

A Zimbabwean woman<sup>1</sup> born between 1972 and 1974<sup>2</sup> was sentenced to jail on 28-29 September 2010. The devious n'anga<sup>3</sup>, dodgy medicine woman, faith healer, inyanga<sup>4</sup>, magician, medicine woman, mystic, sangoma<sup>5</sup>, sorcerer, spirit medium, traditional spirit medium, traditional healer, traditional seer, witchdoctor<sup>6</sup> known as Rotina Mavhunga<sup>7</sup>, Nomatter Tagarira<sup>8</sup>, Portia Mavhunga, Sekuru Mboni<sup>9</sup>, Sekuru Dombo, Changamire Dombo<sup>10</sup> from Pemhiwa village in Guruve<sup>11</sup> is a grade 3<sup>12</sup> educated, grade 3 graduate, grade 3 dropout, primary school dropout, semi-illiterate, shrewd and self-styled spirit medium, modern day Moses<sup>13</sup>, cheeky spiritualist and woman of astounding beauty<sup>14</sup> who conned, duped, tricked, suckered, scammed, hoodwinked, shim-shammed government, police, ZANU-PF<sup>15</sup> officials into believing she had found, discovered, conjured much needed-fuel, natural, pure, diesel<sup>16</sup>, petrol, pre-refined diesel, Jet A1 fuel, paraffin, gasoline, oil cascaded beautifully, coming, mysteriously oozing, streaming, spewing, guzzling, seeping, issuing, pouring from a hole in a rock<sup>17</sup>, a spring in the bush at a traditional shrine, a sacred place near limestone formations, a mountainous area near the provincial town of Chinhoyi<sup>18</sup> known as Chinhoyi Caves 60-70 miles north-northwest of Harare<sup>19</sup> in the Maningwa Hills, Mashonaland area.

She uncovered an abandoned fuel tanker, bowser, an abandoned tank from the colonial-era military, or left by a white commercial farmer who lost his farm during President Mugabe's land reforms, 125 litres of fuel given to her by Tobaiwa Mudede<sup>20</sup>, and rigged it with standard fuel pipes, a hose. Her assistant, henchmen, sidekick would open the spigot, tap after she hit, struck, rapped on a rock, granite boulder with a stick, wand releasing the diesel, oozed out, liquid flowed, a fountain of diesel gushed out. She told the cabinet, government officials she could produce enough oil to meet

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<sup>1</sup> This is almost without question, a certainty. Although in one particular article in which she is referred to as Sekuru Dombo it is reported that *"The team complied with all Sekuru's requirements but each time it was his turn to deliver the diesel he would make fresh and unrealistic demands," the minutes state* (<http://bit.ly/cE3QYV>)

<sup>2</sup> There is no clear age attributed to the woman, though it seems in 2007 she was 35, according to numerous reports she was still 35 when she was convicted in 2010, perhaps this was one of her many magical powers

<sup>3</sup> A traditional healer among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, believed by many in the country to reliably tell fortunes, give advice, bless and heal people

<sup>4</sup> Inyanga (plural izinyanga) is a Zulu word for a traditional herbal healer, literally meaning "the man of the trees". Concerned predominantly with remedies made from plants and animals, an inyanga differs from a sangoma (see 5) but could well be the same as an n'anga (see 4)

<sup>5</sup> Another kind of Southern African traditional healer who instead primarily uses divination for healing. The difference between a sangoma and inyanga is said to be 'the iinyanga learns from the living, while the sangoma learns from the dead'

<sup>6</sup> The original use of witch doctor was to refer to a type of 'cunning man' who would try to cure ailments caused by witchcraft; much like a doctor would try to cure disease. It has come to refer to healers who use traditional remedies rather than modern medicine to treat disease, particularly in Southern Africa

<sup>7</sup> Most commonly used to refer to the woman

<sup>8</sup> Ironically 'No matter' is an English word which could mean 'regardless' and 'Tagarira' is a Mijikenda word which means "that which does not make sound" or literally 'something that does not exist'. 'Mavhunga' itself is a Swahili word for 'lies' (<http://bit.ly/ebcTPh>)

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes spelled 'Muboni'

<sup>10</sup> Commonly known among Zimbabwean schoolchildren as the leader of the Rowzi empire (1684–1834)

<sup>11</sup> Only referenced in this article (<http://bit.ly/fWTRzR>)

<sup>12</sup> Grade 3 in Zimbabwean education is the stage at which pupils make the transition into reading and writing in English. This occurs before secondary school, which they attend after completing grade 7

<sup>13</sup> This comparison is presumably in reference to the Bible, Numbers 20:11 *Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank*

<sup>14</sup> According to Robert Mugabe

<sup>15</sup> Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front

<sup>16</sup> A liquid fuel produced from the fractional distillation of crude oil

<sup>17</sup> Colonel Edwin Drake drilled first oil well in Titusville, Pennsylvania, USA because he saw oil seeping from a rock this was crude oil and not refined diesel

<sup>18</sup> Formerly Sinoia. Town and capital of the Mashonaland West province, Zimbabwe, estimated population 56,794 (2002)

<sup>19</sup> Capital of Zimbabwe

<sup>20</sup> The Registrar-General in the Zimbabwean government

Zimbabwe's fuel consumption for the next 100 years<sup>21</sup>. When the fuel ran out she would buy 400-500 litres from passing truckers, truck drivers, Uswahungani<sup>22</sup>, Zambia.

A large "task force" of politicians, Mugabe's ZANU-PF, lunatics in charge, high powered delegation, political bureau, high powered task force, high level ministerial team, the feared Joint Operations Command<sup>23</sup>, members of the Presidium, government officials, security forces, supposed academics, traditional leaders, loyal cabinet team, politburo, Mugabe's most trusted advisors, intelligent representatives in government, 3 senior cabinet ministers, ranking officials and members of the security services, Security Minister Secretary for Administration and Minister in Charge of CIO<sup>24</sup> Didymus Mutasa<sup>25</sup>, Defence Minister Sydney Sekeramayi, Home Affairs Minister Kembo Mohadi, former Mashonaland West Governor Nelson Samkange, Deputy Commissioner General Godwin Matanga, Nicholas Goche<sup>26</sup>, Air Commodore Shebba Shumbayaonda, Assistant Commissioner Arthur Makanda and Provincial Intelligence Officer Madondo visited the shrine for 13 days.

At the shrine, grubby shrine for a ritual, cleansing ceremony they removed their shoes, sat on bare ground, sat with legs stretched, clapped hands in unison, walked in caves without shoes, clapping and ululating, following the spirit medium, engaged in some mojo with the mystic dazzling the gullible with mystical incantations, cabinet ministers grinning like passionate idiots, feet bare, trousers rolled up, the customary walking sticks, gasping in delighted amazement, blinded by her beauty and endorsed her phoney story, convinced that she had supernatural powers and was "untouchable", she became possessed by the Spirits of the Forefathers, she showed horsed them<sup>27</sup> with diesel, horsed the ministers with diesel, drenched officials with diesel oil, she could cause the finest diesel to come forth from the rocks, the ministers took off their shoes and knelt or crouched at her feet as she, filled with the Spirits of the Dead ancestors, manifested the precious liquid as quite a magnificent fountain, splashed triumphantly by the medium on the gullible officials, she also roped in "new players/spirit mediums" such as Mbuya Nehanda<sup>28</sup>. Between 28 and 30 May, they were led to various places in Chinhoyi, to Raffingora, Musindizi, the Nyamugomba<sup>29</sup> and Nyakasikana<sup>30</sup>, sources of the Sleeping Pool at the Chinhoyi Caves where they held biras<sup>31</sup> until the ancestors showed them where the "diesel" was, waded through pools and caves identified as Chitubu Chemachembere, Garoi, Nyakasikana, Pasipameraziso and Chiroroma.

A trip of 150km to Makuti and 80km to Kariba, a 465km trip for night-time rituals was made using 50 vehicles, helicopters were deployed, she was flown about in air force helicopters, flown to Kariba where she extracted gold from Kariba Dam.

She was given 5 billion Zimbabwean dollars (worth £1.7 million at the start of the year but now worth one seven-hundredth of that, US\$1million, \$17,000, \$2.7 million dollars, US\$165,000, €2.42m<sup>32</sup>), a 24-hour armed security to watch the rock and the whole mountain, 2 previously white-owned farms,

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<sup>21</sup> According to NationMaster.com Zimbabwe consumes 14,590 bbl (barrels) of oil a day which is 2319624.707 litres. Over 100 years this would be approximately 85 billion litres of oil.

<sup>22</sup> Meaning of this word unclear, all searches refer the same article

<sup>23</sup> A grouping of security chiefs who are fiercely loyal to Robert Mugabe

<sup>24</sup> Central Intelligence Organisation, the secret police of Zimbabwe

<sup>25</sup> It was later reported that Mutasa visited the woman to perform rituals which would help him succeed Mugabe as President. Some sources even reported that he had had an affair with her (<http://bit.ly/ecJz1k>)

<sup>26</sup> Currently Minister of Transport, previously he was Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare

<sup>27</sup> <http://bit.ly/gF2K2s>

<sup>28</sup> Nehanda Nyakasikana was a spirit medium of the Shona people (c1840-1898), she became a source of inspiration during the struggle for liberation in the 1960s and 70s and as such her name is now usually prefixed by with the title Mbuya, meaning grandmother

<sup>29</sup> Infested with snakes

<sup>30</sup> Infested with vicious baboons

<sup>31</sup> Traditional beer ceremonies, according to the source (<http://bit.ly/eMAeji>). Aside from the obvious it is unclear what this entails.

<sup>32</sup> Due to the global reports on the story 'dollars' becomes an unknown variable, however 5 billion Zimbabwean dollars is the most recurrent quantity

nearby farms, 2 head of cattle, 3 buffalo, a car, a piece of land, a farmhouse, cash, 3 cows, 2 buffalo, large quantities of food, thousands of dollars, billions of dollars, other services, eleven war veterans on standby to ensure her needs were catered for.

A second team, another committee was sent to the site, made up of Minister of Energy and Power Development, Retired Lieutenant-General Mike Nyambuya, Science and Technology Minister Olivia Muchena and Mines Minister Amos Midzi, Police Commissioner Godwin Matanga, a police tanker. There was nothing convincing found, no deposits of fuel or diesel in the area, experts said it was scientifically implausible for diesel to gush out of a rock, concluded she was full of more than just diesel, diesel is not water so it cannot come from the ground or as diesel.

On being discovered for the hoax, prank, wild goose chase, strange saga she absconded, skedaddled, escaped, went on the lam, on the run, skipped the country hiding in South Africa, a house in Harare, at cholera camp in Guruve unwell with swollen legs<sup>33</sup>, at Tobaiwa Mudede's home, at Dora Farm in Guruve for over a year, fugitive for 18 months. 50 followers, disciples arrested, Martin Mazvazvido (38) and Lyton Munodawafa Tauro (48) charged.

She was charged with lying to the government and swindling it of the equivalent of US\$1 million in out of circulation Zimbabwean dollars, fraud, criminal nuisance, treason involving some vague plot to kill Mugabe with a magic horn, defrauding the State, defrauding the government, supplying false information to senior government officials, wasting ministers time, lying to a public officer and allegedly exchanged a stone weighing 18kg, claiming it was gold, for a cow.

Judge Ignatius Mugova found her, the bail-dodger, fraudster guilty in absentia. Eventually she was lured into a trap at Mucherengi Farm, a farm in the Banket area, by Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri who said that he wanted to consult her over some personal problem, Mashonaland police arrested her, soldiers had to arrest her, she was conducting some ritual ceremonies, she claimed she was not aware they were looking for her, she read in The Herald that she was wanted but did not take it seriously<sup>34</sup>.

At her first court appearance, she went into a trance, Defence lawyer Mr Chandavengerwa Chopamba of Mushonga and Associates had requested the presiding magistrate Mr Ignatius Mugova to allow his client to go into a trance, growling in the dock apparently possessed - causing several spectators, terror-stricken public to flee the room, gallery. The magistrate said she had been faking a trance to try and have herself declared unfit for trial, so she could not give evidence. Detectives took her to Chinhoyi for indications on the site where she operated from. She showed police skins and other tools of her trade at the scene, she told the court the "spirit of Changamire Dombo" was responsible for everything, she started conducting rituals at the age of 13 and became Changamire Dombo's "medium" in 2003, the prosecutor said the accused might have a split personality.

She was sentenced in Chinhoyi magistrates court, initially fined US\$50, 27-39 months, 3 years 3 months in jail, prison<sup>35</sup>. In mitigation she said she looked after 14 children, including eight of her own, as well as her elderly parents. Mugabe forgave his ministers, arguing they were products of a society long steeped in superstition.

*A database cataloguing every online source relating to the story is available to download from [tomdurley.com/witchdata](http://tomdurley.com/witchdata)*

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<sup>33</sup> An outbreak of cholera began in Zimbabwe in August 2008, by January 2010 there had been 4,293 deaths and the epidemic is ongoing at the time of writing. Perhaps not the ideal hiding place.

<sup>34</sup> This was published in *The Herald* (<http://bit.ly/dNo2bF>)

<sup>35</sup> On the first count of fraud, she was sentenced to 36 months of which 12 months were suspended. The second count earned a 10-month sentence of which seven were suspended. She will, therefore, serve an effective 27 months behind bars (<http://bit.ly/etjw9T>)