

Abstract

Nyasha Samuel Chikowero

Title: Uroyi: Contesting “Witchcraft” Regulation in Zimbabwe, 1890-2023

This study is a historical exploration of the regulation of *uroyi*—what came to be translated as “witchcraft” in Africa. It specifically investigates the role of colonial law as an instrument of control in Zimbabwe from the 1890s to 2023. Focusing on the 1899 Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA), which was inadequately and ambiguously framed, the study argues that the colonialists interfered with African spiritualities. This is achieved by analysing the debates over its enactment and amendments since the late 1890s. By examining the competing realities between Africans and the British colonialists, this study foregrounds *uroyi* as a concept of defiance to colonial epistemic and physical violence that sought to subvert African cosmologies, spiritualities and knowledge systems. I contend that Madzimbabwe refused to be defined, radically insisting on their right to hold their beliefs and knowledge systems to tell their own story. This thesis focuses on historical moments when the state regarded *uroyi* as a concern and African opposition to its regulation was strong. This work also demonstrates that the WSA only reflected and respected the attitudes and values of British colonialists and missionaries rather than those of Africans. In this endeavour, the study employs qualitative research methodology, making use of local knowledge gathered through interviews, participant observation. Analysing Madzimbabwe knowledge systems and mediums of cultural expression, such as proverbs, *dare* homestead court, and sacred places such as Gandavaroyi and Chavaroyi, where societal knowledge, history and memories are created, preserved, and exercised, was vital to understanding *uroyi* not just as a belief and practice but as a socially constructed knowledge. The study also uses the information obtained from archival sources, including newspapers, Legislative Council Debates, records of court cases and internal correspondences within the colonial government to illustrate what was on the minds of the local colonial officials about the WSA.