective benefits, such as success in martial ventures, to the benignity of their ancestors (McGuire 1950:4).

The writer's language in these files is full of derision and denigration. He did not elaborate on his claims that the described people were "savages" and "heathens". One may argue that McGuire's writings were merely reflecting the general perceptions of his time. Descriptive terms such as "pagan" and "heathen" were used probably because what the writer observed

did not fit within Western Christian world view that he was used to. Though some other writers (Styt 1931) at that time wrote that the Shona had knowledge about a God, the author appears to be ignorant about the existence of a God whom they worshipped through the *mhondoro* or territorial spirits (Lan 1985:32). Furthermore, the *mhondoro* spirits are known to oversee such things as fertility, droughts and customs of the land rather than illnesses of individual persons.

In one of McGuire's files he wrote about a court case: Ngindi versus Matumba. The judgement was delivered by H.M.G. Jackson, Esquire, Assistant Superintendent of Natives, Division IX, 10 April 1945. Matumba was accused of sorcery and of the death of Ngindi's son. The summary of the court decision contains bits of descriptions and interpretations of Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices.

These savages believe that not only animals but inanimate things also possess life. Ngindi's charges that his son's drowning was caused by a ritual conducted by Matumba is based on primitive and senseless beliefs. The belief that any ritual may cause a person to drown or to get sick is founded on wrong premises. It is like the seamen buying wind from the Shetland woman ... we have a great task of bringing civilisation to these people (McGuire 1950:12).

On the grounds that his charges were based on superstitious beliefs, Ngindi was denied the twenty head of cattle that he demanded as compensation.

It should be noted that McGuire was primarily concerned with writing about the court case and not Shona religion. It would be unfair for anyone to expect systematic documentations from these writers particularly because the context of the native commissioners was not for research. However, it is from these writings that I try to explore if it is possible to obtain any information of use in our study of Shona culture and religion. Most files of the native commissioners hardly contain information that is of value for a better understanding of Shona religion and culture. However, in trying to sift that which might be of value, scholars attain fresh ideas about the

dynamics of cultural, religious and political conflicts between the early Europeans and the Shona. From the files of native commissioners we find clues about certain types of certain rituals, symbols that were used, etc. by the Shona. These aspects can then be followed up in thorough research by historians, archaeologists, etc.

Sometimes McGuire went out to the "reserves" to observe how people lived. As an example, he in one case described what he called "a party of the natives" as follows:

The women brewed the beer. The dancing of these heathens took place at night when the moon was "white" (full). First the women danced in a ring. Then they stood in long rows, the men stood over opposite them. A few came out in turn as they were called, danced over the men's side and a little in the middle, gave a man a stick, and then danced back to their own side. Their gestures were often unlike our idea of what is pretty. *Kugwata* is merely a buttock dance, and they have a not very artistic variation of the dance *de ventre*. The music was provided by drums which the men and young boys beat. During the dance the women sung and the men sung; all clapped their hands or blow whistles (a horrid innovation) or snake dried hollow gourds containing beans and maize (McGuire 1950:9).

Though this description is very brief, it touches on a number of significant aspects about Shona religious beliefs and practices. It's a pity that from this description, one can not ascertain the type of ritual that he saw. Furthermore, this description is inadequate because it does not describe the preparations for the ritual, why it was conducted, where and how it was held. The meaning of dancing in a ring and in rows is not clear. The stick that is being talked about might be a walking stick but its symbolism and significance in this ritual is not explained. This stick was given to a man whose status and role in the ritual are unstated. The writer does not describe the songs that were sung. These are some of the phenomena that some of the current researchers try to explore and understand. In order to do so, one would need rigorous research methods some of which I discuss and analyse in chapter six.

Some of the information was collected through hearsay. One finds information such as the following:

... we received a charter to administer the district known as Mtoko. The area was ruled by one called Ishe ... Tales of this place, its savage people, their satanic practices and worship of their king and their departed relatives had long been disseminated amongst us by an explorer called Mauch (McGuire 1950:iv).

By the time they got to Africa many of these writers already had preconceived opinions about the African people on the basis of hearsay.

From the foregoing we see that in certain cases, these writers' cultural interests and colonial concerns seem to have played major roles in determining the manner and the way in which they collected information and the way they structured it. One of the goals of most native commissioners, as is implied in their accounts, was to subdue the Shona people in most spheres of life. It was probably partly because of this that they developed negative attitudes towards the Shona religion and culture, and wrote about them disparagingly without any empathy and openness.

Fr. Biehler, the Native Affairs superintendent of the Empandeni out-stations was particularly notorious for his violent means of banning a religious ritual to appease territorial spirits which is called the "lion spirit cult ceremony" when he got to know the political implications of this ritual. Bhebhe related that one day Fr. Biehler invaded the village where people were holding the cult's ceremony, with a *shambock*. He mercilessly lashed the old women who were dancing and he warned that if they performed their ritual dances again they would be sent to jail (Bhebhe 1984:123). It is apparent that if such a person wrote on Shona traditional religious practices, his presentations would be biased. Indicating his particular interests, McGuire wrote:

... wander lust was in me. I was fired with an ardent desire to join the troop ... I was most interested in the political system of the natives. Viewed from any angle,

the natives do not have the slightest idea of political structures, civilisation or a faint idea about religion. There is lawlessness and everything is jumbled, they need the help of our civilisation (McGuire 1950:16).

Thus, the information in many native commissioners' documents suggest that their information was geared for use in policy making (this includes land policies and native by-laws). Such specific interests and goals played crucial roles in determining the attitudes, approaches and results of their data. In some cases when accurate information about how African religions and cultures function was obtained, it was used as a tool for controlling the African populace under these native commissioners' jurisdiction (Zvabva 1991). The writer's data was in some cases re-structured for intelligence purposes and this often acted as a reliability-reducing mechanism that distorted these writers' descriptions and interpretations. What this means is that some of these writers were to a large extent an integral part of what they described and how they described it. The political context, cultural backgrounds and [orthodox] Christian concerns greatly influenced how certain writers understood and interpreted their object of research. I am of the view that, in such cases, the extent to which a researcher has to be part of the research should be exceedingly diminished to the humanly possible limit so that a researcher may attain as much impartiality as possible.

These kinds of approaches call into question the reliability, validity of these writers' conclusions. I have already stated that although the descriptions and interpretations of these native commissioners were not accurate, put to critical analysis, they may yield some useful information, for example, about the dates when certain kinds of rituals were common.

In some cases, perhaps due to official interests, native commissioners falsified some information. In a foreword to the "The '96 Rebellions" BASCo. reports volume 2", Beach stated that at times, findings were falsified for political

considerations. As an example, Grey, its editor, purposely distorted and misinformed the European readers about Ndebele uprisings:

... the British government's own enquiry into the uprisings entirely contradicted the Martin Report which had already made public that the Company was mainly responsible for the outbreak of the fighting in Rhodesia. Grey's loyalty to Rhodes forced him into conflict with his own sense of honesty. This version of the causes (of the Ndebele) uprisings read oddly compared to his correspondence in the Martin Report and in his private papers (Beach: 1975:iii).

The discrepancies in this article are, firstly, the incapacity of a war-like and aristocratic race to give up their old habits, and to accept their natural place in a peaceful and industrial organisation of a settled civilised community (1975:5). Secondly, later in the volume, because of official political considerations Earl Grey twisted issues. He admitted that this factor in itself did not account for the uprisings. He blamed the extraordinary influence of the M'limo (the Shona Mwari cave cult) and its use of the natural disaster of drought, locusts and rinderpest as the cause of the Ndebele and Shona revolt. His argument thus in effect blamed African irrationality and acts that were based on the "superstition" and "witchcraft" surrounding the cave cult God. The uprisings were blamed on the Mwari cult and on its hostility towards Europeans, thus absolving the Company of responsibility. Grey was glossing over the "unpleasant" facts uncovered by the Martin enquiry which pointed out the real factors behind the revolt. Having looked at the earlier writings of Grey, Beach (1975: foreword) observed that "Grey's loyalty to Rhodes forced him to conflict with his own sense of honesty".

This twisting of information about Shona culture, religion and customs was done so as to suit government purposes (Shoko 1991:66). As an example, if Africans were depicted as morally inferior, treacherous savages and unprogressive pagans, this information would be useful for the intelligence and policy-making departments. Shoko has argued that most of these

deliberate misinterpretations and misrepresentations of Shona religion were useful when it came to drawing up native policies which would facilitate easy manipulation and control of the "natives" (1991:67).

It is, however, important to note that not all native commissioners relied on hearsay. We are informed from Heinrich Barth's biography that he used a much better method of gathering information:

In his recreation time, in that precious hour of coolness before the sudden sunset of the tropics, the alien administrator in his out-station took an evening walk. He chatted with all he met on his way; perhaps climbed a hillock to sketch, listen to legends, took down a few linguistic and historical notes; and purposefully went out of his way to talk and learn about the people and so became accepted by them (Kirk-Green 1970:28).

Barth lived with the Shona people and he developed good relations with them such that in the end, they freely interacted with him and shared with him information he wanted. Confidence is epitomised in the vignette drawn by Barth when he wrote:

I then determined to ascend the rock ... After I had finished taking angles I sat down on this magnificent rocky throne, and several of the natives having followed me, I wrote from their dictation a short vocabulary of their language (Kirk-Green 1970:28-29).

Barth's attitude and approach was more positive than that of most other native commissioners. He realised the need to be linguistically competent in the language of the Shona people so as to understand their expressions. It is important for us to note that African history largely consists of oral history. Accurate knowledge goes hand in hand with accurate translations and correct interpretations. This is one of the important aspects that was overlooked by most of the "early writers" analysed in this chapter.

Concluding remarks

I indicated that the "early writers'" publications are important because, if they are subjected to serious critical analysis according to their historical contexts, they are capable of furnishing us with important information which would be difficult to obtain from anywhere else. I gave the example that from the accounts of these "early writers" we gather that there used to be female chiefs among the Manyika people. From the works of these writers, it is also possible to tell that such and such beliefs or practices were common at a specified place and period. As an example, from some of these accounts we can tell that rain making rituals have been practised for a long time. Another example is that Father Biehler physically whipped people for attending ancestral cults (Bhebhe 1984). Deducing from such information, we can tell with certainty that ancestral cults were in existence before the missionaries came to Shona communities and they were confronted with "muscular Christianity" (that is, a kind of Christian evangelisation that involved intimidation of the Shona people who participated in these rituals). Thus scholars can make use of such information to calculate historical dates relating to certain religious phenomena with reasonable accuracy.

As a concluding summary to the foregoing description one can say that there are various lessons which may be learnt about methodology, research techniques and approaches from the records left by the "early writers". An important question raised in this chapter concerns the significance of the "early writers'" negative attitudes to Shona culture and religion, this is inalienable from discussions about ways of obtaining information and how they analysed it. An attempt has been made to understand the factors why some of these "early writers" wrote the way they did. All these issues have a bearing on the history of the academic study of Shona traditional religion today. In chapter seven I seek to clarify the significance of

these writers in their times as well as in our modern time. This will enable us to appreciate the development of the history of the documentation of Shona traditional religion, culture and society.

The following chapters study approaches and methodologies of contemporary writers on Shona religion against the backdrop of their emergence from the shadow of African colonial history, Victorian cultural orientations and Judeo-Christian theological perceptions.

CHAPTER THREE

MICHAEL GELFAND

Introduction

This chapter concerns itself with a study of Michael Gelfand's research into the religious beliefs and cultural practices of the Shona people. Gelfand was born in 1912 and he died in 1985. Although his works date as far back as 1948, his most relevant publications to this research were written in the 1960s and others were published after his death in the late 1980s. Gelfand was a prominent writer on Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices. He was born and raised in the South African Cape and arrived in the former Rhodesia at the age of twenty-six. He had a deep interest in health and medicine, he was a consultant physician and was employed as a government radiologist (Gelfand 1964:Foreword). In addition, he was also a lecturer in medicine and an editor of the Journal of Medicine at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Gelfand had extensive experience as a government medical practitioner and was recognised by his medical colleagues as one of the country's most experienced physicians until he died at the age of seventy three. Although little about Gelfand's personal life is recorded in his books, we do know that for most of his adult life he had a profound experience of mixing with African people both in Rhodesia and South Africa.

I examine ways in which Gelfand's cultural and professional backgrounds, as well as his medical interests play a role in determining the way he perceived and described Shona traditional religion, culture and society. I try to see whether there was any development in the works of Gelfand in view of the fact that he conducted research among the Shona people for a very long period of time. I therefore proceed by quoting excerpts from both his very early works and from the later ones. Gelfand's books that I focus more attention on

include one of his early books *Tropical Victory* and one of his later ones *African Crucible*. I choose these books simply because they are a sample representation of different periods and contexts in which Gelfand lived. This enables me to discuss Gelfand in terms of "the early Gelfand" whose works were published in the late 1940s and 1950s, and "the later Gelfand" whose works were published in the late 1960s up to the 1980s. In the process of studying his works I seek to see if we can trace any development in his works in terms of how he described and analysed Shona religious concepts. It is important to see whether his publications show any changes about how he viewed the Shona at different periods during his research.

His descriptions and interpretations will be evaluated in chapter seven in the light of research methodology discussions. It will be interesting to find out the extent to which Gelfand's works relate to that of the "Eurocentrics" who came before him. I will explore whether his being a non-Shona affected or influenced his research because in many cases when Shona traditional rituals are performed, I have seen observers who are not closely related to the people performing the rituals being regarded as "outsiders" and being suspected of spying on how the rituals are conducted. The fear is that if these "outsiders" know the specific ritual procedures they may themselves perform these rituals with the intention of manipulating the ancestors thereby causing death or misfortune to the family concerned. It is partly for this reason that strangers or researchers who write notes during such Shona rituals are asked to leave or are looked at with resentment. It is therefore necessary for us to explore the extent to which Shona people's (believers') attitudes affected or influenced the ways in which Gelfand collected information about their beliefs and practices. At the same time I will analyse the ways in which his understanding of Shona religion and culture was influenced by his own cultural and academic background. I present this chapter in a way (structure) that

enables me to discuss Gelfand in terms of the "early Gelfand" and the "later Gelfand" in each of the sub-topics so as to try and show vividly in each of the sections of the chapter a sense of development in his research among the Shona people.

Gelfand's writings and major themes

In his many years of ethnographic studies of the Shona, Gelfand made a tremendous contribution to an academic understanding of Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices. Gelfand produced over twenty books such that it is difficult to pin him down on one particular theme or stream of thought. His books deal with a wide range of topics and themes which arouse the interests of scholars of religion, those in the medical field, sociologists, anthropologists and the general public. He dealt with these topics and themes along comparative and cross-cultural lines, for example, he compared the African with Western European cultures or the rural with urban African cultures.

Most of his first publications such as *Tropical Victory*, *Mother Patrick and her Nursing Sisters*, *African Medical Handbook*, etc, that he wrote in the 1950s dealt largely with the historical development of Western medical science and hospitals in the then Rhodesia. In one of Gelfand's early books, *Schistosomiasis* he wrote:

This book has shown how the European and Native medical services were developed under Chartered rule, how the powerful voluntary movements led to the establishment of maternity services, and measures were taken to deal with the particular tropical diseases of the country (1959:216).

In this book as well as in his other early publications Gelfand mainly dealt with themes of diet, disease, healing and health. As most of his works at this time were mainly on these themes, this seems to have been his prime interest. Gelfand's early publications also deal with accounts of the history of decisions that were taken to build the health system in

Rhodesia (1953:Foreword). Readers of the "early Gelfand" will in my view gather useful knowledge, for example, about facts that are of historical significance. These facts mainly consist of information about the Christian missionaries, colonial administrators and the development of Western medicine at the early times of Rhodesia. I should, however, state that in these works there is no discussion of Shona traditional medicine except in cases where he commented that the Shona preferred to consult their "witch doctors", and that by so doing resisted civilisation brought by Western methods of healing (1953:5,118). In chapter seven of this thesis I will evaluate Gelfand's research so as to try and assess its significance in the academic study of Shona traditional religion. The conclusions in Gelfand's early works will be viewed in the light of research methodologies that I discuss in chapter six of this thesis.

The "later Gelfand"'s book titles illustrate the variety and diversity which characterise his writings. His book *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona* makes a comparative description of religious beliefs of various Shona communities. It also exposes various conceptions about spirits in relation to such topics as witchcraft, death and funerary rituals. *A Service to the Sick* grapples with topics on disease, medicine, healing and health. It also traces the historical developments of Western medical institutions in Rhodesia. *The Genuine Shona* concerns itself with survival values, particularly the ethics, moral and religious values of the Shona. It also deals with Shona traditional institutions like that of marriage and bride price (*Kuroora ne roora*), chieftaincy (*Ushe*), farming ceremonies where traditional beer is offered, as well as that of totem and taboo practices. In *Diet and Tradition in an African Culture* Gelfand deals with such themes as nutrition, diet, disease and healing. In the *Witch Doctor* he explores the significance and the importance of diviner-herbalists and divination among the Shona people. He also examines the roles of the diviner in opposition to witches and witchcraft. An

African's Religion deals with religious beliefs, rituals and religious places of the Africans, particularly the Shona Karanga people. *A Non-Racial Island of Learning* traces the history, growth and development of the University of Rhodesia. Many other books and journal articles exist but the few mentioned above illustrate the diversity and assortment of his topics and themes. In summary, most of the "later Gelfand"'s research generally uncovers facts that relate to: nutrition, Shona dietary laws, diseases and causes, culture bound-syndromes, Shona cultural ethics, morality and values, Western and traditional medicines and the Shona concept of health in relation to Shona traditional beliefs and practices.

Gelfand's interests and objectives

I have already indicated that many accounts of the "early Gelfand" show that his interests were largely limited to the presentation of the history of the development of Western medicinal science and the establishment of hospitals. Indicating his objectives in one of his early books Gelfand wrote:

In writing this book, I have endeavoured to present a comprehensive picture of the main events in the medical and social development during this period [1890-1923], and as it is not possible to include everything in such a study, I crave forgiveness for any omissions that have occurred as a result (1953:Preface).

This shows that Gelfand was interested in presenting a detailed account of medical and social developments during the early days of Rhodesia. The content of his book *Tropical Victory* shows the extent to which the "early Gelfand" was interested in medical and health issues. Topics that he discusses at length in this book include the following: The Influenza epidemic of 1918, Abortus fever and Bilharziasis, Municipal health, Sleeping sickness, Rabies, Hospital nurses and doctors, etc. (1953:186-245). These topics not only show the writer's interests, but also show that some of his writings were influenced by his career as a medical doctor. To

this end there is a link between Gelfand as a medical practitioner and as a writer.

The "early Gelfand"'s objectives in conducting research are also implied where he wrote that:

During my last visit to England I was much impressed by the reverence with which members of the medical profession regarded the contributions of their predecessors. Such tradition sets a fine example for the present generation to follow. Have we not in Africa tended to forget the achievements of our early pioneers and settlers? (1953:Preface).

From this excerpt it is implied that the writers's interests were to preserve for historical purposes the contributions of his predecessors in the early days of Rhodesia. By writing about the works and achievements of the first doctors and nurses in Rhodesia, Gelfand's objectives included that of encouraging the young people of his generation to follow suit. At this time Gelfand seems to have had no interest in recording the developments of Shona traditional medicine or the nature of the institution of traditional healers.

I now seek to describe the general interests and objectives in Gelfand's later publications. Some of Gelfand's publications in the late 1960s show that he was now not only interested in Western medicine but he also conducted intensive research on aspects of Shona beliefs and practices. As an example he wrote that:

As a medical man I believe I am in as favourable a position as a social worker to study the incidence of witchcraft practice, since it is bound up so closely with disease and with the duties of a *n'anga*. Moreover, the effects of witchcraft beliefs greatly concern the practising clinician, perhaps even more so than any other specialist, as the witch is held to cause sickness and death ... In this study I shall attempt to state the views of the Shona about the witch (1967:2).

This quotation shows that the "later Gelfand" was interested in getting to know much about Shona beliefs and practices. This quotation also illustrates that the "later Gelfand's" interests had now grown bigger such that he also described and

analysed Shona beliefs and practices in relation to the works of Western health workers. This shows us Gelfand's medical professional commitment in his ethnographic publications. A research is not always a research on its own, but it is in relation to the writer. In these excerpts we see a link between Gelfand as a writer and as a medical doctor. His other book, *The African Crucible*, shows that the "later Gelfand" was interested in studying the Shona. He wrote that:

For the past ten years I have tried in an ever increasing degree to depict the rich qualities of the African's personality ... (Gelfand 1968a:1).

Many of the "later Gelfand"'s publications show that he had a profound attachment to the Shona people. In many of these books he describes how he spent much of his time with his Shona patients. His aim stated above shows that the writer had a profound interest in studying how the Africans lived, their beliefs and cultural practices. This interest is also found in his book, *Growing up in Shona Society: From Birth to Marriage* where Gelfand's aim was to present descriptive materials on Shona life. Describing his objectives Gelfand wrote that:

... I therefore elected to study the upbringing of the Shona child from birth until he is married or leaves home ... I am describing the customary methods of training a Shona child (Gelfand 1979:3).

This suggests that he wanted to attain an understanding of the whole life-cycle of Shona people, especially their customary practices. I shall explore and describe the various methodological approaches that were employed by Gelfand so as to obtain information from, as far as possible, a wide Shona constituency. In another book, *Diet and Tradition in African Culture*, Gelfand informed readers about his interests and goals. He wrote that:

But I take the view that in order to give a competent opinion on the food problems of a people, there should be an intimate knowledge not only of the food consumed but of every aspect that affects it (Gelfand 1971a:5).

It was because of this stated interest in getting an intimate knowledge of the Shona world that Gelfand sometimes went out to the Shona villages and to the "African markets" (1979:vi). This enabled him to furnish readers with first hand reports and fairly accurate information than that of the armchair theorists. Gelfand also stated his interest in research as follows:

I shall not deal with the purely medical aspects of nutrition and the various diseases that may follow inadequate intake of food. Instead I would like to give an idea of the place of food, in its broadest sense, for the Shona people (Gelfand 1979:5).

The stated objective shows that the author's goal was that of conducting wide scale research on food and its various meanings in the Shona community.

In *Non-Racial Island of Learning* Gelfand's objective was to show that the history of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland goes back much further than hitherto known. By doing so he showed that this history is much more complicated and interesting than was hitherto apparent from surveys which generally oversimplified episodes such as the decision to make the institution multi-racial (Gelfand 1978:iv).

In his book *African Background: The Traditional Culture of the Shona* Gelfand wrote:

In this study I shall endeavour to describe some aspects of the behaviour of the African in the traditional environment of his village and discuss the forces that dominate his life and outlook. An understanding of Shona background helps to understand the individual. If I can do this creditably, I believe I shall have justified the many days I spent with the Shona ... (1965:4).

This excerpt shows that the writer was concerned with the development of the study and a proper understanding of the Shona. During this study Gelfand interviewed a lot of patients, and the reaction of these Shona patients to Western medical practices motivated him to probe deeper into Shona beliefs. This led him to produce the book, *A Service to the*

Sick. During this period of his research Gelfand's objective was that of presenting reliable information on Shona traditional beliefs and cultural practices. In his other book *The Genuine Shona*, the "later Gelfand" stated his objective as that of presenting some of the moral values that have enabled the Shona to survive and return to their identity after so many centuries in a hostile environment (Gelfand 1984a:Introduction).

In general terms the "later Gelfand's" goal was that of producing a qualitatively better and a much more comprehensive record of Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices. From his stated goals it appears that Gelfand's interests and findings were more of an academic orientation. There is a stark difference between Gelfand's works and those of the "early writers". Commenting about the "later Gelfand"'s publications Father Hannan stated that in his opinion, Gelfand's researches were meant to help the sick African. Hannan further commented that Gelfand published his findings so that others: doctors, missionaries, teachers, social workers, employers of labour may be able to work more efficiently with Shona people (1967:iv).

Gelfand's attitudes to Shona beliefs and practices

The "early Gelfand"'s publications show that he was not only concerned with the documentation of the history of the development of Western medicine and health system. In some of his descriptions there are deriding overtones on that which belonged to the non-Western sphere (1950:16). It is possible that Gelfand's negative depiction of Shona traditional medicine and traditional healers reflects the negative attitudes of the people of his time to Shona beliefs and practices. My hypothesis is that such attitudes also reflect Gelfand's responses to non-Western medical practitioners and their healing methods. He appears to me to have "flowed" with the thought patterns of his times. These are the times when

the beliefs and practices of the Africans were generally thought to be inferior, and the Western ones as superior (1953:36,133,117-118; 1948:Preface). Gelfand's early books in various ways present accounts which regarded the cultural context of the Shona as inferior and sinister. As an example, describing the endeavours of the early Europeans Gelfand wrote that this was:

the establishment within the Southern tropics of a civilisation and a way of life which is true to the Rhodes tradition and ideals that proved to be an unremitting, relentless struggle against savagery, death and disease ... (1953:Preface).

It is suggested in this quote that the introduction of Christianity and Western medical science in the southern tropics was the establishment of civilisation and the eradication of savagery. An attitude of the superiority of Western systems over the African ones is implied by this text. Gelfand did not describe precisely and adequately the ways in which the people he described were savages. Furthermore, it appears to me to be unfair that the extent to which the Shona were savages was measured against European behaviour and life styles. In many places the Shona people were described in pathetic terms. As an example Gelfand wrote that the Shona people:

had yet to learn the benefits to be derived from European medicine and were reluctant to risk the ire of the witch doctor by trying the unknown magic of the white man (1953:151).

I should reiterate the fact that the context in which this was written was one during which the "early Gelfand" was concerned mainly with the documentation of the development of Western medicine and the foundations of the health service in Rhodesia. He was concerned with the events that took place during the period ranging from the 1890s to about 1923. Later in this thesis I will discuss whether it is possible that reliable historical information can be gained about the people whom he described.

Many of the books by the "later Gelfand" such as *The African Crucible*, *An African's Religion*, *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona*, etc. show that his attitude to the Shona was significantly different compared to that in his earlier works. In these later publications the context in which he was working was very different from that of his early times. The "later Gelfand" was committed to the development of the study of Shona religion and culture. It is my hypothesis that he was much more used to the life of the Shona and had developed friends with some of the Shona people, and wanted to find out more about them. Furthermore, his stance was that the medical profession needed a deep knowledge of the Shona people so as to be effective hence he sought accurate information about them. The "later Gelfand"'s goals and professional interests aptly oriented him so that during his later time his writings show that he had a positive attitude towards the Shona. In studying them, he employed his Western medical professional knowledge and sought to improve their living conditions. This attitude, in my view, was appropriate towards achieving an impartial understanding of the Shona people. Beginning *The African Crucible*, the "later Gelfand" wrote that:

It is wrong to judge the African without spending time with the people in their villages in order better to understand their practices and their motives (Gelfand 1968a:Introduction).

In the same book we find the "later Gelfand" writing in such a way which shows that his attitude to Africans was impartial:

It is a pity that the word primitive in its disparaging sense still creeps into descriptions of African society. Admittedly it is difficult to erase the word as it has been used for so long (Gelfand 1968a:36).

Though this does not necessarily follow impartiality, at least the quotation shows that the writer put some serious thought to what he was writing about and how he expressed it. In his later times Gelfand questioned the use of biased terminology by some writers to describe the Shona. This kind of observation as well as the empathetic attitude shown by Gelfand was good for research which aimed to produce fair,

accurate and impartial results. It equipped him intellectually and emotionally, and prepared him to pay meticulous attention to detail. The "later Gelfand's" attitudes enabled him to deal with most of the cultural biases, academic prejudices and racial preconceptions of his time. His attitude to the Shona was indisputably better than that of the "Eurocentrics" and some of the earlier ethnographers. Gelfand also wrote that:

It came as a surprise to me when I first became interested in the African to find a people with an elaborate religion as, prior to that, my conception of the faith was largely based on the ideas conveyed by writers like David Livingstone (Gelfand 1968a:2).

Unlike in his earlier works, we find the "later Gelfand" in the late 1960s critically reflecting on the works of some "early writers". Thus the "later Gelfand" casts some aspersions on the writings of "early writers" when he wrote that:

I doubt if these early writers even conceived that the African might have a religion. That they were superstitious and believed in evil forces was patently clear ... thus the European assumed that the African was not only barbaric, uncivilised and savage, but that he was in urgent need of moral help and upliftment ... (Gelfand 1968a:1).

When compared to his early publications, there are sections of Gelfand which often display a slightly more than an impartial attitude. The following excerpts demonstrate that the "later Gelfand" had a profound liking and passion for the Shona people. As an example, he wrote:

Whenever I go to the Shona village, I envy the residents, though I find it difficult to define what it is that attracts me to their way of life (Gelfand 1968a:91) ... I am impressed by the conformity of design throughout the country of the Shona (Gelfand 1979:18).

There are many such passages in the "later Gelfand's" books which support my claim that in his later times, Gelfand had a deep passion and respect for the Shona. In many cases the reader comes across descriptions that are as follows:

An African is a man satisfied with his lot, not demanding or expecting all the material advantages of the world,

happy to share what he has with his family, exceptionally honest and above all displaying intense respect for his fellow man (Gelfand 1968a:1).

The manner in which he depicted the Shona people shows that the "later Gelfand" had an attitude of compassion and respect for the Shona. Such an attitude was a bit more than the ordinary empathy which is required of a scholar seeking reasonably accurate and impartial conclusions. On the other hand such an attitude contributes towards depicting a picture which is undoubtedly only part of the truth; that is, it is "partial", in two senses: incomplete (some Shona do not fit into this picture), and one which takes sides.

We can see here that the "later Gelfand" seems to have had a biased predisposition towards the Shona. This attitude seems to have, in some cases, contributed to his presentation of only one side of the story. As an example, statements such as, "I have tried in an ever increasing degree to depict the rich qualities of the African's personality" (Gelfand 1968a:1) imply an attitude that could obstruct the researcher from critically exposing and analysing facts because it absolves the African personality of faulty qualities. This might possibly be the case in view of the involved passion which idealises situations and overlooks the gap which exists between the romantic and the actual. In many of Gelfand's books there are descriptions that romanticise Shona people. These descriptions are characterised by passages which use adjectives like "good", "magnificent", "noble", "refined quality", etc. In my view, they not only illustrate the passion of the writer but idealise the Shona context. These issues relate to one of the methodological questions which I shall be dealing with later in this thesis, that is: Is it possible for a researcher to be detached from his or her emotional attachment to what he or she describes or from cultural influences, professional commitments, religious prejudices?

Gelfand's approaches and informants

At the very early time of his research the "early Gelfand" conducted a lot of interviews so as to collect information for publication. I quote only a few of his many cases where he expressed his acknowledgements to the people whom he interviewed:

Many gave hours of their time in interviews. In this respect I wish to express many thanks to Dr. A. Fleming-Bernard, C.M.G., C.B.E., the first medical director and one of the leading figures in this work; to Mr. B.F. Wright, O.B.E., his secretary and to mother M. Berchmans, O.P., one of the original sisters who came to Salisbury with Mother Patrick in 1891 ... (Gelfand 1953:Preface).

He also wrote that:

I also wish to record my appreciation to Sir Godfrey Huggins for providing me with details relating to medical practice in the early days in Salisbury (Gelfand 1953:Preface).

Gelfand did not elaborate on the nature of interviews he conducted with these people, but even at this early time of his work as a writer he interviewed people who were involved in the actual work of what he was writing about. In chapter six I will discuss in detail the different types of interviews and how they can be used in research. It should be noted that at this early period of his work Gelfand was conversant with the existing literature on the Shona people (1953:150,156,230). In many parts of his early books Gelfand quoted from personal letters of some of the health workers such as Dr. A.J. Mackenzie, Dr. W.G. Rose, Dr. T.F. McDonnell and others who were responsible with the establishing of Western hospitals during the early days of Rhodesia. I am of the view that by quoting the letters of these writers, the "early Gelfand" brought to life some of the aspects that he described. This is one of the useful approaches that Gelfand utilised in order to present these writers's ideas and beliefs in their historical perspective. Expressing his gratitude to some of the pioneer doctors and nurses for giving him the information that he was researching about Gelfand wrote that:

I am indebted for their informative letters, such as from Miss L.A. Adlam, one of the early matrons of Salisbury Hospital, the pioneers, Mr. R. Carruthers Smith and Mr. J.S. Crawford ... (1953:Preface).

I believe that by making use of these documents, the "early Gelfand" was able to gather together the useful information about what he was describing. The "early Gelfand" also made use of archival materials that were available at that time. These included materials at the government archives as well as those at Chishawasha seminary (1953:5). From these sources Gelfand was able to supplement or discount the information that he obtained from interviews or from personal letters. Furthermore, one of the "early Gelfand's" main sources of information was the colony's newspapers, more especially the Rhodesian Herald and the Bulawayo Chronicle which contained a lot of information about social conditions among both Africans and European communities in Rhodesia at that time. These ways of research enabled him to produce reliable and detailed accounts about the history of Western medicine. In my view, these methods enabled the "early Gelfand" to present an adequate and clear picture about the major events in the establishment of Western hospitals. These approaches also enabled him to carefully record the works of the early Christian missionaries in trying to improve the health system in Rhodesia from the very early times of colonisation. Amazingly, despite his use of these methods of research, at this early time, Gelfand made unsubstantiated comments on Shona religion as primitive, barbaric and as inferior (1959; 1953). The "early Gelfand"'s research did not dwell substantially on the state of affairs regarding Shona traditional medicine or the development of the traditional health system. This may be attributed to the writer's lack of interest or to the fact that during those days the writer's community generally held negative attitudes about Shona beliefs and practices.

I now describe some of the "later Gelfand"'s approaches. In order to meet his goals the "later Gelfand" employed a wide

range of methods of gathering information as well as different techniques of interpreting it. Describing his methodological approach Gelfand wrote:

I might describe my method of approach as essentially "anatomical" as it deals with the basic pillars upon which the Shona faith is built. The historian and the social anthropologist should be able to build upon this structural description according to their own particular interests. For instance, professor Terrence Ranger, a former lecturer at the university college of Rhodesia and Nyasaland has depicted the part played by the medium in the early history of Rhodesia and Doctor G. Kingsley has recorded the significant role of "mediums" in the selection of chiefs. Already Mr. D.P. Abraham's scholarly researches into the ethno-history of the Karanga peoples have revealed how deeply ingrained was the Mhondoro cult in the past. Indeed it would appear that the history of any tribe must perforce show the basic principles of its religion before it can be properly interpreted (Gelfand 1966:x).

His description of his method of research as "anatomical" for me is a further indication of the influence of his training as a medical doctor in his writings. The exact meaning of "anatomical" is not very clear for me. However, he is right to claim that his publications in the mid 1960s dealt with basic pillars of Shona religion upon which further analysis and interpretation should be built. I will describe some of his methodological approaches during the different times of his research.

Describing one of the methodological approaches used by Gelfand Father Hannan wrote that:

Early in his career Gelfand saw the supreme importance of understanding the background of his patients, and early too, in his research he began to share with the general public the results of tireless research (Gelfand 1968a:4).

Father Hannan's observation suggests that the "later Gelfand" saw the need of understanding the people with whom he lived. With this kind of attitude the "later Gelfand" ventured into much better descriptions and analysis of Shona culture. Furthermore, one sees the medical consultant's respect for the individual being carried over into the ethnographer's study of

the impact of the West European practices on Shona culture. Describing Gelfand's work Hannan observed that the "later Gelfand" did not want the Shona persons to become ciphers in a purely intellectual exercise. Hannan further stated that this kind of empathy and research is of course what one would expect when the whole object of the exercise is to help doctors and others to deal more understandingly with individuals involved in culture contact (1968:vi).

Further informing readers about how Gelfand conducted his research Hannan wrote that:

Gelfand did his research only by stealing from those few hours of leisure and relaxation that occur in the life of a professor of medicine who is also an editor of a medical journal (Gelfand 1966:vi).

On the basis of his personal knowledge, Hannan further argued that Gelfand did most of his research on Saturdays during his free time. Hannan's comments imply that Gelfand did not have adequate time for research. In chapter six I will expound on the issues such as that of what amount of time may be required during fieldwork research and the benefits of staying for a long period with the community in which one does research. In view of the fact that Gelfand (1966:35) used Saturday mornings to go and visit Shona communities, Hannan's criticism is quite legitimate. I will discuss in Chapter six how the fact that living for a long time in the community being studied enables a researcher to know the language and other forms of expression that are used by the studied people and how this is important in research.

A lot of the information in Gelfand's later publications was gathered through both the "structured" and the "open-ended" interview methods. Gelfand used both personal and questionnaire interviews so as to obtain information from primary sources. In many of his books the reader comes across statements such as:

I interviewed 50 unselected girls and boys (29 girls and 21 boys) of average ages between 9 and 19 years, the majority of whom were about 14 years. They were all Shona from different parts of the country, some living in towns in close contact with Europeans and civilization and others living in the country where their lives followed closely the traditional pattern. I left the more delicate questions for the end of the interview for by that time the girl was more confident and more likely to trust me. I also asked them in the presence of an African nurse and I am sure this helped to win their trust (Gelfand 1968a:34).

The "later Gelfand's" method of conducting interviews seems to have promoted good relations and an atmosphere of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. This approach cultivated a healthy atmosphere for his research. Later in this thesis I shall critically examine the relationship between Gelfand (researcher) and his "assistants" and "informants". I shall problematise the doctor-patient, young-old, male-female and European-African relations in interviews. In *Growing up in Shona Society*, the "later Gelfand" informed us of the way he conducted his interviews:

I thought it might be useful to ask Shona children about the age of 15 years to describe factors of traditional village life as experienced by them under the influence of their elders. Three schools were selected for this - Avila mission, St. Ignatius and Mufakose Secondary school. I thought it best to include essays that appeal to me. I edited them slightly but did not alter their meaning (Gelfand 1979:34).

In this book Gelfand collected written information directly from the Shona people and edited some of it before it was published (1979:35). It is easy for researchers and readers to regard verbatim quotations from "believers" as the standard information, even though it may not necessarily depict the traditions as they are actually lived. The method described above is advantageous because it gave ample time for respondents to reflect on the questions. One would think that such a method gave respondents a chance to freely disclose, in the absence of the researcher, their often unuttered ideas. However, the above quotation also shows that most of Gelfand's informants in this research were rather young to be able to

furnish adequate and competent information or a comprehensive analysis of meanings and points of significance on the topic concerned. In the same book Gelfand also conducted personal interviews with ordinary Shona people so as to get information. He wrote that:

Most of the material referred to in this chapter is based on visits and personal interviews with Mrs. Masiyanyama, Mrs. Sekayi and Mrs. Kutsukunya at the Selous mission, Mtoko, 1972, 1973 (Gelfand 1979:56).

The visits enabled him to present firsthand accounts of the practices that he saw. In some cases the interviews that he had with these women supplemented the information that he got from his patients. Gelfand informed readers that in order to make sure that the approach which he used gave him accurate and correct results, he conducted another series of interviews with patients coming from the same type of locality (Gelfand 1979:195). Later in the same book he informed us of the structured interviews which he conducted at a certain school.

I decided to ask a number of boys and girls in their homes in Salisbury to answer a questionnaire. The inquiry was a simple one and the questions presented not difficult. I first went into Highfield secondary school where 52 girls and 51 boys were asked to fill in the questionnaire (Gelfand 1979:67).

The merits of the questionnaire method of investigation depend on the nature of the questions asked. The nature of Gelfand's survey enabled him to obtain information from a wide constituency of the Shona people. This is so in the sense that he interviewed house wives, old men, school boys and girls. The "later Gelfand" was able to present a picture as seen from different angles because the people whom he interviewed came from diverse backgrounds; they were from dissimilar places (rural and urban areas) and were of different age groups and sexes. Commenting about his questionnaire the "later Gelfand" explained that:

... the questions were clear and direct. For instance they were asked who taught them proverbs and puzzles. If they had learnt of any they were to tick off the name of the relation who taught them as listed on the questionnaire. In another research they were asked to

recall a game learnt only at their village. The same applied to taboos, songs, rites, puzzles, ... (Gelfand 1979:88).

The use of a questionnaire which is structured in such a way needs to be questioned. Scholars on research methods need to explore whether such type of questionnaires restrict respondents to ticking one of the listed answers. Though not all his questionnaires were like this, this particular one serves as one example of deficiency in method by a researcher who is looking for representative, detailed and accurate ethnographic information. Its deficiency is that it confines the respondent to the structured multiple-choice questions and fails to furnish the researcher with information such as detailed descriptions, explanations or interpretations. Gelfand's questionnaire limited the interviewee to tick off only one suggested answer. This questionnaire left the interviewees with no room for elaboration on points of significance on some of the issues. As an example, respondents were not given a chance to explain their own views on interrelationships among the phenomena in the questionnaire.

Gelfand also made use of group interviews, that is, he gathered together some people during rituals and asked them questions about their beliefs with regard to the specific ritual. He also conducted these group interviews in schools and in hospitals. In the foreword to his book, *Diet and Tradition in African Culture*, J.F. Brook, a fellow medical doctor, wrote:

I have seen him at work surrounded by a small group of tribal elders sitting hour after hour listening and asking questions (Gelfand 1971a:Introduction).

Brook concludes the foreword by saying:

Having seen this I know that the information which he is leaving to posterity is as nearly an accurate reflection of dying customs and traditions as it is possible for a person of another culture to report (Gelfand 1971a:iv).

One of the merits of unstructured group interviews is that they promoted a more personal interaction between Gelfand and

the Shona people. The group interviews gave these people a sense of confidence and they cooperated in answering Gelfand's questions. It was partly through the free association in this group work that Gelfand got to know these people better. Group interviews (structured or unstructured) are a valuable approach in as much as they facilitate an atmosphere in which interviewees brainstorm ideas, remind each other of omitted information and correct one another in such a way that may enable the researcher to produce accurate and adequate descriptions. This approach, may, however, be taxing on the researcher in terms of time to sort out the data in a coherent and chronological way.

In his later works Gelfand conducted "free association" interviews. He sometimes met Shona people without an appointment and interviewed them in an informal atmosphere. As an example, without prior arrangement for the interview, he met "a man from Mrehwa" on a bus who described to him the customary rituals performed when a man starts a new village (Gelfand 1971a:177). One of the merits of the "free association interview" is that it is not restrictive, it is more of a discussion than a question and answer session. Disadvantages are that the information is fragmentary and the scholar has to take a lot of time sifting, sorting and recording the relevant section of the research.

Many of the "later Gelfand"'s books show that most of his interviews were conducted with his patients. Describing the way in which he conducted the interviews with his patients the "later Gelfand" wrote that:

In selecting my sample of people to interrogate I decided to question a number of Shona males and females attending Harare Hospital out-patient department ... I interviewed 50 unselected men and women of each of the three groups (urban, rural and those living in farms) attending Harare Hospital (Gelfand 1971a:195).

It is worth noting that in the various works of the "later Gelfand" he interviewed both the young and the old as well as

both males and females of the Shona people who came from different backgrounds. This approach was a development in his method of collecting information as compared to how he worked in his earlier publications. Some of Gelfand's descriptions are full of statistical information, that is, numbers of interviewees, numbers of interviews, numbers of different responses, those in the affirmative and in the negative. He included the numbers of male and the numbers of female respondents, the statistics of those from rural and those from urban areas, as well as figures concerning age differences and age groups, etc. In the final analysis each of these is added together and is expressed in percentages. These figures are sometimes difficult to understand, and it is tiresome and difficult for me as a reader accustomed to the qualitative method to go through and understand the statistical and quantitative summaries in some sections of Gelfand's books.

It is important to say a word about Gelfand's informants. Gelfand relied on various types of informants and research assistants so as to obtain descriptions and interpretations from the Shona people. Sinfree Mugeru, an African sub-chief who was training to be an orderly under the supervision of Gelfand, features in many of Gelfand's books as one of his major informants. (This is almost comparable to the case of Victor Turner and his principal informant Muchona which I shall elaborate on in chapter 6). A good number of his other informants also worked as orderlies in hospitals where Gelfand was a doctor. Some of their roles included taking Gelfand to rural areas where he would be an eye-witness to the phenomena which he later described. They also helped him with translation of information from vernacular to English. These people were, in my view, qualified to be his informants because they knew the Shona language and they had a thorough knowledge of the people and places where the research was conducted. Gelfand's informants were already accustomed to the cultures and the various ways by which the people living there expressed themselves (1968a; 1966:35). It, however, appears

that at times the linguistic competence of some of his informants was insufficient to enable them to make good translations from Shona to English. In some cases Gelfand did not present enough information about his informants. As an example, when he described the history of Chief Mutasa he wrote that:

According to a reliable informant, the Mutasa came from Sena. Chief Chilimanzi, like Chiota, is also of the Mutasa lineage (1977:15).

There are many cases where Gelfand did not indicate who his informants were. In many cases too, Gelfand did not furnish readers with the relevant backgrounds of his informants so that we can assess the extent to which they could give reliable information. It is a fact that in some cases, some of these orderlies were habituated to colonial concepts. This means that they saw some things they interpreted no longer as the rural Shona people did. As shall be shown from the way some Shona words are translated and how some practices are interpreted, one needs to contend that concepts must be understood from the Shona point of view rather than entangling them in foreign words and categories.

Gelfand was sometimes warned about the danger of misrepresenting Shona concepts by Father Hannan, one of his special informants (Gelfand 1967:30). In more than one instance Father Hannan warned readers to be careful about some information in Gelfand's books:

Though anyone who reads this book will be helped very much towards acquiring a proper appreciation of the Shona people, at the same time one must enter a caveat against some of the generalisations and interpretation of facts (Gelfand 1968a:Foreword).

Axel-Ivar Berglund echoed the same sentiments when he insisted that Gelfand's works are more of a generalist type (Berglund 1995: Personal communication). Berglund complained that Gelfand was a fast writer who was not very careful with the accuracy of both detail and interpretation.

I have already mentioned that Gelfand sometimes relied on European informants such as Dr. Brook, Reverend M. Hannan and Professor H. Wild, etc. whom he regarded as well informed about Shona culture and language (Gelfand 1968a:vii). These people read and corrected his manuscripts before he published them.

From Gelfand's acknowledgments it appears as if Hannan was much more competent than Gelfand in the usage of the Shona language and may have had more experience in research. Nevertheless it cannot be ruled out that he suffered from his own limitations in interpreting or translating some of the culture-bound concepts. This was perhaps partly because of the fact that he was a non-Shona. Without prejudicing non-Shona researchers it is necessary to mention that they, as well as some Shona writers such as Banana, Moyo, etc. who have been trained in Christian theology and have been deeply habituated to Western concepts are sometimes at a disadvantage when it comes to insider perceptions as well as interpretations of metaphors, ritual actions and symbols of the Shona traditional religion and culture.

Fieldwork experience

There is not so much that can be said about fieldwork research in the "early Gelfand's" publications. His early publications were mainly based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources whose concern was the origins and development of Western medicinal science in Rhodesia.

The "later Gelfand" was an eyewitness to some of his accounts on the Shona. He went out to the field to do research. In *An African's Religion* he wrote:

One Saturday morning 16 February 1963, I visited Matopos. I specially brought with me an African orderly who had spent his school days in Matabeleland. He knew this part of Rhodesia well and could speak Ndebele. We took the Swada road making for Dula rock, where I hoped that I should meet Sinyeyo who was the head of the village. It

took us about 2 hours to reach him. The Matopo rock is more than a rock in the strictest sense of the word. It is almost a mountain of stone, striking and attractive. As there were so many of these large rocks in the area there did not seem to be any special reason as to why this particular one of Dula was chosen.

I was warned that one could not just enter the village of Sinyeyo. I was to wait outside while one of the Africans first approached it and asked for permission to enter. I was also warned that I might be told to remove my shoes ... (Gelfand 1966:35).

This is one illustration of Gelfand's fieldwork experience. In many of his later books that he wrote in the mid 1960s and in the 1970s Gelfand wrote that his accounts were based on visits to many areas of what then in colonial parlance were termed "tribal trust lands". Many sections of these publications are presentations based on firsthand experiences. Gelfand's eyewitness descriptions are fairly detailed, more vivid and contain valuable information like dates, names of people and names of places. He informed readers that during his fieldwork he recorded everything in his notebook. This was a good approach because it enabled him to maintain originality and freshness of detail. His book *An African's religion* is one good example of where Gelfand went on fieldwork and was able to do comprehensive research on a case study of the Karanga Nyajena spirit (1966). His fieldwork enabled him to dwell deeply on the Nyajena spiritual beliefs. In this study, the "later Gelfand" analysed different spiritual beings and the hierarchy in the spiritual world according to the Nyajena people. He described various rituals that are conducted by the Nyajena people for their departed elders, and analysed the different significance of these rituals to these people. Gelfand informed readers that contrary to the old beliefs, his "experiences" with Africans had taught him that they have a religion. It was during his fieldwork research that Gelfand observed that among the Shona there are many who can be described as religious; as intense and devoted as any good Christian, and with a faith so strong that nothing will remove it from them (Gelfand 1968:2).

In *The Genuine Shona* Gelfand informed his readers that he visited chief Chikwaka regularly for several years and attended his court (*dare*) where he gained firsthand experience of religious and customary practices of the Shona. The participant observation method enabled the "later Gelfand" to understand that which would have been more difficult to understand under other circumstances. One unavoidable problem was that Gelfand, as an outsider, was treated with caution; he was dissuaded from observing certain ritual events that were supposed to be witnessed by senior elders only. In some cases, the ritual leaders would delay invoking their ancestors only to proceed when he had left the place. Gelfand made occasional visits to various Shona villages, but he did not live there for a reasonably long enough period of time to enable the Shona to develop trust and to treat him as an insider. This was one problem of his being a casual participant observer because he was able to observe only part of the whole. Although he did spend many hours with Shona patients in a hospital context, traditional life was not played out in such settings.

Sources of information and Descriptions

The "early Gelfand" made use of various literature that was available at that time. I have already stated that he used materials that were at the government and Chishawasha archives. The "early Gelfand" also obtained information from many sources which include his fellow medical doctors (Gelfand 1953:14), chronicles (1953:52), letters from farmers and from Dr. Mackenzie, the Native Affairs Annual Report as well as notes from public meetings chaired by Grimmer W.P. (Gelfand 1953:82). It was probably partly due to the influence of these writings that, in one of his early books he concluded that:

The African himself owing to his primitive beliefs, refused to co-operate and clinics built for his benefit were so poorly patronised ... (Gelfand 1953:118).

This shows a patronising attitude on the part of the early writers. It appears that the "early Gelfand", as a medical doctor, expected these people to immediately abandon consulting the traditional medical practitioners that they were accustomed to and go to Western doctors. Gelfand does not describe in detail why these people did not go to Western clinics. On the main, his early works generally examine the development of Western medicine and ignore the other part of the context in which he worked, that is, traditional medicine and the functions of traditional healers at that time. Remarking on the Shona Gelfand wrote that:

Both the Matabele and the MaShona were primitive in the extreme, so much that the matabele's first introduction to a chair was made by Robert Moffat in 1875. Both people practised ancestor worship ... Illness and misfortune were attributed to offending particular spirits. It was in this connexion that the native witch-doctor or oracle functioned (1948:4).

Many of such descriptions were appropriated from the writings of traders, colonial administrators, or early missionaries' letters. Some of these letters generally retain the widespread air of superiority of the writers as well as the general consensus that Africans were inferior held by their communities in Rhodesia during the period of imperialism and expansion of the European empire. It is a pity that in these early writings of Gelfand there is insignificant elaboration of the Shona beliefs and practices in relation to their beliefs about diseases. It appears that in some cases Gelfand did not cross-check some of his translations and interpretations with the Shona so as to avoid biases and errors. The quotation below illustrates some angles of perception and an attitude of superiority that prevailed during these early times. For example Gelfand wrote that:

When the pioneers first entered the country, the natives were completely primitive and unaccustomed to the white man's advanced methods. They were afraid of his "magic" and it took some years for the few willing workers who had to be taught the simplest things to be useful (1953:133).

Gelfand also noted that:

Now that the essential health services had been established more time and thought were focused on the prevention of disease and on research. White men, with a clearer realisation of their responsibility as the ruling race, became concerned at the ill health of many of the natives -a condition which had been somewhat overlooked in the previous century (Gelfand 1953:117).

Though, at this early period Gelfand might have had noble goals when he started writing about the Shona, he appropriated information from letters of some of the Eurocentrics some of which had negative angles of perception. To some extent, this had an effect on his depiction of the Shona in his early publications. However, it should be noted that in Gelfand's early publications the reader infrequently comes across factual information of some historical value. As an example, the "early Gelfand" wrote that:

Robert Moffat writes in his journal that the Matabele were a strong and healthy race. At no time did he come across any signs of Tuberculosis. Records show that serious smallpox epidemics occurred among them. When a large out break of disease occurred, the king would leave the kraal and live at one of his outposts, away from contagion. Whenever a man became seriously ill, he was removed from his fellows and isolated in the woods where he would be nursed and fed by one of his relatives. In spite of their fear of witch doctors, the natives frequently sought medical aid from the white man ... (Gelfand 1953:7).

In such cases Gelfand avoided speculative approaches because he quoted from writers whose works were based on personal experience. From such accounts, it is possible to discover historically valuable information for example, historians can work on this kind of information so as to reconstruct the traditional practices and beliefs that were rife in the remote past. As an example one can deduce that from the early times African traditional religions had the capacity to adopt and integrate new and foreign beliefs and practices. In view of this, the general tendency of characterising these early works as biased, prejudiced and as inaccurate needs to be replaced by a critical and analytical reading of the individual texts

so as to separate the biased or distorted information from that which is valuable. The reader also comes across reliable historical facts such as follows:

European medicine in the early 19th century was practised by the missionaries of Inyati and Hope Fountain. Before sailing for Africa each missionary was obliged to spend six months at a hospital to acquire experience in the diagnosis and treatment of disease, simple surgery and maternity work. ... They impressed the natives with their method of tooth extraction, which although performed with ordinary forceps was a distinct improvement on the cumbersome native method, by which a small iron bar was placed against the base of the tooth and the other end hammered until the tooth came out (Gelfand 1953:7).

By looking at such excerpts one of the questions that I grapple with at the end is to ascertain whether it possible to attain any useful information from the "early Gelfand"'s works. I will examine these works in relation to various research methods that I discuss in chapter six. This is done with the view to formulate a research model that can be used to produce better research in the future.

Much more than in his early writings, the "later Gelfand" was aware of the existence of written literature on African people hence he wrote that:

I have studied publications on the religious and cultural practices of the countries throughout Bantu and Negro Africa and therefore, with this knowledge, and in the light of my practical experience, I feel that I have good grounds for what I am writing (Gelfand 1968a:1).

This shows that before he specialised on the Shona, Gelfand read widely and was generally knowledgeable about African traditional religions and cultures. He further made use of information from the National Archives of Rhodesia about Shona beliefs and cultural practices (1968a:2). Gelfand also used publications produced by early ethnographers and sociologists such as Carr and Wilbourn. In some cases he also appropriated information and quoted from "early writers" such as Robert Moffat, Blake-Thomson, Van der Merwe, David Livingstone, Emily Livingstone and others (1968a:15,23). Thus the "later Gelfand" tried to consult as many sources as possible so as to enrich

his works. Reflecting on the works of the "early writers" the "later Gelfand" wrote:

Indeed if we study the literature on this subject written by missionaries, explorers, politicians, traders or settlers, what stands out so clearly is the inference that the Africans either had no religion at all or that it was a queer mixture of barbaric beliefs (1968:2).

Comparing the descriptions in the "early Gelfand" to those in the "later Gelfand" one observes a sense of development in the way he documented Shona society, culture and religion. It may be stated that this development is expected because unlike the "Eurocentric", Gelfand was more of a scholar and had academic goals in mind. Furthermore his research was conducted in an academic context. This is indicated in the following excerpts from some of Gelfand's works:

I think perhaps even our social anthropologists were a little slow in interesting themselves seriously in the religious practices of the many peoples they studied. They were content to rest at the stage reached by Radcliffe-Brown when he formulated his analysis of religion. Secondly the African himself had no wish to discuss with those who showed so little personal interest in him. I am quite certain he would have discussed his beliefs quite openly if the European had made a friendly, empathetic approach to him (1968:2-3).

Most of Gelfand's later publications tend to try and recast the works of the "early writers". As an example readers come across statements such as:

It has been unfairly stated by the early writers that the Shona mother stuffs her baby with stiff and indigestible *sadza* from within a few days of its birth. This is quite untrue. How much value the *bota* [porridge] has I cannot say, but it would appear to have no adverse effects, except perhaps if being a vehicle through which infection might be introduced (Gelfand 1968:29).

It should be noted that even in his later publications, Gelfand was interested in themes on nutrition and health among the Shona people. However, in these later publications Gelfand tried to correct some of the "early writers'" misconceptions. The "later Gelfand" expressed some doubts about the

thoroughness of the writings of the "early writers" when he wrote the following:

I doubt the accuracy of some of the food studies so far carried out in Africa. Much of this has arisen from the personal attitude of the European that all in Western culture must be superior and there is nothing or little to learn from the African (1968:30). ... I doubt if these Europeans ever conceived that the African might have a religion (1968a:65).

By so writing the "later Gelfand" tried to show the shortcomings of some of the European writers most of whom he says adopted a superior attitude based practically entirely on first impressions (1968:65). In other cases the "later Gelfand" wrote long sections in some of his books setting right what he considers to have been inaccuracies committed by some scholars on traditional religion and culture. Criticising some of the early European writers Gelfand (1968a:39ff) wrote that the prevailing depiction of Shona chiefs as despots who can remove, kill or destroy at will was inaccurate. Gelfand's view on this matter was that the Shona community can be described as a flower with the chief as its central part and his people as the petals linked to the centre (1968a:39).

Describing what he called the "refined quality" of the African, the "later Gelfand" compared European individualism to African communal life, that is, how an African as an individual is part of a group, of a society which depends on his self denial for its smooth working (1968a:38). In remarkable detail Gelfand described cooperative work in African communities, and that in a traditional set-up these people do not desert each other in times of need (1968a:37). The "later Gelfand" discussed how a meal is not merely a filling of one's stomach but is almost a ritual where one shares the necessities of life with one's kin. He discussed how attention at the meal times is paid to correct manners, and how respect is paid to each one according to his or her status in the family group (1968a:29). These are in my views some of the impressive sections in the "later Gelfand"'s descriptions and analysis. The way Gelfand presented Shona

humanness (*unhu*) (1968a:44-50) is another example of adequate and comprehensive descriptions in his publications. These are examples of Gelfand's research which, in my view, furnish readers with important and reliable information about the Shona people. These sections show that the "later Gelfand" had interest in attaining adequate knowledge about the Shona.

I should also point out that in some cases the "later Gelfand's" descriptive accounts are inadequate and inaccurate. As an example concerning the Shona notion of God he wrote that:

In the eyes of most African peoples the creator is far away tremendously powerful, almighty, but not in contact with each person and his problems. He is too far removed to be concerned with the comparatively trivial aspects of every individual (1968a:3).

One problem with Gelfand's discussion about God is that he was too general because it did not specify the African ethnic group about whom he was writing. Furthermore, if this refers to the Shona, this is a faulty and incomplete description and analysis of the understanding of God among the Shona as I discussed it in chapter one, and especially considering the existence of the God of Matopo hills who was regarded as actively involved with the people's lives (Daneel 1972). In this section of his book Gelfand further compared the attitude of the Africans to God to that of the Europeans to the Queen of England who is head of state and thus cannot be expected to be familiar with the conditions of service every civil servant or soldier, who when he wants anything, he must go to his immediate superior along the usual channels of communication. Gelfand states that, "this is exactly how he [African] sees the hierarchical system in the spiritual world" (1968:3). I have already presented in chapter one some of the controversies about the question of God among the Shona. Contrary to Gelfand's example, depending on their needs and circumstances, certain types of rituals that I observed show that the Shona regularly communicate with God (Dziva 1993). I observed that in various rituals and in some of the Shona

people's daily expressions God is perceived as ever present. This ever presence of God is observed where the Shona people often call God to witness the truth of what is said. Furthermore, when there is a problem affecting the whole community and this problem is beyond the people's understanding, they send messengers to the Matopo hills so as to consult God's oracle about the issue (Daneel 1970).

Another example of problematic accounts in Gelfand's publications is that about "lobolo" (bride wealth). Gelfand described the "lobolo" as follows:

In a family, as each of the brothers marries, he must be given an appropriate number of cattle with which to purchase his wife (1977:42).

In this account Gelfand described the number of cattle and money that is presented to the in-laws. Writers such as Peggy and Clive Kileff (1988) argue that "lobolo/roora" is not purchasing a wife but that it is a token of appreciation. From my personal experience in my own community, the girl's parents ask for "lobolo" not because they are selling their daughter but mainly because of cultural and religious reasons which include the need to strengthen the new relationship between the two families. The paying of "lobola/roora" also serves to ritually join the spirits of the two families. During the marriage ceremony two or three of the cattle that are "paid" by the son-in-law are slaughtered so as to provide meat. The ceremony is also an opportunity whereby family members of the couple are invited so that they meet each other. Rather than buying a wife, the man "presents" the bride-wealth that is asked for partly as a symbol to show his commitment to his wife. Furthermore, the cattle paid as "lobolo" do not belong to the father but rather to the whole family. Some of these cattle are put aside so that the unmarried sons may use them for "joining hands" with other families during their own marriages (Matikiti 1990). It is true that these days some Shona parents have developed a tendency to abuse the concept of "lobola" by demanding exorbitant amounts of money.

The manner in which the "later Gelfand" characterised the concept of power in the departed elders is problematic. He described them as follows:

The spirit of the dead gains supernatural power. Questions are not asked about what a man did on this earth. With death respect is accorded to the *mudzimu* and the love for one's dead is very real. I have never heard any African refuse to pray to his grandfather because he could recall an unkind act or word (1968:12).

Gelfand's analysis is too general and inaccurate because not every dead person's spirit gains supernatural power. Only the deceased whose descendants perform a home-bringing ritual to empower him or her through such a ritual is believed to attain supernatural power. To my knowledge, in the Shona community the people who die without descendants are not regarded as having any supernatural powers. Furthermore, contrary to Gelfand's descriptions it is not true that questions are not asked about what a man did on this earth. Even though the Shona have an expression which says that "a dead person is good" (*wafa wanaka*), this does not mean that questions about what a man did on earth are not asked (Chiunya 1990). The reality of what happens among the Shona is that those people who are considered to be witches or sorcerers are not forgiven. However, these people are feared and they are buried at the cross-roads so that their spirits cannot find their way back to the community that they used to live. No home-bringing rituals are performed for them so as to ritually empower them as is done for other ancestral spirits. The burning to death of witches is an attempt to destroy the deceased physically and spiritually (Chiunya 1990). This means that Gelfand is not accurate to say that what a person did in the past is not forgotten when he or she dies.

The title of Gelfand's book, *The Witch Doctor: Traditional Medicine Man of Rhodesia* shows linguistic and translation problems, a fact that is detrimental to accuracy. It appears to me that the phrase "witch doctor" has no equivalent in the Shona language. Is the witch doctor a witch hunter, a doctor

of witchcraft victims or is he or she a strange, frightening, unscrupulous, Hollywood personality whose magic is feared by all? Berglund has criticised Gelfand and other writers for using the word "witch doctor" because it constitutes a contradiction of terms. The word "witch" is associated with bad and the word "doctor" is associated with good. Berglund further argues that the usage of this word shows both the Western influences as well as Gelfand's inability to grasp perfectly some of the Shona phenomena (Berglund 1995: Personal communication). Accordingly, this word has many meanings; which one is the intended meaning by Gelfand? It is important to note that it is not a concern to have matching names, but that concepts must be understood from a Shona point of view rather than entangling them in alien categories.

These are examples of factual and interpretive faults found in Gelfand's works. The deficiencies in some parts of the "later Gelfand" may be attributed to misinformation by his informants, the patients in hospitals or by research assistants who possibly were incompetent to present him with adequate information about the Shona. On the whole I am impressed by many of the "later Gelfand's" descriptions which opened the way towards a better understanding of Shona traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices.

Case study for comparison

On several occasions I observed and described a *mutoro* ritual. In preparation for this thesis I conducted interviews, observed and participated in Mutoro rituals among my own people, the Shona Karanga people of the Chingoma area. In analysing Gelfand's description and interpretations we hope to understand better the differing interpretations and contradictory conclusions by writers on the same phenomenon. We also hope to analyse Gelfand's attitudes and interests and how they relate to his research. Below is an example of a description of a rain making ritual by Gelfand.

Ceremony for a drought (Mutoro/Doro remvura)

Each year in summer all the members of a clan come together to ask for rain from the rain God. The ceremony is conducted by an important person called a "Gombwe". Beer is brewed and quite a number of cattle are slaughtered for this occasion. Finger millet (*zviyo*) is collected from the people by the *zurukadzi* [the person in-charge of the ritual preparations]. On the appointed day they all make for his village, one or two men blow their horn of *hwamanda* [an antelope horn] as they go. Beer has already been prepared. The *zurukadzi* prays before the pot of beer in the hut. He starts by explaining to the people:

"We have come here for one thing. Every family which has come with *svikiro* [spirit medium] has made beer and we have collected it today, it is ready".

He addresses his tribal spirits and ancestors: "This is the beer for *tateguru* [ancestor]. You have all forgotten us and our children are sick".

Seated next to him is the spirit medium. As he stops offering their prayers, he claps hands, takes the calabash of beer and hands it over to the medium, who drinks it. The second calabash of beer is given to the assistant who accompanies the *svikiro* on his rounds and is shared out in the hut, the rest of the beer is enjoyed by all the people. The *svikiro* wears his black cloth over his shoulders. The women shrill and the men clap their hands as the *zurukadzi* prays.

As the beer is passed around among the people, men and women sing, but no drums or musical instruments are played. After varying intervals the *svikiro* becomes possessed and he takes his seat on the mat while the important men take up their places in the hut. A container (*chibakwa*) containing snuff is handed over to him by the *zurukadzi*. The *svikiro* empties a small amount of snuff on the palm and inhales it, putting the container back on the mat.

The *zurukadzi* addresses the medium: "You let us stay without rain. The *svikiro* replies: "What do you think I can do now?" After further snuffing the possessed man continues: "Do not forget all about me. Look, you cannot have rain because you have forgotten me". Then more pots of beer are produced and the singing and dancing outside the hut continues until the *chisaino* (last pot) is produced, which is a signal for the gathering to disperse (Gelfand 1966:18-19).

Note: The translations in the square brackets are my own.

Most of Gelfand's books have descriptions of this kind. Where he was as an eyewitness and actually conducted fieldwork, his descriptions are in many ways superior to his other accounts especially in his very early publications parts of which were based on hearsay and were appropriated from the works of the "Eurocentrics". In the description above, Gelfand made use of good language which is devoid of exaggerations, distortions and biases. There is no medical or clinical terminology in this presentation. In cases where it was difficult to translate words from Shona to English he used original Shona words.

As shall be shown, Gelfand sometimes did not live up to academic expectations when it came to interpretations. Most of his works lack interpretive activity perhaps because he did not adequately describe the rituals. For instance, the overall meaning of the ritual described above is not clear. From the dialogue between the *Zurukadzi* and the spirit medium, it appears as if the ritual is not restricted to asking for rains only. The dialogue shows the spirit medium's concern about relations and the need to remember the "departed elders". As a reader I am interested in knowing exactly how the ritual relates to the falling of the rains. Does the ritual actually summon the rains or is this just a traditional ritual that is conducted as a matter of routine? Some of the information which could be helpful in the analysis, but which is lacking from the author's description, concerns the significance of the *zurukadzi*. Although the *zurukadzi* appeared to be a very important person in this ritual, being mentioned numerous times, the meaning of the word "*zurukadzi*" was not explained to the readers. Gelfand did not explain the significance of the clapping of hands. Was this clapping of hands an expression of joy, anger, respect or a way of invoking the ancestors? Gelfand also informed us that the women sang, but as a reader I remain puzzled about what they were singing about. Detailed descriptions are those in which the researcher records the words of these songs so that we know the meaning

and the significance of the song in relation to its various contexts. Did the shrilling of the women symbolise fear, excitement or respect? In his description Gelfand wrote that the people were singing and dancing without describing how these people were dancing and how this dancing style was significant in this particular ritual for rain.

Gelfand described the *svikiro* as wearing a black cloth over her shoulders. Did the colour black bear any symbolism for the *svikiro* or for the believers? Could a cloth of any other colour be used? It is not clear what the significance of snuff was and why it was inhaled.

Gelfand did not untangle for us the purpose and meaning of some ritual stages. In the ritual described above (Gelfand 1966:18-19) we are not informed of where, when and how the ritual beer was consumed. In his description, Gelfand wrote that, "important men took up their places in the hut". He did not explain whom he referred to as "important men" and why they were important. The reason why the prayer was conducted in the hut was also left to the imagination of the reader. It is also not stated how many people attended the ritual. In many cases Gelfand's descriptions left a lot to the imagination of the reader.

More on interpretations

In my own research about this ritual I found out that rain making rituals (*mitoro*) in Mberengwa are performed every year before the rainy season whether it is a drought or a flood period (Dziva 1992). The (rain priest) *manyusa* and the chief ensure that the ritual is performed so as to ask for the right amount of rainfall and sunshine. The ritual is also meant to ask for fertility of the land as well as in animals and in vegetation. In the description above Gelfand did not present the background information about this ritual. In my own research I found out that the Chingoma people could trace the

historical origins of the rain-making cult as far back as the time of Chaminuka in the 16th century. Chaminuka was not only known as a political leader but also known as a renowned rain priest. The rain priest that I interviewed explained that in each of the chiefdoms in Zimbabwe there is one clan that is charged with ensuring that rain, harvest and hunting rituals are conducted properly and at the right time. The messengers from these clans are sent to various shrines so as to ask for the right amount of rain fall, sunshine and fertility (Vamazvarira 1995:Interview).

Gelfand rightly indicated that just before this ritual is conducted, discussions are held on various topics. During my own research I observed that ritual participants discussed issues that concern the community at large apart from the ritual itself. Examples of some of the issues discussed included the importance of upholding traditional culture, the need to support government developmental programmes in the rural areas, problems of a new political order that reduces the powers of traditional leaders, problems brought by modernisation and Westernisation, etc. (Dziva 1992:97). My point here is that in Gelfand's discussion, it is not clearly shown whether this ritual serves multi-purposes besides that of asking for rains.

I should also mention that during the rain making ritual that I observed, several other meetings were held before the actual ritual (*mutoro*) is performed. These meetings were presided over by the chief, and most of these discussions revolved around who was to contribute what for the ritual. Every homestead was asked to contribute corn; men would cut logs for firewood from the forest, and women fetch water for brewing the ritual beer (Dziva 1992). In Gelfand's ritual it is not stated whether there were any other discussions with, and about the community besides asking for rains.

During my research I was told that it was only the very old women who are permitted to prepare the ritual beer. The young women who are still menstruating are not allowed to prepare the beer because these women are considered as impure and the ancestors would regard the ritual as "defiled" (Dziva 1992). Every adult in the village was expected to attend the ritual lest they are suspected of being against the wishes of the community. When the ritual was finally conducted, it was conducted under a mukamba tree. This tree is believed to be sacred by these people. I was not able to find out why the Mukamba tree is believed to be sacred.

When I observed this rain-making ritual I found that reference was made to the God of the Matopo hills (*Mwari wekumabwe*). The rain-priest advised the people to send messengers to the Matopo hills to consult the Mwari oracle about why there was insufficient rain. One would have expected Gelfand's description to mention something about this conception of a Matopo God who is also widely known in Zimbabwe as the rain God. In my research I found out that the songs sung during this ritual are that of the majukwa spirits (rain spirits). The majukwa spirits are said to have links to God and are believed to possess mainly people whose totemic animal is the monkey (Shoko/Mbire) (Dziva 1992). The heavy rhythm of the songs, the drumming and clapping of hands during the ritual are not only believed to help in inducing possession of the (*nyusa*) rain priest, but they are also believed to help in invoking the heavy rains that soon follow after the ritual (Vamazvarira 1995:Interview).

In Gelfand's description there are other things that are not described, these hinder the researcher from a fuller interpretation of their significance within the whole traditional religious setting. Thus, one of the weaknesses in most of Gelfand's works is that of inadequate descriptions. As a reader I would like to know how Gelfand would interpret the significance of these events, symbols, significant words, etc.

used by the Shona in their rituals. It is important for researchers when analysing these rituals to find out whether, for the Shona, the purpose of the ceremony for a drought is really a "rain making" ceremony, an economic transaction or a political deal. Is it a means to integrate community, to summon rains or is it done to initiate commerce between the visible and the invisible worlds?

Answers to these questions are not found in Gelfand's accounts. Perhaps far more about this ritual could have been learnt if Gelfand had further interviewed professional "rain priests" (*manyusa*) than by asking ordinary Shona people. It often happens that many participants do not know why certain things are done; they may know perfectly well the general significance of a ritual, but at the same time may be honestly unable to account for its details. Here recourse to experts may be necessary and helpful. There is need to assess the extent to which the methods of research used by Gelfand play a role in the production of this quality of research.

Though the above account has very few interpretations, Gelfand's views on interpretations are as follows:

Throughout my studies I have tried to describe the rituals of the various clans I met at the same time interpreting those I felt competent to do correctly. I believe this is a wise policy for in the many years in which I have been engaged on this research, I have come across many hypotheses postulated by workers in Africa that were later discredited (Gelfand 1977:84).

Gelfand appears to be stating that in cases where he felt incompetent to interpret, he left his descriptions without any interpretations. In the case above Gelfand described the "rain making" ritual as he saw it and did not trace historical origins and the historical contexts in which it developed. A researcher understands phenomena better when he or she has a thorough knowledge of the cultural and religious practices of the studied people. As an example, a researcher observing a ritual should be able to differentiate between an "incidental action" and a "ritual action". A scholar who goes straight

from the university office to observe a ritual may in the first instance be confused by the significance of certain "actions", e.g. the action of a ritual actor who constantly scratches his itching face may be confusing as to whether this has to be interpreted as ritual action or not. There is therefore a need to observe the same ritual more than once. Eliade argued that the explanation of a ritual is found in a myth, and myth in a special sense relates the history of a people. Eliade's idea, if it is at all something to go by, is summarised in the phrase, "ritual is myth in action and myth is ritual in word" (1975:87). What this means is that a rain-making ritual should be explained by a myth. On the basis of my own research (Dziva 1993), it is difficult to find African myths which explain rituals. However, when one listens to Shona myths, one often finds that these people are seriously concerned with their genealogies, legends and history. In the evaluation chapter I seek to briefly access what aspects of the history, phenomenology, anthropology or sociology methods he could have used so as to present adequate descriptions and to trace information about the possible origins and conditions in which this ritual thrived, as well as historical meaning and significance of symbols found in this ritual and what these beliefs tell us about Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices.

I should stress here the fact that there were cases where he was an observer and did a lot of field work. In such cases his descriptions were detailed, fair, impartial and enjoyable to read because of their originality. It is in these cases where the reader comes across some good interpretations. This was probably due to Gelfand's conviction that:

In order to make a religious phenomenon intelligible the student must both describe and analyse it. The success of his descriptions depends upon the appropriateness and clarity of the terms which he employs; they must correspond clearly to real characteristics of the facts studied (Gelfand 1968a:36).

The quality of Gelfand's descriptions invariably depended on the nature of the method which he used to obtain the information. For example, in more than one case we are told that Gelfand was invited to attend a ritual (1968a:52). He would drive from Harare to Mtoko and arrive there early on the morning of the performance of the ritual. One problem with this method of research was that it did not give him a chance to witness and describe the preparations done on the night prior to the ritual hence he did not describe and appreciate the ritual in its complete context.

Stating that he was not always content with mere descriptions Gelfand wrote in *The African Crucible* that:

A merely factual description would probably prove boring. Instead it might be of interest to explain some of my reactions to the main aspects of the material culture of the Shona ... (Gelfand 1968a:19).

This shows that the "later Gelfand" was interested in both the descriptions and interpretations of traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices. However, I am of the view that on the whole, there are generally more descriptive accounts and less analysis and interpretive work in Gelfand's work. Where he did, it appears that in some cases his interpretations were influenced by his profession as a medical practitioner because of his use of Western technical medical language. Here is one example of how Gelfand interpreted drinking habits of the Shona people:

The difference in drinking habits between male and female would go a long way to explain sex differences in the degree of siderosis. There is a greater requirement of iron in females because of menstruation and pregnancy ... Siderosis is found more often in the African male than in the older female ... haemosiderosis alone is probably not responsible for the fibrosis and cirrhosis of the liver but probably contributes to its production because of the indisputably higher incidence of fibrosis in subjects with marked siderosis. Haemosiderosis lowers the body resistance to infection as shown by the development of an unexplained peritonitis in some siderotics ... women start drinking later than men and heavy drunkenness in women is found in the 5th and later decades (1966:24).

In my opinion the excessive use of medically related language mars Gelfand's presentations in the sense that this kind of language is not easy for me as a non-medical student to understand. This kind of writing however, augers well with his stated aim that he also wrote for his fellow medical workers so that they would get a better understanding of the Shona community. One limitation in such an interpretation is that it does not present us with an insider perspective. We are presented more with a medical anthropology context which in my view does not illuminate much about the Shona beliefs and practices within their cultural and religious contexts. In most of Gelfand's works most of the edible things such as water, opaque beer and meat that were used in Shona rituals were perceived in the light of Western medical insights only. Rather than examining beer drinking as a Shona social-cultural practice which relates to religious conditioning, Gelfand's interpretations were based only on Western medical insights. These descriptions and analyses do not deal with some cultural issues, for example, the fact that among the Shona beer drinking at ancestral rituals was compulsory for everyone belonging to the family where the ritual was being performed. This act was regarded as communion with the ancestors. It often happens that in some cases habitual beer drinking among the rural Shona people starts from drinking beer at ritual ceremonies. This drinking then develops as time goes on so that some individuals end up as habitual drinkers. According to traditional Shona culture, the old women who in traditional times were allowed to drink beer only did so in the company of their husbands. My point is that the interpretation by Gelfand says nothing about important factors such as that Shona drinking habits were sometimes influenced by religious and cultural factors. Another example is that when he wrote about food. Gelfand wrote that:

The more I meet the Shona the more I realise that I have little advice to offer them in food. Many a European looks down upon maize, so much sought after by the African, and implies that wheat is a far superior source of carbohydrates. Are we justified in unhesitatingly recommending to the African that they change over to

wheat? It is true maize may lead to pellagra when other items in the diet are lacking, but when wheat is linked so clearly too with the gluten sensitivity syndrome that I wonder whether the African is better off since spruce and coeliac diseases are so very uncommon among the Shona (1968:27).

These examples illustrate the fact that there is a connection between Gelfand's ethnographic works and his professional commitments as a medical doctor. A writer may describe and analyse in the language and style he or she likes but there is need to be cautious about how this is done, so that the beliefs, practices and convictions of the studied people are not misrepresented.

Closing remarks

In summary, the "early Gelfand" was mainly concerned with the documentation of the history of the development of Western medicine and the establishment of Western hospitals in the early days of Rhodesia. The "later Gelfand" was a medical doctor who appreciated Shona religious phenomena mainly through medical and Western eyes. It has been noted that, in some of his publications, Gelfand's target readership was particularly those in the medical profession and those training to be doctors. Gelfand wanted these medical workers and other researchers to follow suit. One would conclude that in these cases Gelfand was aiming at an improved, more enlightened medical practice than at ethnography on the Shona people. This is probably one explanation as to why he dwelt on the medically oriented topics that he selected. Some of the excerpts that I used from both his early and later publications illustrate the fact that Gelfand's professional commitments as a medical doctor played a fundamental role in determining what he wrote and how he wrote about it. Furthermore, this influenced the way he understood certain aspects of the Shona, especially the Shona traditional healing systems.

If Gelfand's intended readership was African readers, presumably his account would be different. One may say that the "later Gelfand" was, of course, writing for Europeans so as to enlighten them or even to expose them to a Shona point of view and to correct their negative perceptions. It should be stated that Gelfand's writings were a major development compared to those of the "Eurocentrics" in terms of attitudes, descriptions and interpretations. By using various methods described above the "early Gelfand" was able to document valuable information about the development of Western medicine in Rhodesia. The "later Gelfand" employed more rigorous research methods which enabled him to present vast amounts of information about Shona religious beliefs and practices. He was able to demonstrate the fact that health, illness and medical care systems are not isolated but are integrated into a network of beliefs and values that comprise Shona society. With this kind of knowledge, and in the light of his own practical experience, he felt that he had good grounds for what he was writing about (Gelfand 1968a:1).

Gelfand did not succumb to the temptation of armchair theorisation. Though he applied his own techniques and principles of research, it seems that he had the influence of anthropological orientation from writers like Monica Hunter, Raymond Firth, Godfrey Wilson, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner and other writers whom he had read. Gelfand's works show amateurish ethnography in places but nevertheless his field of research broadened our knowledge about Shona beliefs and cultural practices. He resumed research on old issues such as those of animism and animatism in the light of fresh and objective experience. One of the tasks in this thesis is to try and explore the extent to which the works of Gelfand are of any academic value. It is necessary to discuss the various ways by which we can analyse and sift them in order to attain information that is of academic importance. It is during this later period that Gelfand explored a diversity of issues concerning Shona religious beliefs, cultural practices and

traditional medicine by utilising several methods of research which should be contrasted to those that I discuss in chapter six of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

GORDON LOYD CHAVUNDUKA

Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of Gordon Loyd Chavunduka's research on some aspects of Shona traditional religion and culture. I discuss Chavunduka's works using him as an example of a Shona reflecting on his own religious and cultural tradition. Chavunduka deserves to be discussed in a thesis of this nature because he is in my view one of the most prominent Shona writers on aspects of Shona culture and religion and has been currently involved in the teaching of Shona cultural and religious aspects. I seek to assess his documentation and record the quality of his contribution to scholarship. One of the objectives of studying him here is to assess and examine the approaches and methods which he used for research so as to relate them to contemporary methodological debates.

It is necessary that we study and examine how Shona writers seek to correct the lop-sided presentations and frequent misrepresentations that have prevailed hitherto. In a way this may enable us to see how they perceive their own culture and religion. In the case of Chavunduka I seek to study his works or sections of his works which describe, analyse or reflect on his interests and personal involvement in research and the historical conditions in which he researched. I also examine how his relations to his informants such as people in his community, traditional healers and patients influenced ways in which he conducted his research. By analysing his works in this way it is possible in the end to clarify the extent to which aspects such as: Chavunduka's religious inclinations, Shona cultural roots, political views and professional commitments influenced his understanding and interpretation of Shona culture and religion.

At the end of the thesis it will be of interest to note the differences between Chavunduka's research methods, analysis and interpretation and those of the non-Shona writers. These approaches and methods of research should be contrasted to those that I discuss in chapter six. With regard to the issue of "Shona" and "non-Shona" writers I discuss later in greater detail that researchers are "insiders" or "outsiders" in ways peculiar to them and these should be identified and described clearly. Using the case of Chavunduka, one would like to see whether there is really anything special about the so-called "insider" researchers. At the end of the chapter one may be able to differentiate, for methodological purposes, the merits and demerits of studying one's own religion and culture. In this thesis I am particularly interested in the research itself rather than the question whether the writer was an "insider" or an "outsider". However, it will be interesting to find out whether this issue determined the quality of Chavunduka's descriptions and interpretations.

Chavunduka was born in Zimbabwe, Manicaland in 1931. He studied at the University of California in Los Angeles, USA, the University of Manchester in England, and was both a student and a lecturer at the University of Rhodesia from 1966 up to 1994. As background information, it is of interest to know that in the early 1970s Chavunduka was trained for three years as a herbalist at a South African school of traditional herbs and divination. We could call Chavunduka a traditional healer, a counterpart to Gelfand who was a medical Western doctor. They each have their own differences that will be clarified at the end of the thesis. Part of the relevant background situation is that since 1980 he has been the president of a 50 000 strong Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers' Association (ZINATHA). Furthermore, he was chairman of the Zimbabwe government traditional medical council. He wrote that his job included the role to promote the practice of traditional medical practitioners and to foster research into, and develop the knowledge of such practice (1991:34). He

also supervised and controlled the practice of traditional medical practitioners (Chavunduka 1978a:32). Part of the context in which he worked is that of working on daily basis with traditional people who acknowledge, e.g. the existence of witches with mysterious powers and charms to cause injury, illness or death. This is also a context in which the people that he deals with, as ZINATHA leader, are disgruntled about the marginalisation of their religion and culture by Christianity and Westernisation. He became Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Rhodesia in 1974-1975. He was the head of department and professor of sociology since 1979 and was the vice chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe from 1992 up to 1996.

Nature of Chavunduka's writings and his major themes

Chavunduka started writing about aspects of Shona culture and Shona traditional religion in the 1970s up to the 1990s. Despite the detrimental political atmosphere during the colonial period, as excerpts from his works shall illustrate, his works did not belong to the "literature of tutelage", that is, of indigenous writers who presented the view that pleased the State, their European mentors or a picture influenced by Christianity. Most of Chavunduka's publications are restricted to themes on Shona traditional medicine, traditional healing and traditional healers.

In studying his many publications my analysis focuses more on Chavunduka's book *Traditional Healer and Shona Patient* and his articles "*Traditional Medicine in Zimbabwe*" and "*ZINATHA: The Organisation of Traditional Medicine in Zimbabwe*". I chose this book because, in it, he presented fairly detailed discussions about both Shona beliefs and practices, and his methods of research.

In his booklet *Social Change in a Shona Ward* Chavunduka explored a demographic profile of villages as well as social

change within them once in every three years. In this booklet, he dealt with themes such as that of patrilineality, rural village administration, village composition and size as well as farming and the land question in relation to Shona culture. He also examined institutions such as marriage and divorce, labour, and the implications of labour migrations.

Chavunduka was chairman and editor of a "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Agricultural Industry to the President of Zimbabwe". In this research, he analysed a number of issues which covered the general overview of agriculture in Zimbabwe and the problems it faced. This included such issues as land occupation and its utilisation in view of the government's land resettlement policies. It also included the issue of employment opportunities in the agricultural industry in view of trends towards labour substitution by mechanisation.

His article, "Traditional Medicine in Zimbabwe: Professional Associations and Government", has themes which relate to the development of African traditional medicine. Chavunduka argued that traditional medicine was as good as Western medicine. Besides these books and articles Chavunduka has also written several booklets on ZINATHA (Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers' Association), for example, on the constitution of ZINATHA and on the registers of traditional healers in which he made inventories of different kinds of diseases which they are able to cure, as well as lists of the contact addresses of these healers (Chavunduka 1980). He has also written a lot on the development of African traditional medicine. In a nutshell, besides writing about African traditional medicine, healing and the well-being of Shona society Chavunduka's research also revolved around themes like that of witchcraft, witches, sorcery. His works seem to articulate beliefs and practices of the colonial and post-colonial Shona communities which have experienced the process of Christianisation. In view of the harsh conditions to which Shona traditional

religion and culture have been subjected by colonisation, [orthodox] Christianity and Western modernisation, Chavunduka seems to write filling a gap and, in a way appears to be defending the culture and religious practices of his people.

In *Traditional Healer and Shona Patient* he professed belief in God and other spiritual beings such as ancestors. As an example he wrote:

The world of the spirits has God (*Mwari*) at the apex of the hierarchy. Lower than God are other spiritual beings such as clan and family ancestral spirits (*midzimu*) who exist in spiritual form and participate in the daily events of the Shona ... (1978a:12).

Parts of his publications imply that Chavunduka believed in witchcraft and sorcery as "real" and "active". Describing the Shona community he wrote that:

there are certain people who are actively involved with the employment of dynamistic powers so as to harm others. This is done in secret by use of harmful medicines so as to cause illness, barrenness or death. The secrecy and unpredictability of sorcery and witchcraft make them the most dreaded negative factor in the life of the Shona community ... When there are problems the diviner (*n'anga*) is consulted so as to find the persons who use harmful medicines, and to restore peace by relevant rituals (1978b:18).

This relates to one of Chavunduka's interesting books entitled *Witches, Witchcraft and the Law in Zimbabwe*. In this book Chavunduka discussed the implications and significance of the Zimbabwean statute called "The Witchcraft Suppression Act" of 1899, in the light of Shona people's beliefs and practices. Discussing "The Witchcraft Suppression Act" Chavunduka argued that this Act was unfair because:

It aims not to punish witches but those individuals who name others as witches. In the Act, witchcraft is referred to as, "so-called witchcraft". Witchcraft is taken as something which has no real existence at all (1986b:7).

Chavunduka further discussed the five groups of persons to whom "the Act" is applicable. He summarised the Act as follows:

Any person who names or indicates any other person as being a witch is guilty of an offence. The second category of persons affected by the act are persons referred to as witch-doctors (*n'anga*). Any person who names or indicates any other person as being a witch and is proved at his trial to be by habit and repute a "witch-doctor" or a "witch-finder" faces a heavy sentence. Thirdly, it is an offence to employ or solicit any other person to name or indicate thieves and other wrong-doers by means of witchcraft. The fourth group of persons affected by the Act are those who claim to have knowledge of witchcraft or of the use of charms. It is an offence to advise someone how to bewitch any person or animal or to supply someone with what the Act calls "pretended means of witchcraft". Lastly any one who on the advice of a "witch-doctor" (*n'anga*) or a "witch-finder" or any person pretending to have knowledge of witchcraft or the use of charms, uses or causes to be put into operation such means or processes as he or she may believe to be calculated to injure any other person or any property, including animals shall be guilty of an offence (Chavunduka 1986b:2-3).

I should mention that in the actual Act, it is stated that a person found guilty of contravening this law is fined five hundred dollars or imprisonment for a period not exceeding seven years or whipping not exceeding thirty six lashes (Chavunduka 1986b:46).

Chavunduka argued that, in the eyes of traditional courts, the 1899 "The Witchcraft Suppression Act" was unjust because it tried to curb the activities of traditional healers (1986b:10). This, he says, forced traditional healers to operate in secret. In turn, this made them appear like nefarious workers so that they became less popular within their communities. Chavunduka further wrote that those traditional healers who were found practising were prosecuted. He says that this treatment made it quite hard to find one in times of need (1986b:14).

This picture could be contrasted with his own views about traditional healers. When I interviewed him he informed me that:

Traditional healers are able to cure complicated diseases such as heart problems (*moyo*), epistaxis (*mhuka*), leprosy

(*mapere*). They are able to deal with mental disorders such as dementia (*kupenga*). They can deal with physical disorders such as swelling legs caused by black magic (*chitsinga*) as well as other complications such as dysmenorrhoea (*jeko*) or epilepsy (*zvipusha*). *N'angas* can solve health problems that are caused by aggrieved spirits (*ngozi*) or mythical spiritual beings (*zvivanda*). Traditional medicine men can protect homes by planting medicated pegs in homesteads (*kupinga musha*). They can exorcise spirits (*kudzinga mamhepo*) and can trap and stop lightning from striking people or their properties (Chavunduka: Interview, University of Zimbabwe 1995).

All this information is also available in his booklet *Registers of Traditional Medical Practitioners* (Chavunduka 1980:2-3,40,76,79). In this interview Chavunduka did not express any doubts about the ability of traditional healers to cure diseases. He expressed his belief that it may be possible for traditional healers to discover the cure for diseases such as AIDS through dreams or power from spiritual possession (Chavunduka 1995:Interview). In *Traditional Healer and Shona Patient* Chavunduka discussed different types of traditional healers and how they became healers. Querying about the way in which traditional healers were viewed, Chavunduka wrote:

Some Christian missionaries castigated the (*n'anga*) in favour of the modern Western hospitals because the (*n'anga*) was conceived of as a death dealing charlatan, a rogue operating in squalid and with mystical means of preventing patients, who would otherwise be treated effectively with scientific drugs in mission hospitals (1978a:78).

He examined traditional healers' different healing systems and also analysed disease and illness among the Shona people in relation to their spiritual beliefs and cosmology. Chavunduka concluded in this book that the Shona traditional healer is indispensable to the Shona community. Chavunduka stated that by writing his works he attempted to fill a gap because he felt that very little information about traditional healers and their medicines as well as the examination of the place of religion and witchcraft in Shona medical practices has been written from a Shona point of view (1978a:1).

Chavunduka's objectives and attitudes

I have briefly surveyed the nature of Chavunduka's works and the types of themes which he favours for research. Now I will try to present a general summary of Chavunduka's attitudes to Shona religion and culture as well as his objectives as indicated in his various works. I will relate these to his cultural background, his professional training as a sociologist as well as to his training as a traditional herbalist.

It has already been noted that, generally, every scholar starts research with some kind of angle of perception. This angle of perception (or some kind of pre-conception) is often subtle, and it is not always easy to detect or to show how it operates. This implies that the question of "objectivity" in academic research is problematic. As is the case with most researchers there is an extent to which Chavunduka's works were influenced by his attitudes to Shona religion and culture.

His attitudes to the object of his study may be defined in two ways. Firstly, as already indicated he was a Shona speaking scholar who also happened to be an "insider" intent on correcting the misrepresentation and misinformation that have done harm to his religion (1978b:29,30). We see that this is a writer who has a rather sympathetic attitude to the religion and culture that he wrote about. Secondly, some of his writings appear to reflect his own strong convictions and personal beliefs about Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices.

However, in his book *Traditional healer and Shona Patient* Chavunduka pointed out that his major objective was to give a balanced view of some aspects of Shona traditional religion in order to satisfy the spiritual needs and intellectual curiosity of his readers (Chavunduka 1978a:Introduction). The

fact that Chavunduka showed concern about the "spiritual needs" of his readers makes him sound as if he was personally involved spiritually, emotionally and intellectually in his research. I should however, state that it is not clear what he meant by "spiritual needs" of his readers, and who his targeted readers were.

One of the factors which motivated Chavunduka to do his research was his feeling that very little had been written on such things as traditional healers, illness and health among the Shona people (1978a:12). Even though some works on the same topic had been written by writers like Gelfand, a Western medical doctor, Chavunduka appeared to discount them as inadequate. He wrote that:

No major work has yet been undertaken to examine the process involved in defining illness, decision making process in the choice of therapy, and the organisation of traditional medical practice (Chavunduka 1978a:9).

Some sections of his writings appear to me as if he wrote as an activist for African culture and traditional religions, particularly for the traditional healers. The Shona community about which Chavunduka was writing was that of a community whose beliefs, practices and thought patterns had been affected and influenced by both Christianity and colonisation. Though Chavunduka did not indicate precisely the historical context of the community that he was describing, from his works, it appears for me that he wrote about the Shona of his time of research, that is, the Shona of the 1970s and 1980s. He informed us that:

... many Shona people are ashamed of revealing their connections with the traditional healers because of the stigma attached to traditional treatment (Chavunduka 1978a:31).

Chavunduka was illustrating the psychological damage and the attitudes of some Shona to their own religion and culture as a result of what was done by the early missionaries and colonial administrators. Chavunduka wrote that for a long time these early Europeans propagandised in favour of scientific medicine

and despised Shona practices (1991:29). Under these circumstances, Chavunduka relates that he encountered cases where, when he interviewed the Shona about their traditional culture, these informants avoided embarrassing themselves by lying to him. He gave an example of a sick informant who offered various rationalisations to explain why she, as a Christian, would not consult traditional healers. A few days later, however, he met her at a traditional practitioner's place of healing. Later when confidence had been established between them, she agreed that there was nothing wrong with consulting both traditional and scientific medical practitioners (Chavunduka 1978a:31). From his initial formal questions alone, he would never have gained a full understanding of her illness behaviour.

Approaches and methods used by Chavunduka

Chavunduka employed several approaches in his research. Most of the information discussed here is from his book, *Traditional healer and Shona Patient*, where he discussed substantially his methodological perspective. Firstly, he obtained some of his information from secondary sources (1978a:5; 1991:32). He often quoted from some of the works written by the early missionary writers so as to illustrate both the positive and the negative impact of Christianity and missionary education on African traditional beliefs and practices (Chavunduka 1978a:31). At times he quoted from sociologists and anthropologists like Emile Durkheim, Michael Gelfand, Michael Bourdillon and others (1978a:22,34,40).

Besides reading from books, Chavunduka also informed us that he obtained some of his information through fieldwork research which he did in the rural areas of Manicaland province (1978a:30; 1979:5). Chavunduka stated in some of his publications that he had to attend many more rituals than he would normally attend, took careful notice of who was doing or saying what, took discrete notes and wrote down most of the

things which he observed. In one of his works he explained that:

The data were obtained by systematical observation and from interviews ... (Chavunduka 1986a:84).

In his research about the process involved in defining illness, the decision making process in the choice of therapy, and the operation of traditional medical practice he wrote that he:

carefully observed individual behaviours of the studied patients. While traditional ideas, customs and beliefs concerning causation and treatment of disease are taken into consideration, it seems to me that conditions under which these ideas, beliefs and customs become operative must be considered (1978a:27).

In this case Chavunduka used a perspective which views illness behaviour within an adoptive framework. Thus he traced illness behaviour in relation to community reactions to the ill person and the environment.

The example I have presented already about the girl that for some weeks concealed information from Chavunduka until after confidence had been established between them shows that Chavunduka would not have attained a proper understanding of the beliefs and practices of this girl at his first encounter and through his initial formal questions alone (Chavunduka 1978a:31). Chavunduka also wrote that:

Information relating to people who were actually sick during the time of the study took a long time to collect. At first a long time was taken to establish rapport with the sick individual and his social group (1978a:32).

It is therefore useful for researchers to utilise proper and relevant approaches in order to attain a better understanding of African traditional religions. I will further discuss Chavunduka's approaches in chapter seven when I relate it to my chapter six discussions of methodological approaches in the study of religion. He also followed sociological research models by such scholars as Suchman, Machanic, Gould etc. These

writers tried to deal with the "reality" which the people involved create by the sick people's interpretation of their illness in terms of how they act "so as to achieve a full sociological understanding of the phenomenon they sought to explain" (1978a:28).

In his analysis of illness among the Shona people Chavunduka stated that he tried to make use of approaches used by the sociologist Blumer (1962:188) who argued that:

since people act by interpreting the situation in which they find themselves and then adjust their behaviour in such a way as to deal with the situation, we must take the view point of the person whose behaviour we are interested in, and catch [understand] the process of interpretation in which they construct their actions (1978a:29).

Describing the research method that Blumer says may help the researcher to understand, Chavunduka further explained that the "researcher" should act "as if" he or she were the "researched". Chavunduka wrote that:

To catch the process [to understand] the student must take the role of the acting unit whose behaviour he is studying. Since the interpretation is being made by the acting unit in terms of objects designated and appraised, meanings acquired, and decisions made, the process has to be seen from the acting unit (1978a:29).

Further discussing this method of research Chavunduka pointed out that:

To try to catch the interpretive process by remaining aloof as the so-called "objective observer" and refusing to take the role of the acting unit is to risk the worst kind of subjectivism (1978a:29).

He stated that the objective observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his own surmises in place of catching the process as it occurs in the experience of the acting unit which uses it.

In my view Chavunduka made use of this methodological approach by going out into the field (1978a:28) where he actually acted and played the role of a traditional healer whose "reality" he presented in his publications. I should state that this procedure is similar yet different from the methodological approaches such as "methodological conversion" that I will discuss in chapter six.

As part of his field procedure Chavunduka wrote that the primary source of his data has been the case histories of the sick people from a sample population of Highfield township, Salisbury/ Rhodesia, and the interviews with various types of medical practitioners who were consulted by the patients in the study. In many cases the research assistant and he were present at the consultation (1978a:29).

Chavunduka also informed us that from his fieldwork experience, he learnt that:

... many Shona resent investigators who collect data for strictly theoretical purposes without an intrinsic interest either in the welfare of the Shona culture or in the welfare of the Shona people (Chavunduka 1978a:32).

This quotation introduces a significant point in the study of African traditional religious phenomena. Scholars need to be aware of the fact that in most cases, the communities that they study are interested in the practical results of the research. He had many contacts who freely furnished him with the information which he was gathering partly because of his ethnicity and because he was known as an activist who, if given inside information, might later help them to solve some of their problems.

When I entered his office and told him that I wanted to conduct interviews he told me that he was a bit suspicious of people who came to interview traditional healers. He informed me that a lot of "researchers" were sent by European pharmacists and chemists to Africa to secretly tap as much

information as possible about traditional herbs, healing systems and medicines (Chavunduka 1995:Interview). He cited cases where information that had, in his view, been unethically collected from traditional healers was used by some pharmacists in America so as to manufacture important tablets. He said that no acknowledgements or payments were given to the traditional healer in the villages who originally discovered the medicine (Chavunduka 1995:Interview). When he got to know that I was from the Religious Studies Department, I did not have any problem in interviewing him.

Chavunduka also explained that it was much easier for him to do research in his own community. Chavunduka wrote:

A number of factors helped me to gain confidence of the informants. Firstly, I was well known in the area both as a sociologist and an African nationalist. Rhodesia was in a state of political tension before and during the time of this study (1978a:31).

In his community "outsiders" were unwelcome and were treated with suspicion. In the quotation Chavunduka seems to be saying that his community quickly trusted him and confided their beliefs and activities to him because he belonged to them. One may say that because of the conditions of that time, he therefore was more suitable to study Shona religion and culture so as to produce more valid and better results than other writers.

Another reason why some of the Shona concealed information from "outsider" researchers is discussed by Chavunduka as follows:

... in the field of traditional medicine certain activities tend to be kept hidden from the outsiders by those involved (Chavunduka 1978a:31).

Chavunduka seems to imply that, in cases that involve conducting research about private cults, it is the "insiders", like himself who are best suited to describe and explain what happens in these cults. Though it need not always be the case,

this might be so because such people as him are well-equipped conceptually and linguistically, and furthermore, the fact that they belong to these private cults makes the collecting of information much easier than it would be for the "outsider" researchers.

Exploiting this privilege of belonging to this community, Chavunduka employed the method of participant observation (1978a:30). He attended many rituals; he participated in them and in some cases gave these Shona participants advice about certain procedures during the ritual (1978a:31). It is particularly important to note that participant observation facilitated a development of a great interest in healing such that Chavunduka started to train as a herbalist himself. He described his training to become a traditional healer:

Towards the end of the study I became a student of traditional medicine and was attached to one of the healers in the study with whom I served my apprenticeship (Chavunduka 1978a:32).

That he was no longer just a participant observer, but a "believer" and a traditional healer appear to have been significant for him because he developed a fresh perception and attitude to Shona traditional religion. This is quite significant in this discussion because it has a bearing to theological approaches that I discuss in chapter six.

Even though he was now carrying out his research from "inside" the "private healing cult" Chavunduka discovered how hard it was to extract information from people. He warned that sociological tools of research do not work in all situations:

Certain kinds of data can not be gained through survey techniques and formal questionnaires. This is particularly true in the field of traditional medicine ... (Chavunduka 1978a:31).

Chavunduka's remarks show that his training to become a traditional healer had far reaching implications for his method of collecting and interpreting information. As a fellow

herbalist, he may have had access to more confidential data especially from his tutor-herbalist than he might have had as an ordinary Shona scholar or outsider researcher. If he were not a trainee-herbalist, his informants would have treated him with suspicion and would not furnish him with the kind of information that is in some of his works (1980:1-105). The fact that he was a member of a certain traditional "closed cult" enabled him to record "private information" easily and carefully in a way which an "outsider" to this cult would not be able to do.

This implies that Chavunduka's informants who were traditional healers volunteered information partly because they knew him to belong to their community. Chavunduka further stated that he:

was an active member of a nationalist political party and commented on political issues from time to time both at public meetings and in newspapers (1978a:31).

It is interesting that he stated that this helped him to obtain information about his research on Shona traditional culture. He stated that when he did research the situation was such that the community in which he conducted interviews was generally on guard against Europeans or "outsiders" who were always suspected to be plain-clothes African detectives and government informers (1978a:31). Thus it would have been hard for a person from outside that community to conduct research in this area at that time.

Chavunduka also wrote that:

Another fact which helped me gain confidence of both the sick individuals and healers was that I made every effort to demonstrate that I was genuinely interested in their health problems (1978a:32) ... Other assets I had were a car and money to spend. I had the feeling that some informants invited me to accompany them to traditional practitioners and hospitals mainly because they wanted to make use of my car. Once I provided transport, in this way I became part of the group and was a friend (1978a:32).

Chavunduka related this as one of the tactics that he used so as to have easy access to the information that he wanted. One advantage of having the company of these friends with whom he went to conduct interviews was that they taught him how to carefully observe the appropriate Shona social protocol (1978a:32).

Therefore the study of one's own community is easier, less expensive emotionally and technically, and therefore more advantageous than that conducted by an "outsider". The other fact is that the translation process, both at the linguistic level, at the conceptual level and at the cognitive level may not be as complicated or difficult as that done by a non-Shona researcher. It is conceivable that Chavunduka had less difficulty with regards to the grasp, interpretation and analysis of Shona religious concepts and paralinguistic expressions. One could further say that Chavunduka had fewer problems in decoding the religious meanings which are encoded and veiled in his "people's culture".

I should hasten to clarify that there is a difference between being a Shona and being an "insider". Not all Shona people are "insiders". At the same time, non-Shona researchers who have been immersed for years in fieldwork research or who grew up in the Shona community are sometimes as competent to speak Shona language or understand other forms of expression as the Shona. It is therefore nonsensical to ignore the fact that scholars like Jan Platvoet among the Akan, Michael Bourdillon among the Shona and Victor Turner among the Ndembu are some of the so-called "outsider" researchers who were able to do very good research in these communities.

It was because of his academic training as a sociologist that Chavunduka applied social-scientific methods of research. For example in the preface of his research about Shona urban courts he wrote:

This is also a sociological study. The disputes that people bring to a court of law can be an important indication of the stresses and strains of social life (1979:preface).

In this book Chavunduka constantly reminds the reader that the study is mainly sociological. This sociological angle is also found in his other publications. As an example he wrote:

In gathering the material for the study I have used the sequential model for individual behaviour (Chavunduka 1978a:30).

This method of gathering, analysing and assessing information individually, according to its varieties and contexts is useful in research in as much as it is helpful in avoiding generalisations. Chavunduka also used questionnaires for his research. Furthermore, he conducted personal interviews and made use of research assistants. From this fieldwork experience he wrote that:

My research assistant and I obtained data by systematical observation and from interviews. Sampling was by random digits ... I numbered serially all houses in all three sections of townships, and then drew them from the corresponding table of random digits as many different numbers as there were cases to be included in the sample. The number of people to be interviewed were limited to 200 so as to gain depth of insight (1978a:30).

Chavunduka described in detail the class, the living conditions as well as the health conditions of people whom he interviewed. The interviews were held in the homes of the individual interviewees so as to create a free atmosphere of trust and dialogue. In some cases the interviewees were led to talk informally about their illness after first making note of specific data which could be taken down directly such as name, occupation, education, religion, etc. (1978a:32). Chavunduka also states that short interviews and numerous informal contacts were arranged with the other persons in the family or neighbours or workmates so as to supplement the information. Later a research assistant spent about a week with the healers consulted by the patients and recorded their daily activities.

This kind of methodological approach enabled him to collect as much information as possible from both the sick people and the traditional healers. Chavunduka also made use of questionnaires that were administered to interviewees with whom he had a wide-ranging conversation.

Giving us more information regarding his research method and procedures, Chavunduka wrote that his interviewees talked to him informally about their problems only after he had established a good rapport with them. He did so, so that in this length of time informants would gain a sense of security and confidence and would volunteer information normally withheld under more transient circumstances (Chavunduka 1978a:33).

One of the problems which restricts a full-scale analysis and evaluation of some of Chavunduka's interpretations and conclusions is that he did not present enough information regarding how these specific people qualified to be his informants and research assistants. For example at one time he wrote:

One healer who claims to have been taken under the sea by a mermaid told me that ... (Chavunduka 1978a:45).

Some readers would be interested in knowing who this healer was, how old he was, whether he had formal training to become a healer, whether he was an urban or rural dweller, etc. This kind of information is helpful for those wanting to appreciate the validity of information and conclusions on the basis of where the information actually came from. It is only in a few cases that we find Chavunduka informing readers about names of his informants, for example, in one case he wrote:

I was assisted in gathering the material by Mr. P. Katandawa and Mr. W. Hlazo, research assistants at the department of sociology of the University College of Rhodesia (Chavunduka 1970:vii).

It would have been helpful if Chavunduka had presented his readers with all the relevant information about his informants and assistants, for example their age, gender, their education, religious orientation, occupation, their training, etc. This is an important and relevant issue in research and methodology debates because some of the types of research assistants and informants are able to give much more valid information than others.

Chavunduka's descriptions and language

Unlike the case with other writers I have described so far, in Chavunduka's works I did not come across any elaborate descriptions of Shona rituals or Shona myths. In most of his publications Chavunduka mainly dealt with descriptions of the activities of Shona traditional healers and the development of their organisation. I therefore try to extract some of his descriptions and analysis that relate to my interests in this thesis.

Most of Chavunduka's books and articles are presented in admirably lucid language which can be easily understood by ordinary readers. As a social scientist, the writer seemed to avoid sophisticated and highly technical social-scientific language which is often above the heads of ordinary readers. It appears that he had very few translation problems of language and religio-cultural concepts from Shona to English. Most of the descriptive names that he used are value free and show no prejudice. In cases where there were translation problems Chavunduka used Shona words with their nearest English equivalents in brackets. As an example, unlike Gelfand or the Eurocentrics, the Shona word "n'anga" he translated as "herbalist" and next to it wrote words such as "diviner, pharmacist, diviner-therapeutics" in brackets (Chavunduka 1978b:29,34). Chavunduka (1980) did a great deal of translation activity particularly in cases where he furnished

his readers with Shona names of diseases which the traditional healers claim they can cure.

Chavunduka's descriptions in many cases tried to correct the various distortions which he said had been made by earlier writers. As an example, in one of his books he wrote that:

... colonial government and early missionaries despised and therefore attempted for many years to discourage the use of traditional medicine ... did not know that traditional medicines are effective in curing many illnesses ... (Chavunduka 1978b:30).

He blamed the colonial situation which he said did not respect, and in some cases did not allow, Shona traditional beliefs and practices to flourish. Chavunduka attempted to do substantive research which he thought lacking in the works of the "early writers". This includes his descriptions about Shona society, living conditions, Shona patients and how they react to illness. Unlike the other writers studied here, Chavunduka's descriptions were enriched, and substantiated by diagrammatic, pictorial and statistical presentations.

One of the weaknesses in Chavunduka's descriptions is that they are sometimes brief and thin. As an example, in his book *Traditional healer and Shona Patient* he wrote a scant report describing how people get possessed by spirits which are believed to cause witchcraft. In this description, Chavunduka did not go into great details about the rituals which are done before possession, and did not speak about the kinds of songs sung in order for a person to become possessed (1978a). As a reader I would have liked to read about this kind of ritual. I would have liked to know the various symbols that are used in these rituals, as well as how the people interpret them. Though he was not really obliged to give his readers all this information, he left the readers craving for more information and wondering about how exactly the ritual is conducted and its significance to the Shona.

An example of how he described traditional healers and taboos that relate to their works is as follows:

In order to maintain his knowledge and skills the traditional healer is usually required by the spirit that possesses him to exercise certain taboos and observe certain practices. These restrictions vary from healer to healer. In the present study some healers mentioned the restrictions placed on them (sometimes more than one taboo). These are: not to take scientific medicine, not to have sexual intercourse with prostitutes, not to eat fish, not to drink beer, not to eat chicken, not to eat tinned food, not to eat onions, not to eat wild animals, not to bewitch anyone, not to perform abortion ... (1978a:22).

Such descriptions from Chavunduka's accounts are inadequate because he does not give further information about the types of traditional healers who observe these taboos. Furthermore, he does not explain in detail why these practitioners observe especially these particular taboos. In these descriptions Chavunduka does not discuss in detail the implications of these healers' observation of these taboos to themselves or to the communities in which they work.

In order for Chavunduka to describe the ways in which traditional healers become practitioners he interviewed many traditional healers. Some of them were possessed by their ancestors, others by alien spirits and others underwent apprenticeship (1991:32-34). In these descriptions the reader comes across such descriptions as:

There is another way by which a healer may qualify. This is by living in a river bed or pool. One healer who claims to have qualified in this way told me that one afternoon while standing near a pool, a hidden force pulled him into the water. He sank to the bottom of the pool and remained there for two days. At the bottom of the pool he found himself in a village peopled with spirits. He was told by the spirits that he would become a healer from that time. He has been practising medicine since then ... (1978a:33).

In these descriptions the reader would like to be presented with more details about this kind of training. It is not explained how this person got the skills to heal people after

two days. The writer did not clarify what this "hidden force" was - a postulated mermaid spirit or gravitational force? One question to be asked is about how critical and analytical Chavunduka's writings are.

In his booklet *Register of Traditional Medical Practitioners of Zimbabwe* Chavunduka described the different types of traditional healers as follows:

Traditional medical practitioners are of three main types in terms of qualifications and practice. Firstly, there are spirit mediums (SM). These are concerned with the cause of illness or other social problems. They do not handle medicines. In the second group are those traditional medical practitioners who treat the patients using medicines (TPM). The third group consists of those who carry out divination as well as treat patients (TMP, SM). Within each branch there are specialists of various kinds. Another important point is that traditional healers deal not only with medical problems but also with a wide range of social problems as well. Much of the healer's time is spent trying to help people to come to terms with their social problems (1981:1).

After this brief description the rest of Chavunduka's booklet presents lists of names, contact addresses and types of diseases that are cured by traditional healers. My view is that such a presentation is supposed to furnish the reader with adequate information about the function of these different types of traditional practitioners. The description does not furnish the reader with enough information about these three different categories of traditional medical practitioners. There is need to clearly define the boundaries which distinguish the three groups from each other.

Chavunduka's categories do not include the practitioners who function by using oracles, dreams, etc.

The quotation above seems to limit traditional healers' functions to sociological perspectives. Rather than being concerned with "cases of illness or other social problems" recent research shows that spirit mediums have many other roles to play such as religious and political roles (Lan 1985:217).

In writing about disease and traditional healing in Shona communities Chavunduka explained that he collected the history of each of the patients and the diseases that they suffered. It is a pity that he did not actually present some of these histories to the readers. In order for a researcher to produce thorough analysis and serious interpretive work, reasonably adequate and detailed descriptions are a necessity. In chapter seven I elaborate on the fact that researchers need to produce adequate and good description in order for them to carry out thorough interpretations.

The other problem which relates to Chavunduka's descriptions is that of factual inaccuracy as well as misconceptions on some issues. As an example, Chavunduka was inaccurate in his usage of the word "worship" with reference to ancestors. Chavunduka wrote that "Worshipping one's ancestors was at that time regarded as a sin" (Chavunduka 1978b:30). Though Chavunduka was not discussing the issue of "worship" as a topic on its own and in great detail, my point is that in trying to ameliorate the errors of the early writers contemporary researchers need to highlight problematic terminology and recast it wherever is possible. In this case Chavunduka appears to me not to have done so. Writers such as Berglund and Westerlund refute that ancestors are worshipped because libations do not end at the level of family rites of libation and food offerings. They are deeper, comprehensive and extend to the greatest spiritual being who is God (Westerlund 1985:29).

Chavunduka's descriptions are generally fair in the sense that they are not biased and do not distort Shona beliefs and practices. The main weakness is that he did not give enough details as well as the information concerning the historical periods which he wrote about. It is implied that Chavunduka dealt with the Shona as he saw them in the present time. Most of Chavunduka's works do not clearly show whether there were any developments and changes about Shona beliefs and practices

through the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial periods. In some of his descriptions, Chavunduka did not clarify precisely which Shona dialect group he was writing about. In some cases he shifted imperceptibly from Shona Korekore religious concepts to African traditional religious concepts in general without due attention.

The fact that Chavunduka wrote that African traditional healers and African traditional medicines are good, true and real, for me, suggests that his descriptions were sometimes biased in favour of the object of his study. Reviewing how African traditional religion has been presented Chavunduka wrote that there is nothing wrong with traditional religion (Chavunduka 1978b:41). One should take into consideration the fact that this was said in a context where he was researching the religious beliefs and cultural practices of his own people. In view of the stigmatisation that had been attached to these religious beliefs, Chavunduka was probably therefore reacting to this negative depiction by describing it as without flaws. In analysing works by African writers on certain African traditional issues we should try to understand, where necessary, the emotional make-up of these writers (or of the described community) and their reaction or relation to the outside world.

It is difficult to establish with certainty whether such interpretive statements are from Chavunduka as a "researcher" or from him as a "believer". His descriptions and analysis particularly where he dealt with traditional healing show that he personally believed that witchcraft and sorcery truly exist; they are real and the problems which they cause are real.

Recently Chavunduka as leader of the ZINATHA has been lobbying for the amendment of the law so that witches and sorcerers may be tried in modern courts. He has strong support from the rural folk and chiefs, but has faced massive opposition from

the judiciary, churches and academics who accuse the ZINATHA for dragging the modern society backwards. Chavunduka was quoted by Lizwe Moyo as arguing that:

People should remove the European definition and religious naivete about witchcraft. It is an African art that even modern science has not understood because its practice is meant to confuse society (Mail & Guardian 1997).

The newspaper further states that the major points of amendment asked by Chavunduka include acknowledgment of the fact that witchcraft exists, that the act must punish witches through the courts and that the law must not harass traditional healers who sniff out witches as long as they are able to prove their case. Though people such as supreme court judge, Justice McNally, have dismissed the ZINATHA initiative as "misguided, oblique and ineffective", Chavunduka says that once the law is changed, ZINATHA and traditional experts are willing to interpret African understanding of the practice and advise judiciary (Moyo 1997:Mail & Guardian).

It is clear that Chavunduka expressed his views in a non-academic forum. The question is, does it make a difference that, here, Chavunduka's views are expressed in non-academic forum? In this case, though Chavunduka raises this issue with the government, he also happens to discuss the reality of witches in some of his books. This understanding and approach relates to the problem of "boundary hopping", that is, disregarding the boundary between the testable and the non-testable reality. In some of Chavunduka's works he shifts imperceptibly from witchcraft beliefs to the "reality" of witches. I will expound on this in chapter seven.

In Chavunduka's descriptions the reader comes across such statements as:

It is rare for an individual to refuse to accept a healing spirit. One reason for this is that the spirit may continue to worry the individual throughout his life although a few healers can dispel the spirit ... (1978a:21).

The author writes in a way that implies that he believes that there are spirits and that these spirits can actually be dispelled by traditional healers. Thus the question becomes that of how to differentiate between the writer as a "believer" and the writer as a critical scholar. Chavunduka described the function of African traditional healers in the following manner:

In traditional medical practice, too much of the healer's time is spent trying to help people to come to terms with their social problems. In Shona society the traditional healer is regarded not only as a medicine-man but also as a religious consultant, a legal and political advisor, a police detective, a marriage counsellor, and a social worker (1978a:19).

Chavunduka further wrote that traditional healers do not abuse their powers because of fear of ancestors. In his discussions about this institution, he does not mention that in many cases these traditional healers are feared by members of their communities. He does not describe and discuss the aspects that some traditional medical practitioners are sometimes accused of. These include the fact that some of these practitioners are the ones who sometimes prescribe traditional rituals that involve such things as incest, ritual murder, etc. In daily newspapers we read of people who take some traditional healers to legal courts accusing them of rape, incest or murder. In view of these cases one may argue that Chavunduka presents the reader only with one side of the story.

Unlike the "early Gelfand", Chavunduka saw Western medical systems not as superior to that of Shona traditional healers. He wrote that many colonial government officials and missionaries did not know that:

there was an ethnocentrism, that is, the tendency to like what is familiar and to devalue the strange and the foreign. Ethnocentrism led many early Europeans to regard those who failed to act in accord to their own practices as being ignorant and superstitious. To them, the only medical system that worked was their own ... (1978b:30).

Writing that traditional medicine was suppressed because of economic reasons Chavunduka wrote:

It was the desire on the part of colonial administrators to force Africans everywhere to depend entirely on medicines produced in Western countries. Complete dependence on Western medicines would of course, benefit Western countries and their pharmaceutical companies (1978b:30).

He further wrote that:

Another way of breaking down traditional medical beliefs and practices which was attempted was the building of more mission and government hospitals; again it was hoped that in future these hospitals would prove one of the greatest instruments of breaking down suspicion of the white man and a means of conversion and of keeping in touch with the spiritual life of the church (1978b:30).

These statements for me show Chavunduka's unwavering support of the culture of his people. However, there is no evidence in his descriptions to support the claim that hospitals and schools were primarily built for the reasons he stated. Against this background Chavunduka argued that the persistence of traditional medicine is due to the success of traditional healers in curing a large number of illnesses.

Chavunduka also argued that:

the complaint by the early missionaries and others that traditional healers prevent people from becoming Christians has never been supported by evidence. In fact a large number of traditional healers themselves are Christians. Some are preachers in Christian churches. Membership of the Christian church does not prevent an individual from practising traditional medicine or from participating in religion (1978b:41).

Chavunduka points out very significant issues about the problems of the clashes between African traditional religions and Christianity but does not take the chance to elaborate on the problem in greater detail. To explain this sharp conflict, I stated in chapter one and two how in the early times Christianity rejected all traditional religions as pagan and heathen (Bourdillon 1976a:4; Westerlund 1985:28). Those people

who participated in traditional rituals or shared beliefs about the powers in ancestral spirits were despised. Chavunduka is wrong to say that traditional healers did not prevent people from becoming Christians. Indirectly they did. Very often traditional healers prescribed the performance of ancestral rituals (Mbiti 1969:56; Lan 1985:49,55) and this was contrary to Christian beliefs.

I should also point out that like Gelfand's descriptions of Western health medicine in Rhodesia, Chavunduka's descriptions about the historical developments of traditional medicine in Zimbabwe are quite detailed. He described in detail different kinds of traditional practitioners, the attitudes of the government to traditional medicine, the formation of the ZINATHA, its development and the problems it faces. Part of his description which deals with some of the problems faced by this association is as follows:

There are a number of unresolved issues. Proper registration of all healers is not going to be easy; many are old men and women who are unwilling to travel long distances to register, and some spirit mediums argue that the spirit which they inherited will not allow them to register. Attempts to get Medical Aid Societies to include traditional healers on their list of medical practitioners will also present problems; many do not have bank accounts and banking facilities are not available in rural areas ... (Chavunduka 1978b:42).

Chavunduka describes the development of traditional medicine and the institution of traditional healers in its proper historical perspective and in comprehensive terms. This is an example of cases where Chavunduka's accounts are, in my view, considerably precise and accurate. Chavunduka further presents detailed information about the formation of African traditional hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies in Zimbabwe.

He also describes different types of Shona traditional diviners and healers and the ways in which those who live in rural areas differ from those who work in urban communities. Describing their different behaviours Chavunduka wrote that

their difference is largely due to the difference in the social and demographic features of town and country.

The major difference between the rural and urban communities is the heterogeneity of the towns. In urban areas there is also a great mobility and the population is by and large residentially unstable. On the other hand, rural villages are inhabited by people who are known to each other. Thus there is no real need for a healer to publicise his practice. His reputation depends on the success of his treatments which are generally known in the area. And because rural population is generally stable, rural healers can afford to wait until the patient is fully cured before collecting their fees. Because of these changing social and demographic features in the country healers have now been permitted to use door plates on which their qualifications are indicated. Medical certificates and badges issued by the association are also in common use ... (1978b:39-40).

This is a good description and analysis in as much as it presents a detailed account of the historical development of the institution of traditional healers as well as the dynamics of change according to conditions.

Some Interpretations in Chavunduka's works

Most of Chavunduka's research is centred on Shona traditional medicine. He, however, sometimes described and interpreted the relationship between Western scientific medicines and hospitals. In such cases the reader evidently reads Chavunduka as a researcher seeking to present accurately and interpret the importance of Shona ethnographic materials. His analysis is that whereas the treatment by the Western medical doctors is often focused on the disease, that of traditional healers first interprets the psychology of the patient, the relatives, acquaintances as well as the environment from which the patient originates.

It is important for us to distinguish whether in Chavunduka's works the interpretations are by the Shona people themselves or whether they are his own explanations based on certain academic theories or on his personal experience as a

traditional healer. He, in some places often wrote about Shona symbols, religious objects, and religious places. It is not clear from these writings how the Shona people interpret the significance of these religious and cultural objects and places in their religious context.

Many sections of Chavunduka's works generally contain few interpretations. This is so perhaps because he conceded the fact that in reality the Shona perform rituals to which they are accustomed with little reflection on the meaning of the ritual. In most cases, religious and cultural concepts are a reality which is perceived rather than examined, lived rather than articulated. Perhaps Chavunduka as a Shona researcher writing about his own culture overlooked the need to present the interpretations of the various religious and cultural phenomena which he might possibly have regarded as obvious and commonplace.

Despite the lack of detailed analysis and thorough interpretation of the various religious phenomena, most of Chavunduka's descriptions were probably much closer to "historical reality" than the presentations by many of the other writers on Shona, especially on topics about the development of Shona traditional healing.

In cases where Chavunduka made interpretations, these interpretations seemed to be influenced by two factors. Firstly, in my opinion he wrote from a Shona neo-traditional position in the sense that he propagated for the acknowledgment and advancement of Shona traditional systems in contemporary life, and secondly, from a sociological perspective as seen in some of his sociological interpretations of Shona practices. That Chavunduka worked both as a scholar and as a "believer" appears to have put him in some kind of predicament. This became clearer when he became leader of a private cult of traditional healers. He wrote:

The author was elected president of ZINATHA. Although I was not a practising healer at that time, a number of reasons helped me to gain the leadership of the new association. Since the previous association had failed to unite partly because of rivalry between them, it appears that the voters were now looking for someone who was not controversial ... During the past ten years I had worked among healers as a research worker from the University of Zimbabwe and got to know many of the leaders. *I had demonstrated my respect and keen interests in their work.* Traditional healers at that time also appear to have been looking for an educated leader who knew many of the government leaders and *could therefore fight the political battle for them for legal recognition ...* (Chavunduka 1978b:48).

I have already adumbrated the shortcomings of the "boundary hopping" method. As the president of ZINATHA, it may be argued that he was bound by certain obligations of this association in his writings. As their leader he stood for the rights of traditional healers and had belief in their works. It is most likely that his writings were expected by the members of his association to be written in a way which would influence the outcome of decisions about this association by both the public and the government. The responsibilities and obligations of his position as president of this association bound him to make descriptions, analysis and interpretations with certain angles of vision so as to support principles and ideologies of the association.

His sociological training also seems to have influenced him to perceive some of the things from a sociological angle. Let us examine a few quotations in which he appreciated phenomena in a sociological light. In *A Shona Urban Court* Chavunduka wrote:

Illness is the social entity or status, defined in terms of social function and sickness is the personal reaction of the individual (Chavunduka 1979:26).

The role of a medical practitioner in every society is socially defined (Chavunduka 1979:27).

It is easy to discern the influence of Chavunduka's sociological training from these quotations. These appear to me not to be thought patterns originating from the Shona

people but they rather seem to be Chavunduka's academic interpretations. In *A Shona Urban Court* he stated that this was specifically a sociological study (Chavunduka 1979:5).

In *Traditional Healer and Shona Patient* Chavunduka displayed a concern for sociological dimensions of the phenomena which he was studying:

This study is also largely concerned with cultural and social aspects of illness behaviour and medical practice (Chavunduka 1978a:21).

Rather than dwelling on sociological interpretations about disease and illness, the Shona people in my view, believe that many of the diseases are caused by witches and sorcerers. I think that instead of sticking to the sociological understanding, Chavunduka in this work needed to have further explored other factors apart from sociological ones so as to attain a fuller and multi-angled understanding. Illness is an experience that is liable to be interwoven with all aspects of human life, thus trying to understand it from a sociological perspective may miss the important concerns of the Shona. In chapter six and seven I will explore the methodological processes that may enable researchers to separate clearly, e.g. the sociologist's cognitive process from the concerns fundamental to the cognition of the people being studied. While a direct presentation of the Shona's views may well make the account more readable, the distinction between the Shona's views and Chavunduka's analysis of these views is important.

Concluding remarks

The merits of Chavunduka's works are real. For a start his works were written in attractive prose which is easy to read. In some cases he often collected ample ethnographic detail which he obtained from his fieldwork research as well as from his personal experience as he grew up among the Shona people. I have tried to give examples of cases where parts of his

descriptions were inadequate and cases where they were detailed.

The descriptions from Chavunduka's works show that he made use of several research methodologies which include the use of questionnaires, informal and formal interviews, participant observation, etc. Interestingly as a member of a secret cult he presented not only what he observed but what he stood for. The presentation of information acquired from personal experience is interesting in terms of methodological discussions and theoretical development. In chapter seven I seek to discuss the methodological significance of his approach and methods of research, the extent to which his Shona cultural background and the academic setting influenced his research. It is also necessary to assess the extent to which his working relationship with his informants determined the quality of his research.

I would like to conclude this section by stating that, for me, it appears as if the worth of Chavunduka's writings is less in its analysis and more in its descriptions and exposure of new facts as well as the names and addresses of traditional healers who could be contacted for further research. In chapter seven I critically evaluate Chavunduka's works in view of research methodology issues.

CHAPTER FIVE
MICHAEL FRANCIS BOURDILLON

Introduction

This chapter contains a critical study of Michael Bourdillon's research on Shona religion and culture in view of research methodology development. The discussion proceeds with the examination of the author's Western culture and academic backgrounds, in relation to his works and research methodology development. This chapter also examines the extent to which Bourdillon's sociological interests and concerns influenced both his methods of research and manner of interpretation.

Bourdillon's background and his works

Bourdillon was born in Zambia in 1942 and brought up in Rhodesia. He was educated in Salisbury before going to England to join the Society of Jesus. After studying philosophy in a Jesuit seminary, he went to Oxford University where he read social anthropology and theology. He is currently a non-practising Roman Catholic priest. Upon returning to Rhodesia he studied the religion and culture of the Korekore dialect speaking Shona people.

Bourdillon has written many books on the Shona people and many articles on religion in general. From the early period of his academic career in the mid-seventies, Bourdillon was already deeply concerned both with the recording of facts correctly and accurately, and with their proper interpretation (1976a). He showed a great concern over the need to be less biased and to exercise empathy in the study of African traditional societies.

His works are of relevance to students of sociology, anthropology, religious studies, education, etc. His publications include the issues of: African traditional religion, Shona traditional religion, ancient Israelite

religions, Shona religion and Christianity, religion and politics, and industrial sociology. His initial two year fieldwork experience led to the production of *The Shona Peoples*. Bourdillon is furthermore the editor of *Christianity South of the Zambezi (Volume 2)* and an editor of several journals. He has taught social anthropology at the University of Calabar in Nigeria and is currently Head of Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe where he has been teaching for the past 20 years.

Major themes in Bourdillon's works

In the early period of his academic career Bourdillon attempted to expose the general misconceptions of white Rhodesian writers about their Shona compatriots. He castigated these writers for their weak methods of investigation, biased descriptions, prefabricated interpretations and their "myth making" approach. In *Myths about Africans* (1976a:5), Bourdillon argued that the preconceptions of the "early writers" led to a lot of misinformation and misrepresentation of Shona religion. Bourdillon was conscious of the distortion, superficiality and exaggerations of religious phenomena in the works of some of these "early writers" on the Shona people. About some of these writers, Bourdillon wrote:

Much of the contact was superficial and the written accounts give an exclusively Portuguese point of view which is not very satisfactory for the understanding of the Shona history (1982:4).

Regarding the information provided by some of the British Eurocentrics, Bourdillon argued that:

Accounts of British missionaries, explorers and settlers: while these did not have a Portuguese orientation, they were equally far from providing a Shona history as the Shona themselves saw it and understood it (1982:4).

He polemically challenged some of the ways in which white writers thought about their black countrymen. In addition he lambasted elitist black writers who because of their Western

life styles readily cast some aspersions on African life styles (1976a). Against this background, Bourdillon discussed the role of professional social anthropologists in research.

Besides attacking some of the "early writers" for their negative attitude and biased works, he also castigated the school of thought which idealises the African past. These romanticists, he argued, have an attitude which ignores the conflicts which have always existed within African societies. Bourdillon was thus aware and warned us of the danger of falsification which involves stereotyping. After pointing out the implications of this in the academic study of cultures and religions, Bourdillon therefore tried to achieve a reasonably reliable and balanced view of Shona culture and religion.

Bearing in mind the need to produce accurate, impartial and reliable research, in *The Shona Peoples*, Bourdillon appears to have cautiously and thoroughly grappled with topics dealing with traditional institutions like the ancestral cult, spirit mediums, witchcraft, disease and traditional healing among the contemporary Shona. He also discussed the political environment of Shona life; land use and agricultural extension work, the situation of migrant labourers, the role of chiefs, the administration of the law and the political roles of spirit mediums in earlier times, as well as aspects of these issues in contemporary Shona life.

In my view, Bourdillon's book *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa* was a significant shift from mere ethnographic descriptions and discussions in his book *The Shona Peoples*. *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa* contains more critical discussion both in terms of emphasis and approach. In this book, Bourdillon shifted from a focused study of the Shona people to an overview of African traditional religions. He explored various issues which include: the relationships within ritual structure, the power of symbols, ancestral cults, spirit possession, traditional religion and ecology.

Bourdillon also discussed the degree to which believers' ideologies support social structures and the extent to which these ideas help to change the structures of the society. His approach was clearly and emphatically sociological and as such religion was discussed mainly as a social issue. It would be interesting to note where and how sociological thought patterns influenced Bourdillon's descriptions, analyses and interpretations. Of interest to explore would be whether he tied himself only to the sociological and functional interpretations and if so, how this was detrimental to research.

Bourdillon's book, *Where are the Ancestors? Changing Culture in Zimbabwe*, is even more different. Here he took a novel approach to both the format of presentation and the analysis. He presented his information dramatically in a thriller or storybook format. Themes dealt with in this book included: families and kinship, witchcraft and conflict, divination, traditional healing and that of the ancestral cult. He looked at these issues in order to find out whether they make any sense in the contemporary Shona world. He also deals with problems of urbanisation such as homelessness, labour migration, poverty and prostitution (1993b).

Bourdillon has also produced many journal articles most of which I did not include in the bibliography because they deal with other religions such as Christianity, and therefore do not directly relate to my discussions here. Some of the journal publications that I included here deal with themes like: disease and sickness, religious practitioners and healing, religion and ethics, manipulation of myth, authority and the politics of change, Christianity and wealth, sacrifice, religion and symbolism.

In most of his works, Bourdillon appears to be saying that although some of these traditional beliefs and practices may not make sense to "outsiders" and to non-believers, they

however influence the lives of the Shona people. He therefore said that scholars should carefully listen to, observe and examine what the people do and say.

Bourdillon's interests and objectives

Bourdillon's documentations reflect that he has a variety of interests and concerns as a researcher. He has a protracted concern for the need to employ proper methods of collecting information, analysis and interpretation in the academic study of Shona traditional religion.

Bourdillon's aims and objectives, as stated in *Myths About Africans: Myth Making in Rhodesia*, were mainly to discuss some of the misconceptions that white Rhodesian writers commonly held about Shona culture, religion and society. After having critically examined some of the literature by various "early writers" Bourdillon argued that most of this literature examined was:

... partly misleading, particularly in its emphasis, and some people are misled by preconceptions, often subconscious preconceptions of what they wish or expect to find (1976a:5).

He further stated that some of the researchers because of their approaches and methods of research were:

misled by misconceptions of Africans themselves about how their society works in practice (1976a:5).

This is so, for example, in matters such as witchcraft fears and sorcery beliefs where these issues are in most cases held as a secret. I should therefore comment that the emic approach (an emic point of view is the perception of the "actor". This is explained in detail at the end of chapter six) should not always be taken as the only appropriate approach and should not be regarded as the final word in the study of religions. Bourdillon argued in his booklet that the stereotype presented by the "early writers" does not correspond with the Shona

people with whom he is familiar, that is, neither the tribesmen nor his colleagues in the university. Bourdillon wrote that the intention and motives of some of these writers were not those of presenting an accurate account of the Shona. Their goal was that of writing accounts that would serve as a charter for values which would rationalise the privileged position of whites, thereby maintaining the structures of the society (1976a:6).

Bourdillon stated clearly that one of his objectives was to alert readers to the dangers and pitfalls of research in the academic study of Shona culture and religion, as well as that of foreign cultures in general. At the end of his analysis of the works of some "early writers" on Shona culture and religion, Bourdillon argued that the question of whether a "white man" [an outsider] can understand an "African" is tricky, and evokes misleading answers. His argument was that anyone can study any phenomena accurately and thoroughly as long as the right attitude, approach and right tools are used for the particular study.

The problems besetting the documentation by the "early writers" primarily stem from partiality; in the sense that, on the one hand the works consisted of partial descriptions, and on the other hand they did not incorporate the whole truth. Bourdillon argued that some of these "early writers" did not consult the people about the information which they collected and therefore the reports became too generalised and deficient to be able to represent a full picture of Shona traditional religion. Rather than aim to produce new facts out of research, these researchers appear to have aimed to vindicate their home brewed theories and preconceptions.

Some of these writers occasionally sought to support the government, and from time to time the government employed persons who had done research in anthropology so as to obtain "reliable" information. This information was, in turn, used to

support various forms of suppression (1976a:17,28). Arguing against writers like Magubane, who have suggested that the early professional anthropologists were responsible, albeit unwittingly, for the distortion or for the inaccurate presentation of information, Bourdillon contended that, in practice, Rhodesian professional social anthropologists like himself and C.J. Mitchell explicitly and repeatedly tried to expose elements of myth-making, distortion and inaccuracy in the works of these writers (1976a:21,28). Thus the aims and goals of Bourdillon's researches were not to support the political status quo but to expose errors of fact.

In the foreword to *The Shona Peoples*, Chavunduka expressed an admiration for Bourdillon's approach which enabled him to depict a competent picture of Shona society:

I have always been impressed both by the great pains he (Bourdillon) took to ensure that he has correctly recorded the facts, and by his sympathy towards deep understanding of the men, women and children who are the subject of this book (1982:ix).

In the preface of this book Bourdillon stated that his aim was that of describing how the Shona live and not the ideas and ideals in the minds of policy makers (1982:xii). He further mentioned that his approach followed in the tradition of social anthropology which aims to see and understand the inner man rather than simply describe outer curiosities (1982:x).

Bourdillon's attitudes towards the object of study

Many scholars would agree that one of the requirements for reliable and accurate research conclusions is to make sure that the researcher has an appropriate attitude towards the object of study. A suitable attitude in research is one in which there are no suspicions between the interviewees and the researcher. Researchers should forego prejudiced and biased attitudes to the object of study. Such an atmosphere establishes general goodwill among the interviewer and

respondents. Accordingly, Bourdillon befriended his interpreters as well as his students and colleagues with whom he worked at the university. This created an amenable atmosphere which was a necessary starting point towards a better understanding of the Shona.

During his fieldwork, Bourdillon shared both the hardships and the cheerfulness of his Mtoko and Korekore hosts. His living with them for over two and a half years defused any of the suspicions which they could have had about him as an "outsider". Living with the Shona people made it possible for him to gain better insights into their cultural consciousness. But one of the methodological cruxes in participant observation was: to be a participant and to remain an observer; to become an accepted "insider", and to remain a relative "outsider"! Bourdillon's understanding of Shona religion and culture may be said to be unbiased and fairly accurate partly because he had an attitude free from strong preconceptions and prejudices against their religion and culture. In looking at the Korekore with humanness and not necessarily a complicated academic stance, he aimed to understand the Shona empathetically without endeavouring to prove academic theories.

Fieldwork and methods of obtaining information

Let us analyse Bourdillon's fieldwork first by looking at his book *The Shona Peoples* which is based on his fieldwork research among the Shona of the Mtoko area in 1969. He stayed with the Korekore people of that area for a period of over two and a half years. This fieldwork experience enabled him to carefully observe, understand, record and examine Shona religious thought patterns, cultural practices as well as the interpretations of their ideas, symbols and practices. Some of his descriptions bear testimony to eyewitness reporting:

I once attended two lengthy night sessions organised to initiate a new host before the husband and the kin of the

initiated decided that the diviner who had prescribed the initiation ceremony must have been wrong (Bourdillon 1982:158).

It was during his fieldwork research that Bourdillon learnt with surprise that some of the Shona people could not give reliable details about the significance and meanings of some of their phenomena while others were utterly unaware of the differences between the beliefs of the Shona living in different localities. This was because, as I discussed in chapter one, the Shona people have a basic cultural and linguistic similarity which unites them as a group. They find themselves readily able to fit within their various dialectical groupings (Karanga, Manyika, Zezuru, Ndau and Korekore), hardly noticing significant differences in beliefs and social organisation. This often makes it difficult for researchers to trace accurately the historical origin and developments of some religious beliefs or practices. Secondly, because "meanings" are sometimes "imported" from other Shona communities and remain submerged, ordinary Shona ritual actors sometimes instinctively act without reflecting on why certain things are done. Thus, one can, once again, argue that the *emic* method cannot be the definitive statement in the study of religious phenomena.

Bourdillon employed several methods to obtain information, analyse and interpret it. Though he appropriated descriptions from other writers like Michael Gelfand, Valerie Moller and Gordon Chavunduka (1982:6, 166, 218, 250, 269) he also used informants and made firsthand or eyewitness descriptions. During his fieldwork he made extensive use of the participant observation method. By taking part in Korekore community's daily life, Bourdillon was able to observe and participate in rituals, and record most of the ritual proceedings. Joining storytelling sessions in the evenings enabled him to get more information from the people about themselves.

Bourdillon (1982) was aware of the problems and weaknesses of relying on oral tradition. He said that most of these stories were normally recounted only for a specific purpose and survived only as long as people continued to maintain an interest in the subject. A corollary to this is that informants recited to him only those aspects of their *oral tradition* which served their own purposes or which aroused their interests because of specific contemporary situations. Through *informal and unstructured interviews* Bourdillon obtained information about the history and practices of a certain chieftaincy in the area. His research became easier because the dispute over chiefly succession made some members of different houses readily recount those aspects of their traditional history which supported their own claims to the chieftaincy. To avert problems of misinformation or of one-sided information, Bourdillon consulted all the families involved in the chieftain dispute. It was only by fitting together the accounts of all the interviewed informants that he was able to put together the historical coherence of the entire story. Although this method is useful for accuracy, it involves a retrospective procedure of collecting information which can be a hectic and tiring process.

Research and informants

Bourdillon obtained most of his information from the Shona people themselves. I have hinted at the fact that Bourdillon was aware that among the interviewees there are different kinds of informants. He observed that, like any society, the Shona society contains all types of people: dreamers, pragmatists, conservatives, cynics, superstitious traditionalists, individualists, progressives, good people and bad people (1976a:x). This observation is a warning that it is possible that a researcher may come across all these informants, some being able to give more or better information than others. Bourdillon wrote that some of his informants twisted the information that they supplied him with according

to their personal interests at that time. He also related cases where some of his informants were simply ignorant of the meanings of certain aspects of their religion (1982:176). It is important for researchers to be alert to these facts.

Bourdillon did not furnish us with much information about most of his informants. It is therefore difficult to evaluate the quality and the reliability of the information that these people gave to him. In many cases he wrote:

Shona people say that (1982:172) ... Although some say ... on the other hand, an evil herbalist is said to be ... many claim that ... a witch or a sorcerer is believed to be ... (1982:169).

Thus it is generally difficult to assess the quality of Bourdillon's information in relation to the type of informants he consulted. Except in a few cases, Bourdillon rarely presented detailed information about who his informants really were. One example is when he wrote that, "this information comes from conversations with my colleague, Professor G.L. Chavunduka" (1982:187). In such cases it is quite helpful that Chavunduka is clearly identified as one of Bourdillon's informants but I insist that a brief biographical sketch would be of help to those interested in knowing more about the sources of his information. I will discuss the significance of this issue in detail in chapter six.

Primary and secondary sources of information

Unlike some of the writers that I have discussed, Bourdillon did not rely on hearsay information. In *The Shona Peoples*, his major source of information was the Shona people of the Mtoko area. Through his fieldwork experience he had access to primary sources and became an eyewitness reporter of most of the things which he wrote about.

In *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa*, Bourdillon points out that some of the information that he analysed was from his

personal experience and firsthand contact with the Zimbabwean and the Calabar (south east Nigeria) communities. Bourdillon disagrees with approaches that substitute the original, primary sources with hearsay or with secondary information. Primary sources are however not always sufficiently available so *secondary sources* form an important addition.

I have already stated that he conducted interviews with both the rural folk and urban people. Bourdillon (1991:1) however, emphasised the importance of consulting information from other authors. In *The Shona Peoples* he wrote that:

I remain convinced that I have utilized the sources which provide information on my subject, and have presented the information fairly (1982:xiii).

Bourdillon (1976a:24-25) refused to make use of certain types of information from government-controlled sources like newspapers or government circulars because the information from these sources was so opinionated and biased that it was not suitable for academic purposes. He wrote that:

What I am not prepared to do is to use statements of policy as descriptions of practice (1976a:25).

Bourdillon studied the historical background of the Shona people looking, among other sources, at the archaeological studies of places such as the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. He noted that the kind of information archaeology can yield is very limited and needs to be exposed to serious critical analysis (1982:3). I think that such sources are useful if they are subjected to good review and critical analysis regarding questions of context, reliability, accuracy, etc. I will discuss the history methods in greater detail in the next chapter.

In some cases Bourdillon used his own information:

I am relying largely on my own Korekore material in the description of this ceremony (Bourdillon 1982:218).

Bourdillon argued that some of the accounts written by the "Eurocentrics", if carefully analysed, may fill in some of the gaps left by the archaeologists. Some of the information used by Bourdillon came from recent writers like D. Beach, M.L. Daneel and others (1982:6, 274, 287). In his book on Shona traditional religion in the modern setting Bourdillon (1993b) makes use of information from writers such as A.M. Hamutyinei and Planger's analysis of Shona proverbs, and also makes reference to writers such as M. Wilson, R. Horton, V. Turner, etc.

It has been noted in this thesis that appropriating information from "Eurocentrics" whose research methods were weak and were uncritical may imply inheriting the flaws therein. This means that a scholar who uses materials from these writers needs to submit them to critical analysis which Bourdillon did (for example, in his *Myths about Africans*).

Descriptions and language issues

As a non-Shona, one of the problems that Bourdillon was likely to encounter in fieldwork was that of language. Language being the basis of culture, two years of living in an alien community may not have been enough for him to master the Shona language. Bourdillon did not state in his book how he coped with idioms and metaphors which are inextricably tied up with religious and cultural expressions. It was only after my interviews with him that I became aware that he took some lessons in Shona and his Shona was good enough to enable him to understand what was going on (Bourdillon 1995/7/26: Personal communication). If he was utterly ignorant of the Shona language, he would have had serious linguistic and translation problems because most of the elders, especially traditional leaders do not even know how to greet in English, they speak only the Shona Korekore dialect. With a view to seeing whether he is free of the research methodology problems identified in other writers, I will briefly discuss how

Bourdillon dealt with the language and translation problems using one of his descriptions of a ritual.

Bourdillon recorded various descriptions of Shona beliefs, rituals and customary practices some of which include birth rituals, coronation rituals, divination rituals, healing rituals, rituals of cleansing from witchcraft, and funerary rituals.

The following is a description of a ritual that was performed in honour of ancestral spirits (*Doro rekupira midzimu*), which Bourdillon observed among the Korekore of Mount Darwin. I have chosen this ritual simply because I was a participant observer in this kind of ritual among the Duve people in Mberengwa during my own research. I shall compare my findings with those of Bourdillon, and discuss the issues that relate to research and methodological debates.

Case study for comparison

Ritual in Honour of FAMILY SPIRIT ELDERS

The ceremony usually starts the evening before the beer is ready for drinking, when the adult members of the family gather with their senior *muzukuru* (sister's son) to inform the spirit of the ceremony of the morrow and to consecrate to the spirit a pot, or perhaps a small gourd container, of fermenting beer. After sunset the people gather around the shrine in the principal room of the homestead, or in some areas a temporary shrine in the courtyard outside, and salute the spirit by rhythmic clapping of hands. The *muzukuru* or the family head then pours an offering of beer while formally addressing the spirit, announcing that this is the beer brewed in his (the spirit) honour, and saying that he should not ask for more beer but should look after his grandchildren and should refrain from causing trouble in the family. If the family considers that the spirit has been failing in his obligations towards them, the formal address may involve a harangue with shouts of support from attendants. When the libation has been poured and the address has been made, all clap in honour of the spirit and disperse.

During the night, people may dance in honour of the spirit, and young boys and girls may be asked to dance their gay dance through to the morning to keep the spirit

happy. But this depends on local custom and the solemnity of the occasion as practices may vary.

Early next morning a large group of attendants gathers, including more relatives and most neighbours, who come to share millet beer. Again the rites depend on local custom and on how much of the ceremony has been performed the previous evening. Often the small offering of the previous evening is replaced by two large pots of beer, one on the right for the spirit of the family head and one on the left for his principal wife, the grandmother to the senior branch of the family. The spirit's pot is consecrated with a smearing of meal around the top and the living head of the family may place a token offering of snuff tobacco by the beer. Again, attendants gather around to honour the spirit, and a formal address is made to the spirit explaining the ceremony and reminding the spirit of his obligations towards the family. Then the people disperse to the part of the courtyard where the men normally sit and chat.

Further pots of millet beer are brought out and distributed to all who are present. Sometime during the drinking, the senior son-in-law to the family takes the pot of the wife of the spirit (a son-in-law can always expect hospitality from the senior woman in his wife's family in return for the services they demand of him). When all the beer except the last consecrated pot is finished, the crowd usually disperses to gather again in the evening for the final ceremony. Again the people gather around the consecrated pot of the beer and salute the spirit. A son-in-law removes the pot. Depending on the local custom, this may be replaced by two small gourds or pots into which are poured a libation for the spirit and his wife, with yet another formal address to the spirit: at this stage of the proceedings the address is usually light-hearted in tone and often abusive. After a final salute to the spirit, the remainder of the beer is distributed.

The primary symbolism of this ceremony is in honouring the spirit with millet beer ... In this way, the spirits too must occasionally be honoured with millet beer in order to keep them happy. When the beer is brewed for a spirit elder, one pot is formally presented to the spirit concerned and one to his wife (or occasionally to her husband). The beer is distributed to all present, but a little is poured as the personal share of the spirit, which can be taken only by the appropriate functionary (Bourdillon 1982:217-219).

As with any research it is difficult to describe virtually everything which is done in a ritual. A scholar chooses what to describe and what to emphasise. It is regrettable but

acceptable that one scholar may stress and give weight to an aspect that another scholar may regard as insignificant, and vice versa, each at the expense of the overall implications of a described tradition.

In my view this particular description from Bourdillon generally suffers from deficiency of detail. Here and there, gaps exist which need to be filled in order to depict the complete picture, the meaning and significance of the ritual. I maintain that a description needs to give reasonably sufficient details so as to depict a complete picture of the ritual. Without full details about what happens in the ritual, it is difficult to significantly appreciate the significance of the ritual as well as of the religion.

Points of interest

From Bourdillon's description it is not easy to get a good picture of the whole ritual proceedings partly because he did not describe most of the things which were seen, heard, smelt or felt. Though not strong enough to create mental pictures in the minds of readers the language which he used is quite easy to understand. He, however, did not pay adequate and careful attention to details of the various aspects of the ritual in his description. This jeopardised the chances of making thorough analysis of the ritual.

From his descriptions, there is however, no doubt that Bourdillon was successful in entering the Mtoko Shona community physically and empathetically. I think that this enabled him to present descriptions in fairly accurate and value free language. In the foreword of *The Shona Peoples* (1982:ix), Chavunduka wrote:

Bourdillon has tried, I think successfully, to present his materials in a language that ordinary men and women, who have no knowledge of social anthropology can understand.

The descriptive categories, names and words which he used do not discredit or prejudice his descriptions. Sometimes he had problems with translations and he informed us that:

In the absence of an adequate English word, I prefer the technical anthropological term "bride price" to the colloquial term "*lobola*" which although it is in common use in Zimbabwe, is neither English nor Shona (Bourdillon 1982:34).

I will compare Bourdillon's description of the ritual and his analysis of some of the phenomenon to the one that I observed among the Duve people of Nyamondo in the Mberengwa District. I maintain that whenever a religious phenomenon is analysed, it is necessary to describe it thoroughly so as to present its full picture for those interested in interpreting it or its parts.

Among the Duve people, the ritual of the ancestor (*Doro remidzumu*) may start at anytime of the day. "The reason why we perform the ritual in the evening is because relatives, neighbours and friends of our family would have finished the chores of the day" (Saratieri Mabeza 1994/12/15: personal communication). The other major reason why the Duve people perform the ritual in the evening is due to their belief that the ancestors are awake and are more active during the night. "When it is night here, in the netherworld it is day time and our ancestors are active" (Saratieri Mabeza 1994/12/15: personal communication).

Bourdillon said that in general, the reason that such a ritual is performed, is due to problems such as disease. Although he said that the family spirit should be honoured regularly, he did not indicate why this particular ritual was performed. It is not clear whether these people performed this specific ritual because of any specific problem or whether they performed it as a matter of traditional routine. The ritual I attended among the Duve people was performed because it had been prescribed by a diviner as the best way to bring to an

end the deaths and the series of misfortunes which were befalling the Duve family (Baba Kamufoti 1994/12/15: personal communication).

Bourdillon's description did not include some of the important details about this ritual which I as a reader would like to know. For example, we were not told how the ritual officiator conducted the ritual. Among the Duve the nephew (*muzukuru*), who was about 65 years of age officiated at the ritual. He moved away from the stool and squatted on the ground in the *bikiro* (ritual hut) to pour a libation to the ancestors. Snuff played a significant part in communicating with ancestors. The ritual officiator, in a squatting position, sprinkled snuff on the ground and then poured a bit of fermenting beer on the ground and sprinkled more snuff on the ground for invoking ancestors. Snuff was distributed and shared amongst almost all the ritual participants. This was followed by the officiator's invocation to the spirits:

Iwe Mboko newe Makasva newe Renge tivudzireivo vari mberi kwenyu kuti vatitaririre. Tsaona dzanyanya, vana vopera makangotarira mati taita sei?

(You Mboko and Makasva and Renge tell those greater than you that they should look after us. Misfortunes are too much in this family and you are just watching. What have we done to deserve this?)

In his description Bourdillon stated that fermenting millet beer in a small gourd is poured on the ground, but he did not describe the snuff episodes which normally accompany this event. He told us that the invocation may be done in a slightly abusive voice. Although he summarised the words uttered during the libations, it would have been better if he had furnished the readers with the actual words which were uttered during the invocations. This also applies to the songs which were sung during the ritual because he simply told us that the people were dancing to the music.

A good description is one in which a scholar furnishes readers with detailed information about the ritual dancing styles, the types of musical instruments used and the words of the ritual songs. The symbols, the gestures and the ritual objects all need to be recorded so as to avoid premature interpretations. In the ritual which I attended, musical drums and rattles were used for music. These instruments were decorated with black chevron and circular artistic patterns around them, and the people whom I questioned did not know the meaning or symbolism of these patterns. Although one young man was the lead vocalist, it was mainly the old men and women who sang while the young men and women danced. Women ululated and men whistled to the dancers who danced in a circular formation. They rhythmically clapped hands and the singing continued through the night. Many different songs were sung throughout the night and I tape-recorded the texts of some of these songs on to tape cassettes. Some of the words in these songs praised the ancestors of these people for the feats they performed when their people were confronted with pestilence and drought.

The outfits which were worn by the participants varied. Some wore ordinary clothes: Those dancing tied animal skin (kudu, lion, crocodile and leopard skin) around them. On their heads they wore hats made of ostrich, eagle and fowl feathers. They also tied rattles on to their legs while others tied amulets around their arms and heads. All the people who entered the ritual hut (*bikiro*) were required to remove their shoes. Some of the dancers during the dancing used their walking sticks (*svimbo*) to point to the north, to the ground and then up to the sky. The spirit mediums tied black, white and red cloths across their shoulders. Some of the phrases which were shouted from time to time include names like Makasva, Njelele, Zame, Renge and Madzivaabwe. Without some of these details, it would be difficult to appreciate fully and interpret accurately their religiosity.

Some of Bourdillon's interpretations

I am of the opinion that Bourdillon's interpretive activity was in a way handicapped by the inadequate details of his descriptions in some places. I have already indicated some of the gaps in his description of the ritual. He did not explain the significance of the "principal room" where the ritual was conducted. For example, the Duve people informed me that the purpose of snuff is to "activate" the spirits (Guard Mabeza 1994/12/15: interview). Bourdillon did not, however, address the meaning and significance of such things as snuff as well as the ritual songs, symbols, objects nor did he describe nor interpret the meaning or significance of any peculiar words shouted in the ritual. Some of the words which were shouted in the Duve ritual songs, I learnt later were names of places where the clan passed through during their migrations. Some were names of shrines where some of the clan heroes were buried. The previously mentioned name, Renge, is the name of one of the great clan heroes of the Duve tribe. The dancing in a circular form (*dendenedzwa*) was interpreted as representing a nest; this has something to do with comfort as well as with continuity and completeness of their living. The walking stick was interpreted as a symbol for manhood and protection. Meanings of the songs were explained to me and the significance of the colours of the ritual cloths red, black and white were also interpreted for me.

Bourdillon interpreted the meaning of the ritual basically as an act of honouring ancestors. It is interesting to view this statement in relation to Victor Turner's hypothesis that researchers need to interpret religious phenomena remembering that ritual meanings may be manifest or latent (1975:6). It is not quite clear from Bourdillon how and where he got these interpretations nor is it clear whether this ritual interpretation was of the manifest or the latent kind.

The appellation "Ritual of honouring the ancestors" is problematic. The Shona Duve people call it "*doro remudzimu*", "*bira*" or "*doro remusha*" which means "ritual of the home". It is true that the ritual involves respect as well as showing allegiance to the spirits. From the way the spirits were addressed, it is apparent that the Shona people fear these powerful spirits. Although they are feared because they are unpredictable, they are also loved because they are part of the extended family. They are naturally honoured because they are departed elders of the family. The fact that the ritual officiator used "reproachful language" to address ancestors somehow undermined the question of "honour". It appears that the intention of the ritual was not fundamentally that of honouring the spirits as implied in this appellation used by Bourdillon. According to my informants, VaChikanga and Baba Kamufoti, one of the purposes served by this ritual was to initiate communication and to establish a reciprocal relationship between the people and their ancestors:

Doro remudzimu tinoriitira kuti tikwanise kutaura nevakuru vedu tose takavungana kundayizvi. Ndiyo nguva yokuvika zvichemo zvedu kuvadzimu vedu. Tinoda kuti vatitaririre, kuti zvitifambire zvakanaka sezvo isu tichivarangarirawo (Vachikanga and Baba Kamufoti 1994/15/12:interview)

We perform this ritual to our ancestors so that we are able to talk to them as we are doing now. This is the time to air our grievances to them. We remember them and we want to communicate with them so that things go well for us.

In his text Bourdillon did not show exactly how this ritual constituted an honouring of ancestors. In his interpretations he stated that the presence of the spirit elders was felt most strongly in times of anxiety and tension. He said that a family living close to, or below subsistence level, with poor health resulting from a scanty diet and the consequent problems and tensions, was likely to pay more attention to the spirit elders than a wealthy family for whom life was smooth (1982:220). One could argue that by including "variations on the themes", Bourdillon was indicating that he was not

describing a particular event, but was providing a generic description of the type of the ritual. I however want to state that it appears as if Bourdillon was becoming too general because his analysis does not fit most Shona communities. In actual practice, the wealthy people supply material resources to perform the ritual but do not really bother about actual procedures of these rituals; they leave the rest of it to be arranged and performed by poorer families in the extended family. Though they may not participate in the actual arrangements of the rituals, they contribute material resources so that they somehow become part of the ceremony.

Bourdillon's interpretation from a social-anthropological perspective was that this ritual served the function of drawing the extended family group together (1982:221). For Bourdillon the purpose of this ritual was to integrate families and unite society. He strengthened this argument by saying that the ancestors are believed to hate quarrels and therefore family disputes were settled during rituals. This may be true because usually, in these rituals family members get together, talk and sometimes, by chance, find something common which may bind them together. This does unite them but I think the fundamental intention of conducting this type of ritual is not that of uniting families. There are many cases where such rituals are conducted and families often quarrel and split over who must take over the medium-ship of a prestigious ancestral spirit. Instead of maintaining unity, these rituals sometimes may actually disunite families (Platvoet 1995b:1-20). This nearly happened in the Duve family where some of the ritual leaders got divided over who was going to take the position of distributing food during the ritual. There are, however, certain rituals which are performed especially for family reunions. Bourdillon's analysis is here a functionalist one in line with Durkheim's theory of religion as cohesion of society.

Another social-anthropological interpretation which we find in Bourdillon's analysis is that ritual serves to reflect how the society functions. He said that various kinship roles are dramatised in funerary rituals (1982:221). In other words, Bourdillon was saying that the ritual serves to support authority and hegemony. The ritual officiator's authority may be dramatised and may be strengthened during the ritual. Though this may be so, it would be of interest to know whether this interpretation was from the Shona ritual participants themselves or whether this was the scholar's. The interpretations by the Duve people of the same ritual show that the intention of the ritual is to open communication channels with ancestors. Rituals are poly-functional and their meanings are polyvalent; however, sometimes specific rituals are intended for some specific end; to honour ancestors, to thank them, to integrate a family, etc. According to the Duve ritual participants, they performed the ritual essentially in order to communicate and to redress a crisis so that life is normalised. The other things which were done in the same ritual included: Thanking the ancestors for the good things they do for their families, having communion with the ancestors and assuring them that they are still remembered.

Because of the difficulties involved in such research Bourdillon recommended that the collection and analysis of information is much easier if done by people who are thoroughly acquainted with the society they are studying. He is of the opinion that theory may only offer suggestions as to what questions might be asked, and the empirical data to test the theories need to be properly collected (Bourdillon 1994:11).

Bourdillon argued that one of the serious problems of research in African traditional religions concerns the difficulties faced by outsider researchers. As an example, a researcher who comes from outside the cult of witches has difficulties in obtaining information (1994:10). At the same time, it is not

easy for a researcher from the First World to research on and understand topics like that of witchcraft beliefs or sorcery fears. To explain further Bourdillon's point, if witches work in secret, would it be ethical for a researcher to attend and observe how they dig graves and devour human flesh? This also poses one of the questions that I will try to grapple with in the next chapters, i.e. as to whether a researcher has an obligation towards those researched.

In *Religion and Society*, Bourdillon's approach to interpretation was specified as follows:

This book is an introduction to the study of African traditional religion from a sociological point of view ... this book is primarily about the sociology of African religion, and it is intended primarily for people in Africa, who are interested in a deeper understanding of the way their own societies work (1991:Introduction).

Bourdillon put together various relevant theoretical perspectives of the sociology of religion. He clarified that he was different from the sociological functionalists like Emile Durkheim who argued that religion is a social fact and can only be explained in sociological terms (1991:27). Thus, Bourdillon distinguished between Durkheimian reductionism (religion is about social function) and a more legitimate, verifiable Durkheimian sociology (religion has social functions in addition to religious ones) and these functions explain something about religion (they do not "explain it away"). In this book Bourdillon examined religion within its social contexts without trying to fit in theoretical perspectives. He looked at the effect religion has on society, and what it does with respect to other social institutions. It was noted in the ritual quoted above that Bourdillon interpreted most of the religious phenomena basically in sociological and anthropological terms.

Though this is quite controversial, Bourdillon concurred with van Gennep and Jean La Fontaine that social scientists should look beyond the manifest motives of the communities which are

being studied and must look for the latent purposes of these rituals. Bourdillon further stated that the latent functions of religion are not always recognised by the participants. So scholars need to try and uncover them using their tools of analysis. In so doing they go beyond the emic (that is, including it but looking further). I however, think that more serious attention should be given to what the ritual actors ascribe as the purpose of the ritual than to anything else. Where the researcher goes beyond the emic, caution should be taken so as to avoid misrepresenting the ways in which the people understand these phenomena. In *Religion and Society* Bourdillon appears to me to be more concerned with the analysis of theoretical concepts and interpretations than with descriptions. He however, presented a few precise ethnographic descriptions which served to illustrate his argument.

I think that the language which he used in this book was rather more complex and more analytical than in *The Shona Peoples*. It appears as if it was not targeted for ordinary readers because of its social-anthropological theoretical orientation. Bourdillon grappled more with the elucidation of social-anthropological and functionalist interpretations and how they fit together with African traditional religious concepts.

One of Bourdillon's most recent and relevant works was a journal article (1993a) entitled "Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion". This article, in my view, marks the height of serious articulations of research methods in the academic study of Shona traditional religion. In this document Bourdillon was concerned purely with the exploration of methodological questions in the study of traditional religion. His approach was that of examining lessons that may be learnt from social anthropologists for the study of African traditional religion. He made a distinction between scholars who have taken a positivist (scientific) approach associated with for example, Durkheim, who sought to explain religion

rather than to interpret it; and the social anthropologists (favoured by Bourdillon) who are sympathetic to religion, and who have tried to understand it from the point of view of the participants. Bourdillon's contribution to methodological debates began when he analysed problems in collecting information. He argued that the first handicap facing the researcher is the limitation of subjectivity. When a researcher collects information, what he or she collects is already influenced by his or her own vision, background and personal interest. At times the researcher is influenced by the school of thought within which he or she was trained to search for specific things. Bourdillon said that one solution to this problem is that researchers should train in a wide variety of academic fields. This may improve the scope of the researcher during the investigation (1993a:218). Nevertheless, the investigations done by even a well-trained observer are those of a particular person with particular interests and therefore will always have certain angles of perception.

We have already noted the fact that adequate information is the basis of a proper interpretation and understanding. Furthermore, I stated that deficient descriptions cripple the ability to analyse, interpret and to understand any context. A researcher must in the end be able to decipher as many factors as possible which necessitate performance of a ritual according to the information available. It has already been noted that the presence of a researcher during a ritual may affect the way in which the participants conduct it. In the process, the participants may modify the ritual so as to meet the expectations of the "outsider" observer. So there is need for researchers to pay attention even to unintended roles that they may play when observing a ritual.

Bourdillon (1993a:222-223) enumerated a few steps which he said need to be followed in an anthropological approach:

The first step is that the researcher requires a long immersion in the culture concerned, short visits are not enough.

The second step is that the researcher must learn and know the language as well as other modes of expression which are used by the people being studied.

For the third step, Bourdillon states that a researcher does not learn about a religion or a culture simply by asking questions during a brief stay; dialogue must be entered into as equals. The best results are obtained when the researcher does not control what is spoken about or the direction of conversation. The interests and perceptions of the members of the society should dominate the resulting description. The researcher must be aware of the limitations of his own perspectives so that he or she establishes a relationship of equality and trust with the subject of study. The so called "outsiders" need more immersion in the field, this should involve full observation and where necessary, participation so that they may be almost of equal status as the local people researching on their community. Bourdillon stated that it is difficult to understand fully the object of study if one tries to maintain the status of an independent observer (1993a:223).

All this is important in as much as it guards against imposing the interests of the researcher's own system of feelings, cognitive systems and experiences on the community being studied.

Bourdillon discussed the strengths and weaknesses of phenomenological methodology which I will present in the next chapter. He stated that it is not always possible to enter into the shoes of the subject of study. Bourdillon (1993a:224) contended that researchers can muster adequate empathy, but as an example, it is not easy for a scholar from a First World upper-class context to step into the shoes of a homeless

beggar who is without income in the city centre.

Correlatively, how can one enter the shoes of a Third World rural peasant who is trapped in a declining rural economy? I will try to elaborate on these methodological issues in the next chapters.

For Bourdillon, a valid account of the studied society is one which focuses not only on what is said, but also on what is done. Religion is not simply a system of beliefs and formal rituals, but it comprises events which take place in real life. Attention needs to be paid to sounds, smells, tastes and other sensations which go with certain religious activities (1993a:255). Despite these good points, I should however, comment that most of these research methodology issues and requirements which he raises here were not as thoroughly dealt with as he demands, neither in his 1982 ritual description above, nor in any of his earlier works.

Bourdillon argued that the goal of his kind of research method (like that of phenomenology) aims to describe so accurately and in such detail the experiences of the people being studied, that readers may broaden their own perceptions to the extent that, what before may have appeared bizarre, is now recognised as natural and familiar. For example, the Shona belief that some people can manipulate thunder and lightning must not be discarded with contempt. All the details need to be fully put on the table in their historical context. The researchers should indicate clearly the roles they played during the collection and interpretation of information. They should also state clearly the informants' contributions to the research conclusions. The researcher's own perceptions must stand clearly on their own without being mixed with those of the studied people.

Bourdillon contends that researchers have a right to judge religions. He said that no religious system has a perfect system of knowledge. For example, he said that among the

Calabar, the system of throwing a few corn crickets to chickens so as to control troublesome crickets in the fields is clearly less adequate than other systems for controlling nature (1993a:228). For Bourdillon a researcher may legitimately judge that there is definitely something wrong with the idea of child sacrifice, because there is something immoral about it.

Bourdillon argued that the phenomenological approach has advantages of enabling the researcher to record as much as possible from the believers. His contention was that its weakness is that it does not pay serious attention to connections between religion and social, economic, political and psychological phenomena, which can have important consequences for the people concerned.

In view of this, Bourdillon (1993a:229) wrote:

All approaches must be respected because trying to understand someone else's religion has parallels with trying to understand the point of view of another academic.

He argued that for academics in different religions and traditions to understand one another, the first requirement is to *listen*. We must learn and understand what other people say before we can judge what they say and do. For Bourdillon, the phenomenologist's prescription to exercise *epoche* (a temporary suspension of one's biases) can be accepted only as an instruction to listen (1993a:230). This he said, was an important prescription when the study of religion was introduced in reaction to theologians who simply dismissed other religious traditions. He stated that the notion of *epoche* has now passed its usefulness. I concede the fact that there are lots of controversies about *epoche*, but I will discuss in the next chapter that this concept continues to be useful in the study of "foreign" traditions. Besides, he viewed this *epoche* as simplistic if it lends credence to the delusion that one can eliminate one's personal bias when one

tries to understand other people. For Bourdillon, performance of epoche is an attempt to distinguish between an open mind and an empty mind. He said that the only way to be totally without prejudice is to be like an infant (1993a:230). Bourdillon attacked the phenomenological approach when he said that, "an academic colleague would find it insulting if you claimed that the only way to understand him is to bracket out all your previous knowledge and all your previous judgements" (Bourdillon 1993a:229). He also complained that it would be equally insulting to suggest that all perspectives are valid perspectives and that there are no grounds on which you could possibly criticise them however different they may be from your own (1993a:232). Academics from all schools of thought are concerned with establishing the validity of their own perceptions, often against alternatives. Finally, his argument is that in academia we listen to another person's argument and try to see how it fits together, and how it fits the data we are discussing. In the process then, we are already making judgments about whether this particular way of perceiving religion works in practice. In the end it is possible that we may choose any aspect of the other person's view to integrate into our own mental framework.

Concluding remarks

Bourdillon must be commended for his interesting discussions on Shona traditional religions. I am particularly impressed by his research and discussions on methodology development in the study of African traditional religions. Even if he has not fulfilled some of the criteria which he recommended himself, he must be credited for promoting the improvement of the empirical study of religions as a directive for others, hoping that they will achieve greater perfection than he did himself.

One development in Bourdillon's works was his shift over the years from an interest in ethnographic details alone to an interest in both ethnographic details and the methodologies to

study them. Bourdillon was particularly interested in the social-anthropological theories and the methodologies in this discipline. This is indicative of the fact that one's profession influences both interests, objectives and methods of research. The next chapter deals with critical discussions of various approaches and methodological issues in an attempt to offer insights towards an understanding of how these writers worked.

CHAPTER SIX

A GENERAL EXPOSITION OF VARIOUS APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Introduction

Having looked at the ways of researching and describing Shona traditional religion by the "early writers", Gelfand, Chavunduka and Bourdillon "on the ground" as it were, I now present research methodologies that relate to how these writers worked. I also discuss approaches that may be useful in a poly-methodic and a multi-disciplinary enterprise in the study of Shona traditional religion. It is always interesting to compare theory with practice. Hopefully, this chapter will serve to highlight both flaws and merits in the approaches and research methodologies of the writers in question.

The chapter consists of a general exposition of the different approaches and research methodologies in the study of religion. These approaches have different origins, and articulate different concerns in relation to questions of how best to engage in fair, balanced and accurate academic research. I do so with the goal of stimulating serious reflections on how best we can discover fresh perceptions in the study of Shona traditional religion. Furthermore, this chapter will enable us to attain a wider understanding of the problems raised in the previous chapters.

Methodological approaches such as: phenomenology of religion, history of religions, psychology of religion and sociology of religion constitute the science of religion and should all be exploited where required so as to assist in a poly-methodical attempt to depict a complete and unbiased picture of African traditional religions. Philosophy and theology (though they are arguably outside science of religion) include useful methods in the study of religion. In trying to understand the

Shona context, I define the term philosophy as a way of studying thought patterns, wisdom and the way it relates to conceptual analysis and expressions about the universe and the metaphysical world by use of tools of linguistic analysis, aesthetics, epistemology and logic of the people studied. Most academic theology as we have known it has concentrated on Christianity. Theological and some philosophical methods are determined by their generally common pursuit of knowledge about the relations between humans and the meta-empirical realms which they postulate. It is basically because of their particular normative approaches that they are not classified among the science of religion.

Philosophical questions about religion largely deal with meaning as well as criteria of truth and falsehood. Sometimes the philosopher plays in the same league as the theologian. Thus for instance, the supposed proofs of the existence of God engage the attention both of the Catholic apologist and of the philosopher of religion. Moreover philosophical questions arise when dogmatic conclusions seem to be confirmed or threatened by wide ranging studies such as psychology and sociology of religion (Smart 1986:165). J.S. Cumpsty (1991:8) pointed out that religion can be studied from different angles because it concerns many traditions and a plethora of forms. The study of religion is multi-disciplinary in that it includes phenomenology, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc. One of the questions is whether the writers that I deal with in this thesis employed the relevant tools from these methods, and to what extent they did so. By analysing these different approaches, we will see how they may enable researchers to attain a better understanding and depiction of Shona religion, society and culture. I have already stated that the methods which will concern me here are particularly those which have been used by the authors we have studied in the previous chapters, as well as by others who are interested in the academic study of African traditional religions such as Cox, Platvoet, etc.

Religious Studies

In his book *Structure and Creativity in Religion*, Douglas Allan noted that the central problems in Religious Studies are methodological in nature. He pointed out that most of the 19th and 20th century approaches, while involving a vast accumulation of religious data, have tended to be methodologically uncritical (Allen 1978:xi). While some scholars in the study of religions have primarily been concerned with the understanding of religion in itself and by itself, others' interests have been in the applicability of certain theories in their study of traditional religious societies and meta-empirical realities, for example, in relation to the human psyche (Cumpsty 1991:4). Another example is where a writer researches seeking to confirm certain theories such as, "religion is a universal obsessive neurosis". Such writers have done so without noting that theory is provisional, as it should be, and is only a hypothesis to be used, confirmed or disconfirmed, or modified by research results. Generally, no one method, approach or theory can produce comprehensive studies on religion; it is therefore the duty of the researcher to develop approaches and methods of research that will enable him or her to develop a science of religion suitable, among other things, to produce adequate and holistic accounts, and knowledge that may be testable.

HISTORICAL APPROACHES AND METHODS

This section of the thesis attempts to present an outline of methodological approaches with which historians concern themselves. This is relevant in so far as we will gain insights about how researchers described and analysed Shona religion, society and culture within their proper historical contexts. Through this kind of analysis, it should be possible to assess the extent to which the researchers that I presented in the previous chapters utilised history methods and

approaches, and where they were flawed in their attempt to trace the possible origins and development of certain aspects of Shona society, religion and culture.

Historical approaches enable researchers to examine people, their individual choices, their values and angles of vision by which they have looked at themselves and the world. This pervading interest in humanity is the vital link between history and other humanistic disciplines with which it shares tools and objectives. But because history deals primarily with *humans in time*, it offers ways of looking at human experience that other humanistic disciplines particularly do not (Gawronski 1975:foreword).

I do not seek to delve into comprehensive and multi-stranded debates about the different schools of historiography, nor do I seek to discuss in detail various controversies which characterise historical research approaches. Without dwelling on fine details about types of historians such as positivists, empiricists, relativists, idealists and functionalists, I will present what historians are broadly concerned with regarding research methods in their discipline. I briefly deal with objectivity, value-judgment, bias, empathy as well as causality debates in history. At the end of this outline, it should be possible to see ways in which the academic study of Shona traditional religion may benefit from analysing research methodologies employed by historians. I will also try to explore inter-relationships among historical approaches and those from other disciplines with the view to pursuing a poly-methodic approach in the study of Shona traditional religion and culture.

History and research methodologies

There are a number of interlocking definitions of what history is. The aspects presented below do not claim to present a comprehensive view of historical approaches. They however

cover the needs of this thesis and provide a basis for further discussion and argumentation.

Most commonly, historians are concerned with everything that has *occurred* from the beginning of time on through the last eclipsed instant. They deal with the making of historical *records*. Historical approaches are concerned with the flow of things, they try to trace the dynamics of change of various phenomena in relation to time (dating). Thus, historicised perspectives are understood not only according to their present nature but in relation to their origins and development (Gawronski 1975:foreword). Generally, only a small proportion of all the things that happen leave any permanent record. Humans make efforts to preserve the *evidence* of what happened by writing or by memory and oral testimony. As I described in chapter one, like most African societies, the Shona people are an oral community in the sense that their "creed" is orally transmitted from one generation to the next. The clan praise poetry, ritual invocations, songs sung at rituals, etc. exist in oral form.

Gawronski (1975:3) defines history as the interpretive study of recorded facts of bygone individuals and societies so as to develop an understanding of human actions in specified times. Trained historians can re-create much of the past (such as some practices of Shona traditional religion) using various clues or evidence (Gray et al. 1964:2). Concurring with Gray, Gawronski (1975) states that historical methodologies mainly grapple with evidence. Historians piece together these clues, fitting them into patterns of chronological sequence, location and organisation which offer readers a better chance to understand the described phenomena in relation to their historical perspectives. One of the central aspects of historical methodologies is that they deal in facts and evidence tied to a past and to a particular plane of reality which is fixed by the documented date (Gawronski 1975:foreword).

Gray et al. (1964:9) summarised the way historians generally collect and arrange information. This outline is not particularly peculiar to historians but it is worth noting the historians' concerns about "evidence" and "change". Gray (1964:9) et al. summarised ways by which some historians collect and arrange information following six stages:

(i) The selection of a topic. The topic should be related to great events or should be evaluated as representative of far reaching developments. (As an example, in the Christian religion, Exodus is a unique historical event which is studied in its uniqueness and particularity apart from the idea of exodus in general). (ii) Historians track down all relevant evidence. (iii) Note-taking using interviews, archaeology, questionnaires, participant observation, etc. (iv) The researcher's evidence must be substantial and significant and must resort to new evidence that is valid and demonstrable. As an example, they look at all available forms of evidence which point not only at when events happened but "how", "why" and "what" these things meant and mean as time changes (Jenkins 1991:33). (v) The researcher arranges the information into a meaningful pattern according to change of contexts and, (vi) presents it in a manner that will command interest and communicate to readers the fullest possible understanding of the subject. Historians have well established routines and procedures (which they are currently seeking to develop) of checking materials' origins, positions, authenticity, reliability, etc.

Generally, historians (unlike phenomenologists), will not be satisfied with illuminating what happens in a ritual at the time of its immediate occurrence. They use their tools to determine how it originated and developed, as well as to determine its significance. Thus, historical approaches grapple with cause and effect, continuity and change within a given time frame (Jenkins 1991:17). The "change" also refers to change of terminology, words, actions and meanings at

various periods. This is done so as to avoid misrepresentation of information and values of a people, an error which may take evidence away or the described event from its original context (Gray et al. 1964:58). Historical research should be able to "detect" new aspects such as foreign words, new meanings, etc. This is one way by which historians try to discover patterns and trends, and explain the behaviour of people at specific times.

Historians' sources and evidence

Historians select their information from primary works often called "original source materials" for historical facts (Carr 1990). Primary sources include eye-witness accounts, diaries, letters, documents, laws, treaties, hearings, court decisions, etc. Historians' primary sources may further include photographs as well as artifacts discovered by archaeologists. History may benefit from the works of archaeology and geology. Stamps, coins, coats of arms, bushmen paintings, hut decorations, clan legend stories can be used by historical researchers as clues to the past. Thus historians utilise primary materials to acquire information or facts, which they organise, interpret, and formulate into the reconstruction of bygone events.

Historical approaches also make use of secondary sources (Jenkins, 1991:22). Secondary sources can be both published or unpublished books, journal articles which include magazines, newspapers, etc. Secondary sources are materials for study that have been edited, interpreted or consist of a composition that is not original. This is particularly so in the study of Shona religion and culture, for example, the consultation and use of works translated and interpreted by Eurocentrics has in some cases led to the production of misleading works. Secondary sources of information need to be carefully examined in case they are already edited in a way which may give an angle that might not be accurate. Any material that has been

altered in content becomes secondary work. Most relativists (constructionists) synthesise the materials obtained from all sources so that they construct their own interpretive structure based on the information that is at their disposal, and thereby produce more secondary works. For some historians, information becomes historical when a historian examines given sources (for example, survivals from the past) and gathers evidence (Carr 1990), but for relativist historians, a piece of evidence only becomes an acceptable historical fact when the historian selects it and puts weight on it so that it becomes significant.

Unlike relativists, empiricists try to do as little interpretive work as possible. Both relativists and empiricists, in some instances, do make use of research tools of the natural sciences for such purposes as determining the authenticity of old documents and ascertaining the age of a document by means of paper, water-mark or ink analysis. This is strictly a laboratory technique that aids historians in collecting facts and determining their reliability.

Relativists or constructionists such as Jenkins (1991) and Carr (1990) believe that apart from conserving, transmitting basic facts and interpretation they have a special obligation to re-create, re-assess and re-interpret the past, bringing it to bear on the present. Unlike empiricists, they consider history to have "many pasts" and therefore many interpretations. They claim that historians tell a multiplicity of "stories" which try to represent what happened. Whereas relativists are skeptical about objectivity, empiricists claim that they aim to present the "past as it happened". Most empiricists claim to be objective. They are less emphatic about the claim that historians put weight on certain facts so as to make them significant. Their position is that the task of the historian is to present the past as closely as possible to how it occurred and changed over time.

As most information on African traditional religions is not documented, historians have relied largely on oral traditions. The relevant material has to be converted into chronology by exploring its forms in different periods of time. The task of reconstructing the past of oral societies is very complex. In chapter five Bourdillon pointed out that though oral testimonies are respected as tradition, historians who make use of oral testimonies must take note of the social or political functions which they perform. Some of the oral testimonies are narrated with an ideological slant. Historians working on African history largely deal with orally transmitted information. It is therefore important for them to present to readers the situation in which the information was narrated; whether the informant was prompted into relating the testimonies by responding to questions. Was the informant speaking for him or herself or for the community? Were the testimonies recorded in a spirit of apology, fear, despair, elation, etc.? Variants of the same story which exist need to be presented and analysed, for example, rumours which are gossip and "hot news" (which vanish quickly). Accounts from independent witnesses are needed when interviewing and recording the information. These are factors which could prejudice the nature of the information collected. The actual informants of the testimonies need to be assessed. As an example, historians investigate whether their informants and assistants are eye-witnesses to what they testify, whether they are "insiders" and whether they have background information about what they describe. If the informant obtained information from someone else, all these criteria will have to be repeated for that person (Carr 1990:23; Gray et al., 1964:57).

These issues are important in research methods, particularly in the study of African traditional religions, where researchers often face problems of inaccuracy of dating and uncertainties of chronology of events. It is also important for the historian to know the language and expressions of the

people who provide the oral testimonies. Furthermore, in order to attain a comprehensive grasp of whatever phenomena they are studying, historians should have mastery of a secondary discipline such as religious studies, sociology, political science, or economics combined with primary training in history and its approaches (Gawronski 1975:6).

Some controversies in historical approaches

Without entering into detailed discussions I seek to present some controversies which have been raised regarding history research methodologies. Among these methodological debates has been the question as to whether historical events are unique. Whilst scholars such as Jenkins contend that there is nothing unique about history others argue that historical events are unique. Scholars like Gray et al. (1964:9) argue that, because no two events are identical as they occurred, each is unique in as much as it has its own peculiarities. However, when the term "unique" is applied technically, not everything in historical accounts is unique. It is the events that lead to significant developments that are unique and unrepeatable. These events have a major influence on other events. Thus, in this sense, some historians are interested in individual historical events in their capacity as unique episodes within a historical framework. As an example, millions of people have crossed the Rubicon in peculiar ways and historians see nothing unique about it. However, it is Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon which is considered to be a historical event because it is regarded as leading to major developments. This is one example where we see the legitimacy of the relativists' claim that the researcher "selects" and gives "prominence" to some facts so as to make them historical. Historical methodologies expose idiosyncrasies and variables of certain events, individuals or of a given community, and each piece is shown to have its own integrity. However attractive the parallels between past and present may be, historical approaches show that the past is not really repetitive, that

history does not repeat itself and therefore that some events can be regarded as unique.

The question of whether objectivity is possible in the academic study of Shona traditional religion and culture arouses a lot of controversy in Religious Studies. I will elaborate on this issue in detail later. For now I will briefly look at discussions about whether historians are objective or not. Whereas empiricists are concerned with objectivity, relativists contend that descriptive accounts and interpretations are subjective in as much they are selected and are given weight by individual researchers. However, empiricists contend that the careful accumulation of what really happened and how it really came to be remains the primary step in the method of the history of religion (de Vries 1967:37). Whereas most empiricists claim that the task of history is to provide "raw" factual materials, relativists argue that when a historian explains what an event "really was" or what it "amounts to", this kind of procedure is generally referred to as interpretation. Scholars like Jenkins (1991:33) note that there is no method of establishing incorrigible meanings. He further argues that for all facts to be meaningful, they need to be embedded in interpretive readings that obviously contain them but which do not simply somehow arise from them, and this relates to the claim that research of most relativists involves subjectivity and value-judgment.

Scholars like Gawronski contend that while historians are concerned with fact, they also deal with feel; they try to infuse facts with insights into quality, tempo, temper and meaning of the life in which they are rooted. Relativist historians locate, select and sift information about human experience; they go beyond this by giving it values that are stimulating and suggestive to time contexts. Thus, in accounts by relativist historians, we often find the historian's ideological position and personal interpretations. Gawronski

holds that even presupposing a super-human effort at complete detachment, historians cannot help but subconsciously "adjust" the past somewhat to meet their own personal standards and convictions (1975:7). He, however, states that the greater the knowledge possessed by historians, the greater should be their degree of successfully re-creating the past and attaining a better accuracy of interpretation. The historian's ideological position and personal moral judgments are aspects which should be controlled by the development of "tight methodological rules" where the researcher reduces his or her "moral" interventions by "bowing down", as empiricists claim, before the evidence so allowing the past to speak "directly". E.H. Carr (1990:75) argues that it is scarcely necessary today to argue that the historian should not pass value-judgments on the private life of the characters in history. This view should be examined in relation to my discussions on phenomenology and "objectivity" in the study of African indigenous religions. In later sections of this thesis I discuss the contention raised by some scholars that facts do not speak for themselves; they say something only when chosen, arranged and interpreted.

In a fairly restrained way, I have tried to summarise some of the discussions about historical methods. Researchers on Shona traditional religions may draw some useful methodological insights from historical approaches. Some of the important research methodology aspects that are unique to history, and that may contribute to making comprehensive research on Shona traditional religion include the fact that:

- (i) Researchers on Shona religion and culture must seriously take note of the issue of "change of time" as important in shaping events, these people's thought patterns and practices.
- (ii) Researchers should be concerned with certain Shona religious phenomena in specific contexts and how they developed over time.
- (iii) Evidence is important for historians. The historicity of studies on Shona religion and culture is more significant through a thorough analysis of raw

materials or traces of the past and their form in the present. (vi) Empiricists collect as much evidence as possible so that they do not get in the way of telling what really happened. In the same vein, researchers on Shona religion and culture should aim to collect evidence and narrate it in a way that is accurate and consistent with past events as they happened.

History of religions

Though the above descriptions about research methods in "history" are important, my main interest is in the approaches and methods of "history of religions". The phrase "history of religions" is used in many different ways. Some people use to it mean Religious Studies. Others regard it to be a sub-branch of the main academic discipline of religion known as *Religionswissenschaft*. History of religions is concerned with historical connections in religious traditions. The relevance of the above discussions about history methods is that history of religions employs historical approaches that deal with the reconstruction of historical events and historical sequences within the field of religion. This helps religious studies researchers to trace ideas of how religions have developed from preliterate milieus. I believe that, though focused on certain religious themes, history of religions should make use of history methods in the study of religious traditions. Though it does not matter whether a historian of religions takes sides with empiricists or relativists. Having weighed the above discussions, in order to sustain a meaningful development in the study of Shona religions and culture, I am of the view that researchers should be more empiricist than relativist. Furthermore, it is important that historians of religion working on the Shona should seriously consider the methodological debates and discussions done in the history discipline.

Instead of presenting lengthy general discussions on history of religions I will directly relate the foregoing discussions

to the history of the study of African traditional religions. Until the 1950s, African traditional religions were studied virtually only synchronically, by observing how the people actually practised their religions, and by using these ethnographies comparatively. Platvoet argued that it was taken for granted that histories of these religions could not be developed because there were no written texts about them (Platvoet 1995b:20). Because of this, little in the field of the diachronic study of traditional religion has been done in Africa. The implication of such a neglect has created the popular impression that African traditional religions are static and unchanging. The most notable contributions so far to the historical analysis of Shona traditional religion have come from projects initiated by T.O. Ranger and I. Kimambo. Other historians who have done research on the Shona people include D.N. Beach, S. Mudenge and C.M.J. Zvobgo. These historians have collected and analysed aspects of the history of Shona culture, religion and society like political structures, clan genealogies and aspects of traditional religions (for example, the influence of the Mwari cult on Shona politics). Most of the records produced by writers such as Zvobgo and Mudenge are mainly diachronic descriptions of historical accounts of colonisation, missionary education and religious change in the history of Zimbabwe. I do not intend to go into elaborate detail regarding these historians. However, historical studies by these and other writers have advanced over the works of the "Eurocentrics" to the point of rendering the latter almost valueless. In my view, research on Shona culture and traditional religion is not a finished chapter because more historical reconstruction of Shona religion needs to be undertaken. This reconstruction can take place through analysis of archaeological materials, through studies of documents in archives and analysis of oral testimony.

I should however state that, at independence, the new government put a high priority on the rapid development of the

study of the archaeology and history of Zimbabwe and its people, of the pre-colonial era, the colonial period, the struggle for independence, and nation building. This was done because of the need to produce the history which colonial prejudice and lack of interest had denied them. At the University of Zimbabwe there is a department of history and archaeology with solid publications, text books, journals and conferences. This post-colonial policy decision has fundamentally altered views on the possibility of serious historical studies of Shona culture and traditional religion.

I criticise the majority of the writers who have written about Shona traditional religion for not adequately historicising their descriptive accounts. As I outlined above, historical approaches are unique in as much as they are concerned with "change of time" and how it reshapes events, practices and thought patterns. Historical concerns such as how contexts have developed over a period of time need to be explored so that religious scholars can comprehensively trace the possible origins and developments of religious milieux even in comparative ways.

In most cases history of religions studies the religion of a people in a specific geo-historical setting. Historians of religion are able to separate the "historically knowable" into minute pieces of information which can be considered separately in relation to evidence. Each event is looked at by the historian not only as independent but contributes to a given historical scenario. Thus, history of religions compares origins, developments, similarities and differences of several traditions. Historians are therefore not only restricted to dealing with the documentation of religious facts, but with a careful interpretation of information in the light of their chronology and causation (Waardenburg 1973-74:510). By confining themselves to the historical progression of a religion or certain segments of that religion, historical methodologies therefore avoid, although they would do well to

be acquainted with, speculations of a philosophical or theological sort (Baird 1971:33).

The "history" of African indigenous religions, as it has begun to develop, is a markedly different type from the historical-philological study of the scriptural religions: it is usually part of political, economic, cultural and social history. So the researchers in this area need to be equipped not only with a knowledge of the Shona language but with knowledge of research methods of other disciplines as science of politics, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, etc. Most historians of religion need to spell out clearly the systematic procedures for the collection of data and interpreting them according to their chronology and historical epochs. One problem which relates to data collection is that there are depths and heights which historians of traditional religions are unable to investigate. For example, it is not easy to tell conclusively when or how the Shona Mwari cave cult originated. This is because the historian of Shona religion jumps into the stream of events somewhere in the middle and not in the remote past because there is a limitation on the availability of data.

The "historical study" of most African indigenous religions suffers the disadvantage of the absence of written religious texts. However, if these historical studies are done well, the bonus is that of a high degree of contextualisation - history of religions studies religion as it functions in specific geo-historical contexts, and this enables it to be highly contextual. The religion which it shows in action is an "unpremeditated" one; it reflects the beliefs and convictions of the studied community. Though a few elements of history of the study of Shona religion may be found in Ranger (1979), Schoffeleers (1992), Westerlund (1993) or van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers (1985), more history of the historical study of religions in specific African communities must be written.

Each African traditional religion needs to be studied by the historian of religion in its own environment, in its development within that environment, and in its relations with the wider contexts belonging to the same environment, such as praise poetry, rock art, speculative thought, social structures and so on (Pettazzoni 1954:216). Historians of religion dealing with traditional religions seek to collect and analyse facts and figures of how specific ethnic groups, their culture and religion originated and how they developed within specific periods. I think that historians of religion on Shona or African traditional religions must try and reconstruct information about this religion from as many sources as possible. These sources should include: historical data from praise poetry, legends, songs, proverbs, folklore, art, archaeology and written works. I think that in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of Shona religions, like historians, researchers should make sure that their sources of information are exposed to external and internal criticism so as to test their reliability. History of religions must be more than the chronicling of events; it must be an attempt to enter into the meanings of these events so as to understand the thought patterns of the studied people. Historical methodologies enable historians to achieve a high degree of contextualisation. This methodological process includes analysis of sources and the interpretation of information in its chronological development, historical associations and within its natural limits (Bianchi 1975:31). This is important because it relates to the need to present unbiased information which is respectful of the "truths" of the studied people.

In short, generally, historical approaches in the academic study of African traditional religions aim to trace what happened and how it really came to be in its chronological sequences. It is a pity that historical studies in the departments of Religious Studies in Africa have been confined mainly to the study of history of the mainline "mission" churches, to a few of the many African indigenous Christian

churches as well as to Islamic studies. Furthermore, most of the historical study of traditional religions was partly impeded by the hegemony of the comparative, synchronic, unitary African traditional religion (ATR) model, which was not only pan-African in its ideology, but also de-contextualising in its methodology because of its "religionist" aspiration.

Many of the early works on African traditional religions were mainly done by describing these religions in a timeless ethnographic present time frame. This approach has not enabled researchers to get to a fuller understanding of these religions within their historical time scale. Shona traditional religion can not be fully understood without the historical dimension and the understanding of their historical component. African historians such as Ranger, Kimambo, Bhebhe, etc. have maintained a holistic approach to historiography and to a great extent have managed to avoid a division into subdisciplines such as economic, social, and political history. This approach is appropriate in the study of African traditional religions because these traditions are holistically intertwined with almost all other aspects of life in general. In this thesis I emphasise the need for researchers to utilise historical approaches in order to attain a better understanding of the origins and developments of Shona religious phenomena. Historical methods enable researchers to abandon the idea that Shona religion is merely a pathetic survival. By using relevant historical methods researchers become more equipped to conduct research and understand the historical developments of Shona religion, its capacity to innovate and respond to new cultures as well as its present forms (Ranger & Kimambo 1972:21). The summaries of methods in history described above are important in as much as they are informative of the various ways by which historians function. From this summary and analysis of historical methods we should, in the next chapter, be able to evaluate the extent

to which the writers in question utilised historical methods in their study of Shona traditional religion.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Very few works on Shona traditional religion have been written from within phenomenological perspectives. Cox's book (1992) is in my view one of the first detailed books which deals with phenomenology of religion with reference to the Shona people. I therefore seek to discuss the nature of phenomenological approaches particularly as they are used by Cox. I explore its importance and implications in the academic study of Shona traditional religion and I later relate it to the writers and scholars that I discussed in the preceding sections of this thesis.

Historical background of phenomenology

Phenomenology of religion emerged out of a larger movement called philosophical phenomenology headed by a philosopher Edmund Husserl (1818-1890). Husserl was concerned with epistemology. Emphasising the scientific approach towards understanding, Husserl paved the way for phenomenology of religion. Rather than offering descriptions of the nature of reality itself, he argued that the phenomenological approach should provide a method for knowing or investigating the way we understand reality; the external things as they appear in one's mind. Attaining an impartial understanding of that which manifests itself to humankind then remained the prime target of phenomenology of religion. His disciple, Max Scheler, a philosopher of religion, and a "religionist" developed a philosophical phenomenology of religion.

Hall (1978:259) wrote that Husserl maintained that an easy way for a scholar to attain an impartial understanding of the nature and meaning of religion, is through performance of

epoche. This is a Greek word which means to hold back, to bracket off or to suspend. The observer must temporarily suspend all his or her own personal opinions, cultural bias, racial pre-suppositions, academic or scientific preconceptions; all forms of preconception regarding the religious community being studied need to be temporarily suspended. To suspend preconceptions and judgments does not mean to deny them, it means a mere temporary suspension so as to avert subjectivism (Sharpe 1975:236). (I should state that though it is not my intention here, a proper historical study of what Husserl proposed and what phenomenologists of religion did with some of his theoretical proposals for attaining more objective knowledge, seems in order).

Phenomenological approach and the context of its rise

Along with other scientific approaches, phenomenology of religion accepted the need to describe religion carefully, impartially and accurately. Thus phenomenology emerged as a reaction against: (i) All forms of normative theological reductionism and compartmentalisation. (ii) The principal tendencies of explaining religious phenomena *exclusively* in terms of disciplines other than the study of religion itself like geography, economics, psychology, anthropology or sociology (Cox 1992:30). Some scholars in these sciences have developed particular theories whose contention is that, "... a religious phenomenon owes its existence to non-religious causes" (Pals 1986:18-36). (iii) Evolutionary assumptions concerning the origins of religion. These theories share preconceived ideas about the origins, morphology, and development of religions.

Summary of the meaning of phenomenology

In this section of the chapter I would like to outline the meaning of phenomenology as it is understood and used today. When the word phenomenology is used loosely, it can mean one

of two things, that is; some use the term to mean the broad synchronic subdiscipline which deals with typological and morphological systematisation. Other scholars use it in philosophical terms and for some a phenomenologist is a comparativist. I use the term phenomenology precisely to refer to the method of research that makes use of epoche and empathy so as to understand as much as the believers do.

The fact that the definitions of the phrase "phenomenology of religion" run in divergent directions shows the ambiguity in the use of this phrase and there is no one accepted and integral method of "phenomenology of religion".

I will begin by briefly tracing Van der Leeuw's understanding of this phrase. He (1890-1950) was a Dutch student of Chantepie de la Saussaye in ethics and philosophy. He studied history of religions and phenomenology under Brede Kristensen at Leiden University (1902-1937). In his book *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* he employed the Husserlian concepts including the initial step of performing epoche. Van der Leeuw's contribution in phenomenology of religion lies in his discussion of methodological questions like the problem of how the subjective observer gains knowledge of an objective entity.

At the heart of Van der Leeuw's method lies the process of what he calls "types". By this he meant the structural connections and relations inherent in the personal, historical and religious experiences (Van der Leeuw 1964:683). Van der Leeuw defined phenomenology as the systematic discussion of phenomena, that is, that which manifests itself to the observer (Van der Leeuw 1964:683). Van der Leeuw listed seven steps which characterise his method towards an objective understanding of religious phenomena. The first thing the phenomenologist should do is to assign names or classificatory names to what has become manifest. Examples of names are rituals, scripture, art, etc. I should comment here that care

should be taken to assign neutral and value free names to the phenomena. Terminology as that used by the early writers should be avoided. In his works, Van der Leeuw did not indicate how one does that, and what it takes, in good methodology, to develop neutral, value-free categories. Once the observer assigns names to phenomena, the second step is that of interpolation of the phenomena to the observer's past experiences. This means that the observer has to exercise some empathy and cultivate a feeling for the religious phenomena being studied no matter how strange they may appear to be. The third step is that of performance of *epoche*. Van der Leeuw argued that presuppositions need to be bracketed (1964:675-676). Step four is that of clarification, that is, the observer puts together the observed phenomena logically. This is done by creating meanings and seeking the ideal typical interrelation and significance of religious phenomena. The fifth stage is that of attaining an understanding of that which in itself may not be easily apprehended but "manifests itself" to the observer. The sixth stage is that of checking and controlling the data. The whole process ends with the seventh stage, that of attaining objectivity. Though relativist historians would not agree, for writers such as Van der Leeuw, objectivity is the sole treasure of phenomenology of religion (Sharpe 1975:223). The criticisms which have been levelled against Van der Leeuw's methodology shall be discussed later towards the end of this chapter in the section where I deal with the methodological weaknesses of phenomenology of religion.

William Brede Kristensen (1867-1953) studied theology for a year and then switched to Arts and studied languages in Norway, Paris and Leiden. His book *The Meaning of Religion* was composed from his lecture notes after his death. In this book Kristensen defined phenomenology of religion as a method which systematically treats the history of religion. He argued that its task is to classify and group the numerous and widely

divergent data in such a way that an overall view of their religious content and the religious values can be obtained.

Kristensen was also concerned with the problem of value judgement. He adopted the method of *epoche* in order that the central aim of understanding religion could be achieved. Kristensen argued that understanding religious phenomena objectively occurs only when the scholar is able to assume the viewpoint of the believer because:

There is no religious reality other than the faith of the believer. It is their religion that we seek to understand not ours (Kristensen 1969:19).

Kristensen held the opinion that the phenomenologist must investigate the religious value the believers attach to their faith and what religion means for them. He argued that the phenomenologist must be able to *get into* the phenomena of religion, and experience them the way the believer experiences them so as to produce good value free accounts (Sharpe 1975:230).

We have noted so far that for Van der Leeuw and Kristensen, *epoche* methodologically enabled scholars to avoid premature value judgements or distortion of the testimony of the believers. In this way phenomenology of religion provided a useful beginning step towards avoiding prejudging other people's religious traditions. It allowed theologians like Van der Leeuw to be able to suspend or bracket off their faith without denying it; to be open as phenomenologists while maintaining their allegiance to a particular tradition.

Some contemporary phenomenologists

Without producing voluminous pages on phenomenology I will summarise ideas from some contemporary scholars as Jouco Bleeker, Ninian Smart, Cantwell Smith and James Cox.

Jouco Bleeker

Jouco Bleeker (1898-1983) is one of the leading phenomenologists in contemporary religious scholarship. Though he is a major exponent of phenomenology, he argues that phenomenology of religion lacks a consensus of opinion about its nature and goals. He highlighted the fact that in phenomenology, one can identify three schools of thought, that is: (i) The descriptive school (of Chantepie and Kristensen) which is content with objective descriptions and systematisation of the religious phenomena. (ii) The typological school which aims at comparisons, for example, that of Van der Leeuw. This school aims to find similarities, differences as well as types of religious phenomena. (iii) The phenomenological school in the strict sense of the word makes inquiries into the essence, sense and the structure of religious phenomena from the believer's point of view.

In his book *The Sacred Bridge*, Bleeker pointed out that phenomenology of religion is not theological, that is, it is not tied to a particular Christian church or dogmatic theology. Therefore it does not verify or falsify truth claims of religions, as done in liberal academic inclusive theology. The believer and his or her beliefs are taken seriously. The phenomenologist treats each religion with respect, empathy and seriousness. Bleeker argued that, "phenomenology takes a position of impartiality by refusing to pass any judgements of the beliefs" (Sharpe 1975:236). Like other scholars Bleeker argued that the truth or falsehood of the beliefs of any religious community is not considered by the phenomenologist. What is important for the phenomenologist is the attainment of understanding in an accurate and value free manner.

The phenomenologist's own beliefs, opinions, and biases are bracketed. For Bleeker, the phenomenological approach grapples with what he technically termed *Theorea* (speculation). The phenomenologist also grapples with penetrating and delineating the structural connections that logically link religious

phenomena. *Logos* was the technical term which Bleeker assigned to this task. Bleeker also stated that the phenomenologist studies the dynamics in the religious life of mankind and this he termed *Entelecheia* (Bleeker 1963:42). Above all these goals is *Verstehen*, that is, an "understanding" of the meaning of religion which must be undertaken with an impartial attitude which allows the observer to objectively understand the religious phenomena being studied. For Bleeker, a phenomenologist passes no judgement on the truth or falsity of the religious facts which he or she studies.

Ninian Smart

In his book, *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*, Ninian Smart (1927-) argues that a scientific study of religion does not explain it away. He holds that many people consider the idea of looking at religion scientifically as absurd and even distasteful (Smart 1973:1). Absurd, because a scientific approach is bound to miss or distort inner feelings and responses to the unseen. Distasteful, because science brings a cold approach to what should be warm and vibrant. For Smart, these hesitations about the enterprise are fundamentally mistaken, though understandable. He states that the human sciences take account of inner feelings precisely because human beings cannot be understood unless their sentiments and attitudes are understood (1973:1). Pointing out that there are new ways of discovering historical truths apart from the biblical way, Smart explained the scientific study of religion as an enterprise which is aspectual in as much as it treats religion as an aspect of existence (though its boundaries are not very clear).

Discussing the fact that religious studies should be poly-methodic Smart maintained that there are multiple and differing methods or disciplines of studying religious behaviour of people (1973:9). Some of these methods such as philosophy of religion bring about philosophical questions about religion. These philosophical questions substantially

have to do with criteria of truth and falsity rather than descriptions and explanations (1986:165). Other methods try to explore religion by the methods of history, sociology, phenomenology and so on. Smart further pointed out that some disciplines which are primarily not concerned with religion can still make a contribution to the understanding of religion (1973:10). He maintained that the scientific study of religion is pluralistic because there are many religions and religious traditions, and it would appear that no full study of religion can properly be undertaken without becoming immersed in more than one tradition. It is necessary to emphasise this elementary fact because, in the past, theology has tended to confine itself to one given tradition (1973:9). Smart argued that since there is a variety of religions and cultures, the study of religion can take in more than one tradition. Such comparative studies can serve a descriptive, historical function. One can note resemblances and contrasts between different doctrines, myths, experiences, developments and so on (1986:167). This may be useful in testing theories such as those used by psychology or sociology students about the origins of religion.

Smart subsumed the study of religion (which includes philosophy of religion) under the studies of world-views. To a large extent, Smart's method for understanding religion combines features of both the phenomenological approach and the historical approach. Smart's understanding of phenomenology includes procedures of attaining meanings of religious acts, symbols, institutions, etc. of the believers. Smart describes phenomenology as a method that involves a kind of imaginative participation in the world of the actor (1973:20). This is so because what the researcher wants to bring out in describing the Shona rituals is a web of values, beliefs and feelings of the participants, and this task may be obstructed by hasty comments on the truth or otherwise of the beliefs, the validity of the values, or the propriety of the feelings (1973:20). In this context, the idea of bracketing is

also very important. Smart's understanding of phenomenological procedures emphasised the point that it is a method of eliciting and evoking the meaning of religious beliefs and practices from the point of view of those who take part in them (1973:110).

So, then, description has to be in a deep sense phenomenology: one needs to penetrate into the feelings and aspirations and experiences evoked by the symbolic forms under which a religion presents itself (1986:168).

Though some scholars such as Segal (1992) would not completely agree with this position, I agree with Smart's argument, especially that one main point of describing matters accurately and sensitively is that they can then be explained, or can help to explain other matters by seeing the mutual relations between different phenomena (1986:168). Smart's phenomenology of religion claims that, by "description" one must not mean a mere external recital of outward histories. He further explains that in order to understand a religion like those who follow it, one must describe and explain imaginatively and sympathetically the life and experiences of the believers (1986:168). In this process, explanations try and bring out where possible, a correlation between doctrines on the one hand and religious experiences and practices on the other (1986:181). Smart also argues that:

Since religion has its wider milieu, these explanatory correlations should be extended, for example through considering the psychological and sociological roots of certain religious phenomena, and the converse, the religious roots of some psychological and social phenomena (1986:182).

This in turn means that psychology and sociology need the right kind of information and sensitivity to tackle religious themes. Smart pointed out that Freud's account, for instance, of the genesis of religion is culturally idiosyncratic. Smart urged for an approach that is typological, descriptive, explanatory and evocative. For him such an approach will enable researchers to deal with types of changes and types of relationships between different religious phenomena. Thus this

method seeks to make objective descriptions and value free interpretations which are as close to those of the believers as possible. Smart's point is that phenomenology can be used as an approach to reach value-free descriptions in religion. Such descriptions if carefully done, aim to try and depict adequately and accurately that which is value-rich. For Smart, the descriptions need to be evocative rather than flat, though the evocations themselves are of course bracketed (1973:21). In my view, Smart's viewpoint was that phenomenology brackets off questions of theological truth, and aims for value-free descriptions and interpretation. For him the performance of bracketing is essential; this principle of bracketing neither affirms nor denies truth verdicts (Smart 1973:21). For Smart, *epoche* like "methodological agnosticism" is vital as a method of phenomenological investigation (1973:57). He used the term "methodological agnosticism" as a correction of Berger's "methodological atheism" which he said could not accept the existence of God. For Smart, what should be used in approaching religion is not so much the principle of methodological atheism as the principle of methodological agnosticism (1986:215). By being methodologically agnostic, a researcher is able to come to terms with the "truth and falsity" question. He argued that it is not useful for an investigator of religion to begin by imposing assumptions drawn from his or her own world-view upon the subject matter (1986:215). Smart believed that *epoche* prevents the observer from affirming or disputing the religious phenomena which he or she hears, sees and experiences. Smart held that the study of religion can be a scientific discipline, based on dispassionate observation and sympathetic intuition for the human feelings that formulated that phenomena. he maintained that the student of religion needs to have a historical knowledge and expertise, sensitivity and imagination in crossing cultures and time, and should have an analytical grasp of the multiple structures of religious faith, myths and institutions (1986:206). In his book, *The Science of Religion and The Sociology of Knowledge*, Smart argued that:

The aim of the phenomenologist, in his descriptions, is to provide, where necessary what may be called a structure laden account which is not theory laden (1973:58).

Smart (1978:45-46) stated that religion involves institutional organisations, rituals, experience and doctrinal beliefs which are all interrelated within a religious tradition. He stated that however, all these can be phenomenologically compared among religions. Smart himself has made a detailed comparison of the religions of Christianity and Buddhism using these categories. He argued that the above listed aspects of religion can be seen, but their significance needs to be approached through the inner life of those who use these externals (1986:11). Using an example of the ceremony of baptising a baby, Smart further argued that, how can we understand it, save by knowing what the idea of baptism means to Christians and by knowing the hopes and feelings of those who participate in the occasion? What Smart means is that researchers must be able to see the way in which the external and inner meanings of religion are fused together. This means that the complex nature of religion is indicated by this need to hold together its outer and inner aspects (1973:11). Though Smart actually never developed a precise and clear operational definition of religion, and contended that one cannot generate a clear-cut definition of religion, he explained that if one wants to understand religion, it is necessary to look at the facts dispassionately. For Smart, understanding can be reached when the researcher describes inner events and meanings without prejudice and with a sensitive and sympathetic understanding (1973:12).

In summary, Smart's position is that the scientific study of religion first of all is scientific in the sense that it is not determined by a position within the field - that is, it begins neither from a theological nor from an atheistic standpoint. Secondly, though the scientific study of religion looks for theories, it does not begin by building theories into phenomenological descriptions, and it adopts

methodological neutralism in its descriptive and evocative tasks. Third, this description and evocation begins, in a sense, from the participants and attempts to delineate the way the focus or claimed transcendental reality looks from their point of view. Fourth, it is scientific in having an analogy to the experimental method, that is, the use of cross-cultural comparisons. Fifth, the scientific study of religion makes use of such methods as may have evolved from the disciplines which share in the study of religion, it is poly-methodic (1973:159). Sixth, the scientific study of religion makes descriptions in such a way as to illuminate and explain religious phenomena in relation to their historical traditions (1973:159).

Wilfred Cantwell Smith

There are at least two sides to W. Cantwell Smith (1920-). One is the theological side and the other fits well with phenomenology. Smith strongly "religionised" his approach by arguing that "the transcendent is real"; because of this he is therefore often interpreted as theological. In my view, one of his major contributions was his 1959 article, "Science of Religion, Whence and Whither" in Eliade 1959.

As I understood him, Smith maintained that religion cannot be studied as a laboratory object (that is, from outside). His starting point was that religion is a matter of faith and belongs to the heart of the believers. It therefore involves an intensely personal experience analogous to love, loyalty, hatred or despair. This understanding implies that religion cannot be objectified or reified so as to be described and understood from "without". Therefore only believers or sensitive students can legitimately and correctly describe it.

He maintained that, to describe religion without the observer having experienced a religious moment or being himself or herself also religious is like a deaf person claiming to discuss eloquently the different types of music and their

rhythms. Smith argued that the psychologist or the sociologist has probed the externals of faith, missing the heart of the matter that has kept the externals burning (Smith 1978:9). Thus Smith criticised methods which present a "distant" understanding of religion because they often relatively ignored the thought patterns of the believers.

He expressed it thus:

Such scholars might be compared to flies crawling on the outside of a goldfish bowl - making accurate and complete observations on the fish inside, measuring their scales meticulously and indeed contributing much to the knowledge of the subject, but never asking themselves, and never finding out, how it really feels to be a goldfish (Smith 1978:12).

I do not think Smith called for the conversion of the scholar to the religion of the believers. At the same time, it appears that what he called for was something more than empathy. He seemed to call for a method which helps researchers make an insightful analysis of the phenomena of religion of the believers such as the temples, scriptures, dance patterns and moral codes. This he called the cumulative tradition. Thus Smith's approach concurred with the idea of assigning classificatory names when observing phenomena. Smith distinguished between cumulative tradition and faith. How scholars should come to grips with the problem of the "inwardness" of religion and how this is to be handled in the academic study of religion, was one important aspect to his discussions.

Scholars such as Thomas Ryba (1988) have done extensive research and analysis of various meanings of phenomenology as used in different disciplines. He stated that the general problem is that although the phenomenological methodology seems to gain in attractiveness with the publication of every new article employing it, the very equivocality in what "phenomenology" means for different practitioners threatens and undermines its generalisability (Ryba 1988:Preface).

He however contended that the use of phenomenology implies an intentionality which encompasses both an awareness of the need for a special science of phenomena and an explicit purpose to delimit a new domain of scientific investigation (Ryba 1988:215).

Ryba (1988:227) outlined constituent procedures for a synthetic phenomenological technique that involves pure observation and description through *epoche* and empathy. He explained that the purpose of the phenomenological method is to provide comprehensive unprejudiced diachronic and synchronic descriptions of religious phenomena. Ryba's explanation of how this is done is significant. He wrote that this is achieved through observation, interpretation, description without hypothetical importation and associating variable orders with qualities of appearance. Furthermore, the researcher describes the place of phenomenon within the overall structure of the observed phenomena and tries to trace its history and emergence according to its morphogenetic development.

I now present a detailed account of Cox's phenomenology because he has done phenomenological studies of the Shona community.

James Cox

James Cox is a scholar of Third World religions as well as research methodologies at Edinburgh University, New College. Cox developed nine working stages of the phenomenological approach in his research into the Shona context. I will try to summarise these stages from his book, *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. These are as follows:

Performance of epoche: The scholar temporarily suspends academic theories, brackets off scientific theories, holds back personal views, cultural bias and religious prejudice in order that an understanding of religion from the inside might be attained.

Empathetic/ sympathetic interpolation: So as to understand the strange and the unfamiliar, the scholar employs empathy and cultivates a feeling for the religious life of the community under observation. The scholar tries in this stage to "enter into" the experience of the believers; to identify with the attitudes, thoughts, and activities of the believers without being converted. The strange and the unusual phenomena are fitted into the knowledge or experiences known to the researcher so that these phenomena make sense. If the phenomena are to appear without distortion, they cannot be merely observed but must also be understood. The barriers of culture, language and unexplained symbols make the task extremely difficult.

Maintaining *epoche*: The researcher is not converted, and does not necessarily have to believe in what the adherents believe. At the same time, the truth claims of the believers are not to be judged. The scholar has to maintain the act of *epoche* throughout the research or else he distorts the phenomena by affirming or dismissing some of the things which he or she observes.

Describing the Phenomena: The phenomenologist describes the religious phenomena as accurately as possible. Interpretations which potentially could distort his observations need to be avoided. The language used by the scholar should be value free; words like "superstition, barbarism, and ancestor worship" need to be avoided so that the descriptions correspond to the testimony of the believer. Everything seen, everything heard, the actions, gestures, songs, symbols and explanations by the adherent need to be recorded faithfully. A description of the structure of any religion incorporates processes such as change, development, crises, growth or stagnation. This, therefore, shows that phenomenology is not only strongly historically grounded but is a systematically and comparatively oriented study of religious phenomena.

Naming the phenomena: This stage is known by other scholars as that of assigning names, classifying phenomena or making categories of religious phenomena. After the description, the scholar now assigns names to phenomena. These names must meet the accurate sense of the believer's testimony and, like the descriptions, they need to be free of biases. Some nouns that have been used in describing African religions, though not incorrect in themselves, carry connotations which misrepresent the actual meaning for the believers. Cox suggested the following as broad and neutral typologies of religious phenomena; myths, rituals, scripture, art, religious sacred practitioners, religious sacred objects, beliefs, and morality. The categories are helpful because they are value free.

Building the structure of religion: The various phenomena which have been classified enable the scholar to build a structure for understanding the religions being studied. The scholar begins to see meanings by looking at the relationships, connections and the processes which exist among the different names of religious phenomena. The listed categories are not individual and independent entities; all the typologies are intricately linked to each other to form a composite picture. Myth, for example, is often told in rituals and rituals are often officiated by sacred practitioners, and in rituals sacred objects or art are often used to depict a scriptural teaching and to offer a moral lesson. So the interrelationships and processes which exist within religious phenomena play an important part in the overall understanding of the meaning of religion.

The paradigmatic model: From the structure of a specific religion, the phenomenologist is now able to draw a paradigm (pattern, structure, design) of the study of the religion. The paradigm is important because it enables the scholar to understand and compare various phenomena, their interaction and their processes. The paradigmatic model helps us to

compare and see the ways in which the content of various religions vary, how that influences the adherent's experience of the sacred and the types of rituals that are emphasised to reinforce those beliefs. In order to understand a given phenomenon, one can and sometimes must compare similar phenomena in different religions even when they are apparently historically unrelated (Plantinga 1989:175). This is what Kristensen has called "informative comparison". However he did it only very sparsely, and only for religions he knew well, historically and philologically. Informative comparison is important because it results in an understanding of the meaning of the classifications of religious phenomena.

Eidetic intuition: The final apprehension of the *eidōs* of the tradition being studied may be attained at the end of the research. "Eidetic intuition" or "eidetic vision" means seeing into or the full understanding of the overall meaning of religion. This is different from defining religion because it occurs after all the other seven steps have been taken and it results from an interaction with the phenomena themselves. Examples of eidetic intuition are: Eliade finds the meaning and nature of religion in the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. For the religious person, Eliade argues, the meta-empirical being remains hidden and irrupts into the profane world thereby invading and manifesting itself only partially (Eliade 1961:14). Platvoet has criticised Eliade's "eidetic vision" as an ontological or metaphysical assumption and not a result of his study of religion. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's eidetic vision identified the locus of religion in personal faith. For Smith, individual believers respond to a sacred being in an intensely personal way which can never be understood fully from outside and therefore cannot be described objectively. Nevertheless, personal faith occurs and is expressed in the cumulative tradition of the believers. Faith thus can be observed in its myths, rituals, beliefs, art, sacred practitioners and other phenomena. Individuals within the same cumulative tradition respond in personal ways

to transcendence. They have a common sharing of beliefs and therefore express their personal faith similarly. Some scholars have expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of "eidetic vision" and have criticised it as verging on "private theologizing", which does not help towards objectivity and therefore has no important use in the "Science of Religion" (Platvoet 1995: personal interview).

Testing the intuition: This is Cox's final stage in the phenomenological stages. It analyses and evaluates the accuracy of the whole process so as to get to the meaning of religion researched by a scholar. In this stage the phenomenologist returns to the phenomena, tests his or her intuition in the light of the phenomena and makes revisions where necessary. All the previous steps in the method may be retraced. Since it is the phenomena themselves which determine the meaning of religion, all statements of the eidetic intuition remain accountable to them.

Cox's phenomenological stages seem to me to be fairly straightforward methods in an endeavour to produce thorough descriptions and to reach a fairly accurate, unbiased and a better understanding of Shona traditional religious phenomena.

Methodological limitations in phenomenology

I will discuss briefly some of the problems which beset the phenomenological method. The impression that phenomenology is a flawless method of studying religion is incorrect.

Phenomenological research has no one consistent methodological procedure, each scholar has his or her own particular "steps". This availability of many methodological procedures has been criticised as confusing. Critics have raised an alarm over the feasibility of the principle of *epoche* and others argue that it is impossible to achieve pure and complete *epoche*. Whilst

some scholars have argued that bracketing is very difficult to perform, others have argued against its necessity.

Some of the questions that can be raised about this method include the following:

Firstly, to what extent does the phenomenological approach rest on presuppositions?

Secondly, the question about whether phenomenology is evaluative has caused controversy in the study of religion. If phenomenology provides descriptions without some form of evaluation, it could be criticised as unscholarly. We need to explore the type of evaluations which might be undertaken by phenomenologists.

The third question relates to the problematic claim coined by Kristensen and also used by Smith that, "The believer is always right". He argued that no statement about religion is valid unless it is acknowledged by the believer. But the question is, how many believers should be consulted to confirm a point or to produce an adequate account?

The fourth question is, must the phenomenologist be confined to the emic approach (outlook in which the believer occupies the status of the ultimate judge of the adequacy of the observer's descriptions and analyses? (Platvoet 1995a:15)). This also relates to the question of the extent to which phenomenologists should be permitted to be etic (analysis, theorising, explanations and contextualisation, etc.). One of the dangers of using etic interpretive grids is that believers may reject some of the information obtained by researchers from "outside perspectives" as false or foreign to their religion.

The fifth point is that phenomenology of religion is criticised as uncritical because it seems to depict a good

picture of the believer's religion without drawing enough attention to its bad aspects. Others criticise it for its complacent approach, for instance when studying such issues as racism. The scholar who presents the religion in a way which conflicts with that of the believers breaches Smith's dictum that, "the believer is always right!" Later in the thesis I question whether the believer is really always right. What if three believers were to contradict each other on some religious experience, description or truth question, how many believers should adjudicate them? How does the phenomenologist deal with a presentation which is denied by the other believers as untrue? These questions are relevant and pertinent to the academic study of African traditional religions.

Concluding remarks

The foregoing discussion is constructed upon the argument that in phenomenology of religion, the researcher suspends all forms of bias and prejudice so as to allow the religious phenomena to speak for themselves without being filtered through any forms of presupposition like religious, atheistic, academic, cultural or racial biases. No matter how difficult, the bracketing of judgments must be performed if the phenomena are not to be distorted by the observer's preconceived notions. The core argument is that all prior judgments, personal ideas, or pre-conceived knowledge must be temporarily suspended. The more the scholar becomes conscious of his or her biases and possible distortions, the more he or she will be able to keep away from distortions. This is a step towards striving for a more accurate, thorough and reliable approach.

Some phenomenologists contend that explaining religion in non-religious terms "lies outside" the phenomenological approach, and such an approach may distort the phenomena as seen from the point of view of the believer. For example, rather than describe religion as "the opium of the people",

phenomenologists seek to describe it as much as possible from the believer's point of view. Whether religion is true or false, this claim must be held in abeyance in order that the religious phenomena may manifest themselves to the observer without distortion. By so doing, some phenomenologists seek to study religion *in se* and *per se* (in itself and by itself). As I have already mentioned, it seeks to set aside all preconceptions by the researcher about what is ontologically "real" or "true" and lets that which is being studied speak for itself as believed reality (Hall 1978:260). This idea concurs with Eliade when he wrote that "a religious phenomenon will only be recognised as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say if it is studied as something religious" (Eliade 1958:xii). Any method that provides tools for inquiry into the views held by the believers themselves and illuminates what is in religion, avoiding distortion and reducing the data to its own categories, is surely useful as a method of study! According to one view, phenomenology insists on the *sui generis* character of religion and its irreducibility, whereas according to scholars like Maxwell (occasional discussions), the phenomenologist should suspend judgments as to whether religion is *sui generis* or not, irreducible or not.

The researcher must enter imaginatively and hermeneutically into the lives and experiences of the owners of the religion. This enables the researcher to describe in a penetrating manner the feelings, aspirations and experiences evoked by the symbolic forms under which a religion presents itself (Smart 1986:168) without being converted to that religion. The particular method to be chosen by the scholar should depend on the data to be studied and the purpose of the investigation (King 1993/3/30: interview). Even so, some of the necessary ingredients in the production of a more genuine, more sensitive, and accurate report of a religion are imagination, empathy and proper interpretation.

Despite its problems and limitations, I believe that because of the caricatures and misunderstandings of Shona traditional religion and society which have been perpetuated, it seems clear that a method (like the phenomenological approach) that values *epoche* and empathy can only result in less adulterated interpretations, a fairer and a more accurate picture of Shona religion.

THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES

According to Wiles (1979:12) theology co-ordinates faith and doubt in a way that does justice to believers. Bleeker (1963:142) defines theology as starting from "statements about religious truth, which result from revelation and which are accepted as worthy of religious belief by the faithful". Both theological and religious studies deal with questions of human experiences and faith. However, many Religious Studies scholars generally regard theological approaches and methodologies as not offering the effective scientific approaches of studying religion. That being the case, what relevance does theology has in the academic study of Shona traditional religion? In this thesis I argue that the study of Shona traditional religion should be poly-methodic for the sake of adequacy I include theology. I also include theology because it deals with themes which concern Religious Studies researchers. The interests of this thesis do not require me to go into details about the wide range streams of theological sub-disciplines and their methods of research. The theology aspects which are relevant in this thesis are; firstly, that theology must be done from the perspective of faith (from "inside"), its procedures may offer insights into the deep personal faith and insider experiences of the Shona. This is significant because the study of African indigenous religions is undertaken increasingly by African scholars who belong to these African religions it can be assumed that much of their academic research in this field is theological. For writers such as Cox (1994:1), this calls for a renewed discussion of

the relevancy of theological methods in the scientific study of African traditional religions.

Secondly, in view of the fact that many interpretations of Shona aspects such as ritual, clan poetry, beliefs, etc. have in the past been done out of the Shona cultural, religious and social settings, contextual theology's emphasis of the importance of understanding the studied people in their own contexts is for me relevant in this discussion.

In popular jargon, Contextual theologies are most often defined as including Liberation theology, Black theology, Feminist theology, Womanist theologies, Gay and Lesbian theologies, Ecological theologies, etc. (Walker & Cochrane 1996:12). Though contextual theologians' emphasis is on empowerment and the social, political and economic contexts of the studied communities, my interests in the study of Shona traditional religion is mainly on the importance of understanding its phenomena taking into consideration Shona cultural and social contexts.

Contextual theology researchers use tools of historical and social analysis as part of acts which aid them to "see" and "interpret" contextually. They use methodological insights from other disciplines in a way which helps them to attain a "depth reading" of the people's experiences in relation to the Bible. Thus, Contextual theologians utilise this kind of approach so as to detect the fundamental differences between public transcripts and hidden or coded transcripts (Walker & Cochrane 1996:12).

Scholars such as Gerald West (1995) maintain that when analysing biblical texts, it is not only the Bible, but the particular context of the reader that also constitutes an important source for analysis. West urges scholars to use an approach which tries to understand not only the interpretations but the interpreted materials in relation to

the interpreter's experiences. Thus, the scholar studying Shona religion should understand Shona myths, legends, poetry, proverbs in relation to the social and cultural contexts of the people who use these oral texts. Researchers should not study these oral texts by themselves but should do so within a broader cultural-religious and social-economic context which influence interpretations. This approach helps the researcher not only to historicise facts but also to translate them into new contexts by interpreting from within a poly-methodic framework so as to gain fresh insights.

I will paraphrase some methodological procedures followed by contextual theology as outlined by Walker and Cochrane.

(i) The studied community must participate in the research through workshops. (ii) The researcher should be consciously inserted into the community while retaining an element of criticality about the local content. (iii) Research should be done in such a way as to allow people to volunteer information as much as possible. (iv) The researcher is urged to be inter-religious and inter-disciplinary. Here we see the importance of tolerance, a way which may help to sacrifice parochial prejudices and bring new insights.

(v) Indigenous narrative stories such as legends, myths, idioms, songs should be treated as significant sources of reflecting the thought patterns of the people where the research is conducted. (vi) This methodology encourages a situation of "learning by doing" that is, by conducting workshops, fieldwork and so forth. (vii) The theologian utilises small groups as important processes for case study. (viii) The researcher aims for a learning context in which real life situations can be brought together with classroom learning (1996:27). Such an approach enables a researcher to be aware of his or her own limitations, to accept his or her ignorance and try to learn from the studied community (Philpott 1993:18).

Whereas scholars in disciplines such as phenomenology put emphasis on the presentation of what the researchers see, hear, feel and smell, theology presents a deep personal understanding by the indigenous people, "the insider perspectives". Nuernberger (1993:8) stated that it would be insufficient to study a religion only from the outside as a disinterested observer because then one would miss the very essence of faith, namely the commitment to the disclosed truth. In order to understand some elusive aspects of African traditional religions, it may be necessary to depend on "insider perspectives".

When studying private cults in African traditional religions, the job is easier done by insiders, researchers who belong to these cults. Theological approaches are significant here because the "insider information" that is often regarded as confidential is made accessible. Though Chavunduka is not a theologian, one can use him as a good example to illustrate this point.

Most of the research on Shona traditional religion has been approached thematically (God, salvation, ancestors, etc.). I think that researchers should give greater emphasis to context rather than themes. Without saying that researchers studying Shona religion should do contextual theology, my view is that researchers on Shona religions should start with the cultural, social and religious contexts of the Shona people as they reflect on their oral texts such as myths, ritual invocations, proverbs, etc. Researchers should examine the orally transmitted tenets of the Shona in relation to their social-political and economic contexts. I believe that this may help in bringing about accurate reflections on the practices, beliefs and faith of the Shona.

Far from arguing that Religious Studies researchers should introduce theological studies in their research, I am confining my comments to the importance of "insider

perceptions" and the importance of social and cultural contexts in the study of Shona religious phenomena. Religious scientists in African studies have not paid adequate attention to discussions on the kind of hermeneutics that is most suitable in order to attain a better understanding of the Shona religious tradition (which exists mainly in oral form such as myths, proverbs, clan poetry, prayers and invocations).

SOCIAL SCIENCE METHODS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

I stated in the thesis that the study of African traditional religions developed from amateur ethnography and history of often very poor quality which is becoming more rigorous and academic as more research is done in this area. I described Chavunduka as one of the Shona sociologists who has written on Shona traditional religion. While amateur ethnography from "Eurocentrics" and early ethnographers continued to contribute, in modest ways, a more scholarly approach to the study of indigenous religions and cultures began to emerge in the first decades of the 20th century. This was when some colonial governments were, for various reasons, in need of more reliable information on the traditional societies which they governed, and appointed "government anthropologists" to supply them with that information (Kuper 1975:127-130). Precisely because of the colonial needs, the study of African societies and religions by anthropologists expanded greatly and improved in academic quality, in many cases within the limits set by paradigmatic perceptions and theoretical models congenial to the pragmatics of European colonial empires (Mudimbe 1988:5). As Bourdillon stated, the early ones depicted African society as an indistinct mass of numerous, generally small and "primitive tribes" which were in need of a western master to establish order among them. This approach has largely been abandoned in recent anthropology whose focus is now on unbiased, accurate and reliable record.

Social science approaches use methods which are largely empirical, observational and experimental. These methods generally relate and refer to perspectives of societies and cultures in different times and places. A social scientist investigating religion may use quantitative methods, or qualitative methods or both. In quantitative research, reality is reduced to formal units and is measured by survey techniques that produce statistical results. Many social scientists adopt a historical perspective at least as part of their kit of analysis tools.

Another method of research is that of sending questionnaires to interviewees. This method of research is impersonal in as much as it does not allow the researcher to meet personally the people whose responses are being measured. The questionnaires may set off a smooth process of reflection and response in the informants. One weakness in this approach lies in the methods and procedures of research employed by the individual sociologist. As an example, some sociologists rely on hired interviewers (agentic research) who may present their own interpretations or may lead interviewees into certain answers. On the other hand the qualitative method may be based on the "face to face" method, that is, the interviewer goes out to meet the interviewee. The representativeness of data obtained in the qualitative method is much lower than in quantitative research (Hultkrantz 1983:37). Hultkrantz argued that quantitative social methods are not appropriate for the complex and often intimate realities of the religions. Qualitative methods produce descriptions which are richer in texture and which do better justice to the religion studied than those of the quantitative investigator. The empirical method of collecting information, analysis, interpretation and systematisation is a valuable attempt at being as accurate and reliable as is possible within the limitations imposed by this (qualitative) research method.

Social-scientific approaches understand that religion is a socio-historical fact and can be described and analysed in terms of its structural or functional relationship with other facets like that of the human psyche or social existence (Cumpsty 1991:4). On the one hand contemporary social scientists like Clifford Geertz have argued that the issue of truth is beyond their social scientific ken. Social-scientific approaches restrict the researcher to the question of origin, evolution, function, structure and meaning. As an example, Jung asserted that religion originates in the projection of archetypes of the collective unconscious on to the world, yet he denied that his explanation had any consequence for the truth of religion. He particularly opposed Christianity's exclusive truth claims, not those of religion in general.

On the other hand some social scientists are more eager to evaluate the truth of religion. These include Mary Douglas, Victor Turner and Peter Berger in his later years. Their approaches contend that social scientists should take the truth of religion seriously (Turner 1981:195). Mary Douglas appears to me to be a relativist who regards some religious beliefs of different cultures to be sociologically true, as social facts, in the Durkheimian sense (Douglas 1978:ix). The later Peter Berger argued that social scientists can confirm the truth of religion (Berger 1980:58-60, 114-42). Other social scientists pronounce religion false. This class includes James Frazer, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. These scholars argued for a secular origin and function and even more for the futility of the function of religion on the grounds of its falsity. I think that this was based not on their social findings, but on philosophical grounds. They themselves would disagree, but that is what their methodological opponents (religionists and neutralists like Platvoet) say. This categorisation should not be taken as suggesting that there are only religion-affirming and religion-denying social scientists. However, both are in the minority, and rather extreme groups among the social

scientists, a considerable number of whom do not bother with this truth question.

We shall now outline the social-anthropological research methods highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, manner of analysis and interpretation as well as relevant theoretical issues arising in their contexts.

Social anthropological approaches

I seek to present some methodological aspects of social anthropology which may help us to have insights regarding the academic study of traditional religions. Some of the discussions will be linked to the works of the writers such as Bourdillon (a prominent anthropologist on Shona traditional religion and culture) and others whose works I presented in the previous sections of this thesis.

p'Bitek (1971) vehemently criticised anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard, Griaule, as well as religious scholars such as Mbiti and others for "hellenizing" African concepts of God by presenting them in the metaphysical terms of the Greeks and Christian scholasticism. He also criticised these anthropologists for using research methods which highly de-contextualised their object of study. p'Bitek also criticised them for employing approaches which sought to integrate African religious beliefs into their personal Christian religion. He argued that some of these writers ended up presenting African traditional religions as well-systematised theologies.

Social anthropology is one of the disciplines whose methods have made a profound contribution towards our current understanding of African traditional religions. There are at present two trends in the anthropological outlook on religion. The first consists of researchers who consider religion as a cultural reflection and thoroughly integrated part of culture

(Hultkrantz 1978:27). Such perceptions tend to become ethnographically reductionistic because the method used by the researcher presupposes and operates on the premise that religious expressions are embedded in sociological perspectives. This procedure does not do much good to the image of social science's methodological approaches in the study of religion. This is so because in some cases a researcher then has a tendency to try and confirm the operation of a theory in the religion being studied. Such a researcher is always entangled in a situation of perceiving empirical reality in an exclusively singular selective and limited way. Such a researcher's method of investigation, analysis and interpretation may be limited only to human relationships and processes of interaction between believers and the meta-empirical beings to whom they relate themselves in their religion (Horton 1969:212).

Another class of social anthropological researchers employ the same methods of research as others but their theories are just hypotheses which may only be confirmed or disconfirmed at the end of the research. In both of these methods, the scholar may get immersed in the community he or she is investigating for a period of about three years. This approach may enable the scholar to attain firsthand information about the community studied and may be able to be a participant observer in the religion being investigated. Social scientists believe that such a method may give the researcher an insider's familiarity so as to produce good results. These approaches may enable the researchers to develop new categories and to develop new theories for the new information they meet. One problem with the emic and the participant observation method is that the people studied may be influenced to modify their ritual so as to cater for the expectations of the investigator (Bourdillon 1993a:260). Another important issue lies with whether this method can safeguard the historical particularities of religions or phenomena being investigated as fully as possible.

I have already indicated that positivist social-scientific methods of research have a tendency to narrow the vision of the scholar to some limited aspect. This results in situations whereby for instance a scholar declares that religion is nothing but an illusion. Such theories are reductionistic because they disable a comprehensive understanding of religions and religious phenomena. In numerous cases, through positivist-reductionist theories, African traditional religions have been reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of some other reality. It is in such cases that "reductionism" issues become relevant in this study. The meaning of the term "reductionism" is understood differently by different scholars. I shall explain shortly why writers such as Wiebe, Kiernan and Segal disagree with Pals' definition that, "reductionism is arguing that religion is best understood by going outside the religion of the believers to explain it" (Pals 1986:18). Pals argued that, in various ways, the theories of these social scientists are concerned with showing that a religious phenomenon owes its existence to non-religious causes (1986:18). Thus this definition contends that reductionism is the steadfast monopoly of research and interpretation by one discipline as the only one in the study of religion. The commonly held definition of "reductionism" takes the approach that there is *nothing more* to religion than its social manifestations (Kiernan 1995 August: Personal correspondence). Those from within the biology and physiology boundaries may resort to explanations of the body and the physio-biological interpretations only. Those from within the psychology boundaries may resort solely to the causes of the needs, rooted in the psychic structure of the adherent, as adequate and self-contained ways of interpreting religion. Thus from these scholars' conclusions, is it safe to argue that in most instances religion rides the surface of hidden forces which are uncovered and explained by these scholars' theories? One problem is that such interpretations of religion are of a speculative nature, and often arise from non-religious contexts and orientations detached from the studied

people. Such theories have been castigated as paying insufficient attention to the visions and contexts of the traditional religious communities. Without pre-judging all social scientists, it should be noted that African traditional religions do not exist in a vacuum: they are inextricably linked to society, culture and behavioural realities. In order to fully understand them, rather than depend on theory, social scientists need to make reference to the social, religious, behaviourist psychology, cultural conditions and to their historical contexts lest they are misrepresented. Platvoet argued that from the social sciences:

Some theories, though based on considerable empirical observation and inductive argument, have deeper, extra scientific foundations ... are often devised and operated to confirm them. Such theories are often governed by a powerful *idee directrices* which often causes the student of religions to perceive the empirical reality in a selective and limited way: it narrows his vision to some aspects of it and blinds him to the rest (Platvoet 1982:9).

Platvoet quoted situations where, for example, religions are declared an obsessive neurosis. Thus through reductionism religion is reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of an empirical social, cultural or psychological process (1982:9). Segal quotes Kepness who stated that students of religion want to understand what they want to study: religion, and not society, physiology or brain chemistry (Segal 1992:7). At the same time, religionistic approaches make use of theories which commit similar transgressions. The proponents of religionistic approaches contend that religion has ontological referents and is, therefore, true. One such case is found in the early Christian orthodox missionaries as well as some of the recent African religionists like John Mbiti, Canaan Banana, Gordon Chavunduka and Jomo Kenyatta. The early orthodox Christian writers were convinced that all other religions were false and their own religion was true. Some of the "Eurocentric" writers on Shona traditional religion analysed in this thesis are victims of the methodological pitfall of this selective perception.

Participant observation method

One of the techniques in qualitative methods of research is the participant observation method. This method is important in as much as it contributes to better understanding of African traditional culture and religions. We will start by scrutinizing the method and techniques of participant observation as employed by a distinguished scholar, Victor Turner.

Having taught at Manchester, Turner became a Professor of Anthropology first at Cornell and then at the University of Virginia. He was an eminent anthropologist who lived in Zambia for many years and conducted intensive research on the religious orientations of the Ndembu people. The Ndembu are a matrilineal and unstable society of Zambia.

I present Victor Turner as a good example of a scholar who used properly the participant observation method in order to attain a thorough understanding of Ndembu traditional religion. My intention is not to analyse Turner comprehensively but to consult excerpts from some of his books and to examine how he did his research. This will be of assistance in understanding some of the central questions which concern this thesis. The following excerpts are from Victor Turner's book *Ndembu Divination*.

...Divination into the cause of death is consequently either done in secret or across the border of Portuguese Angola. I was never able to attend such a public seance, although I had a series of private interviews with an Angolan Ndembu diviner who visited Ikelenge Area in 1952. This man showed me his apparatus ... (p.22).

Since I have not actually observed divination in depth in its natural setting I have thought it best to present full accounts of my interviews with diviners and other ritual experts. To compensate for the lack of direct observation, this method has the advantage of bringing out how the Ndembu themselves think and feel about the subject matter of divination... (p.22).

I had five informants of whom three had practised divination at the time of my enquiry. The other two were a sub chief and my cook, who might be described as "an intelligent layman".

In addition I picked up pieces of information in the course of field-work from a variety of persons, in the form of unsolicited comments and conversations overheard in the men's shelter in villages.

My best informant was a man called Muchona. I have published elsewhere a character sketch and short biography of this ritual specialist (Turner 1960). I shall use his account of divination as the main source of this paper, commenting on it as I proceed in the light of other informants' statements and of my own observations of Ndembu life and ritual ...

I was most competently assisted in these sessions by Mr. Windson Kashnakaji, a teacher at the Nswanakudya mission out-school. He was able to elucidate for me some technical terms and idiomatic phrases of divination which peppered Muchona's narrative ... (p.23).

As an example, after the topic on *tuponya* in his book *The Meaning of the Tuponya*, Turner began a lucid 27 page presentation of firsthand interpretations by two of his informants:

I present here interpretations of the different *tuponya*, first by the Angolan diviner, and then by Muchona (p.56).

Before we dwell on analysing and examining issues pertinent to our investigation, let us read another extract from his other book *Drums of Affliction*. Beginning a chapter, Victor Turner informed his readers:

I personally attended only three of these rituals although I had accounts of the others ... (p.156).

I will set my observations as I first recorded them ... (p.157)

In another case Turner began thus:

On the morning of six November 1951 I arrived at Nswanamundong'u village at about 8 o'clock, to find that its members and three visiting practitioners were already involved in preparations ... villagers

had no hesitation in telling me that Kamahasanyi went to Angola to consult a diviner (p.158) ... I then inspected these *yishing'a* and found out that several other sacred symbolic objects had recently been placed (p.159) ... When I had inspected the shrine I was invited to go to the bush with a small party of practitioners to collect some medicines of *Ihomba*. We proceeded in a single file ... we sang a mournful song (*Mukoke-e*) that is sung by a hunter (p.160) ... The diviner then went to the kitchen and remained there for about a minute, but I do not know what he was doing (p.199)...

My wife and I attended a dozen performances of *Nkang'a* during our two periods of field-work ... My wife visited many novices in their seclusion huts and talked with the women who were training them (1972:199).

From these excerpts, there are a number of points of interest that may help us to analyse the writers in questions. First of all, it has been noted that Turner obtained his raw materials for analysis directly from the primary sources through an empirical field work research method. Turner informed us that the *Ndembu* people were very friendly and cooperative. This receptive attitude of the *Ndembu* people enabled Turner, not only to be a direct observer, but easily to become a participant during the research.

Turner was physically present, observing and often taking part in some of the rituals. This method enabled him to make a close inspection of the unfamiliar religious objects and religious places. Thus Turner wrote about the *Ndembu* religion as an eyewitness. This method enabled him to attain fairly accurate and reliable information. To overcome the problem of forgetting some of the things during the actual writing, instead of using the "retrospective recording method", Turner resorted to the "spot diarisation" method, that is, note taking at the time of observation. (However, if notetaking is done in the presence of the participant, it will have an effect on their behaviour as even the presence of the researcher, and his interest, and questions will). Turner observed and wrote everything directly in his diary. The

benefit of this technique was the production of detailed and accurate accounts.

Turner complemented his information from participatory observation with that which he received from his informants. As we have seen from one of the excerpts, in one case he had five regular informants. These were relevant and qualified to be his informants because some of them were religious practitioners and others were initiands. It is probably because of this precautionary method of research that Turner's description of religious phenomena is fairly reliable and impartial. Turner seemed to describe faithfully everything that he saw and admitted to what he did not see. He made fairly adequate descriptions of: the religious places, religious objects, actions, religious practitioners, gestures as well as what he heard; the songs, peculiar words, myths were all described as from a Ndembu pen. This is not to say that Turner was all knowing. As we have seen in the extracts, Turner sometimes pleaded ignorance of some of the information. He said, "I could not get information about the *ihomba* medicines" (Turner 1975:81). Thus he averted any chance of distorting the reality of the phenomena.

Turner learnt enough of the Ndembu language to enable him to communicate directly with the participants and to conduct his research. He, however, relied on the assistance of a local school teacher in the elucidation of technical terms and idiomatic phrases. This is how the translation problem was taken care of. Proper translations create conditions for impartial and fairly accurate descriptions and interpretations. Turner got more information from unsolicited sources to supplement information from his own observations. He also conducted informal and formal interviews and often concluded by saying:

All informants agree that only men can involve the shades at this episode ... or according to many informants (Turner 1975:204).

This method of research seems good for the production of adequate descriptions as well as unbiased and fairly representative interpretations of the culture and religion of studied communities. His informants reached a consensus agreement on the interpretation and meaning of various religious phenomena.

When it comes to interpretations, Turner resorted to what I think is a very good strategy. He first presented the interpretations made by the Ndembu believers themselves. For example in Ndembu divination he devoted 27 pages to Muchona's interpretations of Ndembu divinatory symbols. After presenting the indigenous exegesis, Turner informed us that he also made his own personal comments in the light of his personal observation and the comments of other informants. Turner informed his readers that he actually eavesdropped on informal discussions of the Ndembu people. From these unsolicited comments he was able to get a deeper insight into the thoughts, feelings and religious nature of the Ndembu people.

Turner urged fellow writers to engage in modes of investigation which "crack the cultural codes" of the believers (Turner 1975:8). This "cracking of the cultural codes" of the believers seeks to explain some phenomena like the religious symbols so that writers arrive at an understanding of the semantic assemblage and the dynamics of that religious tradition. We have seen in previous chapters how different writers cracked or failed to crack the cultural codes of the Shona people. This is much more problematic when it comes to presenting the significance of symbols and symbolism in myths and rituals as well as the interpretation of religious objects and certain religious actions (Turner 1975:1). Symbols are storage units, into which amounts of information are packed; they are the best possible mnemonic, short hand cyphers referring to the whole process of stereotyped thinking (Turner 1975:3). Expressions in African traditional religions are highly symbolic. If care is not

taken to interpret symbols in their contexts the researchers may be misled in their interpretations. The believers' emotive reactions are governed by symbols with private associations in their minds. For a profound understanding, the researcher is bound to "crack the cultural codes", to penetrate and bring to light not only their meanings, but also their efficacy in society. The problems of misinterpretation compel us in our analysis to return not only to the facts but to certain concerns, goals, approaches, methods and other research procedures of individual researchers.

From Turner we can learn many methodological issues that may be valuable for researchers in the Shona community. Turner's accounts teach us that in order to present sensitive and balanced accounts and to achieve a better understanding of African indigenous religions and their symbols, a scholar should employ research methods which enable them to crack the cultural codes of these religious communities. This process facilitates possibilities of interpreting religious phenomena in their contexts and may help researchers to prevent serious errors when they attempt to "translate" straight from the sensory appearance of the symbol to its social function.

Turner presented the interpretations of the Ndembu people themselves and then he later on presented a sociological commentary and analysis of the same phenomena from within social anthropology. Thus, he surveyed single and interconnected relationships as well as conflicts of principles and values of different social and religious structures. Turner, for instance, analysed ritual symbol as a factor in social action associated with collective ends and means (Turner 1975:269). If these kinds of interpretations were his sole manner of interpretation, it is here that the debate about reductionism and the validity of theory formulation would be pertinent. Should religion be studied as a function of culture? If so, some people may argue that this is reducing religion to something else. Through the methods

employed by writers like Turner we can see that the time when accounts presenting foreign religions as a distorted, childish caricature of a human being are gone. Turner's approaches are relevant and appropriate because they try to reduce the problem of producing inadequate descriptions and prejudiced accounts.

VARIOUS RELATIONSHIPS AMONG APPROACHES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

The approaches discussed in this chapter form part of what the phenomenologist Harold Turner has called "the milieu into which religion is interwoven" (Cox 1992:75). This means that the study of religion from the perspectives of other disciplines such as: history (the study of the past of human societies and change of their contexts over time in relation to available evidence), sociology (talking about societies, their institutions and environment), anthropology (talking about people and their cultures) and psychology (talking about the human psyche and mind). Religion can also be studied from the stand-points of philosophy (cognitive rigour, language and reasoning) and theology (the study of religion in relation to the community of believers' faith). Phenomenology does not seek to discredit the significance nor the important contribution made by these various methodologies of religious studies to knowledge. Often, rather than getting to grips with the meaning and nature of religion, some scholars sometimes have a tendency to see only their theories (theological, evolutionary, functional, anthropological or sociological, etc.) in use in the study of religion. *We noted that the object of such scholars's concern is not the believer's perception of the religious phenomena themselves but the application of their own disciplines to the religious phenomena.* We should, however, be careful so that we do not dismiss these approaches outright simply because some of the early anthropologists employed them in certain ideological

ways. There is need to explore whether and how these independent and varied methodologies can be complementary so as to give a full picture of traditional religion.

Ursula King has argued that phenomenology of religion is ahistorical because it classifies its data "irrespective of any historical sequence" (King 1993/3/14: Interview). King's argument is not totally correct because some phenomenologists try to work closely with historians. As we have examined above, phenomenology of religion is complemented by historical and participant observation methods. Raffael Pettazzoni argued along similar lines when he said that phenomenology has nothing to do with the historical development of religion. He propounded the unique argument that phenomenology of religion separates the different structures from the multiplicity of religious phenomena. Pettazzoni was convinced that phenomenology's working procedures help the scholar to find out the meaning of religious phenomena independently of their position in time, space, and their attachment to a given cultural element. Thus, phenomenology of religion reaches a universality which necessarily escapes a history of religion devoted to the study of particular religions. Phenomenology of religion stands as a science *sui generis* different from the history of religion (Pettazzoni 1954:217). Nevertheless, for Pettazzoni it is contentious to argue that the history of religion has nothing to say about the meaning of religious phenomena. He admitted that phenomenology is dependent upon the work of a historian of religion.

Though phenomenology of religion is closely related to history of religion, the two are interdependent "instruments" of *Religionswissenschaft* (science of religion) (Pettazzoni 1954:217). The two disciplines stand in mutual relation and are complementary to each other, each providing material for research of the other. I have explained how the historian of religion traces and establishes the origins, development of religions. He or she collects, examines developments and

catalogues the data within various religious traditions. The raw materials of religious beliefs, practices, and experience are analysed according to the historical methods.

All this activity is informed by the systematic work of phenomenology of religion in devising generalised descriptions, classifications, typologies and a basic methodological orientation to the field work (Chidester 1985:77). This orientation is typified by connected attitudes of *epoche* and empathy. For Van der Leeuw, historical typology is an "essential sub-division" of phenomenology of religion. Notably, some phenomenologists never execute this task without referring to history, so phenomenologists somehow work with historians of religion. In sequence with this line of thought, scholars such as Wach argue that history and phenomenology are able to contribute to each others' study; history, providing the data and phenomenology organising and sorting this data into meaningful entities through typological categories.

I support the contention that researchers need to continue to search for possible relationships, if not partnership, among various methodological approaches to the study of African traditional religions. The relevant approaches and tools of research should be harnessed together for a common purpose of the more productive interaction. History and phenomenological approaches will only be able to give a certain portion of the full picture of African indigenous religions. It has already been stated that in many situations the study of African traditional religions is being undertaken increasingly by indigenous scholars who themselves belong to the traditions they study. We need to ask if a purely "objective" science of African religions is therefore possible in such cases. This question has a basis in the fact that some of these scholars study religion as a religious undertaking and this implies that, in the study of African traditional religions, theology and science of religion remain closely related.

I stated that theology relates to a people's faith. It is sometimes studied in such a way so as to sustain and clarify faith for the religious community. It may contribute useful information to other disciplines, for example, by casting light not only upon people's beliefs but also upon how they understand their faith. Theology is concerned with humans' attitudes and responses to the divine, its concerns may be of value not only to historians and sociologists but also to researchers working on the study of Shona traditional religion. Some of the things which theologians say are influenced by sociological factors, but it need not and should not be wholly determined by them. Technically, theologians and religious studies scholars and sociologists are concerned with the interplay of faith and belief, institutional forms and ethical precepts. But theologians cannot abandon their concerns with the truth and falsity of these beliefs. At the same time historians are concerned with the past perspective of these aspects, and a measure of phenomenological insights on religions is of vital significance for good theology. I stated that Shona traditional religion is inseparable from social, cultural and behavioural realities. Like social scientists, historians as well as other researchers are interested in "when", "how" and "why" men and women acted together as social or religious beings. One link between social science and history is that they both observe how people have developed their institutions, what they have used them for, and how they acted within the religious, political, social and cultural frameworks by which they order their lives. As history traces human behaviour in different contexts over a long period of time, in so doing, it enlarges and clarifies our comprehension of social processes.

Social-anthropological methods and approaches are useful for research in the Shona community. They need to be used so as to augment the methodological approaches from other disciplines. Besides being explained by sociological principles, indigenous religio-social phenomena need to be interpreted by use of

behavioural psychology. Insights from the analysis of the believers' psyche, especially in areas which relate to culture-bound syndromes, magic, disease, healing, etc. will definitely strengthen the input from other disciplines. Psychological approaches contribute illuminations which relate to motivations and intentions of religious behaviour and the impact of religion on them in relation to such issues as the integration or disintegration of personality. On its own, and apart from the historical, theological, phenomenological and social-anthropological research methodologies, behavioural psychology cannot attain a comprehensive picture of traditional religions. A poly-methodic approach to the study of religion may help to free researchers from sectarian bias. Such an interactionist approach embraces and relates findings which try to achieve a comprehensive and a many sided understanding of African indigenous religions. Though this is not an easy task I believe that it can be done either by one researcher, having assimilated all these approaches equally well, or the same work can be done by a team of discipline specialists.

There are many tools of investigation, as we have seen. The researcher is often in danger of falling into the fallacy of trying to fit religious phenomena into a single mode of inquiry. A complete understanding of Shona traditional religion should make reference to their human contexts. A critical study of Shona traditional religion will integrate approaches and tools of research from all relevant disciplines so as to separate historical fact from propaganda and bias.

In our search for a more helpful and appropriate method of studying Shona traditional religion, we seek an approach which avoids deficient and one-sided understanding. It is possible for a scholar to avoid the dogma of methodological exclusiveness on the one hand and "religious naivete" on the other. Part of my task in this thesis is to reflect on how the scholars in question made use of these disciplines in trying

to understand the nature of Shona traditional religions. It is important for researchers to reflect seriously on the various perspectives of academic training which are necessary in order for scholars to comprehensively describe and rigorously interpret, so as to adequately understand Shona traditional religion. The next chapter consists of evaluative conclusions in view of the discussions in the foregoing chapters.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUDING EVALUATIONS

Introduction

Waardenburg (1973-74:4) likened the study of research methods to sharpening a knife and the research itself to using the knife. It goes without saying that good research is obtained through adopting appropriate methodological approaches; a proper attitude to the object of study, suitable research tools and appropriate interpretation. We understand better a scholar's perceptions and concepts when we know his or her goals as well as the methodological approaches which he or she employed. I have focused on the study of the religion and culture of a specific African geographical area in relation to international debates on research methodology development and theoretical discourses. I believe that this study makes a worthwhile contribution in as much as it is the first of its kind in the academic study of Shona religion and culture. No writer to my knowledge has systematically studied writers on Shona religion chronologically, from the "early writers" up to the influential contemporary scholars such as Bourdillon, with a significant assessment of research methodology and theoretical issues that relate to their works. As a Shona who is interested in research methodology issues I felt challenged to study not only how Shona religion has been researched previously, but to examine the development of research methods of studying it.

In this thesis I have described and analysed some passages in the works of some Eurocentrics as well as passages from Gelfand, Chavunduka and Bourdillon. In these passages where possible I indicated sections that refer to these writers' methods of research and theoretical positions. On the basis of some of some of these excerpts it may be argued that there is a relationship between them and some of the writers' professional commitments and cultural baggage. This claim is

based on the assessment of the distance between: the role of the writer as a colonial administrator, as a Christian missionary, or as a *sceptic* (like some "Eurocentrics"). In the case of a scholar like Gelfand it is also necessary to assess the distance between his role as a scholar on the Shona people and as a Western medical doctor. This pattern should also be used to assess the role of the writer as a researcher, as a believer and traditional healer (like Chavunduka) and the consequent effects. These discussions relate to various methodological and theoretical issues that I presented in chapter six such as, the issue of subjectivity, the importance of fieldwork, the "insider-outsider" debate, objectivity and the implications of value priorities held by these writers. I utilised my own fieldwork observations and personal knowledge of some of the Shona religious rituals in order to clarify some issues and to compare notes with those of the other writers.

Using some of the methodological approaches presented in chapter six I will explore deficiencies and strengths of the ways in which these writers gathered information and interpreted it in accordance with differing circumstances and angles of perception. The discussions about approaches and research methodologies in chapter six helped to shed light on research methods from various disciplines. These discussions should help us to gain valuable insights towards formulating a suitable research model in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of the Shona. For us to understand why these scholars wrote in the way they did, it was crucial to describe and understand the contexts in which they worked as well as their interests when they wrote. I evaluate these writers with the consideration that their contexts were different from my own that I presented in the introduction.

Comments relating to chapter one

Chapter one consisted of a brief summary of the explanation of who the Shona people are, their religion and culture as generally depicted in today's research. I used the word Shona to describe speakers of the Shona language living in the plateau between the Limpopo and the Zambezi rivers. The Shona beliefs and practices that I summarised in this chapter generally belong to the colonial and post-colonial periods. One general criticism about most existing publications is that they do not describe adequately and clearly the historical settings of the Shona people. It is necessary that researchers define clearly the time frame or the historical period in which specific Shona beliefs and practices were prevailing.

Furthermore, there has been a tendency to write in general terms about Shona traditional religion without focusing on a specific group. At the same time, in many cases researchers on Shona traditional religion and culture have tended to concentrate their research mainly on the Shona Zezuru dialect group. One of the challenges facing future researchers is the need to have a clear understanding of the divisions between the various Shona ethnic groups, and to extend their locus of research so as to encompass other Shona dialect groups such as the Ndau, Korekore, Manyika. The minor groups who live along the border of Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries should not be neglected. These groups which include the vaVenda, maTonga, maKalan'a and maChan'ana have religious beliefs and practices that are closely related to those of the Shona. Research on religious beliefs and cultural practices of the individual groups should be carried out so that they are understood in their own right, without being overshadowed by the research done among the Zezuru and Karanga communities.

It is noted that the publications of some "early writers" misrepresented these aspects, and recent writers produced much better research. I however wish to express some general

dissatisfaction with the quality of analysis in most books on Shona religion and culture. I criticise writers who, without due justification, blame "early writers" for inaccuracy, as well as biased and prejudiced reporting. Researchers should embark on a more integrated methodology and approach which would enable them to depict a more thorough understanding of the Shona religion, culture and society. This is done partly by seriously examining the relevant tools of research from sociology, anthropology, phenomenology, history, theology, etc. The coalescence of these methods, where necessary, and utilization of the relevant tools of analysis, should be deployed in order to produce thorough descriptions and interpretations of Shona religion and culture in their historical contexts and cultural perspectives.

My discussion of the documentation of Shona religion and culture examines some of these accounts in relation to methodological approaches used by these writers. From my descriptions in chapter one, there seems to be no agreement among scholars about how the Shona people understood God before the missionaries introduced Christianity to them. The on-going controversies concerning Shona beliefs about God are traced from the writings of some of the early missionaries who argued that the Shona did not have a concept of God. In the same vein, writers such as Stayt (1931:240) argued that the Shona God was not a High God, whereas later writers maintained that the Shona had a concept of a Supreme Spiritual God similar to that of the Christians (Nondo 1992:7). In an effort to clarify this issue, David Westerlund argued that the fact that many scholars have emphasised the active character of many High gods in Africa should be seen partly in the light of the great Islamic and Christian influences (Westerlund 1980:37). The controversy deepens as contemporary scholars like Jim Kiernan (1995), Okot p'Bitek (1971:29) and Klaus Nuernberger (1975) claim that Bantu communities did not have a concept of a Supreme God prior to the advent of missionary work. The Shona people that I interviewed and the "nature

rituals" (e.g. rain making or thanks giving and harvest rituals) that I took part in, show that the Karanga people's beliefs relate more to God *qua* the Matopo God than to God *qua* the high God. God *qua* Matopo is identified closely with these ritual practices. From the responses of the ritual leaders to my questions and from my own observations the reality of this God to these people is much more so in times when they need practical help. These are times such as that of drought, floods or mysterious fires. In the light of the existence of beliefs in this Mwari (God) Cave Cult at Matopo Hills which was functional before foreign religions started penetrating the area, the call to engage in thorough research on the Shona traditional understanding of God is necessary. Writers such as Daneel (1970) contend that the Matopo cave cult held beliefs in a God who dealt with their problems on a daily basis and to whom they performed rituals regularly.

David Chidester's recent research, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, has made a significant contribution by arguing that in many cases, the question as to whether Africans had a religion at all was determined by the political circumstances. In this book, Chidester (1996) argues that systems of colonialism and violent conflict determined how certain religions were defined or viewed. In a systematic study of "Religious Studies" on the South African frontier, Chidester found that periods of violent conflict between European settlers and the indigenous people coincided with judgments of denial as to the existence of forms of religion (for example, beliefs in God). When political control was firmly established, African religious systems were uncovered and discovered, only to disappear when hostilities resumed. Chidester argues that "academic debates" on the fundamental nature of African religions which were gathered from missionaries, colonialists, explorers and early ethnographers have usually ignored the real issues of denial and recognition that were inevitably at stake in situations of intercultural contact and conflict. This also means that

writers on African traditional religions were not always "unconcerned" but were in many cases deeply implicated and involved in the process of either repression, authentication or of proving a theory. In chapter six I emphasised the need for researchers to make use of oral testimony so as to come close to the reality of religious and cultural histories of these communities. The chapter six discussions on history methods is most relevant for the clarification of this matter. Religious studies scholars should analyse such things as bushmen art and hut decorations, and should use geological excavations and archaeological findings so as to obtain the evidence that enable them to reconstruct bygone events.

In chapter one I stated that one of the controversial issues in the study of Shona religion is the question as to whether ancestral spirits are worshipped or not. I contend that among the Shona the ancestors are not worshipped. There is a wide range of rituals that are performed on different occasions. These rituals are performed either to venerate the ancestors when they are angry, to thank them, to ritually bring them home, to ask them to relay requests to the great one, etc. So ancestral rituals have various meanings none of which is worship. Further research on this topic needs to be done e.g. on the clarification of terminology, on illuminating on the exact ways in which the "dead" have an impact on the living. When researching on these issues researchers should seriously reflect on some of the issues that I discussed in chapter six, for example, when doing field work, to analyse contextually Shona ritual songs, myths, proverbs, dirges, etc. that inform us about this topic. The precise setting(s) in which various religious and cultural phenomena about Shona spiritual beliefs and practices serve need to be clearly described. This helps to illuminate the meanings of ancestral rituals in different circumstances and to trace the approximate origins of these rituals, when they existed and how they took shape and flourished amidst new religious movements, the influences of Western culture, etc.

Contextual research should be done on how "new" concepts, for example, on virology and immunology have affected the Shona conviction that a *n'anga* in the rural areas may discover the cure for Aids. The important task is that relevant research methods presented in chapter six should be coalesced and effectively used so as to conduct an insightful research that illuminate on both accurate descriptions and insider details, e.g. about the extent to which *n'angas* are effective. Besides the development of an integrated scientific approach to the study of Shona religion and culture, attention should be paid to virgin topics that have not been thoroughly dealt with. As I stated in chapter one some of these topics include: gender politics, incest and religion, the concept of sin, tribal constitutions, dreams and their importance, etc. In order to reach a rich documentation of Shona traditional religion, Shona traditional "priests" and Shona healers should also be engaged in the retrieval of the distant past through oral history. This "insider" information needs to be combined with observed facts so as to help in producing a comprehensive documentation of Shona beliefs and practices.

My analysis of Victor Turner's participant observation method seems to point out that there should be greater equality between the researcher and the researched. For research to be more interesting, realistic and more meaningful, the researched should not be passive objects. Instead of highlighting our own academic categories we should pay more attention to the researched and their understanding of events. We should be unassuming and pay more respect to their point of view than give more weight to high levels of academic formulations. In this vein I am of the view that future researchers on Shona religion should acknowledge their responsibility to contribute to the self-expression and manifestation of the practical life situations of the people they research. This may be done on the basis of empirical observation and religious-ecological participatory research. An example of this approach is presented in chapter four about

Daneel's works (1993a, 1993b) where he suggests that research needs not only to be contextual but should contribute to the survival and development of the people studied. To illustrate this, Daneel's research contributes to the Masvingo Shona people's religious-cultural expression for agro-economic praxis through sustainable development. Daneel not only takes part in the practical work of "religious expression and re-afforestation", his research uncovers facts about Shona religious beliefs and it further seeks to repair the individual psychosomatic ills as well as the restoration of harmony in the face of social disruption and political conflict, and the maintenance of a viable equilibrium between humans and their environment.

Evaluation of the Eurocentrics

In chapter two I chose to concentrate on a few "early writers", trying to give a balanced presentation. I presented those whose works are quite faulty and unreliable, with those writers whose works are fairly reasonable. This sample framework illustrated two opposed views: one that despised and demonised Shona religion and culture (for example, records by Rochefort McGuire) and another that tried to respect it (for example, the works by Livingstone). Having described the contexts in which they worked and their works it is necessary to try and assess the value of these writings to readers of their time, and to those in current academic contexts. In this section of the thesis I appraise these writers' works first by analysing them in their own historical environment and by the standards of their times. Secondly, by analysing them in retrospect, that is, with use of contemporary academic methodological sophistication I seek to establish their value and utility. This procedure provides an answer to such questions as to how it is possible to sift out from the "early writers" that which is of importance for descriptive accounts.

Despite the contexts and historical backgrounds out of which the positions I described in chapter two were developed, one of the positive points is that these works mark the starting point of the recording of Shona religion. Thus, the Eurocentrics were pioneers in the writing about Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices, and in so doing illustrated that it could be done. Directly or indirectly, their works challenged and encouraged later writers to work in the same areas, but with a much more serious goal of presenting accurate information within a well-articulated methodology.

Some of the works by "early writers" are important because they furnish us with valuable historical information which would otherwise be difficult to obtain elsewhere. It is worth noting that some of these "early writers"' works have in some cases been followed up, further developed, partly discarded or in other cases have been totally superseded depending on the nature of the specific writings. There is no doubt that these "early writers" left a legacy: certain ways of understanding which, although sometimes controversial, have to a small extent been inherited by contemporary writers. In some cases researchers use works of these writers more as historical sources than as authorities on Shona traditional religion. Examples of cases where the early missionary writers influenced the understanding of concepts in Shona traditional religion include: the claim that the Shona worship their ancestors and the perception of the Shona God who currently is described in terms as those of the Christians. Shona Christians such as Ambrose Moyo, Canaan Banana and others have also written on some aspects of Shona religion. Their works reflect the adoption and integration of some Christian concepts into Shona culture and religion. Their documentation has a strong inclination towards systematisation, generalisation and an extrapolation from the particular to the universal. As Tempels did, by slipping from "Luba folk wisdom" to "Bantu world view", so these Shona and other African

scholars like Mbiti, Idowu, etc. seem to have sought to "upgrade" the pre-reflective, multi-stranded and the often practised (rather than expressed) beliefs of "individual communities" to a unitary and articulate "African traditional religion". Contemporary writers such as p'Bitek (1971:80) vehemently attacked such scholars for imposing and hellenising African religions. To ameliorate the errors of these scholars he, for example, maintained that people may describe their deities as "old" but not as "eternal", as "great" but not as "omnipresent", as "wise" but not as "omniscient". In this regard I express some concern regarding criticisms by some contemporary scholars of the "early writers" on Shona religion and society without a close analysis of contexts in which they lived.

The "early writers" can hardly be described as "scholars" in the strict sense of the word as used today in academic circles because the context in which they wrote their memoirs, personal letters and monographs was not academic. Many of them were not concerned with problems of mistranslation, misinterpretation and inaccuracy when describing Shona religion and culture as we are today in an academic context that seeks adequate, detailed and comprehensive research. They did not concern themselves with the development of research methodology (the ways of collecting information, correctly decoding, analysing and interpreting it), and its applicability within what they wrote and how they wrote it. In view of the various contexts in which they wrote that I outlined in chapter two, it is therefore unfair to criticise in general terms these "early writers" as having failed to meet certain academic requirements. I however, believe that scholars may gain useful information if they expose some of these writings to critical examination so as to try and see their limitations and significance. The sifting out from the early writings of that which is of importance for descriptive accounts can be done by carefully reading these accounts in a critical way; that is, by assessing the value of these

writings in relation not only to the contexts of the writers but also to the environment of the Shona at the time when these writers arrived. In chapter two I distinguished the context of the Christian missionary from that of the colonial administrator and that of the explorers. From these dissimilar contexts one can already detect distinct intentions and orientations in the individual writers. Some of these writers, like the explorers, were concerned with nothing more than the writing of personal letters for friends and relatives at home. Such documents contain useful information such as accurate historical facts like, for example the dates when a specified explorer arrived or departed from a specified place. However, it is often the case that such documents sometimes contain exaggerations about the "exotic" practices of the Shona. Another example is that of the native commissioners whose work was mainly that of administration more often in hostile conditions such that what they wrote basically depicted the bad side of Shona cultural practices. Furthermore most of these writers' accounts were too general without pointing out specificities. Even though some of the statements in their writings may be correct, their presentation of the data gave a distorted picture of reality that they wrote about. Most of their writings are from their daily work of recording court cases. The environment in which they worked was not one in which they can be expected to have produced diligent and comprehensive descriptions.

When we examine the "Eurocentric's" writings in the environment in which they were written most of these writings were welcomed with open arms. They informed readers about the early Europeans' experiences in Africa; how they perceived African society, religious beliefs, cultural practices and legal institutions. The descriptions of Christian missionaries, colonial administrators, explorers and traders each presented a picture that informed the European readers about Africans. These readers looked forward to being informed about Africa by these writers. In chapter two I presented a

brief summary of some negative aspects of the Shona cultural context when the "early writers" arrived. It was partly because of this situation that most of these writers' works concentrated on the bad aspects of the Shona people. The deficiency of these writings is that their readers at that time were exposed to only part of the Shona culture and religion, and not the full story. However, given the background of these writers, especially the Christian missionaries and colonial administrators, it is not surprising that they felt that they had a duty to help the Africans. When the "early writers" came to Africa most of them already viewed Africans with certain prejudices such as the perception that Africans are not only inferior to be pitied but as with a feeling of disgust. Some of these writers, in dealing with the Shona, therefore felt impelled to inculcate Christianity, but the brand of this Christianity embraced Western social life and commerce as well as colonisation.

When we compare these writers with each other, and in their own environment we see that there is a stark difference, first for example, between the context of some Christian missionaries as Livingstone and other "early writers" who were traders, explorers or native commissioners whose contexts were far from being academic. It would be unfair to expect these writers to have produced detailed, analytical and scientific research because it was not their intention to do so. In any case, during that time and given the amount of exposure that they had to the Shona, what could these early Europeans think of "tribal" life; mud and grass huts, and the scanty clothing, especially when it consisted of a bark cloth? When the early Europeans found none of the obvious European material and mechanical advantages they had known for many years, it is not surprising that they jumped to the conclusion that the Africans were primitive and perhaps subnormal. The dogmatic Christian concerns as well as some of these writers' insistency on white supremacy are examples to support the claim that the religious and the cultural backgrounds of these

writers influenced how they perceived the Shona. Most of these writers approached the Shona people with an attitude of superiority. Such an approach involves power relations in research, and suggests the notion of "muscular Christianity" in the sense that Christian evangelisation involved intimidation of some African traditionalists. Some of my discussions in chapter six are relevant to this discussion in the sense that one of the methodological weaknesses in such cases is that the powerful (researcher) propounded theories that were subjective, ethnocentric and religio-centric. This kind of approach involved a surreptitious setting of limits by the powerful (researcher) to what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible or sayable. This was an attempted extension of authority, influence and power by some of these writers over Shona traditional religion and culture.

Furthermore, the native commissioners wrote about the Shona in disparaging terms partly because of the political influences of the period of colonial conquests and expansion. The culture of domination and intolerance that characterised this period is reflected in some of the native commissioners' writings that I discussed in chapter two. Due to their political backgrounds and interests they marginalised and alienated Shona culture and religion. This contributed towards the production of misinterpretations, value-laden judgements and defective descriptions and analysis of the Shona. Though some of them made good use of the unique opportunities they had of observing Shona rites, nonetheless their political orientations influenced both the way they wrote about certain Shona beliefs in the sense that most of their descriptions were generally opinionated and couched in depreciative and sarcastic language. However, in view of the historical context in which these works were written, it would be unfair to severely criticise individual writers whose works merely reflect the convictions of the times in which they lived.

The point that I am labouring to drive home is that assessed in their own context, the "early writers'" works differ in degree of accuracy and reliability. Judging these writers by the standards of their own contexts we see that, for example, the cursory and insufficient writings of writers such as McGuire were of insignificant value, for example, when compared to the somewhat more detailed and more sympathetic writings by native commissioners such as Bullock or Posselt. On the same note the records by many early missionaries show serious bias and prejudice as compared to the fairly good writings by Livingstone. The combination of "Western colonial" and "Christian theological views" in these different writers produced different views about Shona society, culture and religion, one that despised it, and another that tried to respect it. My hypothesis is that it was mainly some of the early Christian missionaries that produced better and more tolerant works than the rest of the "early writers" perhaps because of the kind of training that they received before they came to Africa. I described in chapter two that most of the early missionaries first went to mission stations where they were taught various things which included biblical studies and literary skills. It is also noted that most of the missionaries had an interest in documenting their experiences, and had a particular interest in education development hence they built a lot of missionary schools. Moreover the development of literacy among the Shona is much more linked to missionaries than to explorers, traders or colonial administrators. I would like to argue that the quality of some of these writings were also influenced by the individual writer's talent in writing and personal interests in the Shona. As an example, though David Livingstone lived in an environment that corresponds to the rest of the "early writers" his works were much better than that of the others, partly because he had interest and was more tolerant of the beliefs and practices of the people that he was describing. In addition he was highly motivated by his readers in Europe who showed great interest in Africa. I would also like to argue

that though he was not exposed to the research methodology debates that I presented in chapter six, Livingstone's writings were of a better quality than those of the other "early writers" because he worked together with his friend Oswell to thoroughly edit his writings before sending them for publication. The fact that the London Missionary Society, newspapers and the Royal Geographical Society journal were eager to publish his writings motivated him to work harder so as to produce better quality work.

In criticising the "early writers" it is also necessary to consider the fact that not all of them published their original research findings as they wanted. The governments that funded some of these writers' expeditions and research, intervened before the publication of the findings so as to control what was to be published and to decide how it was to be worded. I cited cases where some of these writers' conclusions were censored or slanted so as to suit the government's intelligence purposes. This is a significant factor because it contributed towards the presentation of defective and unreliable accounts of Shona society, culture and religion. In such cases the individual writer was not so much at fault as the sponsor (government) who demanded that the research should be presented in certain ways. Some of the "early writers" at that time felt that their right to present their findings fairly was violated but there was nothing much they could do to avert the sponsors' unethical conduct of intervening with the wording in the presentation of their "anthropological researches".

It is important that each writer's weaknesses and strengths should be examined on its own rather than making blanket criticisms. I therefore maintain that works by scholars such as Zvabva (1991:63-84) which ruthlessly attack the works of these "early writers" and emphasise only the negative aspects, should be reviewed from a critical academic perspective. In the same light, contemporary writers are urged to review the

works of these "early writers" against thorough historical research and relevant ethnographic knowledge.

I now assess the value of these writers from my point of view. My context of critique is that of a contemporary religious studies student whose environment is that of research using academic research tools that have been discussed in chapter six. The "early writers" are not expected to have employed these methods of research which, contemporary researchers need to integrate and employ so as to gain insights about Shona traditional religion in its living context. In the process of analysing the "early writers"' works, by using some of these methods, e.g. the history and archaeology methods many concepts about the Shona get redefined and the misrepresentations that were documented in the past are clarified. The retrospective evaluation of the early works, according to contemporary methods of research, seeks to remedy the understanding of these works according to modern research ideals of accuracy, adequacy and thoroughness. From this position one sees a sense of development in the academic study of Shona traditional religion and culture.

In chapter six I discussed that a writer's cultural, religious and academic backgrounds can extremely affect and influence a writer's research. Chapter two illustrates that to a great extent, the Eurocentric's' writings were influenced by the writers' Western cultural backgrounds, orthodox christian backgrounds, colonial political interests, etc. Most of the "early writers", especially those from an orthodox Christian background were not "open" to the existence of other religions and cultures in Africa. These are some of the aspects that led them to despise the unknown or inadequately understood Shona phenomena. Against this background in chapter six I discussed the usefulness of the "bracketing" technique and how it enables researchers of today to deal with preconceptions and the suspension of biases. I discussed in chapter six that some contemporary researchers use phenomenological "empathy" so

that they are tolerant of the so-called foreign phenomena. This methodological technique could be applied so as to deal with the dogmatic Christian backgrounds that today influence some writers towards intolerance and theological partisanship.

The bad attitudes coupled with bigotry and lack of empathy of some of the "early writers" dampened their potential to attain a better understanding of the Shona. These negative attitudes affected these writers' methods of obtaining and interpreting the information on the Shona. Contemporary researchers employ tools of research such as those from phenomenology, history, social-sciences, etc. so as to be able to produce adequate, accurate and reliable research that is free of biased language.

The deficiencies in the works of most of the "early writers" may partly be accounted for from a viewpoint of poor research methods that they employed. These include the "stay-at-home" approach through which some of these writers arrived at speculative conclusions about Shona religion on the basis of hearsay. This disregard of scientific observation replaced objective observation with hearsay, and argumentation with subjective rhetoric. Some of these writers depended on the influence of pre-formulated *theoretical frameworks*, for example, the Tylorian evolutionist "magic-religion-science" distinction, and the Frazerian theoretical perspectives, etc. On the basis of such preconceived theories others sought to maintain the idea of white supremacy without due empirical substance. To illustrate this point, in chapter two I presented the flavour of prejudiced notions in the works of some "early writers", for example, "We are rational, but primitive people (are) pre-logical, living in a world of dreams, make-believe; we are monotheists, but they are fetishists, animists, etc." In explicit and implicit ways, *some Western ideologies* are found featuring in some of the accounts which describe African cultures and religions. Ideology is used here in a general sense to mean a body of

ideas that reflects values and beliefs that are often assumed to be historically true and obviously natural. Ideologies in these accounts take the form of general Western stereotypes of African culture and religion. Most of these ideas were constructed on the basis of selective perception, expedience and second-hand information that was current at that time. This was not Western ideology for its own sake, it involved hegemony; that is control of "the other". From this angle these writers failed to interpret Shona beliefs and cultural practices in their historical contexts and proper cultural perspectives. In most cases, the descriptions from such writers are ahistorical and do not perceive phenomena in their own living contexts (Ranger & Kimambo 1972:2-3).

Another relevant methodological aspect that I discussed in chapter six is the fact that a researcher interested in attaining a comprehensive understanding of the Shona has to live among them for a long period of time so as to conduct thorough research. One of the problems in most of the "early writers'" ways of collecting information is that most of them did not live with the communities about they wrote. This means that they had a scanty knowledge of the Shona beliefs and practices.

In chapter six I discussed that researchers need to have a reasonable knowledge of linguistic and symbolic expressions of the studied people. Most of the "early writers" did not understand Shona language and other forms of expression used by the Shona. I indicated instances where the problems of mistranslation marred some of these writers' accounts. Their incorrect translations contributed to the use of misleading terminology and biased language and terms such as "witch-doctor" to mean *n'anga* or "heathenism" to mean traditional religions. This explains why some of these writers failed to "crack the cultural codes" of the Shona people. In addition, it is a pity that these writers' accounts lack proper descriptive details concerning the inherent connections among

different religious phenomena like Shona myths, rituals, symbols, morality, art, etc.

I have highlighted some of the glaring flaws in documentations by the "early writers". It could be said that they merely reflect the influences of the period in which they lived. This was a period before scientific study and anthropology had revealed the significance of Shona culture and religion. However, in some of the Eurocentrics' works researchers discover important information such as accurate dates about when certain beliefs were common, or significant details such as the existence of female chiefs among the Chiweshe people. Nevertheless, the writings of even the best of the "early writers" is of limited value to later generations, for example, when we try to attain illuminations on meanings of Shona symbols. As compared to the later writers, the "early writers'" works lack adequate descriptive detail and are inadequate for use in contemporary contexts where we seek a profound understanding of the meanings as well as of the historical origins and developments of certain Shona religious and cultural phenomena. In view of contemporary rigorous methods of collecting information and analysing it, we therefore see a sense of development in the study of Shona traditional religion and culture. The later writers on the Shona have produced high quality ethnographic materials that enable us to attain a better understanding of Shona religion, culture and society. I now examine Gelfand's publications.

Critical evaluation of Gelfand

As Michael Gelfand has written a lot of books on the Shona people over a very long period of time it is necessary to analyse him in terms of "the early" Gelfand and "the later" Gelfand. This kind of analysis enables me to trace a sense of development in his research and the way in which he conducted it. I paid particular attention to his book *Tropical Victory* because this book, in my view, represents the general drift of

Gelfand's research orientation during the very early period of his writings. I also mainly used his book *African Crucible* as a sample representation of the general drift of his later works.

The context in which he did his writings played a role in influencing what he wrote about. This was a context in which the early Europeans shouldered the burden to translate into reality the dream of establishing within the southern tropics a Western civilisation. In recording the works of these doctors, as he stated in some of his works, Gelfand was paying tribute to these Western doctors. I quoted some passages that show the "early Gelfand's" great appreciation of the works of the pioneer doctors and nurses. In view of this historical background, Gelfand's works at that time were limited to recording as much as possible, the development of Western medical science and ways in which doctors coped with the curing various types of diseases that were common at that time. At this early period Gelfand's descriptions depicted the Western ideals as "struggling against savagery, death and disease" in the Shona people. Gelfand's works lack a clear substantiation of the ways in which these people were savages or primitive. It should be noted that the period and context in which he wrote his early works was one in which the early Europeans, especially Western medical doctors like him, were contemptuous of and discouraged Shona traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices. Thus, the "early Gelfand's" works show ways in which the context of colonisation, the spread of Christianity and the establishment of Western medical institutions influenced him on what to write and how to write about it. In view of this context he wrote mainly about the ideals of Western civilisation. Thus, to a large extent his writings reflect mainly the thought patterns of his fellow colleagues of that period.

I would like to further argue that his professional background as a medical doctor also played a role in the way he wrote. In

several of his early books Gelfand stated in various forms that he wrote so that his present generation would emulate the works of the pioneer doctors and that from the experiences of the pioneer health workers he looked for answers for the future (1953:Preface). In some instances Gelfand complained about the Shona's preference of "witch doctors" instead of Western medical doctors, a practice that he interpreted as defying civilisation. The depiction of the *n'anga* as anti-civilisation, in my view, has contributed to the contempt of the institution of the *n'anga* by most of the people in current Shona communities. Furthermore, in chapter three I explained that in some cases the "early Gelfand" used negative and disdainful terminology that depict the Shona beliefs and practices as savage, primitive or pagan. This may be linked to the influence of three factors: the colonial context in which he lived, his professional medical commitments as well as his Western European cultural background. Thus, in such cases one sees that it is not easy to separate the distance between Gelfand as a Western medical practitioner and Gelfand as a "mere writer" on Shona people.

His professional commitments featured in his early writings as he announced the need for people to take precautions so as to control the tropical diseases that were already becoming rarer due to the work of Western doctors. Thus, as a Western medical doctor Gelfand had professional commitments that motivated him to write expressing great esteem in the work of the pioneer doctors and nurses and condemning that of Shona traditional healers. This condemnation of the Shona beliefs and practices, in my view, was not only domineering the Shona world view, but was also an attempt of a reformulation of the Shona tradition. Gelfand at this time sought to support the growth of Western medical institutions and was opposed to some of the beliefs and practices of the Shona such as the institution of traditional healers. One may argue that Gelfand's negative position about the practice of consulting traditional healers was not a malicious one because he aspired to improve the

health conditions of the Shona life. However, this condemnation of the *n'anga* had devastating effect on the traditional healers' institution. From such accounts the information that we attain about the *n'anga* is very restricted and gives insignificant insights about traditional healing systems. These accounts are of little value to researchers seeking a profound understanding of the historical function of *n'anga* among the Shona people, for example, the sociological roles, their role in politics and in legal matters, their duties in religious matters, health matters and in counselling.

Gelfand's early books are of some importance to contemporary readers in the sense that they contain valuable information about several issues which include the history of the establishment of Western health systems in Rhodesia. From these early works readers are able to gain information about the major people and governments that were involved in the establishment of hospitals during specified dates of the early time of Rhodesia. Also documented in these works are some of the conditions and hardships that were endured by the pioneer doctors, nurses and Christian missionary health workers. In order to meet his aim of presenting a detailed picture of the development of the health system in Rhodesia Gelfand made use of several methods some of which I discussed in chapter six. Among which the prominent ones include his close analysis of written sources that were available. Gelfand also conducted personal interviews with people involved in the actual work that he described. He also obtained this information from seminaries, archives, books, Eurocentrics' personal letters, information from newspapers, etc. It appears that these sources did not have much information and analysis about the beliefs and practices of the Shona people, however, from them, Gelfand obtained some information that depicted attitudes to the various Shona aspects in different historical contexts. Strictly speaking, Gelfand's early works give insignificant

insights to students seeking a better understanding of Shona beliefs. I now look at Gelfand's later works.

In chapter three I pointed out that in the later times, the general drift of Gelfand's research encompassed both issues about Western medicine as well as Shona beliefs and practices. From many of his later works one can say that the question of his European ethnicity did not play a major role in affecting his research. The context in which he worked was much more academic than that of the "early writers". He was writing from a university atmosphere. Parts of his research show that good research on the *field level* can also be done by scholars who are themselves not Shona. I agree with Gelfand that it does not follow that because a man was born in Africa, he understands the people with whom he came into contact (1968a:vii). Whether a researcher is black or white, he or she can make substantial and considerable contributions to research about Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices. But this exercise calls for appropriate approaches such as: interest in learning more about the Shona, a good attitude that creates a harmonious atmosphere between the interviewee and the interviewer in the field, and more importantly an effective use of the relevant tools of research. Gelfand lived with the Shona mainly in the hospital environment for a very long period such that his familiarity with the Shona increased. His close connections with Shona patients enabled him to write about the Shona from first hand experience as he worked with these people on a daily basis.

It however appears that his European background, together with his training as a Western medical practitioner generally influenced the kind of information he collected and how he interpreted it. For example, there is no doubt that his interpretations of Shona drinking habits are influenced by his medical profession as a general practitioner. In chapter three I presented some of Gelfand's interpretations that illuminate Shona phenomenon only from a medical angle. Though his later

books are on Shona culture and religion such interpretations are, in my view, more appealing for students studying medical anthropology than those studying African traditional religions. Gelfand's approach in most of his books took a strong medical perspective, as he tried to understand Shona religious and cultural practices primarily from a Western medical angle. I protest his introduction, in some cases of his interpretations, of categories foreign to the Shona people without clearly separating them from those of the Shona people themselves. Whereas there is nothing wrong with making sophisticated medical interpretations of Shona religious phenomena, one problem is that the reader is not informed about whether these interpretations are from the community or whether they are the writer's own. It is possible that they were from Gelfand's Shona informants and research assistants who worked as medical doctors or as orderlies. My point here is that, for the reader, the distinction between the "emic" and the "etic" descriptions and interpretations in some sections of Gelfand's works is blurred. This is worse especially where the authors' descriptions or interpretations may conflict with those of the studied community or when they are regarded as alien, inappropriate or meaningless by the studied community. In the particular book where Gelfand deals with Shona drinking habits from a medical angle, his stated goal and the general drift of his whole research concerns itself with an ethno-religious study with reference to the Shona speaking people. Instead of dwelling on the medical interpretations one would have expected him to include in his presentation the Shona cultural perceptions of beer drinking habits as he asserted in the introduction of his research. These medical interpretations are derived more from academic sources rather than from field work research based on visits to various tribal trust lands.

Gelfand needed first of all to have presented ways in which Shona people deciphered their metaphors, symbols, actions and cultural concepts, beliefs and practices, rather than his

medical oriented descriptions which, in my view, overlooked the importance of the spiritual realm of Shona cosmology as well as Shona cultural beliefs and practices, aspects that are impossible to ignore if one wants to truly understand the Shona. As an example, from reading Gelfand's descriptions in chapter three, it is hard to know precisely how the Shona people themselves interpret the ritual. It is possible that he did not have the appropriate inside information. Perhaps the short occasional fieldwork visits to Shona villages which he made were inadequate for him to conduct thorough research. In chapter six I discussed the importance of conducting fieldwork and observation based research. I discussed that it is crucial for a researcher to live in the community that he or she is studying for a long period observing properly and documenting the data. This is nothing new, it has been done by countless earlier researchers but to what extent have contemporary researchers on the Shona employed this approach and improved it? I also discussed the merits of using electrical gadgets like video cameras and tape recorders so as to record information in its living context. These are recommended because they are able to keep a fixed sample characterisation of songs sung, symbols used, ritual actions performed, words uttered during a specific Shona religious ceremony. However one of the research methodology problems in using them for the study of African traditional religions is that they create a controlled environment that is rather "artificial". As an example, what is said and done in camera and tape recorder situation is always different from that done in a free and unobserved atmosphere. Moreover, words uttered and actions performed at one rain making ritual are not exactly the same as those in a ritual during the next ritual.

As Gelfand's later works are mainly on the Shona, the reader expects adequate descriptions about Shona religious beliefs and practices as well as information about how the Shona perceive them. What I find rather more deficient in Gelfand's accounts is the Shona reflections on their beliefs and

practices. A careful reading of many of Gelfand's works, even some of the later works reveals that he is listening more to his professional medical interests and less to the Shona traditional religious peasants. Nonetheless, researchers have the freedom to use alien categories and rules derived from the data and language of science as long as they clearly distinguish between the etic and the emic information so as to avoid confusion to readers. In my opinion Gelfand's etic perceptions would need to be bracketed until at the end of the relevant section after the believers have decoded their own meanings and the significance of various phenomena. Thus the scientific study of Shona traditional religion need not always be studied from the community's own perspective alone. The approach that succeeds in making sense of traditional phenomena from as many different angles as possible is most welcome in the study of the Shona.

Gelfand's medically based interpretations are criticised on the basis that there is no "one correct interpretation" of, for example, ritual activity. His adherence to the medical interpretation in certain instances without referring to other possible frames of reference restricts the possibilities of attaining an adequate understanding of Shona phenomena in their cultural contexts. An exploration of, or an expression of the availability of various perceptions may help to give readers a sense of the holistic nature of Shona beliefs and practices. It is worth noting that events or symbols of a religion may submit to several interpretations, each correct in its own way. Granted that an interpretation is an attempt to make sense of the facts, one interpretation may be *better than another*, in making more coherent sense in exploring the facts. This therefore means that Gelfand's bio-medical interpretations are relevant in a limited way even though they help towards providing a wider understanding of drinking habits among the Shona. One point of concern is Gelfand's attempt to understand religio-cultural phenomena such as food and beer by going outside Shona religion and culture in order

to translate them. The problem, in my view is that he does so at the expense of contextualisation, and this approach does not give due consideration to the explanations by the Shona themselves. Such an approach poses a danger that the researcher's descriptions and interpretations may miss the crucial aspects or the central concerns of the Shona's own reflections about themselves.

It is probably because of this outsider understanding that Gelfand sometimes argued that there is no place for a *n'anga* (witch doctor). Arguing that their institution was facing an end, Gelfand asserted that the *n'angas* were the greatest obstacle to a more enlightened way of life and to the African's progress in civilisation (Gelfand 1964:119-120). Such a conclusion is a value-judgement which reflects Gelfand's negative opinions about the institution of traditional healers. One would want to be informed about the opinions of the Shona people on the issue and why, contrary to Gelfand's conclusions these people continue to value the *n'anga's* services. One could pose the question that if Gelfand sought to improve the health conditions of the Shona how could he portray the *n'anga* in the negative light? One possible answer to this question is that the context in which he worked as Western medical doctor, and the manner in which disease was controlled in this context was vastly different from those used by *n'angas*. In his book, *The African Witch*, Gelfand made careful and detailed analysis of Shona patients' descriptions about their consultation of *n'angas*, he noted that the knowledge of the *n'anga* about anatomy and physiology was most elementary (1967:134). In this research he expressed worries that the approach of the *n'anga* in healing was not based on body or organ function. Much of the treatment, for example, even in such cases as chest pains or gastro-enteritis depended on appeasing ancestral spirits that were believed to be the cause of the disease. Gelfand expressed some qualms with this system because the appeasement of ancestral spirits or the witch-hunting cults delayed his patients from coming to

hospital until such a time when the disease was severe. Out of the many interviews that Gelfand conducted with his patients, almost in all cases, before going to hospital they had consulted four to six *n'angas* (1967:86). For Gelfand this retarded the effective control of disease, thus in writing about the Shona, what he stood for, as a Western medicine-man was opposed to the *n'anga* even though both had a goal of improving the health system of the Shona.

Even though Gelfand reached these conclusions about the hopelessness of traditional healers many decades ago, it is interesting to note that today many Shona people are increasingly relying on the services of the *n'anga*. *N'angas* seem not to be a handicap at all, in fact they seem to have a central place in social and healing spheres among the Shona (Dziva 1990). Thus, some of his conclusions do not concur with some of the recent developments regarding research among Shona people.

The fact that his interpretations discouraged the institution of the *n'anga* because of its "backward" approaches shows the extent to which Gelfand's writings about this issue were influenced by his Western culture and modern perceptions. In some of his works, here and there one notices the influence of Western cultural values and modern thought patterns that dismiss that which does not fit into Western logic and science, for example, healing methods and food types. Such an approach poses methodological problems in as much as it may introduce Western preconceptions and biases into the research. In accordance to general Western convictions Gelfand discouraged the work, and consultation, of traditional diviner-healers in preference to Western medical technology. One can follow a similar criticism on the issue of *lobola* which he criticised as the selling and buying of wives. Gelfand's position in translating these aspects well relates to *modernisation theories* in the sense that his interpretations seem to advocate a "progressivist" approach to

knowledge. This approach, for example, implies that African ways of eating, nutrition and medical habits are primitive and useless, they should vanish and give way to modern nutrition and medical technology, especially those originating from Western culture. This approach urges a move away from certain aspects of African traditional patterns of thought towards contemporary Western thought patterns. A critical examination of this approach shows that in it, is implied an assumption that the Western model represents a developmentally "superior" paradigm. It is possible that scholars who support this position claim that such a transition is justifiable on the grounds of spectacular increase of efficiency in the explanation, prediction and control of events that it will bring. However, the pursuit of such an approach sometimes poses a danger of secularising aspects of African traditional religious practices. While I must acknowledge that Gelfand does sometimes try to present the perspectives of the described community, I query his tendency in some of his works to use an approach that restricts descriptions and interpretations to one perspective. In order to attain a comprehensive understanding of what is happening in the Shona community, researchers need not only present one-sided accounts but to critically examine the similarities and the differences between both the western and African systems. Furthermore, it is important for researchers to be conscious of the ideologies which may influence the way they interpret phenomena of other cultures. It is equally important that researchers need to be cautious about applying their academic theories when trying to understand Shona traditional communities. For these reasons there is a need to formulate a model of research sensitive to different kinds of relations and one that enables researchers to reach a thorough understanding of Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices more in their natural contexts, and less in Western hospital contexts.

Another aspect of Gelfand's later accounts (e.g. in *The Genuine Shona* and *African Crucible*) is that they contain a cloud of Eurocentric liberal-romantic tendencies in the sense that they idealise African rural life. But how do we account for this change in the drift of Gelfand's research from a condemning depiction to one that romanticises that which is Shona? The "later Gelfand" is characterised by a major shift from writing only about Western health systems to writing basically about Shona traditional beliefs and practices from a more "objective" position. The shift shows a sense of development in Gelfand's research possibly because the context in which he lived in the late 1960s was pronouncedly different from that in the 1940s. The "later Gelfand" was much more adapted to the Shona people and their practices. His profession as a medical doctor had given him substantial opportunity to interact with the Shona people as they came for consultation. Over a long period of time he had gone to the villages to observe the life styles of the Shona. Gelfand (1966) regularly accompanied his Shona friends and colleagues to their rural homes in the Mtoko District where he was able to witness some of the Shona practices that he later wrote about.

This shows that the different contexts in which Gelfand worked influenced him on what to write and the way he wrote it. On another level, the descriptive accounts of the "later Gelfand" in chapter three show that there is a relationship between Gelfand's professional commitment as a medical doctor seeking to improve the health conditions of the Shona and the way he wrote. His research over the years, the fieldwork, interviews, and the daily interaction with the Shona, influenced him not only to be careful with details but also to have a more than passionate attitude to the Shona. I described how in his later works Gelfand (1973:91ff) dwelt mainly on the "fine qualities", "rich beauty", etc. of the Shona. It was during his research that he realised how much he envied the Shona,

and found it difficult to define what it was that attracted him to the Shona way of life (1968a:91).

Though at first Gelfand's Western culture as well as his medical background to a large extent influenced his manner of perceiving and writing about Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices, in most of his later writings he did not overtly support a particular dogma as did the "Eurocentrics". As an example we see that in his later works, Gelfand (1977:Foreword) wrote ameliorating the "early writers'" perception that the Shona worship their ancestors, he (1973:33-39) wrote pointing out that the status of women among the Shona is not as bad as it was depicted by the "early writers", Gelfand also argued that Shona people have a traditional religion that should not be viewed as superstitious (1968a:65), etc. One therefore sees a sense of development in Gelfand's academic study of the Shona, as well as a development towards a better understanding of the Shona in general. In all fairness it should be concluded that Gelfand's works contain valuable information and are qualitatively more advanced and than those by the "Eurocentrics". The worth in Gelfand's publications to readers of today is that they certainly contribute to our knowledge about the historical developments of the establishment of Western health systems in the early days of Rhodesia. By sifting the information that is in these books one sees that decisions that were made during the early days of Rhodesia had an impact on the current health system. This is apparent, for example, in the way the missionary hospitals are distributed today in Zimbabwe, and in the regard people have for the traditional healers' institution. His later works are of value because they, in relatively detailed ways inform readers about Shona society, religious beliefs and customary practices. In most cases, Gelfand was much more preoccupied with plain descriptions than with interpretations. In the main, the later Gelfand has the foundation of anthropological facts even though they contain inadequate insider explanations and

interpretations. I quoted one occasion where Gelfand stated that he did not want to engage in interpretations because he knew of cases where some writers' interpretations were rejected and dismissed as false or erroneous. This can not be accepted as a justification for one not to analyse one's descriptions. How important are mere descriptions without interpretations that illuminate on the meanings of the described beliefs and practices. In order for research to be meaningful, the researcher needs to make sense of what he or she describes. By combining and properly using various research methods that I discussed in chapter six, for example; fieldwork, oral history, personal and group interviews, questionnaires, participant observation it is possible for a researcher to produce fairly accurate interpretations that would not only be informative but also clarify for readers the understanding, motivations and orientations of the Shona people. As many relevant methods and approaches as necessary must be employed in trying to understand the Shona because the formal face to face interviews that Gelfand used sometimes tend to limit the researcher in the sense that the interviewees tend to take useful commonplace information for granted because it is common and therefore often assumed to be already known by the interviewer.

When conducting research in an area where one is a stranger, it is not an easy task to choose people suitable to be informants or research assistants. In chapter six I discussed the need to carefully select research assistants and informants so as to be able to extract valuable information from the Shona people. The researcher may go and live in the area for some time so as to assess the way that society functions. By so doing the researcher gets knowledgeable about who the influential traditional leaders are, and this is also helpful in determining who should be interviewed. As discussed in chapter six about Turner's research among the Ndembu the use of unsolicited comments so as to get deeper insights into the thoughts and feelings of the Shona might prove useful for

researchers. In my view, informants should largely be those who are used to Shona language, the environment of the Shona, living conditions, as well as Shona culture and religion. Many of Gelfand's informants were Europeans who in my view lacked insider information on certain aspects of Shona language, religious beliefs and cultural practices. As is reflected in some of Gelfand's works, some of his informants had difficulties regarding the decoding of some of the meanings embedded in African cultural codes. I am of the view that, generally, outsider informants may not be relied upon as the researcher's main source of information.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the quality and competence of most of Gelfand's informants and assistants because he hardly furnished readers with biographical information about most of them. Such information would help us to evaluate the reliability as well as the accuracy of his research. Another problem is with Gelfand's overdependence on informants who were his patients. This is particularly problematic because these "informants" lived in hospital, a "closed-in" environment which would easily influence their responses to his questions. Firstly, the information e.g. about traditional healers that was attained in such environments and circumstances is most likely to be out of its proper historical context because it is acquired out of its living cultural and religious setting. Secondly, the issue as to whether a researcher can obtain reliable information from infirm and chronically ill patients needs to be examined closely. For me it appears that the hospital environment would conceivably induce patients to "construct" responses which meet the interviewing nurse's expectations. This is so mainly because of the asymmetrical relationships between the "researcher" and the "researched". For example, the unbalanced "doctor-and-patient" relationship; interviews that are done by the doctor in the hospital context have the capacity to determine the nature of responses that come from patients, and this may have affected research. It was perhaps because of the

responses of his "sick informants" that he reached such questionable conclusions, for example, that *n'angas* retard development and that they have no place in Shona communities. This links with my discussion in chapter six about the need for researchers to be alert to the fact that, in some cases, informants may be "interested parties" in some of the issues that they describe or interpret for the researcher. This means that in some cases Gelfand may have been misled by some of his hospital patient-informants into accepting certain information about the status and functions of the *n'anga* as the reliable version. My hypothesis is that these patients would consciously provide untrue information about their consultation of *n'angas* so as to receive good treatment by the hospital staff. It is therefore necessary that researchers guard against this by consulting as many informants as possible and by making use of various methodological procedures such as empathising with the studied people, and bracketing biases and academic preconceptions or the detachment from professional commitments which could detract the conducting of careful and accurate research.

Furthermore, regarding the issue of informants and interviews, it is necessary to consider the cultural fact that there is a very cordial but restrained form of communication between the young and the old as well as between the male and the female among the Shona. This may mean that there was a restriction in the flow of information from the young informants to Gelfand. In addition, another limiting point in his research was the political scenario at the time of Gelfand's research, for example, the whites-blacks relationship was quite restrained and this factor conceivably affected Gelfand in conducting effective investigations particularly in the rural areas at that time.

After describing the ritual that I quoted in chapter three, Gelfand did not significantly analyse and interpret the importance or meanings of several things for example, the

symbolism of opaque beer, the use of water and unsalted meat, etc. Among the Shona people symbolism is of great consequence without deciphering meanings that are behind the various forms of symbolic objects and symbolic actions, one's understanding of Shona religion, culture and society remains minimal. It is therefore supremely necessary that Gelfand should have illuminated for readers the meanings of various symbols that were used in the rituals that he described. Instead of explaining the cultural values or the religious importance of these substances as the Shona perceived them, Gelfand dwelt on the chemical and nutritional values of opaque beer and the other substances. I have discussed that if chosen well and effectively used, research assistants and informants have the capacity of furnishing a researcher with ample information about these substances. Thus, Gelfand's ritual analysis in the case study, in my view, shows that he did not effectively use his informants so as to tap information about how the Shona people interpret the meanings and significance of various aspects of this ritual, as well as the overall meaning of this ritual to the Shona people.

Scholars such as Berglund (1995/4/22: Personal interview) have expressed dissatisfaction with many of Gelfand's works. Gelfand has been described by Berglund as a pioneer of medical anthropology whose work showed in various ways strains of amateurish interpretation and analysis of Shona religion and culture. I agree with Berglund's views in view of Gelfand's objective (Gelfand 1966:v; 1965:1-2) of presenting adequate and detailed descriptions and analysis about the Shona people for the benefit of fellow doctors, social workers and other people working with the Shona people. Despite this claim, in many cases Gelfand's descriptions of various Shona phenomena are in my view not adequate enough. In some cases his accounts are restricted to the Western orientation hence, in my view they not only lack sensitivity to the believers' own conceptions but also lack adequate historical perspectives. For interpretations to be accurate and reliable, Gelfand

needed to do them more in accordance with the historical and living religious, cultural, social and political contexts from which they emerged rather than from the hospital contexts.

Despite these short-comings I am of the view that generally, Gelfand's publications command a fair degree of respect in that they are quite plentiful, and have a capacity to supplement each other. Furthermore, the later works were generally based more on approaches such as interviews and observation than on hearsay. It is evident that the methods of research he used to collect information and to analyse and interpret it were far better than those employed by the "Eurocentrics". To this end, one sees a sense of development in the academic study of Shona traditional religion, culture and society.

Gelfand's books such as *The Spiritual Belief of the Shona*, *The African Crucible*, *Growing up Among the Shona* and *The Genuine Shona* present readers with fair ethnographic accounts of the Shona society, religious beliefs and cultural practices. In his later works he generally had an empathetic attitude to Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices. This coheres with my judgment that Gelfand's publications marked a major improvement in ethnographic research among Shona people. Undoubtedly Gelfand made a tremendous contribution to the development of the study of Shona culture and traditional religion. One of my concluding remarks regarding the historical development of Shona traditional religion and culture is that Michael Gelfand's works marked a notable shift from the unpolished ethnographic works of the "early writers" to fairly serious anthropological works about the Shona people. On the whole the significance of Gelfand's works in the academic study of Shona traditional religion lies more in his fairly detailed ethnographic descriptions than in a comprehensive analysis of Shona beliefs and practices. His methods of obtaining information and interpreting it was much more articulate than those used by his predecessors. In spite

of some flaws, Gelfand's works have a prominent place in the contemporary academic study of Shona traditional religion and culture. I now focus attention on Chavunduka.

Critical evaluation of Chavunduka

I analyse Chavunduka's works looking at the interconnectedness that exists between his research and his "insiderness", the Shona cultural background, traditional healer professional commitments, as well as his academic background as a sociologist, etc. The analysis also looks at some of the approaches and research methods that he employed in relation to contemporary methodological debates that I presented in chapter six. It is interesting to note that there are resemblances between parts of Chavunduka's works and those of Inus Daneel, in the sense that Daneel is also an "insider" to a community which he wrote about. Like Chavunduka who is president of the ZINATHA, Daneel is a member and the president of the Fambidzano ecumenical movement. Both Chavunduka and Daneel's researches are on religious beliefs and cultural practices in the Shona communities. Whereas my analysis is of Chavunduka, because of this similarity between these two writers, where necessary I will make cross-reference to Daneel's discussions about how he conducted his own research so as to gain some insights especially about "insiders'" researches.

Unlike the other writers that I have analysed in this thesis, Chavunduka is a Shona writer whose writings are about his own religious beliefs and cultural practices. The fact that he was born in a Shona family and grew up in a Shona environment enhanced the way he perceived certain religious and cultural aspects. He attended traditional rituals in his home area when he was young, and from this early time Chavunduka developed particular convictions in a way that one would not find in non-Shona writers that I discussed in this thesis. Thus, his Shona cultural background played a major role in determining

the way he understood the world, and invariably played major roles in his research. I quoted Chavunduka in his statement that, that being a Shona greatly helped him to obtain the information that he researched from his community. Such a statement carries important implications in research methodology discussions. This was a context in which he not only had "insider" familiarity with the subject matter that he wrote about (Shona cultural practices), but he also knew these Shona people well and had many contacts to people who could explain to him their esoteric beliefs and practices. It is interesting that Chavunduka stated that people volunteered information and supported his research partly because he and his nationalist activities were well known in his area.

Furthermore, I quoted Chavunduka (1978a:31) where he mentioned that some of his informants volunteered information to him particularly because they knew that he was well known both as a university student and as a nationalist. Their cooperation in his research had ulterior motives in the sense that it is implied that if he did well in his studies, and if he, as a politician, would get into a position of power, they would expect help from him. Thus, research in such a context is not just a straightforward matter, there exists a complex connection of interdependence between the researcher and the researched. In such cases the researcher has to be careful of the danger that he or she might be furnished with one-sided information because the informants will be expecting help (mainly material benefits) through the researcher.

From this we see that collecting information from Shona rural communities is not just about the use of proper research methods, it is an exercise that involves several aspects such as whether the researcher is known in the area, how respectable and influential is the researcher, the age and gender of the researcher, what benefit does the community gain from the research, etc. In his research Daneel (1989:9) realised this aspect and wrote that, "I have for instance

often asked myself to what extent a white man can be expected to play a meaningful and leading role in the ecumenical movement of all African churches? To what extent is he "tolerated" or "exploited" on account of his usefulness to the Independents concerned as their representative, mouth piece and fund raiser in the Western World? Is the introduction of Western oriented theological training programmes not just another imposition of a foreign, colonial-type system and an encroachment of the truly African mind? To what extent can a white theologian, still belonging to an economically privileged class hope to promote theological reflection and written articulation amongst fellow Independents faced with essentially different social-economic realities?". Sundkler has noted that:

I am fully conscious that my account did not reach the heart of the matter. I doubt whether any outsider can achieve that. However sympathetic an attitude the White observer may take, he remains - an outsider ... (1961:16).

Fifteen years later in another publication Sundkler (1976:7) made a similar observation. This view has also been expressed by writers on African Independent Churches such as Allan Anderson (1995:286). I regard these a meaningful identification of specific shortcomings (e.g. language, tensions, racism, privilege, etc.) faced by some researchers. It is in view of these statements that Chavunduka's claim about the merits of his insiderness becomes relevant and should be examined. Nevertheless, it is only after having identified and acknowledged these difficulties that the "outsider" researcher goes on to take remedial steps. In view of these observations the "Insider-Outsider" issue is quite pertinent in the study of methodological issues about African traditional religions.

Daneel did research on the African Independent Church people of Masvingo mainly because of two considerations; Firstly, he realised that very little has been published on Independent

Church movements amongst the Southern Shona especially the Fambidzano ecumenical movement that he founded and of which he was president. Secondly, almost like Chavunduka in Manicaland, Daneel was interested in the Masvingo because he was born there and intimately knew some of the people in these churches. Daneel was allowed to accompany Zionist officials, most of whom were his informants, on their country wide missionary work because he was known to them (Daneel 1971:2). He regarded this as a sign of their acceptance of his presence as a "writer of history". Having lived long in this community he was able to speak Shona without need of any help from translators (1971:4). This enabled him to obtain a fairly good idea of church organisation, the hierarchic patterns of leadership as well as the lives of the people that he studied (1971:6). One question that needs exploration is the extent to which such a researcher is different from "insider" researchers. Daneel presented sufficient biographical information about most of his key research assistants and main Shona informants. This is important so that readers may be able to assess for themselves the sources of his information.

As a Shona person, Chavunduka had the advantage of the knowledge of Shona language as well as other paralinguistic expressions used by the Shona people. His works show no major misinterpretations and mistranslation that would sabotage his works as a result of deficient knowledge of the Shona and their language. One may argue that Chavunduka's descriptive accounts are reliable because his competence to grasp the linguistic and symbolic expressions, and therefore the thought patterns of his own people is unquestionable. His decoding of Shona expressions or significance of meanings of objects and actions is not vitiated by speculations as e.g. that of some early Eurocentrics. A non-Shona researcher would need considerable fieldwork time in order to get to grips with how the Shona community functions, and to get to know the key people to interview, but this would be problematic in view of the unstable political context in which Chavunduka worked.

When Chavunduka did his research in Manicaland in the 1970s the liberation struggle in Rhodesia was at its peak. He informs us that strangers were suspected of being spies, and this implies that it would have been very difficult for "outsiders" to successfully conduct research in that area. Furthermore, in this circumstance it would not be easy for an "outsider" researcher to create an atmosphere of trust between him and the interviewees, or with the people where he or she would be a participant observer. The fact that Chavunduka was an insider who belonged to that community certainly put him at an advantage; he had no problem with choosing suitable informants and research assistants, and moreover, an atmosphere of trust between him and the Shona community in which he did research was already there. This means that he had easy access to the information that he was looking for. In chapter four I described that during my own interviews with Chavunduka, he initially expressed some "suspicions" and reservations since I was a stranger to him. Suspicions of "outsiders" and the concealing of information is one aspect that is always found in most African traditional communities. This is particularly so with regard to research that involve clan ancestries, traditional healing methods, etc. This is one big hindrance to the conducting of effective research. One solution to this problem is that the so called "outsider" has to live in that community for a long period of time, become part and parcel of that community, talk the same language with them until this community accepts the researcher as worth furnishing with the information that he or she seeks.

In the descriptive accounts on Chavunduka readers are informed that he had many contacts who eagerly informed him about the information that he looked for. It is a pity that unlike Turner or Daneel, Chavunduka did not in his writings furnish readers with biographical details about his informants. It is therefore not easy to assess the significance and implications of the information that they gave him in relation to such factors as their ages, gender, profession, etc.

The context of Chavunduka's research is that of a sociologist within an academic environment. This means that he was exposed to sociological tools of research some of which he made use of in his research. Despite the fact that he already knew some of the things that he described, Chavunduka made use of the sociological research methods such as the field work (1978a:30) where he had to attend rituals many times than he would normally attend. Through the field work research he was able to produce good quality and highly informative descriptions about healing seances, Shona living conditions, disease, illness and the response to illness by the Shona people (1978a; 1986:84-96). The argument that the fieldwork approach is meant for the researchers who are not accustomed to the studied community is an error. Even though Chavunduka is Shona and was conversant with Shona culture and religion, he did fieldwork and during this period he employed some of the methods that I discussed in chapter six, e.g. participant observation methods. This approach enabled him to see and hear much more than he would have done in ordinary circumstances. It is important to discuss this research technique in relation to Chavunduka particularly because he used it to such an extent that his academic research had an impact on his personal life. I will discuss this further, when I speak about how he decided to train as a traditional healer.

The accounts in Chavunduka's book *Traditional Healer and the Shona Patient* were to a considerable extent enriched by excerpts from secondary literature by writers such as Bourdillon, Gelfand and others. Chavunduka not only appropriated descriptive materials from other writers, he employed sociological models of analysis from sociologists such as Suchman, Machanic and Gould. Of particular interest, I described Chavunduka's use of Blumer's sociological model so as to try and understand the Shona people's responses to illness (1978a:27-30). Following Blumer's model, Chavunduka tried to understand Shona patients first by "entering" into the process of interpretation in which they construct their

actions (1978a:29). Though Chavunduka did not describe how this is done, he stated that this approach discourages the researcher from remaining aloof as the so-called "objective observer" because this would allow him to fill in the process of interpretation with his own assumptions rather than understanding it as it occurs in the experiences of the involved patients. In my view, this approach does not sound different from Cox's methodological conversion that I shall discuss later in this chapter. This model of research does, as described by Chavunduka, not convert one to becoming a patient when studying patients, but it is a research technique that enables the researcher to adjust, for that moment, in such a way so as to assume the view point of the person/ believer whose behaviour is studied.

Furthermore, in accordance with academic research methods Chavunduka administered questionnaires which enabled him to collect a lot of data about histories of the sick people in Highfield/ Harare township. Furthermore he interviewed the traditional healers that were consulted by these patients in order to produce a balanced picture of Shona beliefs and cultural practices (1978a:32). In some cases he managed to get the information that he wanted only on the third or fourth encounter with the interviewee. This implies that the first interview encounters in Shona communities may not always yield the proper and sincere responses. Chavunduka was only able to obtain the real information after several encounters with the interviewees. His approach was quite rigorous because besides the above described methods, he further conducted short interviews and numerous informal contacts with other persons in the extended family, neighbours or workmates so as to supplement the information that he obtained from his targeted interviewees. As part of his method of research, he kept in touch with some of his interviewees so as to keep track of all the relevant developments. Unlike some of the early researchers that were casual observers to African religions and culture that they described, Chavunduka spent a lot of

time with both traditional healers and Shona patients as well as with other people whom he believed would be able to give any information about his research. This method of research enabled Chavunduka to produce fairly adequate descriptive accounts especially in his book *Traditional Healer and the Shona Patient*.

In *The Professionalisation of African Medicine* Chavunduka wrote an article on the organisation of traditional medicine in Zimbabwe. He took a new level of African scholarship as he assessed and urged African governments to synthesise indigenous African systems of healing to the Western forms. Unlike the "early Gelfand", Chavunduka as a traditional healer sought to incorporate selected traditional practitioners such as midwives into Western state-run national health services (Chavunduka & Last 1991; Dziva 1990). In his writings he strongly urged the African governments to involve traditional healers in primary health care (Chavunduka & Last 1991; Dziva 1990:29). When compared to Gelfand, Chavunduka's approach supported the work of traditional healers and sought to clarify what traditional healers are able or unable to do. Unlike the "early Gelfand", Chavunduka maintained that African traditional medical knowledge should be defined in terms of its technical herbal expertise as well as in terms of the symbolic social and ritual matrix within which it is used. From an insider perspective, Chavunduka described a traditional healer as a medical specialist, and in the social field as a religious consultant, a legal and political advisor, a marriage counsellor and a social worker (1991:29). He mourned that traditional healers have lost their prestige due not only to advances in modern medical science but also to Christianity, Western education and colonialism (1991:29). Contrary to the "early Gelfand", Chavunduka challenged the Medical Council of modern medicine for taking part in attempting to suppress the activities of traditional healers. Some of his writings in the 1990s show that he fought for the recognition of traditional medicine, he argued that there are

cases where traditional medicine is said to be medically useless but many patients recover because of the attempts the traditional healers make in solving patients' social problems. He also argued that in any case many traditional practices are empirically correct by scientific standards. For example, he stated that if an individual is bitten by a snake, the traditional healer might open the wound further and suck out the poison or what he believes to be the evil spirit which has entered (1991:32). He regarded this as one treatment by *n'angas* which reach the same result as treatment in Western hospitals. Whereas Gelfand's Western professional commitments influenced him to write discouraging the work of traditional healers and introducing Western healing methods so as to improve the health conditions of the Shona community, Chavunduka, in my view, wrote seeking to do so within a broader framework of the synthesis of the two.

One could say that Chavunduka's main readership target was the "unbelieving Europeans" and those who wrote in disparaging terms about Shona religion and culture. Furthermore, some of the passages that I quoted from his works imply that the fact that he is a Shona traditional healer certainly makes some difference to the way he wrote when we compare him to the other writers. Chavunduka as compared to other researchers enjoys some advantages because he was an "insider" who belonged to a "closed cult" of traditional healers. This enabled him to furnish readers with first hand information on the functioning of traditional healers perhaps much more than "outsider" researchers would be able to do. The fact that he is an "insider" to the Shona community and to the private cult of traditional healers (Zinatha), gave him a special privilege because he had easy access to information which is often regarded as confidential. Thus the "insider-outsider" issue is inalienable to this discussion.

I wish to reiterate that the couplets "insider" and "outsider" are used by authors in different senses. I regard Chavunduka

as an interesting and complex writer in the sense that he is a combination of an "insider", a believer, as well as an "outsider", a social scientist. Chavunduka is an "insider" in the sense that he is known to possess information about private cults. I am convinced that this makes him important not just as a scholar but as an "insider" scholar who collected information about culture bound syndromes as well as information about names of traditional healers, types of diseases they cure and some of the curative measures that they use, this type of information is a privilege for the "insiders". Traditional ethics do not allow n'angas to publicise their practice, and this means that the information about them is often undisclosed. The so-called "insider scholars" are in my view, important because they have been able to infiltrate certain communities and present a deep insider perspective, and can describe in a sensitive way the meanings of people's beliefs and practices.

I want to stress my conviction that I do not subscribe to the opinion that regards the so called "insiders" as the only suitable people to study their religious communities. The point is that both "insiders" and "outsiders" have advantages and limitations. That their limitations are very different in nature matters a great deal. The same can be said about their strengths, for example, sophisticated academic competence (of the outsider) versus methodological naivete (of the insider). In research, what matters most is the quality of the work produced by the individual researcher, and not who the person is. However, it is necessary to explore the extent to which one's "insiderness" or one's professional commitments makes one's works different from that of other researchers. In some cases, an "insider" researcher is better positioned and may stand at an advantage when conducting research especially in cases about private cults and personal faith. As Chavunduka stated, people volunteered information because they knew him to belong to their community. It should however, not be assumed that the so called insider researcher is the one who

produces reliable and accurate research. One of the handicaps besetting most of the "insider" researchers is that they often see what is supposed to occur and not what actually occurs. It has been noticed that believers often do not easily take note of commonplace things. In some cases the way insider researchers do research may be influenced by their passionate attachment to what they describe. To this end, one may argue that the "outsider" who is emotionally detached from what he or she is describing is perhaps better positioned to produce reasonably balanced accounts. My point here is that a researcher who is "marginalised" may be at an advantage because he or she is not socially, culturally or emotionally bound. What happens is not part of his or her life in any fundamental sense, and this puts him or her in a better position to explore issues freely. The so called insider researchers need to be careful so that their emotional attachments do not hinder them from a clear minded collection and analysis of their religious traditions.

I would like to conclude this issue by stating that "outsider" researchers may achieve the same goal by spending a lot of time doing fieldwork research. That is, living in the community which they are studying for a long time in order to learn the language and cultural codes of the studied community. This is one way by which these writers may produce adequate and accurate ethnographic descriptions and interpretations. This approach facilitates the development of a broader knowledge together with an interest in how the institutions work in their specific social and cultural contexts. This broader perspective sometimes enables the "outsider" researcher to see the effects of institutions in social life that may be missed by researchers who are believers. I appreciate Bourdillon's argument that by going out into the field, an "outsider" researcher may attain a believer's familiarity of the religion being studied. In addition, "outsider" researchers are better positioned to produce reasonably balanced accounts because they are not

bound to what they describe. I however, maintain that the crux of the matter lies less on who is doing the research and more on the fact that the scholar needs to utilise proper methodological approaches and appropriate tools that enable him or her to carry out thorough research.

In conclusion, the question is not whether it is a European or a Shona who did the research; what matters most are the results and the quality of the research itself. Though the question is how researchers need to make use of relevant approaches and methods so as to transcend the subjective level of the "believer", and so that the danger of one-sidedness and bias can be avoided. Thus, the scholar has a multifold responsibility viz., to be able to grasp and understand with empathy and to be able to intellectually communicate with other scholars and lay people who do not necessarily share in the experience of the believers. I will expound on this discussion later but for now I will digress briefly so as to examine this issue further using Daneel as an example. Even though he is a non-Shona Daneel has produced sterling works on African Independent Churches among the Shona. In tracing the whole history of the origins, various dynamics and developments of these Independent churches, he employed well various methods of research such as: history methods and approaches of research, anthropological tools of research such as going out on fieldwork trips, and as president of the Fambidzano ecumenical movement, he was often a participant observer. On daily basis and for over three years Daneel lived with the Independent Church people and he worked with them, this was important as a methodological tactic because it enabled him to produce a thorough study of their beliefs, practices and activities.

Because of his immersion in this community for a long period of time, Daneel wrote that through this interaction, he and these people have held up mirrors to each other, as a result of which they could reconsider their existing identities and

start opening up (1989:10). I believe that such an approach is important because it helps researchers to gain insider perspectives. Though Daneel was totally immersed in the activities of the Fambidzano movement, this did not lead him to an uncritical endorsement of everything Independent church people say and do. In order to avert falling into this trap Daneel employed several approaches and research methods such as: analysis of the annual reports which he and later Peter Makamba wrote (1989:5), interviews with people closely and loosely affiliated to the church, participatory observation in ecumenical services and other religious ceremonies, sermon analyses and the expressed views of key figures in conferences and the use of secondary literature (1993a:6; 1993b:23). Daneel also wrote that some of his information was gathered through sustained direct and personal contact with people, as well as sample surveys involving in depth-interviews and various types of questionnaires (1971:viii). He explained that narratives by respondents were subjected to joint consideration by the key-figures involved in Fambidzano, as well as the research team before being quantitatively categorised. Daneel made liberal use of the material that he got from these discussions in an attempt to "let the respondents speak for themselves" (1970:14-56; 1971:6). Furthermore, he (1970) presented readers with personal testimonies of numerous Zionists and this has an advantage of presenting "insider" perspectives.

One appreciable thing in Daneel's presentation is that he presents in the appendixes the Shona people's own interpretations and responses to questions, their narratives of religious and other experiences as well as the contexts of their sermons. This is important because it furnishes readers with the author's impression and deductions as well as verbatim accounts by Shona people as they were tape-recorded in the field. This method enabled him to cross-check on dubious aspects or to follow up information at a later stage (1971:6; 1991:22). Some of Daneel's works have an insider

perspective but with a lot of scientific analysis of a detached scholar. Daneel however, points out that he had a problem in that, in order to distil the essentials from the lengthy responses of the interviewed persons to open ended questions, there frequently arose the problem of subjective interpretation and reduction (1971:13). However, Daneel's combination of "raw" interview materials with scientific analysis balances the quality of his works about Shona Zionists.

It is significant that as part of the preparation for his research, Daneel discussed and received suggestions about possible research methods from experienced scholars such as H. von Sicard, Mary Douglas, Bengt Sundkler and many others (1971:vii). He employed a multi-disciplinary methodology - the combination of an historical, socio-anthropological and theological approaches. Such a combination provided at least part of the comprehensive perspective needed for an appreciation and understanding of the rich variety of factors involved in the organisation and life of the community that he studied (1971:4). Daneel's works show that his approach and methods of research were successful in that they yielded a wealth of material from which one could gauge the attitudes and views of some of the respondents as well as his own personal ones. Though he was not a Shona, he was an "insider" to the Fambidzano movement that he wrote about. He produced probing research insights with positive, yet critical theological appraisal because he was well equipped linguistically as well as methodologically, and not merely because he was an "insider". It will be interesting to see whether insiders such as Chavunduka or Daneel's observations, judgments or evaluations, like those of any other scholar, will be either disproved or verified by later researchers working from a greater distance.

Though not as rigorous as Daneel, Chavunduka also utilised some of the research methods. Coming back to Chavunduka and

the participant observation method, some of his works show that he was a participant observer who, in the process of research, became subjectively involved in the object of his study and accepted the responsibilities of an "insider". Thus, we see the subject (researcher) being influenced by the object (Shona religion and culture). The research had an impact on him, it inspired him and developed in him a new bearing in the sense that Chavunduka decided to be trained as a traditional healer. His subsequent appointment as president of a Traditional Healers Association influenced the way he saw the world and wrote about African traditional religions and healing. This appointment as president of ZINATHA (Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association), as I quoted from some of his writings (1978b:48; 1991) seems to have tied him to certain obligations expected of the bearer of this post. This discussion shows that researches need not only be analysed on their own because there is often a whole web of interconnected issues that are involved between the researcher, the context of research and the researched. Contemporary methodological discussions can not afford to overlook these issues. As president of ZINATHA, the development and the image of the organisation largely relied on him and the way he wrote about it, and furthermore, this association seems to have been important to the cultural aspect of his personal life.

Parts of Chavunduka's works show that he could not be a detached researcher who safely withdraws from his subjects when close identification becomes problematic. Chavunduka's case with ZINATHA is comparable to Daneel who stated that the Fambidzano situation demanded commitment, patience and tenacity of purpose that he could not separate himself from, even when he wrote about this association (1989:2). As presidents and co-workers of their organisations, they were subject to the same stresses and strains, the joys of achievement, sadness about conflict and anger at opposition, as the members of their associations that they wrote about.

Daneel discussed this as a methodological problem in that it was hard to avoid dragging a great deal of subjectivity to his works. He wrote that he was conscious of the possible limitations this had on objectivity (1989:xi). Because he was conscious of this problem his "close association", "personal identification" and the commitment demanded by the Fambidzano situation did not detract from his endeavour to be as fair as possible in his rendering of the facts, particularly those that concerned the occasional conflicts which inevitably arose between the leading personalities of the conference, himself included (1989:2). Being conscious of this problem, Daneel decided to avert it by presenting the testimonies of the Fambidzano bishops and staff members thereby "bringing them to life" as he had seen them. This was a real test of authenticity. Such an awareness is an indispensable precondition for engaging in close-quarter historiographical work. Furthermore, it offers insights on the development of research in indigenous communities.

This means that the "insider" status may pose methodological problems especially where the researcher is emotionally and fundamentally involved in the research, and has a double role of serving (ZINATHA) the healers' association as well as academic scholarship. I have already stated that as leader of traditional healers Chavunduka wrote campaigning for the acceptance of traditional medicine and for the institution that he stood for (1991). The general drift in most of his later publications insisted that many people know that traditional healers are successful in curing a large number of illnesses (Chavunduka 1978b:31). I have argued that it appears as if the Shona cultural context from which he came influenced him into seeing that there is nothing wrong with African traditional religions. In chapter three I stated that Chavunduka is at the moment lobbying for the amendment of the law so that witches can be tried in formal courts. In this article Chavunduka is quoted as stating his belief in the existence and reality of witches (Mail & Guardian 1997).

Though Chavunduka is not discussing this in an academic forum, his firm belief in the reality of witches is confirmed. Contrary to some of Chavunduka's opinions and statements, some Shona people complain about aspects of Shona religion and culture like: the position of women in society, rituals which involve murder or incest, witch-hunting cults and others. Though traditional healers are generally more successful in curing some culture-bound syndromes, it appears to me that many people are sceptical that they cure a large number of illnesses as Chavunduka claims. Chavunduka's claim that African traditional religion is without flaws must be criticised as dogmatic and as unduly romanticising Shona traditional religion.

The general flow of Chavunduka's writings especially when he was appointed to the post of president of traditional healers is in the form of a campaign for the recognition of traditional healers much more than detached descriptions and analysis of the professionalisation of African medicine (1991). In his descriptions of what traditional healers are able to do, Chavunduka also stated that, "there are some traditional healers who are able to cure witches" (1991:29). Such statements profess belief in witchcraft and sorcery as "real" and "true". Such excerpts show that in some cases Chavunduka's works adopted a rather affirmative attitude to Shona religion and culture. In writing about the professionalisation of African medicine Chavunduka made no mention of any flaws of African traditional healing systems. In this publication he appears to have imposed some of *his own personal* experiences and beliefs as a traditional healer as the standard view acceptable to his fellow herbalists. Certain parts of Chavunduka's works reflect that what he was writing about was probably not just convictions of the Shona people, but what he personally held as real and true. The way I understand his works is that there is no clear distinction between what he wrote as a writer, as a traditional healer and what other traditional healers or ordinary Shona people

believe. This kind of approach suggests normative tendencies in some of his descriptions and interpretations.

In summary, Chavunduka sometimes imperceptibly shifted from verifiable/ falsifiable "reality" to non-verifiable/ non-falsifiable ones, for example, from witchcraft beliefs to the "reality" of the witches. The issue at stake is that it is not easily distinguishable whether the interpretations and conclusions we read in Chavunduka's books are his own convictions or whether they are of the Shona people. We see Chavunduka "hopping boundaries" between what he could say as an "objective" researcher and as a "converted traditional healer" without due attention to the distinction between the two. His writings seem to be aimed to authenticate or give status to his religion, particularly the cult of traditional healers. In other words, he affirms some of the beliefs believers hold as true and real. As a result of his ambivalent situation he disregarded the boundary between testable and non-testable "reality" for example from witchcraft beliefs to the "reality" of the witches. One notices that in such cases Chavunduka sometimes wrote more as a "pious" insider and believer than as an impartial and open-minded academic.

One detects some indigenisation theories as well as a somewhat conservative syndrome in some of Chavunduka's accounts. I use "indigenisation theories" in my own way to mean an approach that seeks to *defend and develop* one's own culture and religion by presenting it as authentic. Such approaches can be an academic hazard especially where a writer's works slant towards an "*indigenisation* mission" and the authentication of his culture and religion more than presenting historicised descriptions and contextualised interpretations. Such approaches often involve some ethnocentrism that could potentially cripple the researcher's task of interpreting the studied culture, society and religion. Furthermore, such a position may easily influence the researcher to overlook the fact that culture changes, and develops in response to

particular social, religious and material environments. This means that traditional culture and religion change, and the old less useful ways, where necessary, must be invigorated by new ones. At the same time we need to be careful; indigenisation perspectives should not be unduly discarded because the Western world-view has something to learn from African traditional world-views. Researchers, especially African oriented researchers, should avoid dogmatic Afro-centric approaches so that they can increase their understanding of both world-views.

To clarify my analysis, Chavunduka appeared to be torn between two callings, firstly, the "objectivity" of a sociologist on one hand, and secondly, the obligations of a committed "insider" on the other. On one hand, as a sociologist, Chavunduka sometimes introduced social-anthropological theoretical interpretations and meanings on Shona religious beliefs and cultural practices. These interpretations are something to which not all the Shona traditionalists would subscribe. On the other hand, his other works show that he was a believer and an "insider" to "the closed healing cult" to which he was responsible. The fact that he was a social scientist could in a way contradict, or at least considerably mitigate the fact that he sometimes wrote from a dogmatic Shona traditional position. Despite the above critical points, I feel that this seemingly contradictory presentation does not put Chavunduka at a methodological disadvantage because the two may be analysed in such a way that they complement each other.

One can safely say that various factors which include post-Christian religiosity, nationalist desire to demonstrate the respectability of African beliefs, and academic training as a sociologist influenced Chavunduka's methods and approaches of collecting and interpreting information. The misinterpretation and misrepresentation of some Shona religious and cultural aspects by the early writers possibly influenced him to adopt

an approach he thought would articulate Shona religious issues in their proper historical and cultural contexts. I should also remark that Chavunduka's works are not so ethnocentric to the extent that he can be labelled as one who assumes that his own religion and cultural values are the best and that his own ways of doing things are superior.

In conclusion, Chavunduka, however, made a sterling contribution to the development of research on Shona religion specifically with regard to information that normally remains undisclosed by traditionalists and by traditional diviner-healers. This includes information such as that on African traditional medicines, various traditional healing systems, witchcraft and sorcery. I feel that the lasting value of Chavunduka's writings lies less in the analysis and more in the descriptions and exposure of new facts as well as the names and addresses of traditional healers who could be contacted for further research. In my opinion Chavunduka's major contribution to the academic study of Shona traditional religion lies in the following book, *Traditional Healer and the Shona Patient* because it contains valuable descriptive accounts about traditional healers and Shona patients' reaction to various illnesses. His article, *The Professionalisation of African Medicine*, with its insider perspective regarding the struggle of traditional healers to get recognised by the National Medical Council forges a front in the academic study of African culture and religion as it aspires to synthesise traditional medicine and Western medicine. His registers with contact addresses of traditional healers, and an inventory of the diseases that these healers can cure, are important for the general public wanting information on where to contact healers, as well as for academics who would like to do further research. There is a sense of development in the academic study of Shona traditional religion, culture and society in the way that the Shona people begin to take part in the documentation of their own beliefs and practices.

Critical evaluation of Bourdillon

I examined Michael Bourdillon's research on Shona religion and culture as well as his discussions about methods to study it. His importance is that he contributed to ethnographic research on Shona religion and culture; furthermore, he examined approaches and research methods to study it.

My chapter five presentation shows that Bourdillon used social-scientific methods of research which include fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, etc. As we have seen, it is partly through these methods of research that he put together fairly sufficient ethnographic works. Besides his descriptions e.g. on rituals, which I regard as inadequate, Bourdillon's works have few and minor weaknesses as compared to the rest of the writers that I presented in this thesis. On the basis of Bourdillon's works, one can conclusively argue that it is not necessarily true that the Shona "insiders" are the best suited to study the traditions of their own communities. One can also conclude that Bourdillon's academic and Western cultural and Christian backgrounds seem not to have hampered him from producing good quality research. However, some of the shortcomings in his works include the fact that at times he did not employ to the maximum the approaches which he recommends in his works on research methodology. The inadequate descriptions in some of Bourdillon's works, in my view, contributed to the insufficiency of his analysis and interpretation of the Shona rituals that he described. This means that, taking the ritual described in chapter five as an example, readers are not presented with a complete picture of the ritual practices so as to adequately present the convictions, beliefs and the faith of the Shona people. Acceptably, all human efforts produce accounts and analyses which are influenced by the writers' own vision and background but I maintain that descriptions should be detailed as much as possible so that we are able to fully appreciate the meanings of various aspects

of a ritual as well as the significance of particular ritual to the Shona people.

It is necessary to comment on the language used by Bourdillon in his writings. The language and expression which he used in his earlier works was quite easy to understand. In his later works, such as *Religion and Society*, Bourdillon's target readership appears to have been that of the intellectual community which is interested in sociological theorisation and complex analysis of ethnographic information. I also want to state that his usage of language in the early times of his writing was not free from colonial cliches; in occasional cases he made use of words such as "tribesmen", "tribal trust lands", etc. In another case as we have already noted, he wrote that the Shona society, like any other society, contains all types of people; dreamers, conservatives, superstitious traditionalists. We may ask here whether this involves "objective" observation. Who gives Bourdillon the right to judge other people as "superstitious"?

Though academic work must be evaluative, it is academically hazardous for a scholar to judge a religious tradition as "irrational" or "foolish". My opinion is that the main role of the researcher must be conceived as that of describing and interpreting the religions and cultures in a way that is sensitive to the studied people's convictions, beliefs and practices. At the same time, an "insider" researcher, like Chavunduka whose approach generally regards the tradition of his own people as flawless and as beyond criticism risks misrepresenting it. I will discuss in detail later the fact that not all scholars agree that academic work should have value judgements. For me, such kinds of judgments do not have respect for the studied tradition. Genuine respect accepts that others have claim to the validity of their practices and explanations as do researchers. I will clarify this matter later in my section on "Further clarification on language and terminology" where I seek to present diverse discussions on the question on "judgement" by scholars such as Prozesky.

For now, I will examine the point that Bourdillon appears to me to be arguing for "judgements" that reformulate the "less developed religio-cultural tradition" seemingly on the basis of *modernisation theories*. I am of the view that those who judge should base their judgements on very careful analysis and from a multi-disciplinary vision rather than that provided by functional and modernisation theories alone. In studying Shona traditional religion and culture traditionalists' viewpoints need to be included and interpreted poly-methodically. Though Bourdillon touches on the issue of "judging" cultures, religions or their phenomena, he does not take it further so as to explore the question as to whether we are right to assume that all cultures have their own values which cannot be judged except within the terms of the culture concerned. It is necessary to critically reflect on whether value-judgments, normative judgments or truth and falsity judgments are acceptable in academic work. These questions are particularly relevant when one studies religions phenomenologically e.g. as in Cox's sense presented in chapter six. The debate about "judgment" should in my view seek to clarify whether this "judgement" is a private or an academic matter.

Whilst I agree that academic work should be thorough, serious and analytical, I particularly disagree with the making of judgments that are normative. The issue whether a scholar should judge the performance of, for example, a rain making ritual as a pre-scientific, primitive belief system based on the premises of a different world view is for me controversial and untenable. One problem with such an approach is its tendency to exclude the critic's world view, religion or cultural assumptions from evaluation. My view is that a criterion that criticises religious beliefs and cultural practises as irrational shows no respect for the studied tradition. Though religious scholars must go beyond emic to etic, I believe that they should not pass truth and falsity judgments on the studied traditions. In these discussions it

is necessary to formulate a criteria that deals with the subjectivity of the critic. As we saw in the works of the "early writers", it is invalid to make any one religion the yardstick for the criticism of Shona traditional religion because of the obvious bias this involves. Researchers should present adequate historical and contextual descriptions based on integrated scientific methods of research. The judgments, especially about truth and falsity questions or about meta-empirical issues that emerge from outside the believers' horizon should be treated as a private matter and should be documented in their own right without mixing them with the believers' convictions. Scholars have a duty to present a broad base of data about the beliefs and practices. If the descriptions and analyses are done well, readers can draw their own conclusions and judgments. This averts the situation whereby researchers may impose their own norms on the religious people that they study. Academic research should make the Shona people aware of the strengths and limitations in their perspectives by presenting a variety of alternative perspectives. I conclude this matter stating that researchers respect the studied people's traditions more by way of fairly describing and analysing these people's beliefs and practices and less by dictating how these people should live-out their religions. I believe that scholars need not make normative judgements for others, unless they wish to engage in crusades (for example, against witch-hunting cults or female genitalia mutilation) which often seek to reformulate religions and cultures.

This discussion also relates to the issue of interpretations where Bourdillon argued that it would be insulting to suggest that all perspectives from the Shona people are valid perspectives and that there are no grounds on which you could possibly criticise them however different they may be from your own. Very often, academics from all schools of thought are concerned with establishing the validity of their own perceptions, often against alternatives. To this end, parallel

perceptions on the same phenomena from as many angles of perception as possible must be granted space in research as long as there is a clear line so that the etic and emic accounts are not mixed up. The crux of this matter is the need to clarify whether and to what extent the researcher's own interpretations deviate from those of the Shona believers. There are various levels of interpretation; events or symbols may admit to several interpretations, being correct each in its own way. In addition, interpretation is a matter of careful analysis in which there are several degrees of perfection possible and in which there will probably never be something called the "correct interpretation". In interpreting Shona religion and culture various possibilities need to be taken into consideration; this therefore means that the etic views have a place alongside the emic ones as long as the scholar defines their usefulness and states clearly their origins. There are bound to be differences, similarities or conflicts between the interpretations of the studied community, of the scholar and of other sources, but a comprehensive one is one that incorporates all perspectives marking clearly the division between them. Concurring with Van Gennep and Jean La Fontaine, Bourdillon claimed that social scientists should look beyond the conscious motives of the communities which are being studied. On this controversial debate he argued that researchers cannot stop at the manifest motives of the performers. Using their tools of analysis scholars need to explore whether there are any unconscious or latent intentions and purposes of the ritual, for example a rain making ritual may not be only about the quest for rains, but perhaps behind the fronts it may be more about serving and maintaining power and hegemonic structures.

On another note, Bourdillon castigated the "early writers" for their lack of empathy, biased reports and for their prefabricated interpretations. In his booklet *Myths about Africans: Myth Making in Rhodesia* Bourdillon argued that the intention and the motives of the "early writers" were that of

writing accounts that served as a charter for values which would rationalize the privileged position of whites so as to maintain the structure of the society. I criticise this as an unfair criticism because it somehow imputes a latent sociological function to these "early writers" as an explicit and contrived intention. In his criticisms Bourdillon needed to give concrete examples of where it is shown that these writers intended to produce charters of white supremacy. Bourdillon is right to point out the distortions of Shona religion and culture by these early writers but it is not clear enough in his criticism that these writers were aware that they were producing distortions of Shona society and that they actually perpetuated the already deeply held convictions, as charters, that whites must rule the blacks. It appears to me, that in view of some of the negative aspects of Shona cultural practices during that period, some of these "writers" were at that time convinced that they were presenting accurate pictures of the Shona. Bourdillon should have provided a bit more of the context into the background purposes and aims of these writers.

I regard as valid Bourdillon's criticism of black African writers who wrote despising and misrepresenting Shona culture and religious concepts because they preferred Western culture and religion. He also attacked the school of thought which idealises the African past as good and flawless without due research to justify its conclusions. In view of the generally good quality of his works, I think the argument that a Shona person is the one suitable to do research on Shona religion and culture, just because he or she is Shona, is fallacious. His profession as social scientist seems to have had an influence on the manner in which he developed his interpretations particularly in his book, *Religion and Society: A text for Africa*. Though contributing to an understanding of Shona traditional religion, some of his interpretations have a heavy orientation to social-anthropological functional theories. Such an approach has been

problematised by phenomenologists such as Cox (1996:8-9) because its interpretations are built on constructs which are alien to the Shona people. As an example, Cox states that Bourdillon's *functional theory* of religion assumes that religious faith and practises largely can be explained by factors outside religion itself. Cox (1996:9) criticised Bourdillon for ignoring perspectives of Shona people, particularly traditionalists, who hardly accept his argument that the survival of their beliefs and practices depends on the right social and psychological conditions.

Bourdillon is right to maintain that religious studies should not be limited to emic research only. The *emic* approach is not the *definitive* statement in the study of religions, because it gives the researcher only what the believers believe. As stated earlier on, *etic* accounts should be accorded space in scholarship as long as they are fruitful in an endeavour to understand the studied tradition. Furthermore, there should be a clear line between that which is from the "insiders" and that from "outsiders". Bourdillon argued that researchers who are not used to how traditional communities function may be misled by certain informants about how their society works in practice (For example in matters like witchcraft and sorcery beliefs where most people are informed about these phenomena mainly through gossip and rumours). Thus in such cases long periods of fieldwork as well as the use of other relevant research techniques such as those provided by history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc. is essential. Furthermore, Bourdillon (1993) warned that in cases where certain informants have personal interest in the researcher's topic (for example, chieftaincy inheritance), the researcher may be furnished with only one side of the story which he or she may regard as the true one.

Bourdillon is right in recommending a long period of fieldwork and participant observation as extremely useful methods which enable researchers to be as close as possible to the

information they seek to understand. This is so particularly if the researcher does not belong to the studied group of people. It is true that the fieldwork enables the researcher to be well versed with the object of study but it should also be stated that this method does not give the researcher a full spectrum of the life of the "believers". During his fieldwork Bourdillon was able to observe and participate in some events but he did not, for instance, go to the fields, or herd cattle or cut grass for thatching huts, etc. He had his car and more money, and this situation naturally did not enable him to see the world as the people he observed did or to experience their feelings. So participant observation and fieldwork only enabled him to experience part of the life of the Shona people. Furthermore, as a participant observer, it is not always certain how much he actually saw and how much he heard (in interviews), etc. Usually the latter (that is, what he heard) component is much bigger even though the anthropologist actually goes out to do participant observation.

Relating to this, was Bourdillon's argument that the first handicap facing the researcher is subjectivity. Bourdillon is correct to argue that when a researcher collects information, what he or she collects is already influenced by his or her own vision, background and personal interest. At times the researcher is influenced by the school of thought from which he or she was trained, to search for specific things. This may restrict possibilities of producing research free from deleterious subjectivity. I agree with Bourdillon's hypothesis that one way of reducing the degree of subjectivity of researchers is to train them in a wide variety of academic fields. This could serve to improve the scope of the researcher during the investigation.

Reflecting on phenomenology of religion Bourdillon expressed qualms over a research methodology which maintains the importance of epoche. For him epoche is equivalent to the simple instruction to "listen". He also expressed some

reservations with regard to methods which make extensive use of empathetic interpolation, that is, "getting into the shoes of the subject of study". I think that Bourdillon's reservations are methodologically sound, and his contention that one can only to a limited extent get into the shoes of the believers seems commendable. I am of the opinion that empathy is of course quite possible but the call that scholars should use empathy (as if it is some miraculous device which automatically delivers objectivity) should be made bearing in mind that empathy in research is necessary but the extent to which a researcher can empathise is limited.

I agree with Bourdillon that superficially, the role of the researcher in research seems to be both passive and unimaginative. This is in fact not the case because behind researchers' particular methodological procedures and recommendations, there is a particular background or certain concerns that make an individual writer produce the kind of work that is peculiar to him or her. Though every writer has inherent reliability-reducing mechanisms which characterise how he or she sees things, there is a need for a researcher to be a bit detached (e.g. emotionally) from the studied phenomena, and to strive towards more reliable and accurate research.

It appears to me that in his more recent works, Bourdillon got much more involved with *rationalisation theories* in the sense that his discussions implied that Shona religious beliefs need to be assessed against [Western] rational argumentation and logic. Attempts to understand some traditional religious systems by parading them against the ideal and the so-called "rational" models of thought may be alienating since it separates beliefs into two, that is, (i) those that are "rationally" intelligible and, (ii) those which deviate from this ideal and are consequently "irrational" or "illogical". His demand that beliefs and ritual practices should measure up against some "standard" rationality seems to me to be linked

to modernisation theories as well as to the Western conception of the logic of non-contradiction and consistency. But many Shona people belong to both the Christian and African traditional world without suffering the tensions of contradictions and inconsistency. Therefore such a theoretical approach has a handicap of being normative and presuppositional, and it tends to alienate the researched phenomena from their social, cultural, religious and political contexts.

Bourdillon correctly argued that the way to move forward in knowledge is not to discard facts or opinions we already know but to use this in such a way that we do not impede progress to new knowledge and new perceptions. However, I think that if we would not discard some of the opinions that we inherited from the "Eurocentrics", we would not proceed forward in knowledge. Though it is true that sometimes what we already know augments our research, if care is not taken our preconceptions may be impediments to new visions and new insights. I think that some of the preconceptions and old biases should be discarded, but as Bourdillon states, rather than trying to stifle our previous knowledge, we should examine it and try to see its limitations. In this way we can genuinely open up our minds to new perceptions.

Finally, in the light of the existence of advanced methods of research, I regard the doubt that a white person can understand the African as irrelevant. Bourdillon (1968a) has rightly stated that one problem with some proponents of the claim that Europeans cannot understand an African is that they group German and American missionaries, district officers, soldiers, and Greek store keepers under the single category "white man". The quality of the works of these various people grouped under the heading "white man" differ according to the interests and research methods used by each of them. It should be noted that researchers like Gelfand, Turner, Daneel and perhaps Bourdillon cannot be described as utter "outsiders"

purely because of their European background. They grew up amongst Africans; they probably learned African languages from their childhood and this presumably eased their appreciation and understanding of traditional religions.

To conclude, Bourdillon's research is valuable in the study of the Shona in the sense that he wrote about Shona beliefs and practices as well as the methods to study them. Some of the important discussions which Bourdillon has raised include: the limitations of the researcher's point of view, that some members of the society we might wish to study have limited views about how their society works, some weaknesses of phenomenology, and power relations between the researcher and the researched, etc. One of Bourdillon's greatest contributions to the academic study of Shona traditional religion and culture is his book, *The Shona Peoples*. Apart from this one, his other book *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa*, is in my view one of the treasures found in academia on religion in Africa. Bourdillon has also written numerous valuable newspaper and journal articles on Shona religious aspects, and has approached this study with a razor sharp critical mind. Of the writers whom I have analysed above, Bourdillon's works have made the greatest contribution to the academic study of Shona traditional religion. In his writings we see a pronounced sense of development both in anthropological descriptive accounts, and particularly in his discussions about research methodology development in the academic study of Shona traditional religion.

Critical reflection on the methodology chapter

After presenting five chapters consisting of descriptions of writers and their works, in chapter six I summarised and analysed various approaches and research methods that are used for the elucidation of religious milieux. These include procedures and research methods of history, phenomenology, theology, social anthropology and the participant observation

methods. The approaches and methods from these disciplines are helpful so that we see where researchers on indigenous communities blunder, and so that we can map strategies for developing methods most suitable for conducting research in African societies in general, and in the Shona society in particular. In chapter six I also explored what different approaches have in common, though they have different origins and often articulate different concerns. This is important because it enables us to see the interconnections among various disciplines. Furthermore, after presenting various approaches and research methodologies from these disciplines one is able not only to gain methodological insights but also to pull together the relevant ones in order to present a comprehensive understanding of Shona traditional religion. I ended chapter six by summarising the various ways in which these methods relate to each other and how they may complement each other in the academic study of Shona traditional religion.

Concerning the methodological procedures of theology, I stated that they are anchored, at least in part, in truth verdicts and faith. Some of the early and later Christian writers used intolerant Christian truth verdicts to evaluate some of the Shona religious or cultural beliefs as false. These writers' approaches were such that their Christian orthodox verdict was not open to discussion and doubt, and other views were not considered respectfully. This therefore, suggests that such approaches are faulty and are less helpful towards achieving a comprehensive understanding of African traditional religions. I should, however, point out that the importance of theological methods and approaches in this thesis is limited to the significance of "insider" perceptions, and that religious studies scholars should take the Shona cultural and social contexts seriously. Researchers interested in uncovering insider perspectives of Shona traditionalists may need to make use of research techniques employed by contextual theologians, but focusing on the social and cultural contexts.

As many scholars writing on Shona religion are themselves Shona and have been trained in theological disciplines, this means that their works may be theological. I examined some of Daneel's research techniques so as to see how this theologian worked among the Shona Zionists from a theological perspective. Many of his research techniques such as his emphasis that researchers should pay attention to the contexts of the studied people, how he worked with informants and research assistants, his thorough knowledge of the Shona language, etc. are some of the important issues that researchers in indigenous communities should seriously consider.

I examined social-scientific approaches because of their relevance when analysing works by writers such as Chavunduka and Bourdillon. Social science methods are helpful in trying to illuminate how social structural and functional analysis relates to other facets of the human psyche and social existence. I also discussed the dangers of some anthropological presuppositions which may lead to reductionism. From the foregoing discussions on writers such as Bourdillon, Daneel etc., one may conclude that the fieldwork research and participant observation methods enable researchers to get as close to their object of study as possible, and Shona researchers such as Chavunduka even get closer to the Shona phenomena that they study. In order to exemplify the procedures of this method I used Turner as a good example. I should state that his approach, though commendable, has its own weaknesses that have been studied by scholars such as Brian Morris (1987) and van Beek (1985), who have written at length on Turner.

My analysis showed that specific religious concerns, cultural backgrounds or academic orientations and professional commitments influenced the way some writers in question worked. Accordingly, we have noticed that Chavunduka is one such scholar whose work affirmed not just the existence of the

Shona world of ancestors or witchcraft but he also endorsed them as real and true. The phenomenological techniques of *epoche* and empathetic interpolation are useful in order to attain understanding. These techniques, however, may remain elusive even for some Africans who, for example, would find the performance of *epoche* not so easy either because they belong to the tradition that they are studying or because they are adopted to Western life styles or new religious convictions.

Some of the issues addressed in chapter six include the "emic-etic" controversies, the "insider-outsider" issue, discussions on whether truth and falsity judgments or value-judgments should be accepted in Religious Studies and the question of whether phenomenology attains objectivity or not. In relation to the phenomenological methodology scholars such as Segal argue that a non-believer (a non-Shona) can appreciate the meaning of Shona religion for a believer (Shona) but he or she cannot appreciate its meaning in a believer's own conscious terms (1983:100-110). Thus Segal's analysis contends against one of the phenomenological assumptions that a researcher can enter into the religious experience of the believers and achieve understanding by the use of *epoche* and empathy. One of Segal's main qualms regards the use of *epoche*. He argued that phenomenologists have not sufficiently explained how to practice *epoche* and expressed doubts whether this suspension of bias and prejudices can be achieved (1983:108). If Segal's argument is applied here, it means that Shona traditional religion cannot be understood from within religious studies without the researcher subscribing to the Shona beliefs as true in themselves. For scholars such as Segal and Strenski the researcher should not be constrained by the Shona people's perceptions. Such an approach, in my view, has the potential to neglect important aspects about the studied people in relation to their religious beliefs and practices.

I concur with Cox's argument that, with the help of *epoche* and empathetic interpolation, science of religion seeks to describe and interpret religious phenomena in impartial terms, that is, as much as possible, from the point of view of the believer. Though the use of *epoche* has been heavily criticised as impractical, or sometimes unnecessary, I agree with Cox about its significance as well as that of empathy when studying "foreign" phenomena.

I would like to further discuss Cox's ideas about "methodological conversion" in the study of African traditional religions (1994). Issues on "methodological conversion" are presented in the concluding sections of the thesis because these ideas are introduced much later in Cox's works as an extension of his phenomenological discussions. Cox regards the "methodological conversion" approach as significant for the study of African indigenous religions since for Western observers, much of what is described in Africa appears strange, foreign and hence incomprehensible. Scholars such as Segal criticise research methods that stress understanding achieved from within Shona religion as theology. Nevertheless, Cox sees "methodological conversion" as an answer to the problem of inadequate descriptions, subjective interpretations and biased conclusions. I comment that getting "methodologically converted" to Shona traditional religion in order to understand it should be quite a difficult and complex procedure, if not an impossible task for many scholars. However, in order to produce adequate descriptions, insider perspectives and insightful analysis it may be necessary for some researchers to resort to methodological conversion. This research methodology issue is significant for the study of African traditional religions since for many of the Western observers or for "outsiders", these practices and beliefs are regarded as odd and eccentric. This has partly contributed to the production of descriptions of Shona religion and culture in a disparaging and de-contextualising manner.

Cox's methodological thrust claims that every scholar begins with a confession (religious or scientific) to which a process of methodological conversion can be applied. He defines "methodological conversion" as involving a process in order to achieve understanding. It is a process whereby a scientist or a non-believer internalises what comes from outside before approaching the actual phenomena of religion. This, he said, is understanding a religion's theology as true "methodologically" without embracing it confessionally (1994:22). Cox says that this conversion is methodological since it involves a way, a process to achieve understanding. This method requires him to step out from behind his [orthodox] confession and meet the other in a place where his own convictions are suspended. Cox quoted Raimundo Panikkar and David Krieger who argue that methodological conversion can be achieved through internalising the viewpoint of the believer so as to make it the researcher's temporarily. The result is that the scholar may hold two confessions simultaneously (1994:22), a capacity which he said has been demonstrated by Wittgenstein, leading to a genuine understanding of the meaning of the phenomena being studied.

It appears to me that Cox's idea of methodological conversion means that, for example, the Western Christian researcher step out of his or her [orthodox] confessions so that they can meet the other in a place where their own convictions are suspended. This is not confessional conversion (the complete rejection of the "old" view and a similarly total and unquestioning acceptance of the "new" (Cox 1994:24)). Cox regards his approach as scientific phenomenology, because traditionally phenomenologists endeavoured to see as a believer sees, by temporarily applying epoche to their own personal, religious, cultural or political assumptions. Cox commented that he is aware that the argument he was advancing could be interpreted simply as confirming what Segal and Strenski regarded as the phenomenologist's motive of endorsing the reality of the sacred, and hence moving out of the

sciences into theology. However, he would not accept the conclusion that, for example, Otto, Eliade, Cantwell Smith's assumptions present concealed theologies. I agree with Cox that the aim of Religious Studies is to achieve understanding, a goal which cannot be attained if we ignore or deny the faith perspectives of believers by trying to explain them in terms which are incomprehensible to them (Cox 1994:16).

Methodological conversion is scientific in the sense that the first step is that the scholar begins with a critical analysis of his own tradition employing the insights of various disciplines and methods of research some of which I presented in chapter six, e.g. from history, philology, empirical studies, text criticism, etc. Cox noted that at step one, the researcher, although admitting to owning a confession, adopts a critical, scientific stance toward his own confession. For Cox, Segal's non-believing social scientist, for example, examines the philosophical assumptions beneath the rational, causal theories of explanation. The scientist also exposes cultural presuppositions which undergird the Western understanding of alternative explanations of empirical phenomena. In other words, the scientist exposes the scientific method to a critical, analytical examination while still maintaining belief in the method itself (1994:14). The second step is a similar analysis applied to the tradition that the researcher wishes to understand. It is particularly these two methodological steps of methodological conversion that make the difference between "methodological conversion" and "confessional conversion". Although the process of internalising the beliefs of a religion involves a conversion, the critical, analytical scientific approach helps the researcher not to become confessional.

One criticism of Cox's approach is that, though researchers may begin with a certain position, or a world-view, not all observers begin with a faith to which the process of methodological conversion can be applied as he asserted.

Researchers like Platvoet claim to take a methodologically agnostic position neither affirming or denying a spiritual world-view or a similar position; they do not embrace a faith but they simply respect the tendencies of scientific investigation, that is, that which can be verified or falsified by empirical means of observation, analysis and testing procedures.

In the process of developing more comprehensive methods of research in the study of traditional religions, *methodological agnosticism* is one of the methods of research recommended by scholars such as Platvoet (Platvoet 1995/9/29:Personal communication). I will discuss briefly how "methodological agnosticism" (not agnosticism as a philosophy or a world view) relates to the phenomenological approach. This method is introduced only in the concluding sections firstly, because in my view, these ideas are an extension of the phenomenological discussions. Secondly, though scholars are becoming more interested because of the high significance involving it, there is little that has been written about methodological agnosticism. As expounded by Platvoet, methodological agnosticism is not something completely new. Its development is traced through scholars like Peter Berger (1967:100,180) and Ninian Smart (1973). Scholars like van Baal in *Symbols of Communication* have also encouraged the use of this method in research. Used by scholars such as Ninian Smart, the term "methodological agnosticism" referred to a valuable method in research which enabled the methodological agnostic to engage in research using a tradition of "*agnostic restraint*" particularly in matters of ontology. These scholars sought to achieve "maximum objectivity and minimum subjectivity" by neither affirming nor denying a "cosmological" stance (Platvoet 1995/9/29: Personal communication). For Platvoet, agnostic restraint and the development of more precise and more neutral terminology enables researchers to observe, describe and analyse the object of study without bias or prejudice. Methodological agnostics argue that scholars of

religion need not be religious themselves. It is through agnostic restraint that, that which appeared bizarre or childish falls into place and is scientifically presented as it is.

Platvoet's methodological agnosticism contends that all scholarly knowledge is provisional and hypothetical, and that scientific truth is established by falsification. This approach regards the meta-empirical claims of the believers not as a reality but as postulates. I agree with Platvoet in as much as he maintains that what believers argue to be true and real or false must be described just as it is while the researcher practises some agnostic restraint on it. For Platvoet the thought patterns of the believers often revolve around non-verifiable and non-falsifiable concepts. By saying that these should be considered by researchers as hypotheses and not as real, he rejected Chavunduka's approach which considered Shona extra-scientific beliefs as true and real. The methodological agnostic therefore cannot deny or affirm these postulations. This approach therefore de-polemicises orthodox theological approaches.

The researcher is restricted to empirical reality, that is, the study of the objects and institutions that underlie the postulated divine realities. Methodological agnostics regard the spiritual realities as postulates rather than confirmed realities; that is, what believers argue to be true and real or false is presented just as the believers express it, and the researcher practices some agnostic restraint on it. Platvoet's position is that, in academic studies, these alleged realities (e.g., the reality of ancestral spirits or witches) should be considered by objective researchers as mere hypotheses and not as real (Platvoet 1995/9/29:Personal communication). Thus, the methodological agnostic, in his or her studies, cannot deny or affirm the Shona people's postulations. This approach therefore de-polemicises other

approaches such as a theological approach whose starting point, for example, may be, "there is no God but Allah".

According to Platvoet, methodological agnosticism requires a researcher to practise agnostic restraint so that he or she becomes methodologically neutral without taking a position on (ultimate) "truth" and "falsity" questions. Many scholars disagree with the idea of neutrality in academia because every writer has his or her own angle of perception, a background and a vision which makes them perceive phenomena in distinctive ways. According to Platvoet, methodological agnosticism inhibits the researcher from answering such questions as to whether Allah is the God or not, because these questions deal with extra-scientific questions. Methodological agnostics take an attitude of "I don't know" to what is researched. Such an approach is expected to enable researchers to produce objective results. Agnostic restraint is generally practised in the light of the following: firstly, science is an institution of society and is historically conditioned, and is constantly changing; secondly, phenomena are complex, they cannot be explained by one theory; thirdly, it is absolutely necessary to practice methodological agnosticism because the line between the objective and the subjective is quite thin. Science tries to establish provisional things impartially through the use of paradigms and theories which also change with time. Lastly, the starting point in knowledge is often subjective and is constituted in provisional statements, cultures and evolving theories, hence the researcher guards against this and takes a stance of agnostic restraint. I am of the view that methodological agnosticism is quite tenable in research on African traditional religions because it gives space for a many sided, interdisciplinary conversation. I should comment that I find Platvoet's technical jargon and explanation of this approach to be quite complicated and difficult to understand.

This method is different from the Coxian "methodological conversion", that is, becoming converted methodologically to the religion of the Shona as a methodological tool which enables researchers to understand as the "insiders" do. For Cox, in order to really understand, the researcher must become methodologically converted to the religion of the believer. As I understand things, Cox's "methodological conversion" seeks to methodologically convert the researcher, temporarily, into a believer so that, in line with the Eliadean approach, the mental constructs of the believers are recorded and affirmed as real. Adopting the distinction made by and maintained by Raimundo Panikkar (1984) and later expounded by David Krieger (1991) Cox argued that this "methodological conversion" is different from "confessional conversion" which surreptitiously moves the study of religion away from science to theology. He stated that one can affirm methodologically what believers affirm thereby experiencing what they experience. As an example he argued that if he is to achieve an understanding of the religious experience of the Karanga people of the Chingoma area, he must experience transformation himself. He explained that he must step out from behind his Western scientific perspective of causality (to which he is committed confessionally) and adopt an openness to the reality of ancestral spirits and their assumed works (1995:16). I have already stated that Cox is happy to be placed in the same category as Otto, Eliade, Cantwell Smith, etc. who argue that the irreducible religious element is the transcendent mystery. It should be noted however, that Cox rejected the charge that his and the other writers' theories represent covert theologies.

As one reads Cox's works, one notices that phenomenology and "methodological conversion" are not identical. Cox's "methodological conversion" appears to me to be a step further than phenomenology. In phenomenology the researcher does not deny or affirm the specific forms of metaphysical realities that are held as real by the believers, but suspends them. Cox

quotes Segal whose position is that phenomenologists must act "as if" they are believers while actually maintaining the detachment required by the scientific method. In theology the believer, however, truly is a believer who embraces as real the object of his or her faith (Cox 1995:13). In "methodological conversion" the researcher temporarily lives the experiences and conceptual categories of the studied community. This is a process of temporary transformation from one culture in order to understand "the other". Cox's model is a bit more than ordinary empathy yet a bit less than conversion. He quotes Krieger who holds that this approach goes beyond *epoche* and empathetic interpolation (1995:12). Krieger is further quoted as saying that "methodological conversion" requires a turning towards new possibilities for life and thought as a function of genuine communication between religions (1995:12). "Methodological conversion" as advanced by Panikkar and Krieger offers what Cox believes is a genuine advancement within the phenomenological discussions. He says that it does require a form of *epoche*, but rather than trying to bracket out all of one's preconceived academic and personal convictions, it suggests that one can hold differing even contradictory presuppositions at the same time. This is like speaking more than one language whereby the rules, grammar and syntax of one language may be at variance with another but the speaker may "know" and "use" both intimately. Cox further states that "methodological conversion" also embraces a type of empathy since one must affirm that understanding as the other holds. The empathy employed in diatopical hermeneutics avoids the artificial "as if" that is employed by traditional phenomenologists (1995:15). Cox states that a basic presupposition thus undergirds the method, but this is not different from any other academic study of human behaviour which values understanding the human for its own sake.

"Methodological conversion" pulls in a different direction from that of empiricists such as Platvoet who criticised it as

some form of covert theology (Platvoet 1995/9/23: Personal communication). Whereas a researcher using the "methodological conversion" method affirms methodologically that the supernatural world is real and true, methodological agnostics such as Platvoet record statements as they are from the believer, and do not regard statements about the supernatural world as a reality, but as postulations which are neither verifiable nor falsifiable.

The way forward

In short, I systematically studied the main authors on Shona traditional religion and discussed the different ways they presented Shona religion and culture, while also paying attention to research methodology issues. This chronological presentation of these writers in this order is important in as much as it shows the historical development of the study and documentation of Shona traditional religion and culture. I looked not only at the books of these writers, but also at the contexts in which they wrote as well as their relevant biographical details. This helped to trace some of the subjectivities and certain reliability-reducing mechanisms that are involved in research. These include ethnocentric and certain religious biases, for example, those crudely present in most of the earlier literature, and in more subtle forms in some of the later works. The theoretical orientations of some authors, in as far as they were uncritically held, in some instances led to a preconceived selective collection, perception and interpretation of data. Some of the factors that contributed to the production of inadequate descriptions and interpretations insensitive to the beliefs and practices of the Shona people include the following: inarticulate research methodologies, negative attitudes to the object of research, deficient knowledge of Shona language, as well as the failure to interpret Shona religious and cultural phenomena in their contexts.

In view of these research methodology issues, the descriptions of Shona religion, culture and society presented by authors must neither be accepted at face-value nor be subjected to indiscriminate criticism but must be tested for their relative reliability by proper critical analysis of the Shona cultural and historical context, i.e., by carefully examining the characteristics of the ethnic group under consideration, the circumstances in which research was done, the types of informants and research assistants, by whom a particular piece of information was produced, and by relating this information to independent sources, such any comments by other writers on the same subject.

It is possible that some of the Shona religious beliefs that are summarised in this thesis are not necessarily the beliefs which Shona traditional believers held in pre-colonial times. They may be in part a product of Christian missionary work. I urge future researchers to thoroughly research these beliefs and practices with a sharper focus on their historical realities. Many works on Shona traditional religion and culture generally do not present adequate descriptions and interpretations of Shona society, religious beliefs and cultural practices. There is a need for future researchers not only to trace the approximate historical conditions in which certain religious and cultural practices or beliefs of the Shona originated and developed, but also to explore their significance to the Shona people today. These and other writers discussed in this thesis are linked together by their quest to produce adequate descriptions and interpretations of Shona religion, culture and society in their proper historical contexts and cultural perspectives.

All the approaches analysed in the thesis provide the milieu into which religion is interwoven, this means that empirical religion is interwoven in concrete societies and must therefore be studied by a variety of disciplines such as sociology (talking about societies and cultures), anthropology

(talking about humanity and its environment) and psychology (talking about the human psyche and mind) or from the standpoints of philosophy (study of cognitive rigour, logic, language and reasoning) and theology (a study which normatively presupposes the existence of deity). These disciplines all claim to get to grips with human experience, faith and the meaning and nature of religion. Thus, the study of Shona traditional religion and culture should be approached holistically. Students of Shona religion cannot avoid information from disciplines such as history, archaeology, anthropology and sociology, ecology and others so as to come closer to a holistic understanding of the meaning of this religion, culture and society. As stated earlier on, researchers in Shona contexts would definitely need training in Shona language, questionnaire drafting, interview skills as well as other background research skills that are available in all the relevant disciplines. This is very pertinent bearing in mind that Shona society is one of the so-called pre-literate or oral societies. Most of the beliefs exist in oral form, proverbs, music, myths, folk-tales, etc. so a thorough knowledge of Shona language by researchers is necessary. In this exercise students of religion should try to avoid past reductionist speculations, which take religion as an illusion of the mind and therefore subjectively dismiss it as a social function or as originating from psychic anxieties. It is essential that scholars try to understand Shona religion in its own cultural context, as testimonies of the expressions of Shona people in their contexts. This is done partly through conducting fieldwork research and engaging in participant observation. Future research on Shona religion and culture would gain in depth and dimension if it appeared as a multi-disciplinary and poly-methodic enterprise. Cooperation by religious-social-anthropological and folklore studies would provide a fruitful method of collecting information from the field. Phenomenology without idealising objectivity and a sound religious-historical analysis, according to my understanding, will help in ensuring scholarly treatment of

Shona religion. Furthermore, history methods are important because they are not essentialist and they de-polemicise problematic tendencies such as ethnocentric overemphasis. If used well, such an approach should be of great help in an endeavour to produce unbiased, accurate and thorough results. In chapter six I commended works by historians such as Ranger and Kimambo on Shona religion. History methods enable the researcher to understand Shona traditional religion as an authentic system in its own right, with its own dynamics and development that cannot be treated merely as an epiphenomenon of social, economic or political changes, though these factors are interwoven with the religious. Though archaeological and archival evidence constitute an essential source of information, I contend that the oral tradition should be employed most so as to attain an understanding of past Shona beliefs and practices in relation to their forms in contemporary Shona societies. Social anthropology not only helps in providing a correct understanding of Shona religious and cultural ideas, but also is helpful in placing these ideas in their total life context. Psychological tools of research help us to understand the ways in which the Shona respond and react to both spiritual and physical beings in their environment. An adequate understanding of Shona traditional religion will be attained with its values of spirituality, ethics, philosophy, communality and integration with daily existence through an integrated usage of the methods from the various disciplines discussed in this thesis.

The various writers' works on Shona religion and culture presented in this thesis lack a comprehensive depiction of Shona beliefs, practices and perceptions. Some of these works lack a phenomenological perspective and others lack a historical component and oral contextuality. To this end current and future researchers should not only study and analyse the available works on Shona, but should reconstruct Shona religious and cultural history from different angles. I recommend that scholars interested in this area should

seriously explore how they can integrate different research methods so that they complement each other in an attempt to uncover and cover various milieux of Shona traditional religion.

Existing literature has not adequately dealt with themes such as that of Shona art, symbolism, traditional healing, magic, sorcery, myths, rituals, music, etc. and how they relate to Shona traditional religion. In view of such inadequacies in the academic study of Shona religion there is need to do further and thorough research on the above stated neglected issues about the Shona. Though it has been argued that the best work on the *field level* can be done by scholars who are themselves Shona. In the thesis I have stated that this is not always the case. Nevertheless, students from Shona communities should also feel it incumbent on themselves to do research on aspects of their culture and religion. Perspective provided by indigenous researchers may help to support Shona scholars to realise their religious and cultural heritage or may widen academic horizons of other scholars.

It is true that in some cases, in African traditional religions, only "insiders" can furnish readers with the often undisclosed information, for example, about the "private healing cult". In such cases it is important to make use of these insiders so as to obtain information for analysis. As traditional religions are inseparable from social, cultural and behavioral realities it means that in order to attain an adequate understanding of Shona traditional religions, researchers should make reference to their Shona psyche and social existence. The historical, phenomenological and theological research methodologies alone do not make adequate reference to the varied social institutions and cultures or to the traditional African personality and its context. Social-anthropological methodological approaches and tools of research need to be used so as to augment the methodological approaches from other disciplines.

The relevant approaches and tools of research should be harnessed together in order to produce a comprehensive understanding of Shona religion, culture and society. Historical, archaeological and phenomenological approaches will only be able to give a certain portion of the full picture of African indigenous religions. One of the contributions of African contextual theology is that its procedures may be used to help researchers to present "insider" perspectives. Cox argued that as many Africans are studying African religion as a religious undertaking, the scientific study of religion in Africa cannot avoid a close relationship if not partnership with "theology" (1994:3). His argument was that scholars, especially those working in indigenous communities should clearly envisage distinct but compatible roles for social science and "theology", noting in some places how each discipline complements the other (1994:4). While I agree with Cox, it nevertheless should be stressed that the academic study of African traditional religions should be divorced from religious undertakings, and should be radically distinct from theology. A poly-methodic and multi-disciplinary approach to the study of traditional religions may enable researchers to be free from various form of bias, preconceptions and reductionism. The scholars whom I discussed in this essay did not, strictly speaking, adequately combine and make use of the various relevant disciplines so as to conduct an interactionist approach that embraces and relates findings which seek a many-sided understanding of Shona traditional religion. No one approach and method can claim an absolute and unique privilege as "the" method of studying Shona religion. Interdisciplinary and poly-methodic research need not be seen as about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact is willing to let itself go). In doing something interdisciplinary it's not enough to choose a "subject", e.g. Shona traditional religion and gather around it four or five sciences.

Interdisciplinarity should be done in such a way that it consists in creating a new object coalesced from the involved disciplines. One of the important things to concentrate on, as the various disciplines coalesce is the need to explore the possibility of building "applied dimensions" of various fields of inquiry, e.g. applied anthropology, applied sociology, etc. This will help to shed more light on how to coalesce some of these disciplines whose boundaries are overlapping, and should clarify ways in which these fields share a unified approach or object. These disciplines remain in their respective fields of inquiry, though some have interacted for a long time without consciously acknowledging the need to do so.

However, the new science of religion that I seek involves a the use of multi-disciplinary "applied methods" of research on the Shona. Scholars should formulate perspectives of academic training by devising applied methodologies so that they are more inclusive than exclusive and so that they arrive as near as possible, to an adequate and accurate understanding of Shona people's experiences. Science of religion then becomes scientific just as natural sciences partly in the sense that it is their role to safeguard the demands for impartiality, rigour, accuracy and validity in the interpretation and understanding of Shona religion just as much as it is the role of method in the natural sciences in their explanation of natural phenomena.

The science of religion that I envisage in the academic study of Shona religion is one in which research should begin by primarily focusing to the Shona religious and cultural texts suitable for interpretation, e.g., clan praise poetry, myths, legends, ritual invocations, etc. or with the participatory-observation, and then with the writing following later. This may help researchers to understand Shona religion in its historical, communal and spiritual contexts and in its natural living cultural settings. The actual writing should be a marginal dimension instead of emerging as central to what

researchers do in the field. The religious and cultural texts which writers should begin by presenting include Shona myths, rituals, art, institutions, games, cultural idioms, customary life, music, proverbs, religious places (shrines such as caves, sacred stones, hills, mountains, sacred trees, graves, etc.) of specific Shona ethnic communities so as to reduce abstraction tendencies that are found in works of some writers on African traditional religion. I am convinced that behind these various expressions there are ultimately archetypal religious experiences and meanings that researchers should understand through an interdisciplinary analysis. The science of religion used to study the Shona traditional religion should fall within a participatory paradigm in the sense of involving both the local people and the researcher in the production of these texts. Poly-vocality was restrained and orchestrated in traditional ethnographies by giving to one voice a pervasive authorial function and to others the role of sources, "informants", to be quoted or paraphrased. Dialogism and polyphony in the study of the Shona people should, in my view be recognised as modes of textual production. Here the ethnographer no longer holds unquestioned rights of salvage; the authority long associated with bringing elusive "disappearing" oral lore into legible textual form. When the data on the Shona are produced by the collaboration of various members of the Shona people, the "informants" begin to be considered as authorities and as co-authors, and the researcher as a scribe. Through this process the researcher therefore not only speaks for the Shona but also speaks with them. I am of the view that the writer should present the texts by the Shona (about their religion, culture or society) first before his or her actual writing. These texts are free from academic theoretical structure, they help to create social, religious and cultural milieux of the Shona context.

Accounts produced in this way are able to provide authentic insider angles of versions and depths of understanding as well as outsider ones in a way that promotes impartiality and

accuracy. Furthermore, the study of the Shona that involves these people in the gathering of information may be a solution to the problems such as that rituals are performed with unusual care because the outsider is present, or that beliefs may be modified to cater for what the outsider is expected to tolerate. This is related to the problem concerning observation by "outsider researchers", that is, sometimes they observe reactions to themselves. The method of research suggested above pays attention to the role of the researcher in his or her conversations with the people he or she is studying.

More reflection on the evaluatory process should involve the Shona, e.g., religious leaders, ritual participants and the ordinary Shona people. Shona intellectuals as well as any other people from various relevant frames of reference should be consulted in the interpreting processes. This method of research will help us to understand the emotional make-up of the studied Shona people, for example in cases where they, in various ways, express unhappiness and anger about the misinterpretations, misrepresentations and the stigmatisation of some of their beliefs and values by some writers. Furthermore, this method of research should be part of science of religion in which the study of Shona religion becomes a collaborative work of documentation in a manner that gives equal weight to diverse renditions of the tradition and in a way that shows the historical process which has brought the Shona religious phenomena to the present. In this case the researcher's "voice" no longer pervades the accounts on the Shona. To a great extent this redresses the problem of power relationship between the researcher (the self) and the researched (the other) that I discussed in chapter six. This process helps to ensure the involvement of the researched in the control of the research process and accountability is both to the scientific community and the specific Shona ethnic group. Through this process we can ask new critical questions of all ethnographies.

Earlier on I argued that the Shona people's point of view is superior to that of an "outsider" where it concerns descriptions of the way they understand their beliefs and the meaning of their faith. This need not be the case especially in cases where the researcher makes use of the methodological conversion method. Furthermore, the Shona person's point of view may be less superior where matters of contextuality, morphology or analysis of symbolic meanings are concerned. Therefore the dictum, to paraphrase W.B. Kristensen, that "believers are always right", respects only a limited truth. I maintain that, in order to present adequate descriptions and analysis, all the available points of view beginning with those of the believers and then the fruitful ones of "outsiders", need to be presented.

The way forward in the academic study of Shona traditional religion and culture is the adoption of a science of religion whose research methodology enables researchers to explore Shona traditional religion from a holistic and multi-faceted approach so as to attain a comprehensive picture of the Shona. The suggested method in the study of Shona traditional religion should incorporate both methodological conversion and agnostic restraint in ways that assist the particular researcher to attain a better understanding of the beliefs and practices of the Shona. Thus both methodological conversion and agnostic restraint should be coupled into a new science of religion relevant to the study of Shona religion and culture. Both of these methods are tenable because they exploit "field" methods and enable researchers to study the Shona people in their rightful religious and cultural contexts in ways that help the researcher to guard against ethnocentric apperceptions and reductionistic tendencies. Any researcher, whether he or she is an insider or outsider may use both methods alternatively according to different situations and when necessary.

Methodological conversion is, in my view, more significant to, for example, a non-Shona researcher whose Western cultural background regards some Shona cultural practices as illogical, inconsistent or irrational. In the thesis it has been shown that some researchers from a Western Christian orthodox background were utterly indifferent and are divorced from what was happening "on the ground". Methodological conversion helps a researchers from such backgrounds to deal with their Christian dogmatism which retards them to see, hear and feel as the Shona traditionalists. As explained earlier on, this method requires the researcher to step out from behind his or her bias, prejudice and preconceptions, and meet Shona religion and culture in a place where his or her own prejudices are suspended. This process requires something a bit more than epoche and empathy, yet the process is not a confessional conversion, it is not the unquestioning acceptance but a temporary internalisation of Shona religion and culture so as to understand it. Thus methodological conversion has the capacity to help the Shona or non-Shona researcher to come much closer physically, mentally and emotionally to the object of study and to what happens "on the ground". Because the aim of science of religion is understanding from a scientific point of view, the Shona scholar who believes in Shona religion still adopts the position of the scientist at step one of this method affirming critically that rationality defines the essential criterion for knowledge of the world (Cox 1994:15). At step two the same critical but faithful approach must be applied, where necessary by the Shona scholar studying Shona religion and culture.

Since the researcher is brought by this method closer to the studied materials, he or she is able to attain deeper insights into the cultural codes of the Shona in their natural perspectives. This enables him or her to deal with biases, prejudices and other forms of subjectivities. Because the researcher is closer to the studied materials and has

internalised the Shona beliefs in a critical way, this helps in that the so-called "alien" comes into place. The researcher thus uses this phenomenology to record as much descriptive detail as possible, understand like the Shona "believer" does but maintaining the detachment required by scientific methods. Because the researcher is methodologically converted he or she not only describes the externals; what he or she hears and sees, but also the feelings of the Shona people as they are without embracing them confessionally.

Agnostic restraint also needs to be coupled into a new science of religion relevant to the study of Shona traditional religion and culture. At one time or the other any researcher may need to practice some methodological restraint. This is especially so because the Shona researcher whose conviction is that Shona religion and culture are true, correct and faultless, risks misrepresenting them. Thus, agnostic restraint, in my view, helps to "detach" a researcher who is culturally or emotionally attached thereby regarding the Shona tradition as faultless. Furthermore, the researcher charged with ethnocentrism, academic preconceptions, biases and any form of subjectivism may deal with these problems in research by using agnostic restraint. This means that in this science of religion, even an insider researcher cannot claim a better appreciation of Shona religion to which he or she belongs, and which he or she practices, than someone who is an outsider.

Like the methodological conversion method, agnostic restraint enables the researcher to present as many descriptive accounts as possible. Methodological agnostics practice some restraint in their analysis and interpretations of the Shona because they regard all knowledge to be in a state of flux and change. This implies that through this method, the researcher sees all knowledge as provisional and regards information about the meta-empirical world (e.g. the reality of ancestral spirits or the non-reality of witches) as postulates. This also means that theories that emerge should be seen only as provisional

steps towards a greater and richer understanding of the Shona religious traditions. Methodological restraint, in simple terms, is a method whereby the researcher adopts an "I don't know attitude" during research in order to let the tendencies of scientific empirical investigation prevail. The method seeks to achieve neutrality during the research as well as objective results. The researcher is limited to empirical reality, for example, the reality of an ancestral ritual and not the reality of ancestors. Researchers who employ this method are restrained by it from denying or affirming any truth or falsity claims during their study.

The research methods discussed here do not dogmatise the researcher's thinking but enable researchers to present descriptive accounts adequately and fairly, and facilitate the development of a reflective thinking both historically and comparatively. Scholars on Shona traditional religion and culture should use either methodological conversion or agnostic restraint, or should be able to use both methods alternatively according to the needs and contexts in which they conduct their research. Furthermore, they should continue to develop and reflect on ways of research so as to attain better methods of understanding the Shona within a multi-disciplinary and poly-methodic scientific framework. While some problems such as the "insider-outsider, etic-emic", etc. issues seem to be dealt with well, the science of religion suggested here is challenged to respond to, e.g. the demand that a viable science of religion in African contexts is one that licenses researchers to pass, e.g. moral and value judgments. If so, the daring task is that scholars should discuss the norms for criteriology that will be universally acceptable. Issues such as whether religious scholarship should seek to empower the studied community need to be addressed. I hope that the suggested usage of methodological conversion and agnostic restraint take the discussion further in the quest for a science of religion that enables

researchers to attain a better knowledge and understanding of Shona traditional religion, culture and society.

Finally, the following are brief explanatory summaries of protracted and serious debates involving important categories and concepts. I also clarify my position regarding them.

Further clarification of language and terminology

Etic and emic issues

Etic interpretations arise when a writer describes, analyses or interprets religious phenomena using categories and certain theoretical frameworks "outside" the horizons of the believers. There are controversies about the issues of etic accounts. As an example, Cox accused scholars like Bourdillon (1995) of interpreting Shona religious aspects basically according to functional theories. According to Cox these theories assume that religious faith and practice can be explained largely by factors outside religion itself (1996:8-9). Most religionists contend that *etic* interpretations sometimes ignore the perspectives of believers, particularly traditionalists who, for example, would hardly accept the interpretation that witch hunting cults function to dominate and to subjugate women.

Though I agree with this sentiment, I think that religious studies should not be limited to emic research only. An emic point of view mainly constitutes the perception of the "actor". Emic perceptions have as their hallmark the elevation of the "insider" informant to the status of ultimate judge of the adequacy of the "outsider" or the observer's descriptions and interpretations. The test of the adequacy of emic descriptions is their ability to generate statements that the believers accept as real and meaningful. I argued that we should not take the emic accounts as definitive. It gives the researcher only what the believers believe, yet we noted that researchers may be misled by certain "insiders" about how

their society works in practice. The etic mode may make use of categories unknown to the studied community, such as social-scientific theories. Fruitful etic interpretations are acceptable in religious studies as long as they can help in producing a better understanding of the studied community. It is also important that scholars should in their works clearly distinguish for the readers the emic accounts from the etic ones.

Reductionism

There are various definitions of the term "reductionism". Eric Lott (1988:13) a scholar who has written widely on Hinduism and who identifies himself as a religionist, defines reductionism as an approach which attempts to explain religious phenomena in terms that are intrinsically *not compatible* with the meaning expressed by the tradition's "theologians". Segal and Wiebe, however, reject the notion that the result of the scientific study of religion can be accepted only if it is somehow consistent with the believers' own perspective because in any case no two believers share an identical set of perspectives. Pals (1986:18) defines reductionism as a theoretical approach that is concerned to show that a religious phenomenon owes its existence to non-religious causes. In the thesis I made use of Kiernan's definition that reductionists' position is that there is *nothing more* to religion than its social manifestations (1995: Personal correspondence). If this means that reductionism is a closed system which explains everything in terms of its own presuppositions, I argue that scholars should shun such an approach because it hinders the way to obtain new insights.

Many of the sociologists and psychologists in the late 1950s have been criticised because they were theory prone. Scholars need to espouse and develop more inductive methods that allow descriptions, analyses and theory to emerge from the data described empathetically. Traditional religions need to be studied in their religio-cultural contexts as well as in their

proper historical perspectives so as to accurately document the social, cultural, religious and psychological realities of the studied community. Shona traditional religions will be fully understood when reference is made to their various human contexts. In order to produce comprehensive works it is not enough to look at social factors alone. Traditional religions need to be interpreted and understood in their peculiar contexts and within their dynamic circumstances. Many factors such as social, technological, political or economic factors influence Shona culture and religion, so it is necessary to explore ways in which these issues relate to specific aspects of the Shona contexts without being reductionistic.

Value-judgments

The issue as to whether "value-judgments" are acceptable when analysing people's beliefs has been hotly debated in religious studies. In this study I came across writers such as Stayt (1931:240) who judged Shona religion as false and I criticised this judgment as unfair to the Shona people and as unacceptable in scholarship. Scholars such as Bourdillon, Cumpsty, etc. contend that scholarly work may include such judgments but others such as Platvoet and Lewis (1971:12) contend that researchers should exercise agnostic restraint and not engage in value-judgments, normative judgments or judgments, for example, regarding meta-empirical issues.

Contending that value-judgments in academia should be made explicit Bourdillon wrote that scholars should be free to announce whether certain rituals make sense or whether they are superstitious (1993:231). Bourdillon argued that a good scholar should critically question whether certain beliefs are apparently wrong, false, meaningful or meaningless.

I agree with his opinion that for academic argumentation to be meaningful, it should be able to show how limited our perspectives are and the variety of perspectives that are available. I further agree with him that if we are aware of

our limitations, we can enter into academic debate in an undogmatic way, ready to listen and learn (Bourdillon 1994:34). However, I am more of the view that the researcher should present the accounts of the believers in as great a detail as possible. All the believers' perspectives need to be examined and should be presented so that those who want to make judgments can do so on their own. As a researcher, I do not regard it as my duty to tell them that their beliefs are false. What I would be interested in, as a researcher, is firstly, to describe as much as possible this belief and the practices that relate to it. Secondly I would be concerned with trying to understand the meaning(s) of this belief to the studied community. The researchers' own perspectives, especially in cases where they "publicly announce" the studied people's beliefs as wrong, should be clearly separate from those of the Shona people. I contend that the researcher's responsibility should be that of thoroughly and carefully presenting the given tradition. When the religious issues are fairly presented and discussed, anyone can make their own judgments as they wish.

Prozesky (1992), in *Proposals for a criteriology of Religion*, has sought to clarify this issue. Tracing the works of writers such as William James, John Hick, Hans Kung, Frederick Streng and Marjorie Hewitt, Prozesky contends that, it is correctly expected of scholars that they should not only have expert knowledge of their field but also subject it to critical analysis, because there is no other way in which error and harm can be detected and overcome (1992:67). Prozesky argues that critical analysis (judgment) is an essential part of the study of religion, all the more so because faith is never a private affair. Giving an example of the South African political context and its exploitative and dehumanising structures that were given religious legitimacy by Christian churches, Prozesky contends that what believers do affects others for better or for worse. His view is that, in such situations, the academic disciplines of religious studies can

make a valuable contribution by dealing with the issue of religious criticism and especially with the quest for criteria appropriate to appraisal of the place of religion in the society. Prozesky's conclusion is that there is the need for and possibility of the criticism of religious phenomena; and that practical and ethical considerations which amount to the fostering of comprehensive human well-being, are an essential part of the adequate criteriology of religions. He states that James, Hick and Streng additionally propose that the assessment of the purported "truth" of a religion is a distinct but also a necessary aspect of religious criticism. This is in opposition to the ideas of scholars such as Platvoet who maintain that the researcher should exercise agnostic restraint, and if judgments are passed, this may be done as a private matter.

I do not think that researchers should judge in such a way as to reformulate religious traditions that they study. Admittedly, it is important for a researcher to expose in great detail the beliefs and practices, strengths and weaknesses of the believers. This will help in the examination of the meaning and significance of these beliefs and practices to those who hold them. Great care needs to be taken because some researchers are tempted to judge using certain religions e.g. Christianity, or culture such as West European culture as the yardstick for the criticism of the so called primitive traditions. In such cases there is a difficulty of drawing a line between criticism and critical imperialism whereby critics go to illiterate religious groups and impose values and rules from their religious or cultural contexts. It is not easy to distinguish between a critic's personal convictions and judgements at an academic level. It might be helpful for scholars to develop various categories of criteriology such as "the lower level" and "the higher level" of judgments. Nevertheless, readers should be given space so that they can make their own criticism and decisions after they are presented with a comprehensive exposition of descriptive

accounts that are historical, contextual and based on thorough empirical "fieldwork". More importantly scholars are urged to take up Prozesky's initiative and discuss this issue further so as to set out the criteria and the norms by which they judge cultures and religions in a way that is acceptable in international academic debate.

Insider-outsider issue

Many scholars think that the issue about whether a researcher is an "insider" or an "outsider" is neither here nor there. What matters for them is the result of the research (Maxwell 1997:Personal communication). Other writers such as Westerlund (1985:91) and Platvoet (1982:4) insist that books should be studied together with their authors. This involves looking at whether a researcher is an "insider" or an "outsider". They argue for this approach on the basis that the two often have a link through various things such as the backgrounds and attitudes of the authors, the way they perceive phenomena, the subjectivities involved, and other factors which may influence the way certain researchers conduct their research.

I called Chavunduka an "insider" because he belongs to a private cult of traditional healers. He possesses insider information and therefore has an advantage over other researchers. I also used the word "insider" to mean "believer" or a person who belongs to a community being studied, for example, Chavunduka belongs to the Shona people. However, some Shona people may not be regarded as "insiders" to the Shona culture and religion because of certain academic training, new religious beliefs or because they are totally immersed in Western life patterns and they readily cast some aspersions on Shona traditional religious beliefs and practices. Strictly speaking such people are no longer "insiders" like traditionalists in the rural areas. They may not be regarded as reliable sources because they are often unable to furnish researchers with reliable insider perspectives.

Very often, those who regard themselves as "insiders" (vecheimba) decide who are "outsiders". My analysis is that those who are referred to as "outsiders" are non-Shona people, non-believers or members of the studied community who do not subscribe to certain beliefs and practices of their community. These so-called "outsiders" are sometimes asked by those who regard themselves as "insiders" not to attend or observe certain family rituals and this hinders the flow of information to the so called "outsider" during research. Despite such problems, I gave examples such as that of Turner's sterling presentation of Ndembu religion to show that it may be deceptive to assume that all Europeans are "outsiders" and cannot adequately grapple with Shona religious concepts because they are non-Shona. Anyone can understand Shona religion accurately as long as they conduct their research carefully, use proper tools of research and have a proper attitude to the subject which they are investigating.

Nevertheless, scholars such as Westerlund (1985:91) contend that in the study of indigenous traditions, an "insider" is more suited to collect information about his or her own religion. He argues that the principal advantage possessed by the Shona believer in comparison with the Westerner is that the former is far closer to the material, and has a deeper insight into their cultural codes, and has a better knowledge of their own language. This enables the "insider" to have a profound understanding of the meaning of their beliefs and faith. Using Chavunduka as an example, I showed that some "insiders", though they have their own faults, have the advantage of possessing hidden information and the advantage of a deep understanding of the expressions and the meanings embedded in their cultural codes.

Objectivity

The question as to whether it is possible to produce objective research is controversial. This issue has also been important in my discussions. Scholars such as Platvoet think that it is

possible for a researcher to be neutral during research and to produce "objective" academic work. I used the term objective in this thesis in its strict sense. I have tried to avoid using phrases such as "fairly objective" or "almost objective" because it seems to me that either there is "objectivity" or there is not.

I concede that researchers and searchers work with points of view and interests which influence what they see and affect what they discover. The works of the writers I presented are only images of part of reality as they saw it. Research involves what the researcher sees and hears in relation to what they already know. Furthermore, interpretations cannot be entirely free from subjective perceptions. Academic, cultural, religious or professional training sometimes play a role in determining how researchers see and interpret what they see. Religious and cultural information is constructed as a continuum of various layers of information ever evolving and dynamically changing. To explore such a world means creating or modifying it; hence the question of subjectivism is virtually ineradicable.

p'Bitek (1970:66) rightly argued that scholars interpret what they see in terms of their own experience and who they are. He was convinced that the personality of the scholar cannot be eliminated from his or her work. We saw in the cases of Gelfand and Chavunduka that writers' backgrounds and specific goals play a very crucial role which often dictates their approach, attitude, methods of research and the results of the research. In this thesis I tried to illustrate by way of concrete cases that neither the "insider" nor the "outsider" can claim their work to be objective. The works of most of the "later writers" on Shona religion (that is, from Gelfand onwards) present fair and balanced accounts and have less prejudices as compared to that of the "early writers" whose works reflect that their own personal feelings, cultural and

religious behaviours dominated how they understood and interpreted Shona religion and culture.

In any research it is important for individual researchers to be aware of aspects of their backgrounds, attitudes or any other factors which may lead them to certain prejudices and biases against certain aspects of the studied community. This may help to guard against partiality and distortion. The use of good methods of research, appropriate approaches and better tools of research help to eliminate some of the reliability-reducing mechanisms operative in writers' descriptions and interpretations. To this end, I believe that phenomenological methodology is one of the best tools that researchers have in order to produce fair and balanced accounts.

Finally, in this thesis I have tried to show that, fundamentally, writers not only describe what they see and hear but they also express themselves accordingly. When we compare all the writers which I have presented in this thesis we notice that the "early writers" were less rigorous than the later ones. We clearly see a sense of progression in the documentation and academic study of Shona society, culture and religion. This is seen in the presented historical chronology of the writers on Shona starting with the "early writers" through Gelfand and Chavunduka up to Bourdillon. Researchers on Shona religion and culture should not be limited to the presentation of ethnographic materials about the Shona but should seriously discuss possibilities of developing scientific research methods which will help them to carry out adequate, accurate and reliable research.

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Interviews, Personal Communication and Occasional Discussions

Bhariko, M. Interview. December 1995, Chingoma Area, Mberengwa District, Zimbabwe. He is about 70 years old and lives in the rural areas.

Bourdillon, M.F. Personal Interview. July 1995, University of Zimbabwe. Sociology Department. He is Professor of Social Anthropology.

Chavunduka, G.L. Personal Interview. July 1995, University of Zimbabwe. Chavunduka is at the moment the Vice Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe.

Chikoto, J. Personal Communication. July 1995, Mberengwa, Chingoma Area. Juliana is about 37 years old and is a female messenger at Matopo Shrine.

Cox, J.L. Personal Communication. July 1995, University of Zimbabwe, Religious Studies Department. He lectures on Research Methods as well as on Religion in Third World Countries at Edinburgh University.

Shumba, E. Interview. February 1995, Chingoma Area, Mberengwa District, Zimbabwe. She is 72 years of age, an old woman who lived in the rural areas. (Passed away in May 1995).

Guard, M. Interview. December 1994, Nyamondo Area, Mberengwa District, Zimbabwe. He is about 69 years of age and is a retired primary school teacher who used to live in urban areas.

Gumbo, I. Interview. December 1994, Nyamondo Area, Mberengwa District, Zimbabwe. He is about 73 years of age and is a Headman in Chingoma Area.

Kaulem, D. Occasional Discussion. 1995, University of Zimbabwe, Religious Studies Department. Kaulem lectures Philosophy.

King, U. Interview. March 1993, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Religious Studies Department. She is a scholar on Research methods as well as on Religions and lectures at Bristol.

Kumar, P. Occasional Discussions. 1993, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Religious Studies Department. He is interested in methodological issues, particularly Phenomenology of Religion.

Maxwell, P. Discussions. 1993 - 1995, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Religious Studies Department. He lectures on World Religions at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

- Nicolson, R. Occasional Discussions. 1993 - 1994, University of Natal. Religious Studies Department. He lectures on Christianity in Africa and Ancient Religions. He is interested in Research methods and is critical of the Phenomenological method.
- Nuernberger, K. Discussions. 1996, University of Natal, School of Theology. He lectures and has written on Systematic Theology and on its methods.
- Nuttall, J. Personal Communication. 1996, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. History Department. He is interested in research and methodology issues.
- Platvoet, J. Personal Communication. September 1995, University of Natal, Religious Studies Department. Platvoet lectures on Methodology in Religious Studies as well as on African Traditional Religions at Leiden University.
- Saratieri, M. Interview. December 1994, Nyamondo Area, Mberengwa District, Zimbabwe. He is about 68 years of age and is an unemployed rural dweller.
- Vachikanga, P. Interview. December 1995, Nyamondo Area, Mberengwa District, Zimbabwe. He is 55 years old, is unemployed and lives in the rural areas.
- Vamazvarira, F. Interview. January 1995, Chingoma Area, Mberegwa District, Zimbabwe. She is about 28 years old and is a spirit medium and a rain priestess.
- West, G. Discussions. 1996, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. School of Theology. He lectures on Biblical Studies and is involved in the Institute of the Study of the Bible.

Appendix

An Inventory of some of the available Theses and Dissertations on Shona Traditional Religion at the University of Zimbabwe (1984-1992). In one way or another some of these writers' works have been influenced or challenged by the thoughts, opinions and conclusions of the scholars discussed in this thesis.

- Betram, I. *Kurova Guva Traditional Burial Rites and the Anglican Church*. B.A. Honours, 1992.
- Chambwera, E.A. *Comparison of the Reformed Church's comforting Ritual with Kurova Guva*. B.A. Honours, 1992.
- Chinaka, G. *The Chief as a Traditional-Religious Leader: An Examination of the Status and Role of the Chief in Pre-colonial and Post-colonial Zimbabwe. A case Study based on the Chieftainship of Marange Communal Area*. B.A. Honours, 1989.
- Chiunya, C. *Modernisation and its Impact on the Shona Traditional Religious Beliefs with special Reference to the Concept of Ngozi*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Dziva, D. *Mircea Eliade's Conceptualisation of Cosmogonic Myths and Rituals and its Applicability in the Shona Context*. M.A., 1992.
- Dziva, D. *The Function of the N'anga in the Modern Shona Society*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Jindu, M. *Westernisation and the Change of Values in Shona Traditional Religion*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Magaya, N.O. *A Close Examination of the Status and Worship of Ancestors in the Traditional Shona Religion. A case Study in the Zvavahera Area*. B.A. Honours, 1987.
- Magomo, V.J. *Traditional Concepts in Traditional Shona Sacrifice*. B.A. Honours, 1984.
- Makuyana, C. *The Concept of Ngozi - Avenging Spirit. With Special Reference to the Ndau*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Maposa, S.R. *Traditional Ndau Concept of the Supreme Being*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Masanganise, F. *A Comparative Study of the Christian Church and the Shona Understanding of Death and the Hereafter*. B.A. Honours, 1992.
- Masango, J. *The Understanding of Misfortune among the Karanga People of Dewure West in Gutu District, Masvingo Province*. B.A. Honours, 1990.

- Matamba, M. *The Shona Belief in Ngozi with Particular Reference to the Karanga of Munyikwa Area*. B.A. Honours, 1989.
- Matikiti, R. *The Religious Importance of the Shona Family: With Special Reference to the Ndau*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Mbayimbayi, P. *Shona Christians and Illness: A Comparative Study of the Traditional and Christian Approach to Illness and Healing*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Mhike, B.A. *Phenomenological Survey of the Shona Spirit World: A case Study of Ancestral Spirits (Midzimu), Alien Spirits (Mashavi) and Avenging Spirits (Ngozi) in Wedza*. B.A. Honours, 1988.
- Mudzengi, L. *Is African Traditional Religion Anti-development?* B.A. Honours, 1991.
- Munyoro, T. *Rites of passage: An analysis of Death and Life After Death Among the Govera Peoples of Masvingo District*. B.A. Honours, 1987.
- Mushoniwa, S.D. *A Study of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe towards Shona Traditional Beliefs and Practices: A Study of Africanisation*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Ncube, A.R.C. *Tonga Ritual: A Way of Reconstructing Reality*. B.A. Honours, 1987.
- Nhongo, E. *An Assessment of the Shona Traditional Understanding of Nature Spirits with specific Reference to the Karanga People of Mataka Area in Mberengwa District*. B.A. Honours, 1991.
- Shoko, T.M. *The Aetiology of Myth Surrounding Buchwa Mountain of Mberengwa*. M.A., 1988.
- Sumupere, P. *Cattle as Sacred Symbols in Shona Marriage Rituals*. B.A. Honours, 1991.
- Taringa, N. *The Ancestor Cult Among the Shona as a Universal Religious Concern with Deliverance from Evil*. B.A. Honours, 1991.
- Wekwete, T. *Western Influence on Shona Traditional Healing System under the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association*. B.A. Honours, 1990.
- Zijena, N. *The Cult of Ancestors: A Survey of the Beliefs of the Shona People of Zimbabwe with Reference to the Karanga of Mataruse Area in Mberengwa*. B.A. Honours, 1990.

Zijena, N. *Shona Karanga Religion as Having a Humanist Perspective*. M.A., 1993.