

Oratory in Mhondoro Ritual Spaces in Northern Zimbabwe: "Traditional" Authority, Power Relations and Local Political Structures

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The proposed paper presentation is based on a doctoral field research undertaken in North-Western Zimbabwe. Drawing from ethnographic data, it focuses on speech practices and speech acts in ritual context, concretely between *mhondoro* (ancestors of royal lineage descent) and ward residents in Dande Communal Land (Zambezi Valley).

In this area, some social networks related to the legitimation of the *mhondoro* ritual praxis simultaneously work as pressure groups in, e.g., deliberations concerning chieftaincy successions, negotiations related to land and natural resources claims, etc., on the basis of their alleged autochthonous and ancestral connection to the land, that is, as the legitimate descendants of the owners of the land in this area (the *mhondoro*). These ritual networks - constituted typically by elders, village headmen, but also chiefs - belong to the MaKorekore Shona ward leadership, thus dominating in the representation of interests and in ward decision-making structures (to which elected Councillors belong).

Throughout the contextualization of speech acts at séances held at the ritual spaces (the *dendemaro*) the author aims to analyse how *mhondoro* ancestors, villagers at large and members of the aforementioned ritual networks at ward level engage in processes of deliberation, negotiation and decision-making, as well as its implications and consequences.