Chaminuka the Great Man of All Times and the vaNyayi People of the Mutapa and Rozvi States in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

Chaminuka occupies a singular place in Shona historical memory. Remembered as a prophet, rain-maker, healer and seer who long foretold the coming of strangers without knees (referring to white people dressed in trousers with their knees hidden inside their trousers) , and revered as one of the most senior mhondoro, or royal ancestral spirits, of the Zimbabwean plateau, he is described in popular tradition as the great man of all times. The article draws on secondary data analysis of historical, anthropological and literary scholarship to examine Chaminuka in relation to the vaNyayi people, a name applied in oral tradition and in Portuguese and nineteenth-century records to Shona-speaking peoples of the Mutapa and Rozvi states. Afrocentricity provides the theoretical lens of the article. The analysis reveals four themes: the Mutapa and Rozvi states and the vaNyayi people; Chaminuka's place within the mhondoro and Mwari religious order; the career and killing of the medium Pasipamire in 1883 as prophecy and martyrdom; and Chaminuka in colonial, nationalist and post-colonial memory. Sociological and anthropological readings show that Chaminuka's authority rests on charisma, spirit mediumship, collective memory and the politics of the nation. The article argues that Chaminuka's greatness lies less in a single verifiable biography than in his capacity to embody continuity between the pre-colonial states, the trauma of conquest and the imagination of the nation. It concludes by recommending community-centred oral history, inclusive heritage education and critical, plural representations of Chaminuka in museums, curricula and public commemoration.

Keywords: Chaminuka; Mutapa; Rozvi; vaNyayi; spirit mediums; oral tradition; Afrocentricity; Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Few figures in the history and memory of the Zimbabwean plateau command the reverence accorded to Chaminuka. In oral tradition he appears as a man of extraordinary powers, able to summon rain, heal the sick, command animals and foresee the future (Gelfand 1959, Bourdillon 1987). He is credited with prophesying the arrival of white people, the defeat of the Ndebele and the loss of the land. After his death, his spirit continued to speak through mediums, and as a mhondoro associated with the land and its rains he became one of the most senior spiritual authorities among the Shona (Abraham 1966, Lan 1985). In the twentieth century, nationalists invoked him as a symbol of resistance and of the antiquity of the nation, and novelists and historians placed him at the centre of narratives of national origin (Ranger 1982, Mutswairo 1983). Popular tradition has described him as the great man of all times.

The article examines Chaminuka in relation to the VaNyayi, a name applied to the Shona-speaking peoples of the Mutapa and Rozvi states (Livingstone 1857, Beach 1980). It asks how Chaminuka is situated within the political and religious institutions of these states, how the nineteenth-century career and death of his medium, Pasipamire, shaped his memory, and how he has been appropriated in colonial, nationalist and post-colonial representations. The argument is that the figure known as Chaminuka is a composite of an ancestral spirit, a succession of mediums, a body of oral traditions and a set of literary and political representations, each with its own history (Vansina 1985, Charumbira 2015). His greatness lies in his capacity to embody continuity between the pre-colonial states, the upheavals of the nineteenth century and the imagination of the nation.

The question matters for history in Zimbabwe is deeply politicised. Debates about land, sovereignty and

national identity routinely invoke the ancestors and the spirits of the risings, and the memory of figures such as Chaminuka and Nehanda is mobilised by competing actors (Ranger 2004, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). Understanding how Chaminuka has been remembered is important for heritage, education and an inclusive national identity. It is important for the communities who continue to honour Chaminuka as a living spirit, for whom questions about his history are inseparable from questions of religious authority, land and respect for the ancestors (Bourdillon 1987, Lan 1985). The study of Chaminuka thus raises broader methodological questions about how historians can write respectfully and critically about spirit figures known primarily through oral tradition (Vansina 1985). The article first reviews the literature and identifies gaps, then presents Afrocentricity as its framework and describes the methodology. Four themes follow, together with sociological and anthropological underpinnings, implications for African cultural values, a synthesis, conclusions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Mutapa and Rozvi states

The Zimbabwean plateau was the setting of a succession of states in the second millennium AD, from Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe to the Mutapa and Rozvi polities (Garlake 1973, Huffman 1996, Pikirayi 2001). According to widely recorded traditions, the Mutapa state was founded in the fifteenth century by Nyatsimba Mutota, who moved north from the Great Zimbabwe region, and its rulers bore the title Mwene Mutapa, rendered by the Portuguese as Monomotapa (Beach 1980, Mudenge 1988). Portuguese intervention intensified in the seventeenth century, culminating in the treaty of 1629 by which the Mutapa Mavhura accepted a form of Portuguese overlordship (Mudenge 1988). Pwiti (1996) and Pikirayi (2001) show archaeologically that the Mutapa state drew on traditions of the Zimbabwe culture. The Rozvi state emerged in the late seventeenth century under Changamire Dombo, who drove the Portuguese from the interior in the 1680s and 1690s and established a centre in the south-west around Danangombe and Naletale (Beach 1980, 1994). The Rozvi were closely associated with the Mwari cult of the Matopo Hills (Daneel 1970) and declined in the 1830s under Nguni invasions, followed by the establishment of the Ndebele state (Mazarire 2009). Historians have debated how centralised these states were. Abraham (1959) presented the Mutapa as a dynasty with a coherent political ideology, while Beach (1980, 1994) emphasised the autonomy of local chiefdoms and the limits of central control. Mudenge (1988) offered a detailed reconstruction drawing extensively on Portuguese documents. Nationalist historians such as Chigwedere (1980) stressed continuity from the Mutapa to the colonial conquest, reflecting a desire to ground the modern nation in an ancient past.

Spirit Mediums and the Mhondoro Cults

A second strand concerns religion. Shona religion recognises family ancestors (vadzimu) and royal ancestral spirits (mhondoro) associated with chiefdoms and their rains, which speak through mediums (masvikiro) (Gelfand 1959, Bourdillon 1987). Garbett (1966, 1977) analysed mediums among the Korekore and the regional networks of cults; Fry (1976) studied Zezuru mediums as articulators of consensus; and Lan (1985) showed how mediums mobilised the authority of the mhondoro during the liberation war. Abraham (1959, 1966) sought to reconstruct Mutapa political history through mhondoro traditions and placed Chaminuka in a position of special seniority, but Beach (1980, 1994) criticised his reliance on traditions of uncertain provenance. Ranger (1967) argued that mediums led the risings of 1896–97, an interpretation challenged by Beach (1979), who emphasised the role of chiefs and the diversity of local motivations. Bourdillon (1987) cautions that mediums' authority depends on recognition by chiefs and communities, so that their political influence varies with circumstances. This literature establishes that spirit mediumship is a dynamic institution in which religious and political authority are continually negotiated.

Chaminuka in History, Literature and Memory

A third strand concerns Chaminuka himself. Gelfand (1959) recorded traditions of the Chaminuka cult, Selous (1893) described the medium Pasipamire and his death, and Ranger (1982) traced Chaminuka's changing fortunes in nationalism and the guerrilla war. Mutswairo (1983) presented him as a heroic prophet in fiction, Chigwedere (1980) placed him within a nationalist narrative of continuity from the Mutapa, and Charumbira

(2015) examined the making of Zimbabwean memory through figures such as Nehanda. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) analysed contested Zimbabwean nationalism, and Ranger (2004) the rise of 'patriotic history'. Lan (1985) and Fry (1976) show that claims to Chaminuka's mediumship and the activities of other senior mediums continued to matter in the twentieth century. Yet much of what is known about Chaminuka derives from colonial-era recordings and nationalist reworkings, and there has been little systematic comparison of the different traditions or of how they have changed over time.

Gaps in the Literature

The literature is divided between political histories of the states (Mudenge 1988), ethnographies of mediumship (Fry 1976, Lan 1985) and studies of nationalist memory (Charumbira 2015). Few studies bring Chaminuka, the VaNyayi and the Mutapa and Rozvi states into a single frame, and fewer interpret Chaminuka through an explicitly African-centred theoretical lens combined with sociological and anthropological perspectives. This article addresses these gaps through a secondary analysis of the existing literature.

Theoretical Framework - Afrocentricity

The article is anchored in Afrocentricity, a paradigm associated principally with Molefi Kete Asante. Asante (2003) defines Afrocentricity as a mode of thought and action in which African interests, values and perspectives predominate and in which Africans are treated as subjects and agents of their own history rather than as objects on the margins of European experience. Mazama (2001) describes the paradigm as placing African experience at the centre of analysis and rejecting the assumption that European standards constitute a universal measure of value. Central to the paradigm is the concept of location, the cultural and historical place from which a phenomenon is viewed. From an Afrocentric standpoint, much colonial writing on Chaminuka analysed him from a dislocated position, treating him as a 'wizard' or 'witch-doctor' rather than as a figure of religious and political authority within an African system of knowledge (Selous 1893, Gelfand 1959).

Afrocentricity resonates with wider African decolonial thought. Wa Thiong'o (1986) argued that colonialism colonised the mind by teaching Africans to devalue their own languages and histories, and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) that the coloniality of knowledge persists in post-colonial Africa. Mkabela (2005) and Chilisa (2020) argue that research on African culture should be grounded in African worldviews and value community knowledge, including oral tradition. Vansina (1985) provides a methodological complement by showing that oral traditions are historical sources that can be critically assessed rather than dismissed as myth.

The framework is complemented by scholarship on memory. Halbwachs (1992) and Nora (1989) showed that societies remember through social frameworks and sites of memory, and Vansina (1985) that oral traditions are shaped by the contexts of their performance. Read together with Afrocentricity, these insights allow the article to treat traditions about Chaminuka as African ways of knowing the past, while recognising that memory is always selective and shaped by present interests (Charumbira 2015).

Afrocentricity is appropriate for this article for three reasons. First, it restores Chaminuka to his own cultural location, as a mhondoro whose authority derives from Shona understandings of land, ancestors and rain. Second, its emphasis on agency foregrounds the VaNyayi, mediums and communities as makers of their history. Third, its orientation towards cultural renewal aligns with the role Chaminuka plays in contemporary identity. Afrocentricity has been criticised for essentialising African cultures and romanticising the past. The article applies Afrocentricity critically, centring African knowledge while attending to diversity and power within Zimbabwean society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The article adopted a qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis, which involves analysing data collected by different scholars (Johnston 2014). Heaton (2008) notes that secondary analysis allows researchers to address new questions and synthesise findings across sources and periods. The approach suited

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an article that spans five centuries and integrates history, archaeology, anthropology and literature. It aligns with Afrocentric methodology, which encourages re-reading existing knowledge from an African-centred location (Mkabela 2005).

Data Sources and Selection

Data were drawn from historical monographs, archaeological studies, ethnographies of Shona religion, colonial travel accounts, nationalist histories and novels, identified through Taylor & Francis Online, JSTOR, African Journals Online, Google Scholar and African universities repositories. Search terms included 'Chaminuka', 'Pasipamire', 'mhondoro', 'Mutapa', 'Rozvi', 'Banyai' and 'spirit mediums Zimbabwe'. Sources were included if they addressed Chaminuka, the Mutapa and Rozvi states or Shona spirit mediumship. Colonial sources were retained but read critically (Selous 1893, Gelfand 1959).

Data Analysis

Documents were analysed using document analysis (Bowen 2009) and thematic analysis following the six phases of Braun and Clarke (2006). Codes such as 'Mutapa', 'Rozvi', 'Nyai', 'mhondoro', 'prophecy', 'Pasipamire', 'Lobengula' and 'nationalism' were generated inductively and interpreted through Afrocentricity and Vansina's (1985) principles of oral tradition. Where traditions diverged, the principal variants were set out rather than adjudicated, and claims from oral sources were identified as traditions rather than established facts. Following Beach (1980, 1994), oral traditions were compared with Portuguese documents, nineteenth-century travel accounts and archaeological findings where possible, and the dates and contexts of recording were noted. Four themes emerged and are presented with their discussion below.

Trustworthiness and Limitations

Trustworthiness was enhanced by triangulating oral traditions with documentary and archaeological evidence and prioritising peer-reviewed scholarship (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Beach 1994). Many traditions were recorded by colonial administrators, missionaries and ethnographers whose interests shaped what they recorded. The article respects Chaminuka's religious significance for the communities that honour him.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Four themes emerged, each interpreted below through Afrocentricity.

The Mutapa and Rozvi states and the VaNyayi People

The name VaNyayi, rendered Banyai in Portuguese-influenced, Tswana and Sindebele usage, appears in a range of sources relating to the Shona peoples of the Mutapa and Rozvi states. Livingstone (1857), travelling along the Zambezi in the 1850s, described the 'Banyai' as a people who exacted tribute from travellers and chose their chiefs through a distinctive system of succession. In some traditions VaNyayi is understood as a political rather than an ethnic designation, referring to the subjects of the Mutapa and especially of the Rozvi Mambo, and it is sometimes rendered in popular accounts as the messengers or followers of the ruler. Beach (1980, 1994) cautions that ethnic labels on the plateau were fluid and that names applied by outsiders did not necessarily match those people used for themselves, while Ranger (1983) shows that the modern category 'Shona' was consolidated under colonial rule.

Bearing these cautions in mind, the VaNyayi can be understood as the political community of Shona-speaking peoples who lived under the great plateau states and shared institutions of chieftaincy, ancestral religion and spirit mediumship (Mudenge 1988, Mazarire 2009). The Mutapa state's legitimacy rested on royal ancestors whose mediums were involved in succession and rain rituals, and the Rozvi Mambo enjoyed a special relationship with Mwari, whose oracles were believed to sanction their rule (Daneel 1970, Pikirayi 2001). The nineteenth century transformed this world. Nguni groups led by figures such as Zwangendaba and Nxaba invaded in the 1830s, traditions recount the defeat of the Rozvi and the death of the Mambo, and the Ndebele under Mzilikazi established a new power in the south-west (Beach 1980, Mazarire 2009). Bhebe (1979) and

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Cobbing (1976) caution against portraying Ndebele–Shona relations as uniformly hostile, showing that they involved trade, intermarriage and religious exchange as well as raiding.

The institutions of the VaNyayi were sophisticated. Mudenge (1988) describes a Mutapa political order in

which the ruler governed through a court of officials, provincial chiefs and tributary relationships, and in which royal ancestors were consulted through mediums on matters of war, succession and rain. Gold mining, ivory trade and cattle formed the economic base, and contact with Portuguese traders at fairs along the Zambezi drew the state into Indian Ocean commerce (Beach 1980, Pikirayi 2001). The Rozvi likewise combined military power with religious legitimacy. Their defeat of the Portuguese at Maungwe and Dambarare in the 1680s and 1690s is remembered as a triumph of indigenous power (Mudenge 1988). Huffman (1996) argues that the spatial organisation of Zimbabwe culture sites expressed symbolic ideas about kingship, gender and the sacred, suggesting that the religious ideas underpinning the mhondoro cults have deep roots on the plateau. Chaminuka's significance cannot be separated from this long history of statecraft and religion. Interpreted through Afrocentricity, this theme restores the VaNyayi as agents of a sophisticated political and religious order, rather than as the passive victims depicted in colonial historiography (Asante 2003, Chigwedere 1980).

Chaminuka within the Mhondoro and Mwari Religious Order

Chaminuka was among the most senior mhondoro of the central plateau, associated especially with Chitungwiza, south of present-day Harare, and his cult extended among the Zezuru and neighbouring communities (Gelfand 1959, Bourdillon 1987). Mhondoro are identified with the original owners of the land and speak through mediums who advise chiefs on succession, land and ritual (Garbett 1966, Lan 1985). Above them stood Mwari, the high god of the Matopo shrines, associated with the Rozvi (Daneel 1970, Werbner 1989). The relationship between the two systems is debated: in some interpretations they were complementary, with Mwari presiding over the plateau and the mhondoro over territories; in others they were rival centres of authority associated with different political formations (Garbett 1977, Ranger 1999).

Traditions about Chaminuka vary. Some associate him with the royal lineages of the Mutapa, presenting him as a relative or contemporary of its founders; others associate him with the Rozvi period or present him as an independent figure whose authority transcended dynasties (Abraham 1966, Gelfand 1959). Common themes recur: power over rain and animals, healing and prophecy, especially the prophecy of strangers without knees (vasina mabvi) who would take the land. These traditions are best read not as biographical records but as expressions of the qualities attributed to a senior mhondoro (Vansina 1985). The powers over rain, animals and healing are those associated with the guardians of the land, while the gift of prophecy reflects the role of mediums as interpreters of the ancestors' will (Bourdillon 1987). Genealogical traditions that place Chaminuka early in the lineages of the central plateau express his seniority, since in Shona thought the earliest ancestors of a territory hold the greatest authority over it (Lan 1985). Abraham's (1966) attempt to fix Chaminuka within Mutapa dynastic history should therefore be read as one interpretation among several rather than as a settled chronology (Beach 1994). Chaminuka's regional reputation, which extended to the Ndebele, suggests that his authority bridged the mhondoro system of the Mutapa world and the regional reach associated with the Mwari oracles of the Rozvi. With the collapse of Rozvi authority, the medium of a senior mhondoro commanded respect across political boundaries, offering rain, healing and guidance in a time of insecurity (Beach 1980). The identification of Chaminuka with Chitungwiza illustrates the intimate relationship between mhondoro and place. A mhondoro is tied to a territory marked by hills, pools, groves and graves where the spirit resides and rituals are performed, so that a medium's claims are assessed partly through their relationship to the spirit's, land and to the lineages that recognise it (Bourdillon 1987, Lan 1985). Colonial land alienation and later urban growth around Chitungwiza disrupted these relationships (Fry 1976, Ranger 1982). Interpreted through Afrocentricity, Chaminuka emerges as a figure of indigenous knowledge and authority, not the 'wizard' of colonial accounts (Mazama 2001).

Pasipamire and the death of 1883: Prophecy and Martyrdom

The best-documented episode concerns the nineteenth-century medium Pasipamire, who lived at Chitungwiza

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and attracted visitors from across the plateau, including Ndebele seeking rain, healing and divination. European travellers and hunters also visited him, and Selous (1893) recorded accounts of the medium and his death, which must be read critically given the travellers' assumptions. The figure of Pasipamire that emerges from these accounts is of a man of great dignity and influence, whose homestead functioned as a regional ce-

ntre of consultation, and whose reputation drew gifts and petitioners from distant communities. Selous's (1893) description, written by a hunter who later served colonial expansion, nonetheless reflects the stereotype of the African 'witch-doctor', and its value lies chiefly in confirming the medium's prominence rather than in interpreting his role. Relations between Pasipamire and the Ndebele king Lobengula became tense: traditions link this to the medium's influence, disputes over tribute, rivalry for spiritual authority and prophecies of Ndebele downfall. In 1883 Pasipamire was summoned to the Ndebele capital and killed on the way by soldiers acting on the king's orders (Ranger 1982).

Traditions transform the killing from an execution into martyrdom. In some versions the soldiers' spears could not wound him until he revealed the means of his death, or a boy not subject to his power struck the fatal blow; in others he foretold his death and its consequences. The British defeat of the Ndebele in 1893 was widely interpreted as the fulfilment of his prophecy (Gelfand 1959, Mutswairo 1983). After his death, claimants to Chaminuka's mediumship had to establish authenticity through tests of knowledge and conduct administered by elders and mediums, and such claims became politically significant in the twentieth century (Fry 1976, Ranger 1982). Prophecies of strangers are common in the traditions of colonised peoples, reasserting the authority of indigenous knowledge in the face of catastrophic change (Worsley 1957). The episode illustrates the political importance of spirit mediums in the nineteenth century and the tension between the religious authority of Shona mhondoro and the political authority of the Ndebele state. Lobengula himself is reported to have consulted religious specialists, including those of the Mwari shrines, and the killing of Pasipamire may be read as part of a struggle over who controlled spiritual power on the plateau rather than simply as an act of ethnic hostility (Bhebe 1979, Ranger 1999). Through Afrocentricity, the episode shows how Shona communities interpreted conquest within their own cosmology.

Chaminuka in Colonial, Nationalist and Post-Colonial Memory

After the British occupation of 1890 and the risings of 1896–97, colonial ethnographers such as Gelfand (1959) recorded and systematised Chaminuka traditions, contributing to his reputation as the greatest mhondoro while also fixing traditions that had been fluid, a process Ranger (1983) calls the invention of tradition. Nationalists of the 1950s and 1960s drew on Chaminuka and Nehanda as symbols of resistance and national antiquity. Ranger (1982) shows that the figure was mobilised in different ways by different actors and that, during the guerrilla war, Nehanda's symbolic importance grew while Chaminuka's place became more ambiguous. Lan (1985) shows how guerrillas in Dande worked with local mediums. Mutswairo's (1983) novel and Chigwedere's (1980) history consolidated Chaminuka as a founding figure. The pairing with Nehanda, executed in 1898, reveals a gendered pantheon: Chaminuka is remembered for wisdom and foresight, Nehanda for sacrifice and the promise of rebirth (Charumbira 2015). Nehanda's medium, Charwe Nyakasikana, was hanged by the colonial authorities for her role in the risings, and her reported prophecy that her bones would rise again framed the liberation war of the 1960s and 1970s as a second rising (Ranger 1967, Lan 1985). Chaminuka, by contrast, is remembered principally as a martyr of Ndebele violence before colonial conquest. Charumbira (2015) shows that the transformation of a historical medium into a national mother figure involved reshaping traditions in line with nationalist and patriarchal ideals, and a similar process elevated Chaminuka into the wise father of the nation. These representations draw on, but also simplify, the complex roles that male and female mhondoro and their mediums have played in Shona religion (Bourdillon 1987).

In post-colonial Zimbabwe, the name Chitungwiza was given to a large town south of Harare, linking the urban landscape to Chaminuka's memory even as it overlays the places once associated with the spirit (Fontein 2006). From the early 2000s, Ranger (2004) identified a state-sponsored 'patriotic history' emphasising an unbroken struggle for land from the 1890s to land reform, in which the ancestors were invoked as symbols. Chaminuka's prophecy of strangers taking the land lent itself to this narrative, since it could be read as anticipating colonial dispossession and the recovery of land in the twenty-first century as the fulfilment of the ancestors' will. When the memory of an ancestral spirit is enlisted in partisan politics, however, its capacity to

embody shared values may be compromised, and communities that venerate Chaminuka may find their own relationship with the spirit overshadowed by national narratives. Interpreted through Afrocentricity, this theme shows both the power of Chaminuka as a symbol of African agency and the danger of his capture by partisan politics.

Sociological Underpinnings

Sociologically, the findings show that Chaminuka's greatness rests on forms of authority and collective memory that are socially produced. Weber (1978) defined charisma as an extraordinary quality attributed to a person by followers, and distinguished it from traditional and legal-rational authority; Chaminuka's powers over rain, healing and prophecy are classic attributes of charisma, while the succession of mediums represents what Weber called the routinisation of charisma, through which personal authority is transmitted to an office (Fry 1976, Lan 1985). Durkheim (1995) argued that sacred symbols are collective representations through which a group worships itself, and the elevation of Chaminuka from a regional mhondoro to a national ancestor illustrates how a symbol comes to represent an ever wider community (Ranger 1982). Halbwachs (1992) showed that memory is sustained within social frameworks, and Connerton (1989) that it is reproduced through commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices, which in Chaminuka's case include possession rituals, rain ceremonies and nationalist commemorations. Nora (1989) described lieux de mémoire as sites where memory crystallises when living traditions weaken, and Chitungwiza, the heroes' narratives and school textbooks function as such sites (Charumbira 2015). Carlyle (1841) proposed that history is shaped by great men, a theory sociologists have largely rejected; yet the popular description of Chaminuka as the great man of all times reveals what a society values, here spiritual wisdom and fidelity to the land rather than conquest.

A sociological reading directs attention to power, inequality and the nation. Anderson (1983) described nations as imagined communities produced through shared narratives. Smith (1986) argued that nations draw on ethnic myths and symbols of origin; Chaminuka provides such a symbol for Zimbabwean nationalism (Chigwedere 1980, Mutswairo 1983). Hobsbawm (1983) showed that traditions are often invented to legitimate new institutions, while Gramsci (1971) explained how ruling groups secure hegemony by presenting their interests as common sense, a process visible in 'patriotic history' (Ranger 2004). Bourdieu (1977) argued that symbolic capital can be converted into political power, and claims to speak for Chaminuka have been sources of such capital for mediums and politicians alike (Ranger 1982). Fanon (1963) warned that national consciousness can degenerate into the rule of a narrow elite. Worsley (1957) showed that prophetic movements flourish in conditions of colonial disruption. Gendered analysis inspired by Oyěwùmí (1997) reveals how the national pantheon was shaped by nationalist and patriarchal ideals (Charumbira 2015). Berger and Luckmann (1966) add that social reality, including the authority of spirits and the status of national heroes, is constructed and maintained through shared meanings and institutional practices, which helps explain how traditions recorded by ethnographers and taught in schools came to confront later generations as objective history. These sociological underpinnings complement Afrocentricity by showing that Chaminuka's memory is socially produced and can be reshaped towards a more inclusive national identity.

Anthropological Underpinnings

Anthropologically, the findings indicate that Chaminuka must be understood within the cultural system of Shona spirit mediumship. Geertz (1973) described religion as a system of symbols that formulates conceptions of a general order of existence, and the mhondoro cults link land, rain, lineage and political authority in such an order (Bourdillon 1987, Lan 1985). Kopytoff (1971) argued that African ancestors are elders who continue to exercise authority, and Chaminuka, speaking through mediums, is an elder of the whole plateau. Lewis (1971) distinguished central possession cults, which uphold the moral order, from peripheral cults of the marginalised, and the mhondoro cults are clearly central, legitimating chiefs and land rights. Beattie and Middleton (1969) showed that spirit mediumship across Africa expresses and regulates social relations, Lambek (1981) that possession is a culturally structured system of communication, and Boddy (1989) that spirits offer commentary on history and power. Garbett (1966, 1977) and Fry (1976) demonstrated that Shona mediums articulate consensus and intervene in succession, while Turner (1974) described 'social dramas' in which breaches, crises and redress reveal the structure of a society. Gluckman (1954) showed that rituals can express tension and rebellion while affirming the social order, and Horton (1971) that African religious

systems explain, predict and control events, which helps explain the significance of Chaminuka's prophecies.

Anthropology should be examined critically for the discipline was implicated in colonial representations of African religion. Colonial accounts depicted Chaminuka as a 'wizard' and mediums as charlatans or dangerous agitators, images that informed the suppression of mediums after the risings (Selous 1893, Ranger 1967). Evans-Pritchard (1937) had shown that beliefs about mystical power form coherent systems embedded in social relations, and later scholars, including Vansina (1985), demonstrated that oral traditions are historical sources with their own logic of transmission. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) analysed how missionaries and colonial states sought to remake African consciousness, and Abraham's (1966) ambitious reconstruction of mhondoro history illustrates the risks of reading coherent political systems into fragmentary traditions (Beach 1994). These debates encourage collaborative research in which mediums, elders and communities associated with Chaminuka act as co-interpreters of their traditions, consistent with Chilisa (2020) and Mkabela (2005). Douglas (1966) further shows that ritual creates and maintains order by marking boundaries, and the tests of authenticity applied to mediums who claim Chaminuka's spirit are ritual means of distinguishing true possession from false, protecting the integrity of the cult (Gelfand 1959). Turner's (1969) concept of liminality also illuminates possession, in which the medium is temporarily neither himself nor wholly the spirit. The anthropological underpinning therefore combines appreciation of Chaminuka within a meaningful religious system with critical awareness of how knowledge about him has been produced and used.

Implications for African Cultural Values

The findings carry important implications for African cultural values. Chaminuka embodies values at the heart of unhu/ubuntu: wisdom, care for the land, healing, respect for ancestors and responsibility for the community (Samkange and Samkange 1980, Ramose 1999). His greatness is measured not by conquest or wealth but by service to the people through rain, healing and counsel, an ideal of leadership that stands in contrast to the pursuit of personal power (Mbiti 1969). Remembering Chaminuka in this light offers young Zimbabweans a model of leadership grounded in African values.

A second implication concerns identity, dignity and inclusion. Wa Thiong'o (1986) argued that a people taught to despise their history lose confidence in themselves. The colonial portrayal of Chaminuka as a 'wizard' contributed to such a loss. Reclaiming him as a figure of indigenous knowledge affirms the Afrocentric principle that Africans must view their history from their own location (Asante 2003). Schools, museums, churches and families should present Chaminuka through plural traditions and as a shared heritage of all Zimbabweans.

A third implication concerns the relationship between the living and the ancestors. Chaminuka's continuing presence through mediums expresses the African understanding that the dead remain members of the community and that history is a living relationship rather than a closed record (Mbiti 1969, Kopytoff 1971). Respecting this understanding requires that historians, educators and heritage practitioners honour the religious significance of Chaminuka for those who venerate him, even as they subject traditions to critical analysis (Vansina 1985, Chilisa 2020). Such respect is itself an expression of ubuntu.

Synthesis

Taken together, the four themes show that Chaminuka is rooted in the religious and political order of the VaNyayi of the Mutapa and Rozvi states, that his authority bridged the mhondoro and Mwari systems, that his medium's killing in 1883 made him a figure of prophecy and martyrdom, and that he was later made into a national icon (Ranger 1982, Mutswairo 1983). Interpreted through Afrocentricity and sociological and anthropological perspectives, his greatness lies in embodying continuity between the ancestors and the nation. At the same time, his memory has been contested, reshaped and at times appropriated, so that understanding Chaminuka requires attention to the layers of tradition, interpretation and politics through which he is known today across Zimbabwe and well beyond.

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CONCLUSION

The article examined Chaminuka, the great man of all times, and the VaNyayi of the Mutapa and Rozvi states, drawing on secondary data. It showed that Chaminuka was a senior mhondoro bridging the Mutapa and Rozvi religious worlds. The killing of Pasipamire transformed him into a martyr whose prophecy was believed fulfilled. Ethnographers, nationalists, novelists and the post-colonial state reshaped his memory (Ranger 1982, Charumbira 2015). The article makes two contributions. First, it brings Chaminuka, the VaNyayi and the pre-colonial states into a single analytical frame. Second, by applying Afrocentricity critically with sociological and anthropological perspectives, it argues that Chaminuka's greatness is cumulative and collective, built by mediums and communities across centuries. Unlike a historical individual whose life is bounded by birth and death, Chaminuka continues to exist as a mhondoro, speaking through successive mediums and accumulating a history that extends across centuries. His greatness is therefore the greatness of an institution and a tradition as well as of a person, which challenges the individualism of the 'great man' theory (Carlyle 1841) and affirms an African understanding of history as a relationship between the living and the dead (Mbiti 1969, Kopytoff 1971). Recognising this complexity is essential for an inclusive memory. Approaches that dismiss Chaminuka as myth deny Africans their own ways of knowing the past.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the findings, the article makes the following recommendations.

1. **Document oral traditions.** Universities and National Archives should record traditions about Chaminuka from mediums, elders and communities, under community control (Vansina 1985, Chilisa 2020).

2. **Protect sites of memory.** Heritage authorities should identify and protect places associated with Chaminuka in consultation with custodians (Fontein 2006).

3. **Respect living religious practice.** Researchers and heritage institutions should consult mediums and custodians before publishing or displaying material relating to Chaminuka, recognising his continuing religious significance (Bourdillon 1987, Lan 1985).

4. **Promote further research.** Scholars should combine oral, archival and archaeological evidence on the VaNyayi and the Mutapa and Rozvi states (Beach 1994, Pikirayi 2001).

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