

CHINGAIRA MAKONI'S HEAD:
MYTH, HISTORY AND THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

by

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Terence Ranger, Rhodes Professor of Race Relations, University of Oxford, is the Hans Wolff Memorial Lecturer for 1988. He holds B.A. Hons., M.A. and D.Phil. degrees from Oxford University, where he studied at The Queens College and at St. Antony's. At that time he was working on British history in the seventeenth century. His interest in African history was aroused by his appointment to a Lectureship at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1956. There he became involved in the African nationalist movement and began to do research on its roots in late nineteenth century insurrection and twentieth century protest associations. His involvement in African politics led to his deportation in 1963; his research led to the publication of *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7* and *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia, 1898-1930*. In 1963 he became the first Professor of History at the University College of Dar es Salaam and in 1969 went to UCLA as Professor of African History. In 1974 he became Professor of Modern History at the University of Manchester from which position he moved to his present post in October 1987. As Rhodes Professor he has responsibility for the development of African Studies in Oxford as well as a more general oversight of race relations. He was able to return to Zimbabwe in 1980, after 17 years as a prohibited immigrant, and carried out field research in Makoni District. His book, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War* drew upon this research as will his Hans Wolff Lecture. He returns to Zimbabwe in May this year to carry out field research in Matabeleland South. In addition to his long-lasting involvement with Zimbabwe—which has led to him becoming founder and Chairman of the Britain-Zimbabwe Society and writer of a monthly review of the Zimbabwean press—he has worked on many other areas of Africa. His books and articles have dealt especially with resistance, religious change, popular culture and agrarian history. He is Chairman of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* and Vice-Chairman of the general historical journal *Past and Present*.

CHIEF CHINGAIRA'S HEAD:
MYTH, HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE

Terence Ranger

In 1980 I was able to return to Zimbabwe after seventeen years as a prohibited immigrant. I went back with the advantage - and the disadvantage - of having written a famous book or at least a book famous in Zimbabwe, Revolt in Southern Rhodesia. I also went back determined not to write another book like it.

Revolt had been self-consciously a nationalist book, designed to counter white colonial historiography with an assertion of the powerful political and religious systems of the Shona and Ndebele past and a demonstration of how Africans had been able to draw on the traditions of those systems to rise up against the invaders. It had become more relevant with the development, after its publication in 1967, of the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe. The 1896 risings described in Revolt have come to be known as the first Chimurenga; the guerrilla war as the second Chimurenga. So the book became part of the myth of the liberation struggle.

Of course, in many ways this pleased me. Historians rarely see so directly the effects of their research and writing. I was pleased to be welcomed back as author of Revolt. And I was pleased, naturally, when I began to read Chenjerai Hove's splendid collection of poems, Up In Arms, to find a poem addressed "To Terence":

You were gone when I came,
and yet I have met
the blood you spilled
in the muscle of history.¹

And yet, at the same time I felt guilty about taking pleasure in all

this. For one thing, I was aware of the ambiguity of the book's influence. If guerrillas read it, so too did the Rhodesians. David Lan records that:

Information already available on Shona religion was summarised, stamped 'Secret', and circulated to military commanders. Two early articles by Terence Ranger . . . were made available to all district commissioners, while supplies of his full-length study, 'temporarily exhausted', were replenished.²

Above all, I was aware of the ambiguity of nationalist historiography itself.

Since 1967 I had come to accept many of the criticisms made of nationalist studies of African resistance. Such studies tended to bring all types of protest together into a single stream, flowing inevitably to the triumph of the nationalist movement and hence delivering the whole past of resistance to legitimate an African government which might be no more sympathetic to peasant protest than its colonial predecessor.³ Such studies tended to reify 'tradition', and I had come increasingly to regard tradition as something constantly invented and re-invented.⁴ These academic reservations were given more immediacy by historiographical developments in Zimbabwe after 1980. I summed up my anxiety about the new Zimbabwean history books in a review article published in 1983:

It is possible I think to define four ways in which the new historical consciousness is deficient. In the first place, it makes too restricted an appeal to the African past. I know that the continuing emphasis upon [the spirit medium] of Nehanda and her role as a leader of the 1896 Chimurenga reflects the profound significance that her memory had for the guerrillas during the war . . . Nevertheless, it seems that the emphasis now being put upon Nehanda obscures other figures from the Zimbabwean past. . . . It sometimes seems that in popular rhetoric the Zimbabwean past consists solely of Great Zimbabwe and Mbuya Nehanda.

If the new historiographical consciousness is too restricted

in its range of reference, a second danger is of a coarsening of interpretation in the process of repetition. Instead of the original 'nationalist' historiography of the 1960s being modified and corrected by means of radical insights or by the application of a penetrating class analysis, it sometimes seems that the initial nationalist propositions are being extended and overstated....

A third deficiency of the new historiographical consciousness is that it almost entirely ignores the details of white political, economic and social history....

The fourth deficiency [is that] little of this history deals directly with the experience of the people. Great Zimbabwe, after all, was the city of kings and aristocrats who expropriated the people. Even Mbuya Nehanda herself came from a line of mediums closely linked with chiefly dynasties, and though she certainly inspired very many of the people her story is by itself no substitute for theirs.... The demand for 'pride in culture and civilisation' makes it all too easy for another type of elite history to flourish.⁵

I should hasten at once to say that since 1983 Zimbabwean school history books have striven to become radical rather than cultural nationalist. But I quote my 1983 review at some length in order to illustrate my own frame of mind when I set out once more to research and write on Zimbabwe. Once again it was Hove's book of poems which pointed the way. I found in it a majestic repudiation of the sort of colonial historiography which Revolt had been written to counter:

A masquerade in turmoil
They came bound to pretence, to malice,
with home-made head-loads of histories
Swollen with heroic pus
Vomited by their own societies
Like the Pizzaros, they came
to gnaw, to nibble and be heralded,⁶
through censored history chapters.

Hove called for a 'medicine man' who could purge colonial historiography with 'bitter roots.' But were these to be the roots of cultural nationalism? Another of Hove's poems suggested a different answer. Addressed to 'Peter, On His Graduation at University', it ran

in part:

Professors blessed you
like a lamb
journeyed through to the altar.
Indeed, lamb you are that is through
to the altar of man,
poor man in smelly rags
whose tiny histories
rest in the rusty heads of poverty

black souls are little birds
too tiny for the eagle's claws.
So, forever we live in ancestral snuffs
and stuffs picturing the caves,
rivers and hills of our survival
in jungles₇ of hearts, hearts of moisture
inherited.

The medicine man's history, I thought, would have to be a true people's history; he would have to rescue those 'tiny histories' from the 'rusty heads of poverty'; the eagle of academic historiography would have to stoop, so that Africans no longer had to live forever 'in ancestral snuffs' but could read the story of their modern experience.

So I set out to write a people's history, in which peasants rather than chiefs would be the protagonists, and in which change rather than tradition would be the theme. In the introduction to the book that resulted - Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe - I wrote that I had been:

stimulated to think about what kind of history was now most appropriate to Zimbabwe It seemed to me that though political leaders and others called for a 'people's history', the new books did not really deliver it. Admirable as they were as a corrective to the old colonial history, they focussed mostly on the states and aristocratic achievements of the past and on the continuities of the nationalist struggle in the twentieth century. The₈ experience of workers and peasants was largely missing.

In the book itself I tried to chart peasant struggles with the

colonial state over land alienation, enforced agricultural rules, destocking - all topics which Professor Ian Phimister has described as 'constant and vital themes informing Zimbabwe's history.'⁹ In working on the book I was mostly concerned with how to generate and then to handle evidence for such a people's history. Subsequently, however, I have become concerned with another question, and one on which I want to focus in this lecture: whether these topics are really 'vital' to the historical sense of the people themselves.

In order to get at the tiny histories of poverty I had to narrow my focus from Zimbabwe as a whole to a single district. I chose Makoni district in eastern Zimbabwe. I found that there was already plenty of historiographical activity in Makoni, but that none of it was directed towards the kind of history I wanted to write. 'Official' history in Makoni was anything but people's history. When I presented in 1980 my letters of recommendation from the new Minister to the still surviving white District Commissioner, and he grudgingly concluded that he would have to show me something, it was quite natural for him to produce as 'history' all his files on chiefly genealogies. I soon found that he had himself taken research into chiefly history very seriously indeed. He had been convinced that the only way to prevent the guerrillas from winning popular support was to find fully 'legitimate' chiefs, rightly chosen according to tradition from the 'true' line, properly endorsed by the senior spirit mediums and installed with all due rituals. A great deal of his time had been spent, even during the heat of the war, in what might have seemed mere antiquarian researches.

I read his bulging files, full of data on the chiefs, but I was

determined not to use them to write chiefly history. Peasant Consciousness says almost nothing about the activities of either nineteenth or twentieth century chiefs, though it makes full use of material on agrarian conflict which had found its way into the District Commissioner's reports on chiefs. I drew on the files, too, to write an article about late Rhodesian colonial ideology:

These files were full of elaborately researched precolonial histories of the chiefdoms of equally elaborate chiefly genealogies. The District Commissioner supposed that his files would be interesting to a historian because of these evidences of the past. But I soon came to realise that they were secondary to, and dependent upon, the relationship which the files really documented....

What I found in the files was a tragi-comedy, often verging on farce. I found that after sixty years of destructive colonial rule the administrators had rediscovered the sovereign virtues of 'custom' and 'tradition'. I found the files full of desperate attempts by District Commissioners to define what 'custom' and 'tradition' meant, and even more desperate attempts to carry them out in practice. The story was a tragedy which ended in death for most of the chiefs and headmen involved in it. It was a comedy - and sometimes a farce - because of the absurdities of so many of the 'traditions' invented by the administration.¹⁰

I remained insistent, then, that a people's history of Makoni district was to be neither about chiefs nor about tradition. Admittedly, the only recent African attempt at a history of Makoni had been much concerned with both. This had been written by Roland Hatendi, widely respected in the district as an expert on its past. Hatendi's book had unfortunately been destroyed in a fire. As he reconstructed it for me in our several interviews, it became clear that it had been very differently conceived from my own research. Hatendi's history revolved around the Makoni chiefship and the personalities of the recent chiefs, all of whom he had known intimately. Our interviews had in themselves something of the

tragi-comic about them, tragic as Hatendi realised that his failing health meant that his book would never be rewritten, comic as he tried to tell me about myths and traditions I did not wish to record and as I tried to persuade him to tell me the more mundane facts of modern agrarian politics, which he knew very well but did not think worthy of the title of 'history.' Much though I liked and admired Hatendi, I was inclined arrogantly to regard his idea of the 'historical' as itself part of the official, antiquarian model. Hatendi, after all, had been the District Commissioner's most valuable assistant in his researches into 'tradition.'

There had been, and still were, other African historians in Makoni, mainly drawn from the ranks of the mission Christian elites. But such men were concerned with something yet again - with salvation histories, with accounts of the providential establishment of their churches and their links with the pre-Christian past. Such men had been very important in using the newly created written vernacular - chiManyika - to create a sense of an enlarged tradition and to write the history of the so-called Manyika 'tribe' rather than just the history of individual chieftancies. Key 'organic intellectuals', their work was certainly an important part of the modern intellectual history of Makoni but it did not itself constitute an adequate account of that history. 'History' in Makoni, in short, whether chiefly, or administrative, or Christian concerned the remarkable, the miraculous, the mythical; it was about origins and legitimations; about male chiefs and warriors and prophets and evangelists. The lives of women and of peasants were mere 'experience,' not history.

If I were to be perverse enough to continue to insist that such

experience collectively amounts to history, what then was to be my evidence? A great deal of it turned out to be documentary. The Rhodesian administration, while privileging 'traditional' local history, nevertheless was very concerned with peasant experience. From the 1920s onwards the imposition of 'good farming practices', cattle-culling, etc. were indeed 'constant and vital themes' for the administration. So also were issues concerning the control of women to which administrators devoted a great deal of time and energy. A great deal of Peasant Consciousness depends on such administrative record. But plainly it could not depend entirely on administrative record. It would be ironic to construct a people's history solely from the reports, and hence the perspectives, of the colonialists. In any case, the administrative records were concerned mainly with generalities rather than personalities. They were no place to find the tiny histories of black souls.

A people's history was plainly going to have to be culled from the people themselves, from the rusty heads of poverty. Personal reminiscence (rather than oral tradition) would be the means to transmute experience into history. Hence I employed two very able history students from the University of Zimbabwe to collect life histories for me, while I concentrated on interviewing activists, many of whom also appeared in the documentary record. My two colleagues, Peter Moda Chakanyuka and Sister Emilia Chiteka, both came from Makoni district and had ready access to informants. Since I am going to cite many of their interviews in this lecture, I should give a brief account here of the way in which they were collected. Both asked their informants to speak at large about their life experiences,

asking no guiding questions. They returned to each informant many times. They did not ask their respondents to talk about 'history'. Neither had a tape recorder. It was their practice, therefore, to write up the text of an interview and then go back and work over it with the informant, correcting and enlarging, until an 'authorised' version emerged. I quote from these authorised versions, sometimes recorded in the first person, sometimes in the third. Both interviewed old, middle-aged and young informants. In so far as such an assertion can ever be made their informants were largely 'ordinary' people, whose unheroic perspectives were an invaluable corrective to my own tendency to romanticise the guerrilla war.

Here, then, at last was data for a people's history. But in reading these interviews I became uneasily aware that the ambiguity of the exercise still remained. Neither Chiteka nor Chakanyuka had any difficulty in getting people to talk about their own lives. Indeed, it is clear that many of their informants took a real pleasure in doing so. It was remarkable how frankly Peter Moda Chakanyuka's female relatives talked to him about the oppression they had suffered at the hands of his male relatives. It was remarkable how frankly Sister Chiteka's informants talked about sexual and ritual matters to a Catholic nun. Yet it was clear that hardly any of these people could see their experiences as 'history'. This was partly a matter, no doubt, of the criteria of the 'historical' having been set by oral traditionalists or by the Christian literate. But it was also a matter of the disjunction in the minds of the informants between the private and the public.

Only two of those interviewed were able to see their own

experiences as fully historical, and these by deploying very different techniques of narration. One of these was the traditionalist, Manyukure Gorembeu; the other was the nationalist, Mhondiwa Remus Rungodo.

Manyukure was in his late nineties when he was interviewed in January 1981, old enough to remember vividly pre-colonial times. He recalled a time when the scale of public events was intimate enough to accommodate the personal and the private. Thus he recounted the incursion into the district of the prazo-holder and adventurer from Mozambique, Gouveia. Gouveia passed through Manyukure's village, recruiting men for his army. 'On their return journey, Gouveia's people stole my mother's cow'; were pursued, and compelled to pay compensation. The fundamental contrast between Gouveia's incursions and the permanent arrival of the Rhodesian whites is conveyed by Manyukure in similar terms:

Some years later whitemen visited our gutu and on leaving took away some of the property. When they were pursued they stubbornly refused to return the property nor would they agree to pay. The spirit medium warned us against attacking the mashambute (white men) whom they said were invincible.

Nevertheless, Manyukure managed to live the rest of his life almost as though the colonial conquest had not occurred. He practised as an nganga. He resided in a remote part of the district with a headman who refused to accept missionaries or schools. Instead his people petitioned for rain and fertility to the ancestral spirits in caves in the hills, and 'these petitionings always had effective results.' He never used fertiliser but relied instead on divisi, seeds mixed with medicine and distributed by a spirit medium through the kraal head. He never used a plough or marketed a crop. Asked by Peter Moda

Chankanyuka what public events he recalled, he said nothing about such landmarks of peasant history as the centralisation policy of the 1930s or the Land Husbandry Act of the 1950s, nor about political landmarks connected with nationalism and the war. Manyukure's public events were epidemics and famines and the murder of a headman, just as they might have been in the nineteenth century. Thus Manyukure was able to fuse experience and history, the private and the public, by means of doggedly operating within a pre-colonial scale of time and place.¹¹

Totally contrasting was the narrative strategy of the nationalist, Mhondiwa Remus Rungodo. Rungodo fused his life experience with history by means of moving far outside the local context. Much of his account reads as pure picaresque. Running away from home at the age of twelve, he wanders to Salisbury, to Bulawayo, to Kimberly, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth. But the narrative is structured, nevertheless. Its crucial episode is a scene of violence from his time as a domestic servant in Bulawayo. Rungodo becomes engaged in an argument with his employer:

The white man called his son Paul and his son-in-law. Paul tried to intervene in a violent manner. Seeing the situation Remus got hold of Paul by the neck. When the father saw this he tried to help his son and was hit in the face, his spectacles broke in his face and he ran out. There was an uproar. All came to Paul's aid and over-powered Remus whom they tied up with ropes. He was caned by Paul to such a point that he almost fainted.

The story continues with his escape, pursuit, arrest, etc. And thereafter, constant recollection of this experience of arbitrary violence serves to illuminate the whole white world and colonial past. 'He could never forget what happened to him in Bulawayo.'

This perspective enabled him to see even agrarian events as more

'historical' than they appear in the life stories of peasants themselves. Returned to Makoni to run a bakery, and without rights to arable land or to cattle under the Land Husbandry Act, he could see administrative agrarian policy as part of the same pattern of violence:

In the 1950s the introduction of soil conservation brought a lot of miseries to many people People were shifted from their original villages to be concentrated in lines.

Rungodo's narrative is also experience as teleology. His is a story moving towards triumphant resolution. 'He was fully impressed' to hear at a ZAPU meeting held in Makoni in 1962 'that the Boers were to go together with their oppressive laws.' He became a local office-bearer in ZAPU; held secret meetings in the mountains when the party was banned; was arrested and tortured; later working with the guerrillas and becoming a ZANU/PF activist.¹²

The cogency of these traditionalist and nationalist strategies impressed me but it also challenged me. I was, after all, seeking to achieve a historiography which was neither traditionalist nor nationalist. What I was seeking must lie in the life experiences of those informants who fell between the intimate pre-colonial scale preserved by Manyukure and the freedom of the regional political economy enjoyed by Rungodo. Yet it was these people, and especially the women, who found it most difficult to relate their own lives to history. Men were often impatient or imprecise about details of agrarian change, crop production, etc. Women, though much better informants on such matters, saw the meaning - or more often the meaninglessness - of their lives as located elsewhere. Their sense of their lives resided neither in peasant experience nor in a public

history but in endurance of exploitative personal relations.

Typical in many ways was Mavengeni Annah Chakanyuka, whom Peter Moda interviewed in February 1981. Annah had become a master-farmer and so prosperous that she was accused of witchcraft and had to appear before a series of spirit mediums and diviners. But this 'peasant' success did not seem to her to be the central theme of her life. Neither did the public struggle of the nationalist movement and the war:

Annah has not been an active political figure before or during the liberation war. She has some hazy idea about the women's strike of 1960 in Salisbury She remembers that Nkomo [enjoyed support] but could not make head or tail of the stories about party leadership.

The main theme of her life story is her suffering as the wife of a philandering school-teacher, constantly involved with his girl pupils. In her own eyes such a life has no public significance. Her only conclusion is one of endurance:

From her youth she has been exposed to intolerable hardships which she has learnt to tolerate.¹³

Perhaps women and men like this needed a people's history which could give a wider significance to their lives, but they were likely to be hard to convince that they were really part of history at all.

I began to think that the guerrilla war, which constituted the climactic topic of my book, might also have been crucial in transforming people's sense of the historical in enabling them to relate private and public. What pre-eminently characterised the guerrilla war, after all, was its combination of the domestic and the nationally significant. Just as in Gouveia's time, great events could be symbolised by the seizure of village cows. Moreover, in their

night-time political education sessions the guerrillas precisely sought to generalise the peasant sense of local grievance; to turn individual or local resentment at loss of land or cattle into a history of national oppression. This guerrilla political education had nothing Marxist-Leninist about it. But it should have been marvellously productive of a sense of people's history. I began to look through oral accounts of the war to seek to detect signs of such a new historical consciousness.

I have to admit straight away that for many people the war certainly did not give a new significance to experience. Messy and brutal, like all guerrilla wars, it often seemed to fragment experience into meaninglessness. Thus a recent short story by Batisai Parwada gives to its guerrilla protagonist this confession:

For me, the war was a prolonged nightmare. It was a long drawn-out scream to which there was no end. I saw comrades being killed. Good, kindly people fighting for a cause. Good, solid people who were fighting today and pieces of flesh on the next. I saw a lot of things and to this day do not know how I came out of there with my brain working almost well. But like all nightmares that have to flee the light of day, the war came to an end I had a certain exhaustion, a sad dejection I had been to war for five painful years. It was a long time. Five years was enough to destroy a man I had seen war and I did not like what I had seen. War ate up and destroyed people.¹⁴

Parwada's guerrilla talks here with literary rhetoric. But there certainly were real people in Makoni who expressed their own sense of the meaninglessness of war in the undramatic tones of personal reminiscence. Sister Chiteka interviewed such a person in February 1981. Erementia Majarira described how:

the boys [guerrillas] came one day to my home and took my first-born child - Jesca - and they went away with her. They stayed with her in the forest for two weeks and I heard nothing of her. In the third week they killed her to the south of Mawango village and they left her in the open.

The police then took her husband in for brutal interrogation about the missing girl, whom they suspected of having gone off to join the guerrillas. And when the police had finished with him, it was the turn of the guerrillas once again:

the boys got furious with him. They accused him of having reported to the police that the boys had killed Jesca. They came one night and took my husband away That very night he came to me in a dream and told me that he had been killed.

She was in agony, not knowing where his body lay and afraid to search for it for fear of attracting the attention of the police or of the guerrillas:

My husband felt pity for me although he was in another world. He felt the deep grief that I had when I could not find his body. Then, in a dream, he revealed himself to my son and told him where he had been killed.

Mother and son went to the spot found the unburied skeleton; and interred it. With experiences like these, it was not surprising that Erementia felt a total alienation from the public results of the war:

When the time came for voting I did not want to go to vote because I was far too embittered. I was forced by the auxiliaries who herded us towards the polling booths at gun-point I remember that I did not vote very well. I spoiled the paper because I did not want to vote. I was very bitter I did not even join the independence celebrations. I had no reason to celebrate. Now I am leading an ordinary life.¹⁵

But others did seek to dignify their ordinary lives by relating them to the war. They did not do this, however, merely by coming to realise and to assert that the war was essentially about redeeming ordinary lives and revealing them as the stuff of history. People seem to have had to relate to the war in a patterned and mythic way

and also to have drawn heavily upon 'tradition.' As history the war, too, was a story of the remarkable, the miraculous, the mythical. David Lan in his remarkable Guns and Rain has shown how those great oral historians and myth-makers, the spirit mediums, made and remade history during the war. Through their reworking of tradition and their expansion of ritual, the mediums transformed the guerrillas from young strangers, lurking in the bush and spilling blood on the land, into quintessential sons of the soil and descendants of the founding heroes.¹⁶ Administrative attempts to capture tradition could not hope to compete with this profound imaginative reworking. But reading through ordinary lay accounts of the war I am struck by how far rural men and women also participated in this exercise of humanising and localising the guerrillas, even if at a much more stereotypical and basic level.

I have discussed this key stereotype elsewhere. In determining the peasant reaction to guerrilla violence, I argued, 'everything turns on whether it retains its anarchic, anti-social character. For this reason, one of the essential stories of the war, constantly repeated both by guerrillas and peasants, is the story of the first encounter between the two, when it becomes clear that the guerrillas were heroic men rather than animals.'¹⁷

I was told this story in Makoni many times. It is a plausible enough story and could have happened to many people. It seems doubtful, however, whether it could have happened to all the people who tell it, even in Makoni, let alone in all the other districts where it has been abundantly collected. Its ingredients remain everywhere the same. There are the markers of strangeness - the

nickname given to the guerrillas by the government forces, magandanga, 'wild things of the bush'; the Chimurenga nicknames adopted by the guerrillas themselves to mask their real identities of totem and clan. And there is the moment of human recognition. All these ingredients are present in a brisk version of the story told to me in 1981 by Isaac Tsungo, a Makoni store-keeper and peasant farmer. Tsungo was roused at night by young emissaries of the guerrillas:

I was taken to them among the rocks. We exchanged names. I can still remember some of theirs. Their leader was called Soveria; then there was 'Action' and Pedzai Mabunu, finish the Boers. Those were the days when they were called magandangas. They said 'They call us magandangas. Do we have tails?' I said 'I don't see any'. 'We are human beings, you see, and we need your help.' I said I would do what I could.¹⁸

One of Julie Frederikse's informants adds a few grace-notes to the same story:

They said 'You have heard that magandangas have got tails and they are baboons. Look, come here and we will show you that tail.' And then we saw that they were the same as us. And then they 'You have heard that the magandangas are killing people. Are we killing?' Then we saw, ah, they are not killing, they are friendly to us.¹⁹

One could cite dozens more versions. The point of them all is that they are common-sense lay versions of the mythic transformations effected by Lan's spirit mediums. Such encounters with the guerrillas at once establish their legitimacy and disprove their animality. They are everyday myths for ordinary people - but myths just the same.

In this way the guerrillas are localised. But having been localised, how are they to be seen? To what heroic stereotypes are they to be made to correspond? The guerrillas are bearers of people's history. Are they, then, to be seen as peasants and workers at large? The answer is clearly no. Guerrillas are seen as heroes in terms of

local tradition. They are favoured by, and similar to, the great warriors of the past whose spirits endorse the guerrillas through the mediums. They embody the heroic defiance of the first chimurenga of 1896. In Makoni, as elsewhere, the local memories of 1896 revived sharply during the guerrilla war of the 1970s, so that guerrillas were led to the same cave sanctuaries which had given refuge then. This was a linking of the two struggles which had nothing to do with the influence of Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, and which did not even have much to do with cultural nationalism. In its way it was an expression of people's history, of what happens when people strive to articulate experience as history.

So, I came to realise, the new historical consciousness aroused by the war had to be, or at least was, expressed in terms of the old. And even if I was determined to keep the chiefs out of my people's history, the people, it seemed were not. One striking development in Makoni historical consciousness during the war was the great revival of the myth of Chief Chingaira Makoni, paramount of the district at the time of the 1896 risings and shot by the whites outside the caves from which he and his people had been dynamited. Academic historians have debated whether or not Chingaira Makoni was really a resister, or whether he did not merely stumble into confrontation with the whites, or whether, indeed, he did nothing at all and was merely a victim of white paranoia. These revisionist debates are very remote from the terms of the Chingaira myth in Makoni in the 1970s. In the myth Chingaira was unequivocally the embodiment of resistance; the hero ambiguously slain; buried, no-one was quite sure where; maybe to come again. In the oral history collection at the National Archives of

Zimbabwe are two interviews with Makoni made in the last years of the war. Both reveal the Chingaira myth in its variant forms.

One informant, Aaron Mutambirwa Makoni, claimed - quite inaccurately - that Chingaira had been executed at Macheke, the meeting point 'for Mtoko, Mrewa, Makoni areas on the one side and on the other there is Svosve', so that his spirit could animate all those areas. On the other hand, 'no-one knows' where he is buried, or if he is buried at all:

This is not allowed to be said and the svikiro spirit medium does not want us to say the story. We are young but what I tell you is that what was written is not true at all. No-one saw him.²⁰

The other informant, Sylvester Mushauripo, claimed that his great grandfather had been shot with Chingaira. He also claimed that he had inherited the story of the real reason for the war between Chingaira Makoni and the whites, a marvellous mythic interweaving of domestic and historic which outdoes old Manyukure:

Some whites on their way eastwards came to the village of Makoni and rested there. They then told Makoni that they were leaving their wives there so that they might rest and they asked him to look after them. Makoni and his people shaved the heads of these women and so when the men came back they²¹ saw this 'outrage' and beat up villagers. War erupted.

No wonder that after 1980 a street in the town of Rusape, Makoni's administrative centre, with its hotel and shops and ladies hairdresser, should have been renamed 'Chingaira Street.'

And now at last we are ready for the story of Chingaira's head. On September 26th last year I had a visit to my house in Oxfordshire from three Makoni dignitaries: Philemon Zambe Makoni, F.C. Makoni and J.C. Makoni. They had come to ask me where in Britain they could find

Chief Chingaira Makoni's head so that they could restore it to his people. I was inclined to think that the idea of Chingaira's beheading and the carriage of his head to England as a gift to Cecil Rhodes was yet another development of the Chingaira myth. But the three men had an impressive variety of evidence. They pointed out, as is true, that colonial powers had indeed been known to behead defeated African enemies and to display grisly trophies in metropolitan museums. They reminded me that the Germans had returned the head of Mkwawa of the Hehe when Tanzania became independent. They had seen a newspaper report which showed that Watts, the officer who had Chingaira Makoni executed, had travelled back to England in 1897 in the same ship as Cecil Rhodes. But they added oral and esoteric evidence, too. The two elder men were sons of Chief Zambe Makoni, himself the son of Chingaira. Zambe had been a small child at the time of his father's execution. He told his own sons that he had seen with his own eyes the beheading of Chingaira; the headless body was then secretly buried. But my visitors added that they knew it had subsequently been exhumed, because they had seen for themselves the mummified - and headless - corpse of Chingaira in the burial cave of the Makoni chiefs. And finally, as if to clinch the argument, they added that Chingaira's beheading 'is written in your book.' Inspired with this wealth of evidence they had made a fruitless journey to the Rhodes Museum in Bishops Stortford and to Rhodes House in Oxford, seeking for the head.

Now, of course, these men were very much about the business of chiefly history. There was a succession dispute going at that moment in Makoni and it was easy to imagine the sensation and the triumph for

Chingaira's house had they returned with the heroic head. As they politely expressed astonishment that I had not been told 'the truth' when I was in Makoni, they were inadvertently rebuking me for pursuing the lives of peasants rather than seeking entry to the burial cave of chiefs. These were perhaps the least likely men in Makoni to see the point of a people's history. And yet their coming completed my sense of unease with what I had achieved in Peasant Consciousness. When they told me that 'it was written in your book', I knew at once which book they meant. For them 'my book' was undoubtedly Revolt in Southern Rhodesia; for them, and I expect for most people in Makoni and Zimbabwe, Peasant Consciousness can never attain the mythic authority of Revolt. It makes no odds that Peasant Consciousness is about Makoni and that there is no mention of a beheading in Revolt. I took their visit as a characteristically elliptical Makoni historiographical message. In seeking to write a people's history I had left out too much of what makes history memorable to the people.

Now, of course, I am neither so depressed nor so repentant as I sound. Historical consciousness will change in Zimbabwe as the most recent school-books with their versions of people's history reach the younger generation. Zimbabwe is not doomed to an exclusive diet of cultural nationalism forever. But I take the thrust of what I have been saying in this lecture to fit with recent realisations of social historians in other parts of the world. Last year, for instance, there was a great conference on myth and oral history in Oxford. Julie Cruikshank gave to it a paper on 'Myth as a framework for Life Stories', and described her work among the Athapaskans in terms that have become recognisable to me:

My initial objective was to document perspectives on northern social history . . . their objective was to produce family history. These women were approaching our task with a different narrative model of 'life history' from my own. My expectation had been that these discussions would trace the impact of the Klondike goldrush, the construction of the Alaska Highway and other disruptive events on their lives. But very soon, several of the oldest women began shifting the focus from secular history to traditional stories. The more I persisted with my agenda, the more insistent they were about the direction our work should take. They explained to me that these stories were important to record as part of their personal history.²²

The second example is an article I came across only after I had given the oral presentation of this lecture, but which seemed to me admirably to express the lesson I had been trying to learn. In it Hermann Rebel discusses the problem of people's history - 'the problem of finding what lower-class people have to say and to understand what it might mean.' Writing especially about the German peasantry, Rebel is critical of most life history collection because oral historians have deliberately excluded 'fantastic stories, songs, jingles or riddles'. Oral historians have aimed at constructing 'real' experience, but in so doing have neglected the 'philosophical constructions' of the poor. 'We get very little sense of how the contributors are imagining or re-imagining their lives, how they comment on "experience" with concepts and metaphors.' The historian, Rebel asserts, needs 'to consider what concept-forming possibilities existed outside the official world of learning that allowed lower-class people to exercise a rationality that was uniquely their own.' For German peasants one way 'to examine analytically and respond creatively to their experience' of social modernisation was to make use of an 'infinitely variable stringing together of the narrative elements of oral story traditions.'²³

I accept this as the lesson to be learnt from trying to write a people's history in Makoni. In Hove's terms one has to seek to write not only about 'tiny lives' but about 'black souls'; not only about experience but about how people comment on it with concept and metaphor. It will not be an easy task - but it is good to be confronted with a third historiographical agenda in my attempts to understand the history of Zimbabwe.

ENDNOTES

- (1) Chenjerai Hove, Up in Arms, Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1982, p. 33.
- (2) David Lan, Guns and Rains, James Currey, London, 1985, p. 192.
- (3) Terence Ranger, 'The People in African Resistance: a review', Journal of Southern African Studies, 4, 1, October 1977, pp. 125-146.
- (4) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Terence Ranger, The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe, Mambo, Gweru, 1985.
- (5) Terence Ranger, 'Revolutions in the wheel of Zimbabwean history', Moto, December 1982/January 1983, p. 42.
- (6) Hove, p. 24.
- (7) Hove, pp. 66-67.
- (8) Terence Ranger, Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe, James Currey, London, 1985, p. viii.
- (9) I.R. Phimister, 'Pasi ne (Down with) Class Struggle? The New History for Schools in Zimbabwe', History in Africa, 11, 1984, pp. 367-374.
- (10) Terence Ranger, 'Tradition and Travesty: Chiefs and the Administration in Makoni District, Zimbabwe, 1960 - 1980', Africa, 52, 3, 1982, p. 20.
- (11) Interviews between Peter Moda Chakanyuka and Manyukure Gorembeu, Dewedzo, Chiduku, Makoni, January 1981.
- (12) Interviews between P.M. Chankanyuka and Mhondiwa Remus Rungodo, Dewedzo, January 1981.
- (13) Interviews between P.M. Chankanyuka and Mavengeni Annah Chakanyuka, Chiduku, February 1981.
- (14) Batisai Parweda, Shreds of Darkness, Mambo, Gweru, 1987, p. 17.
- (15) Interviews between Sister Emilia Chiteka and Erementia Majarira, Triashill, February 1981.
- (16) Lan, Guns and Rain.
- (17) Terence Ranger, 'Guerrillas, bandits and social bandits: the case of Zimbabwe', in Donald Crummey, (ed.), Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa, James Currey, London, 1986, p. 380.

- (18) Interview between Terence Ranger and Isaac Tsungo, Mbobo, 14 February 1981.
- (19) Julie Frederikse, None but Ourselves, Masses versus the Media in the Making of Zimbabwe, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1982, p. 56.
- (20) Interview between Dawson Munjeri and Aaron Mutambirwa Makoni, 10 and 17 May 1979, AOH/54, National Archives, Harare.
- (21) Interview between Dawson Munjeri and Sylvester Mushauripo, 14 February 1980, AOH/65, National Archives, Harare.
- (22) Julie Cruikshank, 'Myth as a framework for Life Stories: Accounts from Northern Canada', conference paper, 1987.
- (23) Hermann Rebel, 'Why not "Old Marie" or someone very much like her? A reassessment of the question about the Grimms' contributors from a social historical perspective', Social History, 13, 1, January 1988, pp. 22 - 24.

HANS WOLFF MEMORIAL LECTURESHIP

Hans Wolff was born on April 6, 1920 in Mainz, Germany. He immigrated to the United States in 1937, attended Queens College, New York from 1939-1941 and then transferred to Indiana University. From 1942-1946 he served with the Military Intelligence Corps. After the war he returned to Indiana and in 1946 the B.A. magna cum laude in Linguistics, he was awarded the M.A. in Linguistics in 1947 and in 1949 a double doctorate in Anthropology and Linguistics. In 1949 he was appointed to the faculty of the University of Puerto Rico where he taught for eleven years. His early work was in Amerindian languages, especially in Siouan studies, and in the teaching of English as a second language. While still at the University of Puerto Rico, he was invited in 1953 to visit Nigeria, and from that time his interest in Africa and African languages grew. He published widely on the languages and language problems of Nigeria, and became one of the leading authorities on Yoruba. He helped to found and to edit the Journal of African Languages, assisted in the early development of the West African Language Conference, and for several years served as Chairman of the African Linguistics Committee of the African Studies Association. At the time of his death in September 1967, he was Professor of Linguistics at Northwestern University.

The Hans Wolff Memorial Lectures were established at Indiana University to honor his considerable contribution to African Studies.

- 1968-69 David Dalby (United Kingdom), University of London. Linguistics. "Black Through White: Patterns of Communication." (24 March 1969).
- 1969-70 Emile Snyder (United States), University of Wisconsin. African Literature. "Tradition and Modernism in African Literature." (4 March 1970).
- 1971-72 Wilfred H. Whiteley (United Kingdom), University of London. Linguistics and Anthropology. "To Plan is to Choose: The Rationale and Consequences of Language Choice in Eastern Africa." (7 April 1972).
- 1972-73 Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene (United Kingdom), St. Anthony's College, Oxford University. Political Science and African Studies. "Mutumin Kirkii: The Concept of the Good Man in Hausa." (11 April 1973)
- 1973-74 A.E. Meeussen (Belgium), University of Leiden and Royal Museum of Brussels. Linguistics. "Africanisms." (18 April 1974).
- 1974-75 Sembene, Ousmane (Senegal). Novelist and film-maker. "Man is Culture." (5 March 1975).
- 1975-76 A. Teixeira Da Mota (Portugal), Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga, Lisbon. History, Geography.

"Some Aspects of Portuguese Colonization and Maritime Trade in West Africa in the 15th and 16th Centuries." (5 March 1976).

- 1976-77 Nathan M. Shamuyarira (Zimbabwe), University of Dar es Salaam. Political Science and Journalism. "The Political and Economic Crisis in Southern Africa." (14 April 1977).
- 1977-78 Batourou Sekou Kouyate (Mali), National Ensemble of Republic of Mali. Kora soloist. A concert of Mande poetry and song. (19 April 1978).
- 1978-79 L. Adele Jinadu (Nigeria), University of Lagos. Political Science. "Structure and Choice in African Politics." (5 April 1979).
- 1979-80 Leo Kuper (South Africa), University of California-Los Angeles. Sociology. "South Africa: Human Rights and Genocide." (18 April 1980).
- Hilda Kuper (South Africa), University of California-Los Angeles. Anthropology. "Biography as Interpretation." (21 April 1980).
- 1980-81 Ruth Finnegan (United Kingdom), Open University, Milton Keynes. Folklore and Anthropology. "Short Time to Stay: Comments on Time, Literature and Oral Performance." (1 April 1981).
- 1981-82 Francis M. Deng (Sudan), Ambassador from Sudan to Canada. Law, Jurisprudence, and Anthropology. "Security Problems: an African Predicament." (23 October 1981).
- 1982-83 B.W. Andrzejewski (Somalia), Emeritus Professor of Cushitic Languages and Literatures, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. "Islamic Literature of Somalia" (11 November, 1983).
- 1983-84 Thurstan Shaw (West Africa), Ph.D., CBE. "Filling Gaps in African Maps - Fifty Years of Archaeology in Africa" (29 February 1984).
- 1985-86 Bernd Heine (Cologne), Ph.D. "The Rise of Grammatical Categories. Cognition and Language Change in Africa" (4 April, 1986).
- 1986-87 Peter S. Garlake (Zimbabwe), Archaeologist and author. "Structure and Meaning in the Prehistoric Art of Zimbabwe" (April 15, 1987).