

*A SHORT HISTORY  
OF THE HUNGWE  
PEOPLE IN  
ZIMBABWE:  
DESCENDENTS OF  
NEMATO :VABONDA*



MAVOKOMAVI NHEVA, GONA MTISI, CHELELA, ZIENDANEMUDENGA, VAKAYAMBUKA ZAMBEZI  
NEHWATI, MATAPATIRA, CHIVARA!!!

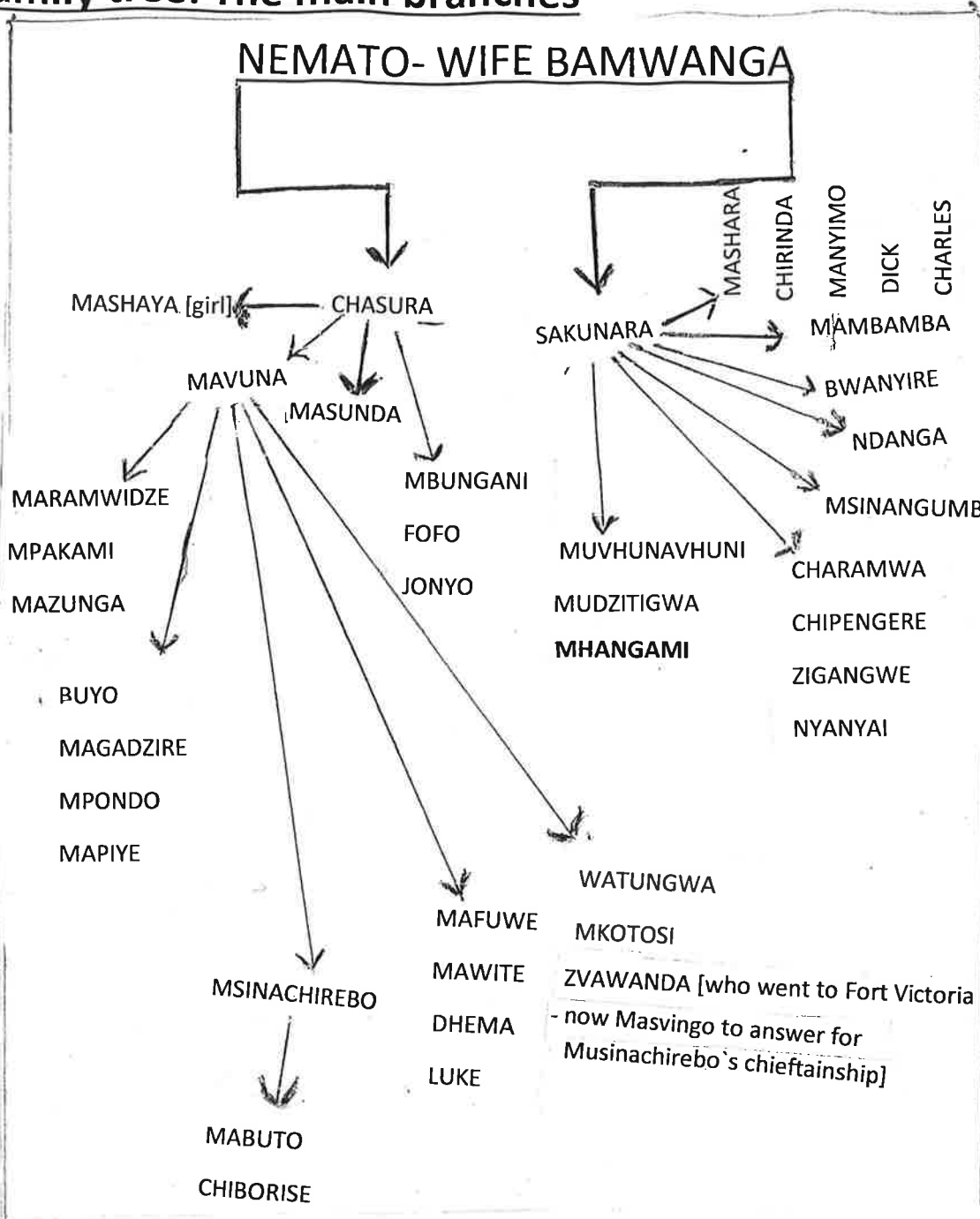
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T.E. [U.Z.]

Booklet compiled using notes written by my late  
father Runyare Thomas Mhangami.

Acknowledgements: The late Runyare Thomas  
Mhangami also known as Chibhayera or Mhute 1929 –  
2008.

*Compiled in May 2018.*

# Family tree: The main branches



## **`VaBonda muZimbabwe` - Origin of the vaBonda people**

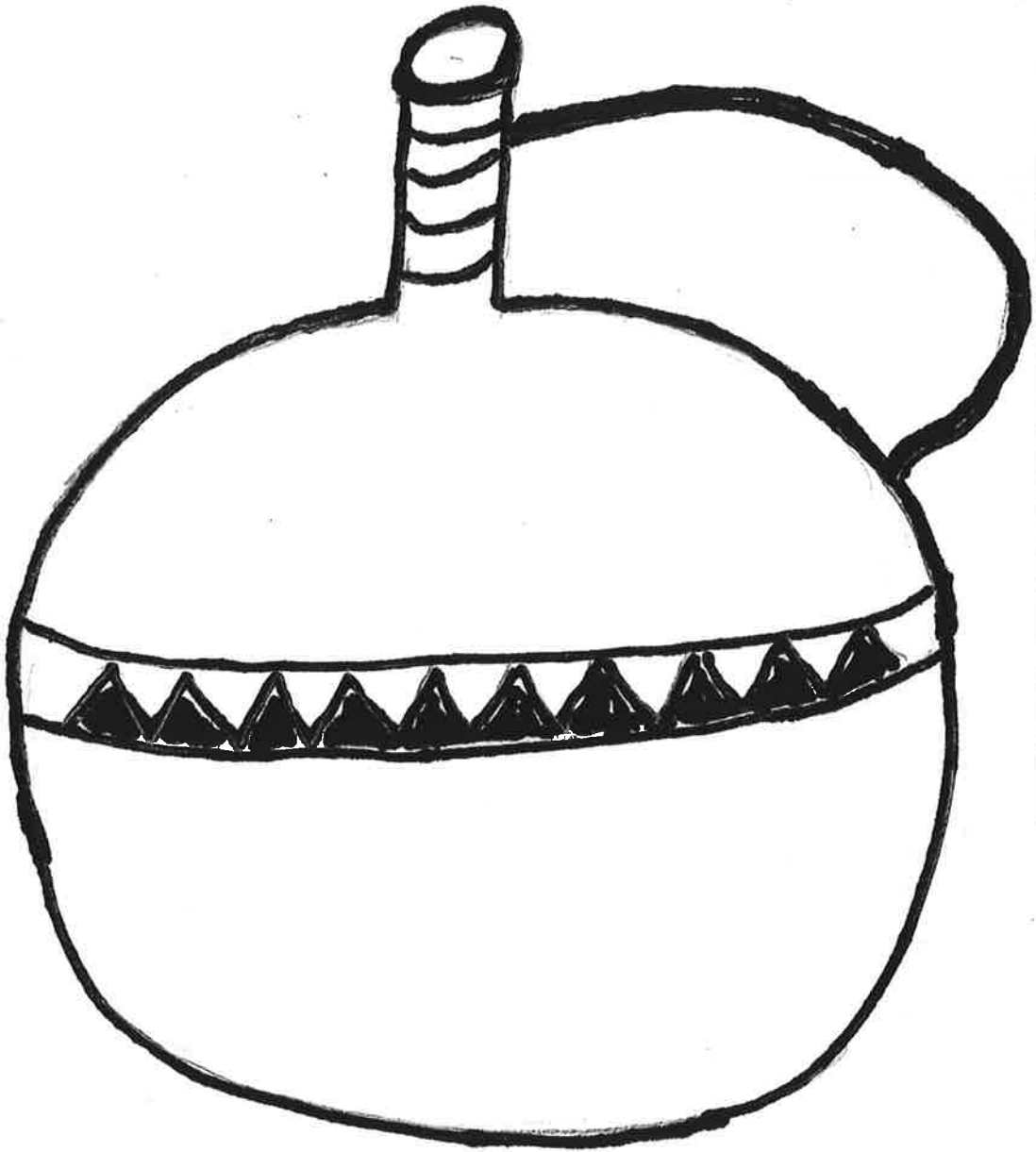
The vaBonda people whose totem is hungwe or bird came from the north of the Zambezi river around 1600. They broke away from a paramount chief Mukuni around Mazabuka in Zambia. Their ancestral history goes back to the days of the great chief Mukuni of Zambia. The vaBonda decided to cross the great river Zambezi due to disagreements with certain practices within the ruling clan.

### **Illness and death of a chief:**

This traditional practice was queer and confusing. The chief was said to be resting when he was dangerously ill on his death bed. The information was usually released by a panel of `machinda` or the chief`s assistants who formed the central court in the compound. The chief was reported seriously ill after he had died. After death, the corpse of the chief was kept wrapped in an ox skin for a maximum of eight days. They kept the corpse to collect a watery stuff from the decomposing body. This watery stuff was collected into a neatly made clay pot with a narrow neck.

The watery stuff collected was mixed with very powerful roots, fat of a male lion and blood of a gorilla. After this process, the spokesman then declared that the chief was dead. The information was then conveyed to everybody at dusk by messengers. Men from all walks of life came to put up there ready for the burial of the chief that next morning.

Pot of magic



Pot of magic

### **Burial of chief**

At dawn, the chief's wives, who usually numbered between twenty and thirty were rounded up by strong men. They were tied to a single rope and strangled. Of course not all died. Those who died were buried with the chief. Their corpses provided a mat for the chief's body. It meant that they were the most loved ones.

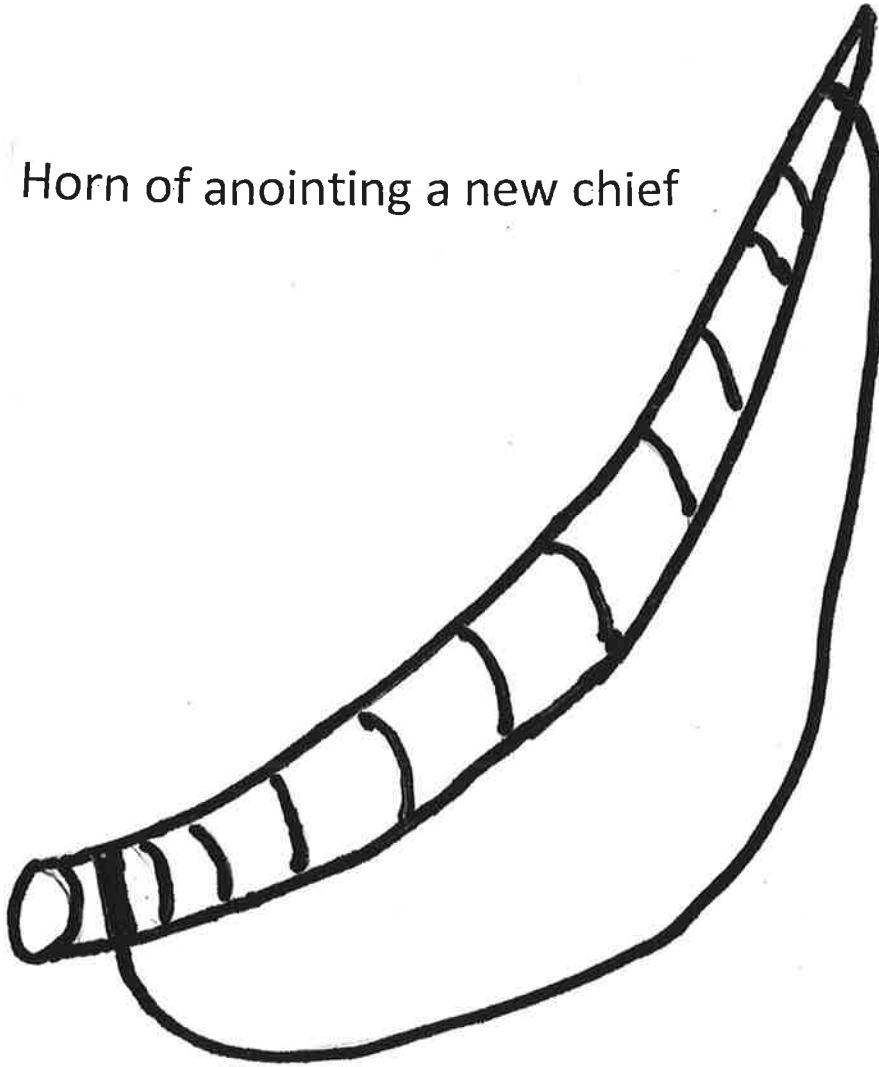
A period of seven days was declared as mourning period. After this the head of the `machinda` or chief's assistants of the central court acted as chief until a new chief was installed.

### **Installation of new chief**

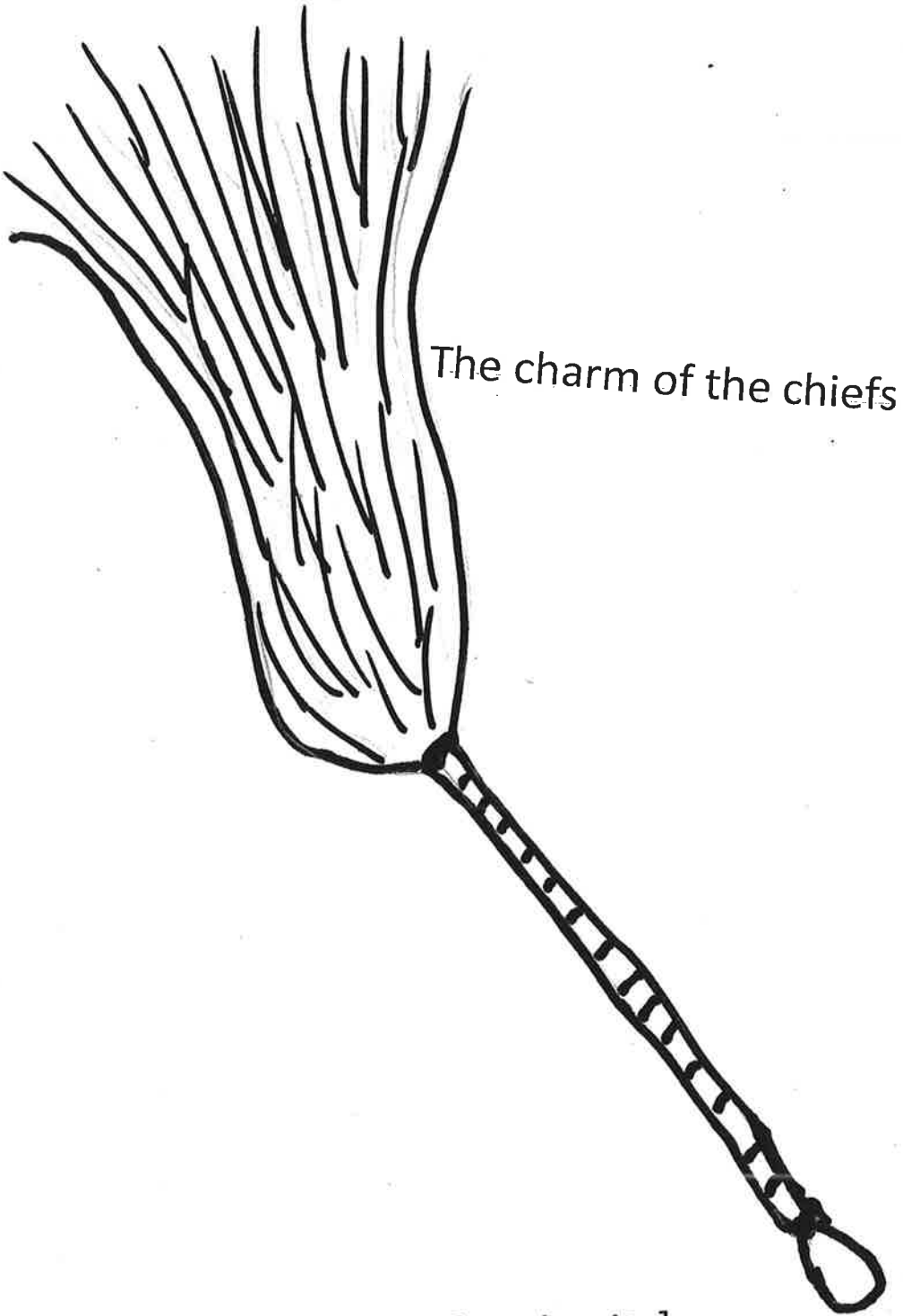
The `svikiro` or spiritual guardian of the clan nominated the next chief. The man nominated was the eldest among the principal founders of the clan. The watery stuff collected from the body of the deceased chief before burial was then used to anoint a new leader of the clan or tribe. The stuff mixed with fat of a male lion and blood of a gorilla and powerful roots were poured into a male sable's horn. The `svikiro` appointed installer poured the liquid on the head and chest. He dipped a `chava` made of tail hairs of various animals into some more magic. He sprinkled the new chief's official rod with it. If a man not nominated by the `svikiro` to be chief came into contact with the magic, he became mentally disturbed. This magic gave the chief command over the tribe. Thus the whole process was declared finished.

Horn of anointing a new chief

Horn of anointing a new chief



Charm of the chiefs



The charm of the chiefs

Pfuna [symbol of authority]



## **Why Nemato left Zambia**

Nemato was one of the sons of a chief who had died. His mother was second senior wife. The son, Nemato was also the second in seniority. Nemato's mother and the other junior wives afraid of being strangled influenced their sons to escape.

When it became known that the chief, Nemato's father was seriously ill, the wives became active. The sons yielded to their mothers. They managed to persuade other people who didn't like the custom of strangling chief's wives. Soon after the death an escape was organised by the chief's sons. It was a big success because nobody ever thought of this.

While everybody was mourning the death of their chief, they were surprised to find the chief's compound and his surrounding villages empty of people. Nemato and his young brothers and mothers had escaped. They crossed the Zambezi river into Zimbabwe somewhere between Chirundu and Kariba gorge using `hwati` or long barks of trees.

## **Inside Zimbabwe**

There wasn't much preparation of this long journey into the unknown virgin land. Many of the escapees died from hunger, fever from mosquitoes and attack by wild animals. Nemato, now chief of the small break-away group, moved on through the jungles of the Zambezi lowlands. He passed through an area now called Hurungwe. They crossed the Umfuli river near its upper reaches.

After crossing the jungles infested with all hazards, they came to an area now under chief Chivero. They camped for several months not very far from the ruins of the first chief, Chivero's father.

Whilst there, Chivero arrived. He questioned Nemato if he was setting up a settlement permanently. Nemato said he was proceeding on.

From Chivero, Nemato and his group wandered about for some time around Chivhu and Mvuma. These areas which looked fertile were already occupied. Nemato proceeded on eastwards. He reached an area which showed no sign of people. This was around Gona in Gutu district. Gona is a popular hill among most people from Gutu. Nemato settled here.

### **At Gona**

This area around Gona had ideal soil and water supply. Nemato began to put roots down in tranquillity. He and his people had found a place to rest. They had found a place for their descendants. It was long before they had seen anyone around Gona and the surrounding areas.

As women went to fetch water one morning, they were frightened by a sable. They reported to the chief, Nemato. The sable became a nuisance for days. Armed men had to accompany women to the well to scare the sable. Nemato failed to kill the sable.

One evening a stranger called Mambwazhe or Chinemukute arrived. He was a hunter who had lost his way. He was carrying a quiver full of poisoned arrows hence his name Chinemukutu. He came from Musana. The hunter remained there for some days because Nemato was kind to him.

There was a discussion between Chinemukutu and Nemato about the sable at the well. The hunter wanted to know what he would get if he killed it. He was promised what he would like which could be

met by Nemato. The sable was killed by Chinemukutu. Nemato, pleased with this, gave the hunter his daughter as a reward of his deed.

Mambwazhe, very pleased, settled with his in laws. He went back to Musana and collected his relatives to Gona. He was given an area to occupy and he became headman under Nemato. Later, he wanted independent chieftainship. Nemato refused to grant him this. Bitterness sparked off between Nemato and Chinemukutu. There was an attempt to poison Nemato`s wells by Chinemukutu. The `muBonda`, Nemato`s magic outwitted his and failed Mambwazhe`s plan. Many attempts were made to kill Nemato by Chinemukutu but they were without success.

Chinemukutu decided to invade Nemato`s kraal at night with armed men. This was tipped to him by his daughter whom he gave to this hunter turning against him now. Nemato escaped before the plan had been effected. He left some vaBonda people there who yielded to Chinemukutu`s power. The descendants of these people are today spread all over Gutu, Bikita and parts of Manicaland for example Mtisi people. Nemato made for Ngorombwe hill near the now Chibi office. This area was under chief Kuvirimira whose totem was Hove. The departure of Nemato meant that Chinemukutu became the dominant chief. He moved to Gona and renamed himself Gutu, hence chief Gutu. Anyone who honestly qualifies to be chief Gutu will not argue with this if he understands the history of the Gumbo people of Gutu area and how they got the chieftainship.

## **Nemato at Ngorombwe**

Nemato died there after a long time and some people who had escaped with him from Gona were absorbed. It looked like he was a finished man. His two sons Sakunara, first born and Chasura who survived the ordeal at Gona continued to live at Ngorombwe after their father Nemato had died. Each of them had married and was responsible for a family.

## **Nemato`s sons: Sakunara and Chasura**

Kuvirimara gave Chasura his daughter as wife in addition to his other wives he had. The young woman was accompanied by Kuvirimara`s youngest and beautiful wife to Chasura. The next morning she took back the would be wife of Chasura after Chasura had coveted her and forced his way to go to bed with her. This sparked off terrible anger in Kuvirimira. Chasura was called to court but resisted arrest and was killed instantly. His sons in order of age were Mavuna, Muvungani, Masunda and Chidakanye. They all fled from Ngorombwe to Zvemapere near Mandamabwe. Kuvirimara had threatened to wipe out all Chasura`s sons in retaliation to what their father had done.

Sakunara who was now old and afraid that his sons would have no future under Kuvirimara sent his senior sons to Murozvi waMambo to ask for land to settle. His eldest sons sent were Mambamba and Ndanga. They travelled from Ngorombwe to Murozvi waMambo who lived at Ndida near Nematare. This was a western headquarter of Murozvi waMambo.

## At Nematare

Mambo had a spokesman called Pwere. After heavy interrogation of Mambamba and Ndanga, Pwere proved beyond all doubt that they were not travelling wizards or spies. He took them to Mambo and introduced them. Mambamba told Mambo the reason of their errand. In return for the land, Mambamba and Ndanga promised to give Mambo their sister. Mambo told them to go back and bring her first. They found their father badly ill. Sakunara was anxious to know the report from his sons. Having heard that Mambo wanted a wife, he called his daughter. Of course she never resisted the order.

Sakunara sent them back once more. This time they were accompanied by Bwanyire back to Ndida. Mambo was highly impressed by the lady. Mambo instructed Pwere to show the men the boundary of their new land. Mambamba, Ndanga and Bwanyire were taken by Pwere on top of Waya mountain to be shown the boundary of their land from a high spot. From Waya, a hill in the De-Beers farm, they passed through Hwogo hill right to Chikwingizha hill near Guinea Fowl, Gweru. From Chikwingizha hill they made a straight line to Svika mountain.

Having been shown this vast area Mambamba, Ndanga and Bwanyire left Pwere and toured the land eastwards from Waya. They came to Fizho mountains about twenty-five kilometres north west of Zvishavane to view the land at a higher spot in the centre of their land. It was a historic achievement. They then left for Ngorombwe to collect their families, parents and brothers. Unfortunately they found their father, Sakunara dead. After a few weeks of mourning, Sakunara`s children packed for their new land.

They were a number of them with their new families –Mambamba, Ndanga, Bwanyire, Muvhunavhuni, Musinaimba, Charamwa and Mashara who remained there at Ngorombwe.

Their first stop was Shungurugwi five kilometres west of Lundi sale yard. They camped here for some time deciding how they would allocate the land among themselves. Ndanga crossed Lundi River and made his fort at Bokai hill near Donga town ship in Shurugwi.

Bwanyire left for Fizho mountain. He found that there were no caves. He later moved to Ramofu hill about four and half kilometres north west of Lundi sale yard.

Muvhunavhuni left for Sharavande hill. It a was a good hill because there were caves good for hide outs in times of trouble. Musinaimba remained at Shungurugwi with Mambamba. He also moved later to Remombe hill about two and half kilometres north west of Lundi sale yard. Charamwa remained at the main fort at Shungurugwi with Mambamba.

After a few years, the `svikiro` or spiritual guardian of Sakunara`s sons revealed itself. It instructed that Mashara another son left at Ngorombwe be called over to the others. A messenger went to call Mashara. On arriving at Shungurugwi Mashara was given an area to occupy. He made his home at Rukwakwatara hills west of Weleza dam.

Whilst Sakunara`s sons were busy establishing themselves in their new land, Chasura`s sons were still at Zvemapere hiding from Kuvirimira. The news that Sakunara`s sons were no longer at Ngorombwe made Chasura`s sons inquisitive to know where they

had moved to. When they heard that they were in their new land, some of them decided to follow their cousins but this did not take effect.

Mavuna, the eldest son left Zamapere for a hill near Chinuwa hill in present day Madamombe area. Muvungani and Chidakanye left for Nhemahuru hill. Things did not go well there. The three requested their cousins to live near them. Mambamba welcomed the idea and accepted their coming.

Soon after their coming, Muvungani was given a hill called Ngome yeGomo near Mbilashaba dam. Chidakanye, the youngest remained with him. Masunda was allocated to Ngome yeBani about four kilometres south of Mbilashaba dam. Two of Mavuna`s sons also followed their uncles. They were Mafuwe and Marovanidze. Ndanga and Mpakami occupied Guruguru.

## Nemato word search

M I R I M B O Y N O J W Z I G A N G W E  
U S K N T H A G N A D N E F A C Y Q O M  
I X I G E O M X T T U R K M Z S C Q B O  
T Z N N V Z V A I G E A A M I B O O I M  
M B R N A R D F V G A S R A P C G B O I  
P K A Z I C U I N U U B K U I O M M N Y  
A A O Y O H H E W N N X W B S U N C T N  
K R J T J C P I D M K A X A G A M D R A  
A A M O O I E A R E A T E N N U H A O M  
M N E W H S K D T E W R A K V Y R C C R  
I U V C K E I N I I B N A H S A I P G E  
T K S A D B C I O Z I O U M H T A R W N  
A A A M E H D R X S F N H S C M K U E D  
B S N N Y E A I M Y A G A R A T F Q V C  
M Z E N I R G H H V K M G W M A B U T O  
A K M M P I Y C H L C Z I Z M A F G C P  
B K A Q A T L U O Z C T H Q Y J P M B V  
M T T M M C N E Y L E D M H A N G A M I  
A J O N D I I N Y A N Y A I O I P R X Z  
M H R K V Q C H A R A M W A N D G M M W

MHANGAMI

MUVHUNAVHUNI

MAFUWE

MAVUNA

JONYO

MSINACHIREBO

NDANGA

CHIRINDA



MSINANGUMBI	SAKUNARA	MPAKAMI	NEMATO
MPONDO	DHEMA	BWANYIRE	CHASURA
ZIGANGWE	CHIPENGERE	MAWITE	MABUTO
NYANYAI	MARAMWIDZE	MASHARA	MAPIYE
CHARAMWA	MKOTOSI	MAMBAMBA	MANYIMO
MASUNDA			

### **Analysing the validity of this historical source using TADPOLE**

<b>Type</b>	Historical source of information
<b>Author</b>	The author is a history and geography teacher
<b>Date</b>	Written about 200 or 300 years after the events
<b>Purpose</b>	To inform the reader
<b>Opinion/fact</b>	Both opinionated and factual
<b>Language</b>	Language is relevant to the topic and refers to the indigenous language peculiar or unique to that cultural group
<b>Evidence</b>	Based on oral history passed from generation to generation

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### **About the author**

Herbert Mhangami was born and bred in Fizho, Zvishavane. He taught at Sanyati Baptist High School, Zimbabwe for 10 years, was headmaster at Chirundazi Secondary School in Mhondoro, Zimbabwe for 7 years, taught in Cape Town, South Africa for 1 year, taught in the U.S.A. for 1 year, taught in Queensland, Australia for 7 years and is currently teaching in the Northern Territory, Australia.