Oral traditions as heritage: the historiography of oral historical research on the Shona communities of Zimbabwe. some methodological concerns

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Introduction

In Zimbabwe oral historiography has been a slave to traditional political and intellectual discourses that have to a large extent dictated the manner in which the oral traditions have been collected and used. In this paper I attempt to chart the trends and the motivations behind the collection of oral traditions on and about Zimbabwe right from the first oral history collections of the Rhodesian Native Affairs Department in search for the identity of its African subjects up to those collected and interpreted by modern researchers. The paper also attempts to trace the emergence of a pool of scholars also known as antiquarians who spent a lot of time and effort collecting and publishing this oral material mostly within the context of native administration and missionary interest. It also looks at the early academic interests in oral traditions roused by anthropological research and how oral traditions came to be the focus of academic debate within successive theoretical paradigms from the nationalist discourses of the 1960s right through the various versions of Marxism. This was the point when oral traditions had become synonymous with pre-colonial history so that by the close of the 1970s there were more people working on pre-colonial topics in Zimbabwe than any other, a development that contrasts sharply with the apparent dearth in actual research on this period in the following two decades. Apart from the growing crop of local archaeologists in the country, the historian David Beach to some level, remained amongst the few who kept the flag flying in pre-colonial studies until the late 1990s. It is quite conceivable therefore that any meaningful discussion of oral methodology in Zimbabwe would need to focus much on the evolution of his work. It is hardly surprising in such a context that amid other factors David Beach was

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complaining of isolation in this field as late as 1998[1]. This however need not imply that oral historiography in Zimbabwe should only be perceived of as Shona historiography. Nonetheless, very little has emerged from the Ndebele stable since Julian Cobbing's magisterial doctoral thesis that still remains unpublished and Kent Rasmussen's *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi: Ndebele in South Africa*[2] save for the fact that in the recent past, Phathisa Nyathi has been putting together some Ndebele oral traditions which he has made available in a number of publications. These however still require a more academic presentation than Nyathi's amateurish and hagiographic style which stems chiefly from the latter's lack of training as an academic historian[3]. There are in fact new developments that have taken place in the new millennium with a number of higher degree theses nearing completion at various universities across the world, one focusing directly on and being a thorough revision of the orthodox views of the Ndebele state.[4] It would be rather too premature to comment on these developments at this point. Suffice it to say that Ndebele oral historiography shall soon be on its feet again.

Oral tradition as heritage

In the light of the above, if we take heritage to imply in the broadest sense what we inherit as a generation from those who went before us, then oral traditions by definition fit within the framework of the discourse on and about heritage. The conference theme 'Heritage Creation and Historical Research' could therefore never have been more apt. In this sense I have in mind Vansina's definition of oral traditions as verbal messages that are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation.[5] However in the traditions concerning the Shona, it seems this definition has required a little modification to accommodate even those statements *about* the past rather than the ones simply derived from it.[6] Both definitions nonetheless are

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1. D. BEACH, 'Zimbabwe; Pre-colonial History, Demographic Disaster and the University', *Zambezia* xxvi, (1), 1999
2. Rex Collins, London, 1978.
3. P. NYATHI, *Igugu LikaMthwakazi Imbali YamaNdebele, 1830-1893,*(Mambo Press, Gweru, 1994).
4. Sabelo Jeremiah Gatsheni-Ndlovu has just submitted a DPhil thesis on 'The Dynamics of Human Rights and Democracy in the Ndebele State' to the University of Zimbabwe at the same time as Professor Ray Roberts is putting final touches to a manuscript on the fall of the Ndebele Monarchy.
5. J. VANSINA, *Oral Tradition As History* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1985).
6. D.N. BEACH, *A Zimbabwean Past: Shona Dynastic histories and Oral Traditions* (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1994), 251.

informed by the thinking that the message is as much a product of society as it is a by-product of human memory and thus a text subject to interpretation. We will look briefly at these two key concepts of memory and interpretation before assessing that of heritage.

First, memory involves remembering those aspects of human *experience* and representing them in the manner that closely resembles what we wish to describe. This form of transmission is inhibited by a number of factors that are all subject to human shortcomings involving in most cases forgetting and/or memory lapse. However, it appears that the choice over what is to be memorized is the most crucial because the human mind is at liberty to choose what is best for it to remember for specific reasons leaving out certain things and in the majority of cases it turns out that most of what is retained must of necessity relate to the present otherwise there is no motivation to keep anything for posterity. This has been termed 'selectivity' in some cases and it is the most important aspect of memory where the individual consciously makes an input into the manner in which *facts* are represented in the transmission process.[7] It involves and is sometimes part of 'interpretation' where information can be altered to assume new forms of meaning, which in Vansina's view, is the most creative and thus the most dangerous characteristic of oral traditions.[8] This is at the individual level but there is also the collective level where a group of individuals deriving commonality in a specific form of identity, whether imagined or real, may want to interpret the past in the same way and, in some cases, believe in such a past. In this paper I will discuss a form of interpretation from without, involving not the individuals themselves on whose memory a particular history is dependent but others imposing the form and manner in which their memory is 'organised'. This interpretation is common especially amongst formerly colonised and previously non-literate societies where alien social systems have been superimposed on existing ones and writing replaced orality as the means of formal communication. The problem lies in the permanence of written sources and the volatility of oral ones and it is this form of interpretation that should be the focus of methodological formulations for the oral traditions of particularly the Shona of Zimbabwe from which examples in this paper are mostly drawn.

Orality and literacy

For Dossou all oral societies face the core problem of how to preserve the memory of human experience. This makes such memory social and historical rather than individualist, implying that it is only those elements that meet the

7. Vansina; *Oral Tradition as History,* pp. 190-192.
8. *Ibid*, p. 191.

highest standards of the civilisation which are worth preserving. He equally observes that literate societies consider societies without writing as inferior as shown by the fact that even the standard historians use to distinguish between history and prehistory is in fact the presence or absence of writing.[9] Consequently some historians went on to coin rules of operation with oral sources tantamount to rendering the latter useless. As Luise White observes, in a rather intriguing way; historians -including herself-had taken Africa, stripped her oral arts and 'all their rich contradictions within and between oral forms' into linear forms of evidence.[10] She maintains that the methodology championed by Vansina seeking to let Africans speak for themselves was rooted in colonial discipline, which placed oral history on the same footing as trials which sought to arrive at an agreed version of the past. For her it is not the search for a 'truth' that should guide the method of the historian, rather even those testimonies which have no basis in the truth may better inform us about the past as the ones based on it. In this way Luise White argued for rumour to be an important source and it is entirely on the uses of rumour that her magnificent book on the Vampires draws upon.[11] Here she argues that what is important about rumour and indeed gossip is that it comes and goes with great intensity, and that people themselves act on the rumours even if they do not fully believe in them. In this book she sought to show that history was beyond the true or false analogy.[12] For her it is the primary job of the historian to negotiate between contradictory accounts, and thus it need not be a problem if such accounts come from the same person. Individual testimony should be a social product just as oral and written texts are a product of the selection and interpretation by their speakers and writers respectively. In the final analysis historians who reinterpret these texts simply add 'another layer of interpretation'.[13] I have alluded to this in someway in my analysis of the significance and meaning of landscape to the Shona, where I saw layers of such interpretations of landscape by successive

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9. F. C. DOSSOU, 'Writing and Oral Traditions in The Transmission of Knowledge', in P HOUNTONGJI (ed.) *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails*, (CODESRIA Books, Dakar, 1997), pp. 283-285.
10. L. WHITE, 'The Most Telling: Lies Secrets and History', *South African Historical Journal*, 42, 2000, p. 12
11. L WHITE, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*, (University of Carlifornia Press, Los Angeles, 2000), This book is also available online at http://www-ucpress.berkeley.edu.3030/dynaweb/public/books/africa/white
12. L. WHITE, 'The Most Telling: Lies Secrets and History', *South African Historical Journal*, 42, 2000, p.13.
13. *Ibid*., p. 21.

dynasties amongst the southern Shona as representing not only the history of that landscape but its historiography[14].

It is this aspect of interpretation that oral traditions share with heritage and that which in fact qualifies them as heritage such that the methodologies of both themes should necessarily inform each other. More strikingly however, it is the word heritage itself that seems to have acquired layers of association and meaning to the extent that it could literary be 'anything you want'![15] Heritage has in fact come to assume various economic and commercial overtones and is as much a contemporary creation as oral traditions are. Heritage is also malleable and subject to cultural choice with particular groups making conscious decisions to select that, which in their culture should be considered significant. In Robert Hewison's view the definition of heritage is itself the product of conflicting interests and its real meaning should be the jobs of cultural critics to decipher. Such cultural criticisms can be divided into stewardship which is concerned with preservation and scholarship which seeks both to preserve and interpret the significance of heritage in the contemporary context. Underlying both these forms of cultural criticism is the notion of identity and its location.[16] Identity is rooted in history; 'you don't know who you are if you don't know where you have been', and it also involves naming, that is; 'you are who you are because you are not them'. In all instances the motivation is 'appropriation' of heritage so that it assumes an identity of its own which is in itself a hegemonic exercise. We need also to underline yet another characteristic of heritage that Hewison underscores which is very pertinent and resonates well with our earlier discussion of rumour, that is, Heritage as a source and vehicle for *myth*. Here, it is suggested that myth like rumour is not necessarily untrue, but that it is true in a special sense in that it has truth for a great many people and this general belief gives it a contemporary validity. It may contain elements that are unhistorical or a-historical, but it adds up to a cultural 'truth' that may constitute national, local, and even individual, identity[17]

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14. G.C. MAZARIRE, 'Landscape and Memory in Shona Oral Traditions: The Past as Perceived by the Mhari and Hera People of Southern Zimbabwe' in G.C. MAZARIRE AND T.O. RANGER (eds.) *Down To Earth: A Historical Study of Landscape in Zimbabwe* (forthcoming).
15. R. HEWISON, 'Heritage and Interpretation', in D. UZZELL (ed.), *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1: The Natural and Built Environment*, (Belhaven Press, London, 1989), p. 15.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
17. *Ibid.* See also J. VANSINA, *Oral Tradition as History*, p. 23 who argues that mythical accounts justify the basis of existing society.

In Zimbabwe literature on heritage has concentrated on dispelling such myths derived mostly from conflicting claims to preserve certain heritages. To start with Ranger's fascinating account of the Matopos hills is much revealing. The Matopos controversy is an admixture of claims by the autochthonous 'Banyubi' and the Ndebele who came to profess an Ndebele *identity* reached at as a form of rebuttal to the conservationist rhetoric of the colonialists. It is in fact on the basis of this identity that a metaphor of resistance was constructed, which informed and shaped the nationalist struggle in the Matopos.[18]More debates have featured on the heritage of the Great Zimbabwe monument where Ashton Sinamai has shown the conflicting interpretations of antiquarians, scientists and the white settler community of Rhodesia that had virtually excluded the views of the indigenous people and how, with the escalation of the liberation struggle, Great Zimbabwe was turned into a place for spiritual sanctification by the guerrillas. Thus in the late 1970s when the National Museums and Monuments had abandoned the site fearing guerrilla reprisals, it was taken over by a spirit medium who assumed its custodianship and gave spiritual guidance to these guerrillas, a process which gave rise to a new nationalist interpretation of Great Zimbabwe[19]. In a recent study of Great Zimbabwe, Weber Ndoro shows that this medium Sophia Muchini had not only been imprisoned by the Rhodesian authorities during this period but that well after independence she continued to lay her claims to the custodianship of the Great Zimbabwe shrine which were surprisingly challenged by the new government which was now interpreting the monument as a symbol of unity. The irony became that it was in fact the Zimbabwe National Army composed of former guerrillas that was sent to evict her[20].

Ndoro's work points to the apparent continuity in the heritage management policies at Great Zimbabwe attributable to the continued links with Europe the heritage managers have had before and after independence through such international agents as UNESCO. This has dovetailed heritage management in Southern Africa to western ideas and international demands as opposed to local values. In Ndoro's view it is this emergence of a new heritage management elite whose values are entirely commercial that has mortgaged

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18. T.O. RANGER, *Voices From The Rocks: Nature, Culture And History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*, (James Currey, Oxford, 1999).

19. A. SINAMAI, 'Heritage in Politics: Great Zimbabwe in the Struggle for Self-Determination', in E.M. CHIWOME AND Z. GAMBAHAYA (eds.) *Culture and Development: Perspectives From the South*, (Mond Books, Harare, 1998), pp. 95-96.

20. W. NDORO, *Your Monument, Our Shrine: The Preservation of Great Zimbabwe;* (Uppsala University, 2001), p. 47.

indigenous views and feelings about the past held by the wider community.[21] Coming back to the issue of mythology and heritage Ndoro makes the interesting observation that some aspects of myths about the origins of Great Zimbabwe as well as some stereotypes about Africans and Africa still linger in Shona oral traditions on and about Great Zimbabwe. If we look closely at this, we can tell just how much the way we perceive and interpret our past can be imposed on us to become a fact of every day life whether wrong or right and to arrive at the context in which that past is constructed we need a method that helps us to know the process of the production of that knowledge or better still the establishment of that hegemony.

The politics of the production of knowledge in Southern Rhodesia: rethinking the tribe and mapping the chiefdom

I have been a reluctant convert of 'invention' theories for the obvious reasons. Among them, my strong conviction that Africans had the power to make independent choices about who they wanted to be despite colonial pressures such as education or Christianity which they remained largely repulsive to except where they seemed to offer socio-economic advantages. I have however embraced the concept of 'imagination' as a conscious and pro-active but selfish contribution of human nature because of the motivations behind all forms of imaginations. Thus although acknowledging that the discourse emanating from such people as Native Administrators and missionaries came to actually constitute the written texts on which the early history of the Shona is based, I have reservations in seeing the Africans as passive consumers of 'invented tradition' except where they seek to manipulate it.[22] Here I wish to dwell on how Europeans in Zimbabwe, missionaries and administrators alike, through their literary tradition, contributed in a large way in shaping the manner in which the African past was remembered. This is at two levels; first at the social level where their reorganisation of African society dictated the way the memory of the Africans would configure any form of identity and secondly at the scholarly level through their literary representation of African life. The latter is a heritage on its own especially if we consider how early colonial literary texts have gone through successive waves of interpretations by generations of scholars of differing paradigmatic persuasions.

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21. *Ibid.,* p. 8.

22. This stems from my difference with the invention school over the issue of Missionary invention of language which I discuss in detail in a forthcoming paper 'The Rise and Fall of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Victoria Circle'.

In the first case it is primarily British rather than Portuguese perceptions that are critical because despite the Portuguese's strong penchant for writing and publishing on the societies of the Zimbabwean plateau, their presence in this region, even during the time of the Mutapa state, never approached any semblance of virtual control (administratively) as to affect greatly the societies therein, let alone influence their conception of the past. On the scholarly level again British sources or those of the Native Affairs Department dominate for the same reason, whereas Portuguese, German or even Dutch material are of importance only where they feature to beef up the worldview of these men on the spot. Terence Ranger highlights this more illustratively when he advances that the white society of Southern Rhodesia were masters in the business of producing models of African societies, customs and conduct.[23] In his view the absence of a pool of professional anthropologists in Southern Rhodesia as those who had emerged in South Africa at the same time meant that these administrators, who mobilised the Africans for employment and kept them working, were also the men who produced the authorised versions of the African past, of African customs and of African 'personality'. These were mostly the Native Commissioners and missionaries whose findings often found an outlet in the *Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA)*. Apart from having a predominantly rural and traditional focus, Ranger finds that even the most esoteric article in *NADA* had something to do with labour management because employers needed to know about the custom so that they could get the best value of African labour and keep it fit and contented.[24] This view is not peculiar to the early colonial period nor to the rural folk alone but as Ranger's later works and the modern urban studies show, specific ethnic factors apparently invented by the administrators themselves did shape their recruitment and labour policies as late as the 1950s and 60s. Thus the idea of the Manyika as good houseboys, the Tonga's affinity for night soil work or being 'Shangani' meaning higher pay at the Rand mines is rooted in this constructionist framework.[25] Eric Worby however believes that it was within the primary mandate to discover the most expedient mechanisms of collecting tax and controlling the exercise that induced the colonial officials to search for some

23. T.O. RANGER, 'The Mobilisation for Labour and the Production of Knowledge: The Antiquarian Tradition in Rhodesia', *Journal of African History*, 20, 1979, p. 507.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 508.

25. See T.O. RANGER, 'Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika', in L. VAIL AND L WHITE (eds.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (James Currey, London, 1989), see also B. RAFTOPOLOUS & T. YOSHIKUNI (eds.) *Sites of Struggle: Essays in the Labour History of Zimbabwe*, (Weaver Press, Harare, 1999).

minimal ethnographic knowledge of their subjects.[26] In the realm of language, Diana Jeater demonstrates that whereas the language abilities of the native commissioners continued to be based on what could be learned from speaking with natives, it was the opposite with missionaries. Their language projects were important not because they helped them to converse with Africans, but because they enabled them to appropriate African languages and reinvent them within the Christian tradition.[27] It was this language competence and 'ethnological insight' that were the essential tools for the Native Affairs Department and the missionaries to fully execute their work and this is why their projects often overlapped.

However the important point is that these early 'experts' did infact give rise to a group of Antiquarian scholars who have received much better scrutiny elsewhere to be repeated here.[28] Although scholars have sought to make a distinction, I do not see any fundamental disjuncture between antiquarian and whatever is called professional anthropology except paradigmatic differences. After all most of these early colonial officials were recruited from amongst anthropologists[29]. What can only be said is that these officials were predominantly male and this patriarchal bias is omnipresent in their accounts. I wish to draw some parallels with the situation in neighbouring British governed Northern Rhodesia where Kate Crehan makes a number of interesting observations.[30] She echoes Ranger's sentiments that the need to be effective administrators demanded that colonial officials should penetrate the mysteries of African societies. In Northern Rhodesia as elsewhere in colonial Africa the concept of 'the tribe' was central in their analysis. To

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26. E. WORBY, 'Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Iconography of Colonial Power in Northwestern Zimbabwe' in *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 20(3), 1994, p. 380.
27. D. JEATER, 'Speaking Like a Native: Vernacular Languages and the State in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1935' in *Journal of African History*, 42, 2001, pp. 454, 456.
28. D.N. BEACH, *'NADA* and Mafohla: Antiquarianism in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe with Special Reference to the Work of F.W.T. POSSELT, *History in Africa*, 13, 1986; G.C. MAZARIRE, 'First Steps in The Oral Historiography of The Midlands: A Review of the Work of Harald von Sicard 1941-1973', Paper Presented to The Historical Dimensions of Development in the Midlands Conference, Gweru, 4-5 May 2001.
29. A. ROBERTS, 'The Imperial Mind', in A. Roberts (ed.), *The Colonial Moment in Africa: Essays on The Movement of Minds and Materials 1900-1940,* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), 1990, 41
30. K. CREHAN, 'Tribes and The People Who read Books: Managing History in Colonial Zambia' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23(2), 1997.

them it was the basic unit of rural society, which governed the way the Africans lived and acted and thus one which ought to inform the way they should be administered.[31] The 'tribe' was a familiar category that these early administrators had encountered in their studies in the classical mythologies of Ancient Greeks, Barbarians, Britons and Germanic tribes, which had been part of their own heritage.[32] Now as they viewed the African peoples as occupying the lowest echelons of the civilisation ladder, they equally perceived the African societies as living representations of how they themselves had lived in ancient times; the Africans were therefore a culture in situ. In this discourse emerged a series of tribal stereotypes discernible in the annual reports of these officials where different characteristics of different tribes were evoked to explain what was happening in particular areas. Thus each official would tend to have his own favoured tribe or 'tribes'. In the case of Southern Rhodesia specific 'empires' were created with J. Blake 'Marhumbini' Thompson carving out a niche in the lowveld, Harald von Sicard on Mberengwa, F.W.T. Posselt on Marandellas and Salisbury districts and so the list goes on.In this way a trend was set for generations of scholars to come, culminating in what I have termed intellectual tribalism elsewhere.[33] The focus of these early ethnographies remained centred on the chiefs and chiefdoms where they worked. Tribal genealogies, histories, customs and folk tales were the inevitable products of these projects which were in the most cases perfected to 'show off the degree of intimacy achieved with natives around a campfire'.[34]

'Tribes' in the eyes of the colonial officials thus became a simple 'common sense fact' although the meaning of the concept of 'tribe' was not necessarily the same to the Africans themselves. It is also these 'facts' that have been taken wholesale by the so-called professionals that followed these antiquarians, the anthropologists and historians alike. We are told that in Northern Rhodesia the 'tribe' was a rallying call for the anthropologists of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (RLI) where all the amateur anthropologists beginning fieldwork were first apprenticed to a particular 'tribe' to map out its basic structures before proceeding to their own areas of intended

31. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
32. *Ibid.*
33. MAZARIRE, 'First Steps in the Historiography of the Midlands', 25
34. E. WORBY, 'Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Iconography of Colonial Power in Northwestern Zimbabwe' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20(3), 1994, p. 384.

fieldwork. Again this produced 'specialists' in particular tribes such as Victor Turner on the Ndembu, Elizabeth Colson on the Tonga and so on. [35]

The authority of identifying the 'tribe' went together with that of naming it and allocating it a socio-geographic space, that is mapping it. In Southern Rhodesia this ethnocartography as Eric Worby prefers to call it was far much more pronounced although it often had to confront the problem of the refusal by colonial subjects to be placed in these cartographic pigeonholes by constantly shifting their identities.[36] According to Worby, this use of tribal maps to represent relations of political power over social space has been an important means through which academic constructs have been used as instruments of colonial domination.[37] In other words, naming and mapping were useful means of establishing settler hegemony. Yet this is just one side to it, the other is the deletion of existing identities by these maps. My current project on Chishanga in South-eastern Zimbabwe is caught up in the dilemma of attempting to resuscitate a vanished pre-colonial Shona polity, an exercise complicated by the fact that it no longer is a common sense 'fact' of history after this new colonial ethnocartography[38]. Diana Jeater identifies what she calls a laager mentality within the Native Affairs Department which addressed its insecurity by trying to erect boundaries around 'native culture' and to impose its own systems of order on its subjects the first step in such a process being linguistic standardisation. This involved an imposition of spatial order; mapping languages into definable places and onto defined people. This linguistic hygiene was a means of achieving that sort of order by placing symbolic boundaries on the people and their behaviour. But as this was often done ad-hoc with the intention to impose a new kind of heritage on the people, the situation would not always work perfectly on the ground. Thus by 1927 a standard map juxtaposing these tribal and linguistic boundaries had been produced that was to influence the ethnographic

35. K. CREHAN, 'Tribes and The People Who read Books: Managing History in Colonial Zambia' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23(2), 1997, pp. 211-213.

36. E. WORBY, 'Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Iconography of Colonial Power in Northwestern Zimbabwe' in *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 20(3), 1994, p. 371.

37. *Ibid*.

38. G.C. MAZARIRE, 'Changing landscape and Oral Memory: Towards a Historical Geography of Chishanga, Southeastern Zimbabwe', Paper Presented to the 'Historical Geographies of Southern Africa Symposium', University of Sussex at Brighton, 4-5 April 2002.

methodologies of the Native Affairs Department and various other scholars who came after.[39]

Although antiquarians could be said to have thrived before the second world war, their work was not put to administrative use until well after the war when the use of such expert knowledge to map relations of power came to assume a new significance.[40] Antiquarianism proper however did not die. We need however to examine the effect of these 'campfire ethnographies' on the oral heritage of the people being represented. Coming back to Luise White's question on the oral methodology for the 'truth,' it is clear that the informants of these officials were mostly chiefs and headmen, or African government employees. Apart from their patriarchal bias as men, such informants almost always took the opportunity to champion their political goals, and it is only in this sense that we see a resonance between the 'invention of tradition' by the coloniser and its 'imagination' by the colonised based as it were on what Worby has called the overlap in conceptions held by colonisers and the colonised on the relationship between power, conquest, and kinship.[41] After the war Worby shows that whatever work showing that tribes did not fit into discrete and uniform territories was suppressed due to the shift in Rhodesian Native Policy seeking to stabilise labour and initiate 'community development'.

Implicit in this discourse was turning the tribesmen into producers and the strategy for achieving this goal was to give more power to the chiefs and reducing those the government bureaucrats. This was the motive underlying the production of tribal maps and the form in which they appeared. The Native Affairs Department was the chief casualty of this shift in policy towards developmentalist discourse and in 1963 it eventually folded to give way to the Ministry of Internal Affairs which continued to work on the same lines but clad in developmentalist garb.[42]

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39. Based on D. JEATER, 'Speaking Like a Native: Vernacular Languages and the State in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1935' in *Journal of African History*, 42, 2001, pp. 464-465

40. E. WORBY, 'Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Iconography of Colonial Power in Northwestern Zimbabwe' in *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 20(3), 1994, p.384

41. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

42. T.O. RANGER, 'The Mobilisation for Labour and the Production of Knowledge: The Antiquarian Tradition in Rhodesia', *Journal of African History*, 20, 1979, p. 520-21.

Professional Anthropology and the maps

The end of the Native Affairs Department did not mean the end of its ethnographic research or a cessation of its publication *NADA*. However it witnessed an end to orthodox antiquarian contributions to it. A combination of the establishment of Anthropology as a discipline and the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN) posed a fundamental intellectual challenge to antiquarianism in general. This coupled with the end of the Native Department and the rise of nationalism in the rural areas signalled the end of the campfire ethnographies but for our purposes, the hand over of the oral heritage to the more paradigmatically volatile world of academia. However as has already been mentioned, to me there is no radical break between antiquarianism and the new anthropology of the mushrooming universities and institutes. In effect they borrowed much from each other due to their relatedness to the colonial project. There was an interesting coincidence however in this fascination with maps by both the Rhodesian government and the anthropologists at the time, especially those drawn from the RLI.[43]

The mapping for community development required the delineation of the actual communities themselves, a project that required yet another ethnographic effort. It was supposed that it would not take long to define the communities that were going to be developed and delineation officers were appointed. There were various theoretical discussions of the purpose of the exercise and how to achieve it and this contributed to the delay in compiling these reports for everywhere, but when they came they tended to become more complicated and full. Later they inevitably came to be seen as important sources of intelligence for rural structures by the Rhodesian Front government during the war. These are the sources on which our history of the modern Shona is largely based on. The mapping and naming that accompanied this process is part of what Crehan has seen as hegemony where dominant groups are able to maintain unassailable authority over their subjects by means of conceptual maps which although imposed, are kept intact by the failure of the subordinated groups to make new ones. This way the dominant group is able to confine the challenges of the subordinated group in a terrain that is mapped out. It is in this context that Africans were unable to articulate any challenge to the state outside the discourse of the

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43. For a more recent analysis of the form and content of Anthropology prevalent at this time and especially that taught at the UCRN see V.N. MUZVIDZIWA, 'The Teaching of Anthropology over the Past Forty Years: Continuities and Discontinuities' in M BABIKER, D MILLS AND M NTARAGWI (eds.), *Practising Anthropology in Post Colonial Africa: History, Pedagogy, Critique* (Forthcoming)

'tribe'.[44] It is also within this context that the idea of the tribe featured in the methodology of the study of the people of Zimbabwe and thus became a heritage that was imposed through the hegemonic vision of the administrators. The chiefdom as has already been mentioned continued as a subject of focus but more importantly it had to be legitimated by the *dynasty* but before we go on to it first let us look at the work of other professionals in Rhodesia at the time.

Donald Abraham in Shona history

Donald Abraham was the one of those people who found themselves trapped in this intellectual overlap mentioned above. There don't seem however to be any connections between him and the Rhodes Livingstone Institute. By and large he was a brilliant linguist who had come to Rhodesia to work in the Patents office when he became interested in Shona oral traditions as language texts and only secondarily as historical sources. He collected material on chiefs and spirit mediums and before the late 1960s he was employed by the Native Department when Professor Eric Stokes raised money through the Leverhulme Trust to appoint him as a research fellow in oral history at the UCRN. He was simultaneously registered for a doctorate at Oxford but he had no previous training as historian or as an anthropologist. He thought of oral traditions in terms of texts rather than as sources. He was continually in search for the authoritative text, and his interpretations could radically change as he abandoned one informant for the other. Although his most widely quoted works are concerned with the Mutapa state, he certainly worked wider than the Mutapa cluster, for instance he also wrote an influential article on the Makoni chiefs[45]. He was picked up by Roland Oliver who thought he could be another Vansina and who published his most popular article in the *Journal of African History*[46]. But his doctorate was a disaster for it had no sources and it was referred but never resubmitted.[47] Abraham appears to have used Portuguese documents very broadly but the major criticism of his work was that he had the tendency to 'feedback' the contents of these Portuguese documents to his oral informants to come out with certain 'historical facts'. David Beach has already done a

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44. K. CREHAN, 'Tribes and The People Who read Books: Managing History in Colonial Zambia' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23(2), 1997, p. 285.
45. D.P. ABRAHAM, 'The Principality of Maungwe,' *NADA*, 28, (1951).
46. *Idem*. 'Maramuca: An Exercise in the Combined Use of Portuguese Records and Oral Tradition,' *Journal of African History*, 2(2), (1961).
47. Personal Communication Professor T.O. Ranger 18/06/02.

much more thorough survey of his work[48]but for our purposes Abraham's legacy lies in his firm belief in the genealogy as the legitimator of political power, a methodology that was inherited later by even his sharpest critics. He had become a past master at the Mutapa genealogy and was busy establishing his empire in that realm when his work was overtaken by the political developments that ushered in the era of nationalist historiography. Academically this came in the form Terrence Ranger, the newly appointed history lecturer at the UCRN who had dared venture into research on seventeenth century Rhodesia on account of his being a 17th Century specialist of Irish history. The 17th century in Zimbabwean history coincides with the height of the Mutapa State, which Abraham had been working on and the latter approached Ranger to literally scare him out of his 'empire'![49] The other coincidence was that Abraham came on to the scene at a time when government policy was experiencing the fundamental shift that was mentioned above. A time when the Rhodesian government was seeking to restore the legitimacy of the chiefs as the nationalist threat increased. The broad range of powers that were given to the chiefs were in essence the creation of the government rather than those rooted in African culture. As David Lan puts it, the district commissioners had to think more deeply about what in native eyes a chief ought to be.[50] Throughout this period, Lan maintains, the administration strongly believed that real traditions were binding and unchanging and change could only be conceived of only as corruption, as loss of authenticity and therefore as loss of authority.[51] It is interesting to observe the manner in which the district commissioners came to see themselves as the vanguard of Shona tradition defending it from 'corruption' by the guerrillas. In Dande each of the government files on the records of the Dande chiefs show the endless efforts to arrive at the original and true genealogy. The district commissioners thus became de facto spirit mediums, the kingmakers responsible for appointing and firing chiefs and Abraham, for all his fascinations with the same canons of historical evidence could not have come at a better time to the government. His interpretations of Mutapa history based as they were on Guruuswa mythology and elaborate

48. D.N. BEACH, *A Zimbabwean Past: Shona Dynastic histories and Oral Traditions,* pp. 227-237. See in particular 231

49. This drama is vividly captured in T.O. RANGER, 'Concluding Remarks' in A. H. M. KIRK-GREENE (ed.), *The Emergence of Africanist History at British Universities: An Autobiographical Approach,* (Worldview Publications, Oxford, 1995), p. 168.

50. D. Lan; *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, (James Currey, London, 1985), 185

51. *Ibid.,* p. 186.

genealogies squeezed out of the Mutapa spirit medium Mutota George Kupara were precisely what the District Commissioner of Dande needed.[52] This way ethnographic research became incorporated in mainstream counter insurgency and there are striking parallels with policies of the present government. Academics for instance were commissioned to write pieces on the history and religious organisation of the Shona while government experts on native custom were made to prepare lectures and talks and programmes on television and all sorts of research about the Africans was promoted. The result was the spirit index and the 'Shamanism Book' which were used by the Rhodesian security forces to locate the guerrilla movements 'geometrically'.[53]

A note needs to be made about the Ministry of Internal Affairs at this point. It was in effect the former Native Affairs Department, which had become incorporated in the counter-insurgency scheme dubbed Combined Operations or COMOPS as the war intensified. This brought together Ministry of Internal Affairs officials, the Rhodesian Security forces, Pseudo Operations Units such as the Selous Scouts and the Police. In addition, because of the mass emigrations taking place in the country, pressure was brought to bear on available able-bodied professionals to enter into compulsory conscription into the army or 'call-up'. Academics were also targeted resulting in a mass exodus from the university. At that point academics in African studies disciplines were faced with the dilemma that emigration meant on the one hand abandoning the fledgling departments that they had set up to be doomed to collapse and on the other, to stay and make whatever knowledge was available about Africans to be at the disposal of the counterinsurgency policies of the Smith regime. In fact many academic differences did emerge as a result of this rift and these should by and large inform our critique of the knowledge produced at that time. The interesting point to make is that the most monumental work on oral traditions of the Shona is produced at this time drawing largely from these administrative histories and written also by an academic who had been commissioned by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in its policies as elucidated above. This is the work of David Beach, but before looking at it let us look at the academic context in which it emerges.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

53. NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ZIMBABWE, File S32776/4 Ministry of Internal Affairs: Security Information & Psychological Warfare n.d.

The nationalist heritage: oral traditions and the tyranny of sources

If antiquarianism had sought to locate the tribe, nationalist historiography had a different approach if not too close to being polemical. It was inspired by the search for a 'usable past' and to restore instead those African empires that had been reduced to tribes. The aim was to establish connections between early forms of resistance against colonial rule and the contemporary forms of mass nationalism that were taking shape in numerable African countries at the time. Although this form of historiography did use the oral traditions available to restore this African 'dignity' it was not essentially successful in dispelling the widespread mythology and stereotypes inherent in these oral sources collected by the colonial officials. So far this has been one of the major criticisms of nationalist historiography although nothing has been said about the nationalist rebuttal of the 'tribe'. This is typical of the response by Beach and Cobbing to Ranger's seminal *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia*[54] Criticism here rests upon the fact that Ranger over-exaggerated the role of the spirit mediums in coordinating the risings. If anything, Cobbing argued, the credit for that job amongst the Ndebele should go to the Ndebele monarchy which was still intact despite its defeat by the British in 1893. On the other hand Beach argued that there was no contact for military strategic purposes between the Shona and the shrine priests at Ranger's presumed military command centre Tabazikamambo. The only Shona people who went there did so in search of locust medicine and took the decision to join (or not to join) the risings independently when they returned home. Beach also draws our attention to the role of those who collaborated with the whites to reinforce his argument that it were local individual factors that informed the decision to take part in the war, which in itself was governed by the nature of the relationship between the African chiefs themselves and between these chiefs and the whites. To our purposes the fundamental point Beach raises is that concerning the manner in which Ranger's analysis reinforces colonialist stereotypes of the 'superstitious and conspiring native' to give a picture of the 'night of the long knives' digressing to the point of accusing Ranger of possession with the *Mhondoro* (spirit medium) of Hugh Marshall Hole, the BSA Company historian. Here Beach overemphasises the interpretive nature of colonial stereotype without looking at his colonialist interpretation of tribes under chiefdoms pre-occupied with averting *shangwa*

54. T. O. RANGER, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia: A Study in African Resistance*, (Heinemann, London, 1967), see J. R. D. COBBING, 'The Absent Priesthood: Another Look at the Rhodesian Risings of 1896-7' in *Journal of African History*, 1977, D.N. BEACH, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1986), Chapter 5.

or drought. To him this was the only way politics interacted with religion, that is, outside the realms of power relations but only within those of disaster alleviation. Beach had been working on Chibi, Chilimanzi, Charter and Hartley districts with a tribal thrust influenced by the Delineation Reports, NADA and the PER/5 Chiefs' files that had given him this political slant. This approach has been more recently challenged by Susan Keech-McIntosh who argues that there is danger in viewing power in complex societies in Africa as centrally located in individuals and the economic strategies used by these individuals to maintain and expand operational power. Power in African society needs to be understood in the context of central authority, often of a ritual nature, which is paired with a power structure that is diffuse; segmentary and heterarchical, as well as societies in which considerable complexity is achieved through horizontal differentiation and consensus based decision making.[55] Mamdani draws our attention a little further by suggesting that precolonial Africa did not have a single customary authority but several. Each of these defined custom in its own domain. There were thus age groups, clans, women's groups, chiefs, religious groups and so on but it must be noted that only one of these-chiefs-was sanctified as a native authority under indirect-rule colonialism, and only its version of custom was declared 'genuine'. The rest were officially silenced. In sanctifying the authoritarian version of custom as 'genuine' colonial power sought to construct native custom as unchanging and singular.[56]This phenomenon seems to be at the heart of the methodology of studies set within the context of the colonial period and those emerging immediately after. In my opinion Ranger's 'crisis' argument in response to his critics in 1979 seems to be inspired wholly by the desire to pay attention to other factors governing African life and informing their decisions rather than simply 'politics'. If we look at it, Cobbing's opinion is centred around the primacy of the Ndebele oligarchy, while that of Beach is one informed by dynastic decisions. Quite strikingly, nobody ever responded to Ranger. In the final analysis although nationalist historiography never conscientiously read into the colonial oral material with the intention to perpetuate myths, it is unfortunate that their preoccupation with a usable past in itself did entail blind source criticism. The nationalists were crushed by both revisionists and Marxist scholars.

55. Keech-McIntosh; 'Beyond Chiefdoms', 4

56. M. MAMDANI, 'Beyond the Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2001, p. 655.

Historical empiricism and the Marxist critique

David Beach had worked on the districts earlier mentioned entirely in response to Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia*. And as he aptly puts it, his thesis was far too much in awe of *Revolt* to be publishable and in the light of his later work he actually branded the thesis obsolete. He declared his *Shona and Zimbabwe* which draws upon mostly these oral traditions to be the sum total of his Ministry of Internal Affairs project minus the latter's censorship. Part of the space in it is dedicated to illustrating the mechanics of dodging the Ministry of Internal Affairs which to me sounds both impractical and ineffective to a regime so much convinced that African rule will never come in a thousand years and so desperate for information of the sort as Beach would so expertly provide. Abraham had just towed the line before him and there is no way to believe Beach could have shrugged off the watchful eye of COMOPS. The point to be made here is that the *Shona and Zimbabwe* makes no radical departure from the Ministry of Internal Affairs literature that it solely relies on. That is, it is strongly rooted in the tribal genealogical focus with vicious lacerations of those very genealogies in search for the genuine ones punctuated by numerous confusions with namesakes. However this happens at a time when a number of developments were taking shape in Zimbabwean historiography in which Beach's own contributions were an integral part. One such development is the growth of Marxist modes of analysis in studies on the history of Zimbabwe. Many would agree that Marxist scholarship in pre-colonial Zimbabwean scholarship was largely a fiasco compared to its success in colonial labour studies. This failure according to Phimister lay in the methodological overlap between liberal and Africanist discourse on the one hand and the new radical historiography.[57] Brian Raftopolous suggests that this failure of Marxist studies was related to the problem of understanding the nationalism-race-class triad under colonialism and the failure of both the Africanist and radical historians to adhere to a common analytical problem in this area in the 1970s.[58] It is largely this failure of Marxists to establish themselves as a paradigm that makes both Beach and Cobbing defy classification.

Marxism in Southern African historiography in general and that of Zimbabwe in particular entered by way of the 'mode of production' thesis as championed by the French historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch[59]. In Zimbabwe as elsewhere the mode of production thesis was a clarion call for

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57. I.R. PHIMISTER, 'Zimbabwe: Economic and Social Historiography since 1970', *African Affairs*, 1979, p. 78, (cxi).
58. B RAFTOPOULOS, 'Problematising Nationalism in Zimbabwe: A Historiographical Review', *Zambezia*, (1999), xxvi, (ii), p. 116.
59. J VANSINA, *Living with Africa*, 198-199, See also Raftopoulos; 120

many scholars but could not be sustained for long in pre-colonial studies of the Shona. Consequenly they evolved to the dependency theories that inspired some influential precolonial studies such as those by Mtetwa on the Duma before disappearing from the historiographical scene[60].

The most effective critique of Marxist pretensions in pre-colonial Zimbabwean history came from within the Marxist paradigm itself although coming very late in the 1990s and like all good works in Zimbabwean historiography, still remains unpublished. This is the critique by A.V. Dhliwayo of David Beach's *The Shona and Zimbabwe* which I will attempt to summarise here.[61] Dhliwayo attacks the theoretical poverty of Beach's work on the Shona, which has resulted in the author's obsession with historical facts. To Dhliwayo, Beach was an empiricist through and through. Dhliwayo was suspicious of the generousity of the ''free hand' of what he calls the 'colonial racist and oppressive Ministry of Internal Affairs' and the 'colonial Department of History of the University of Rhodesia', which enabled Beach to come up with a thousand year history of the Shona' a period too long to be handled by a method simply reaching out for hard facts.[62] Essentially Dhliwayo's critique was centred as this conference is on methodology and as far as Beach's work was concerned he questioned his attempts at applying Marxist methodology to the pre-colonial Shona. Here Dhliwayo advances that the focus on the 'branches of production' was based on a misconception, that of dividing the modes of production into the branches of production as if the mode of production was in itself empirical. This he argues, is inspired by Beach's empiricist methodology, which comes out clearly in his concern with quantitative and descriptive indices. Beach is accused of creating an ideal village on paper and then describing it and analysing it 'accurately', its personalities, social relationships, politics, economy and environment. His methodology in describing and analysing this is questionable in the sense that the village in Dhliwayo's view does not constitute a legitimate starting point for an examination of the Shona pre-colonial history throughout the whole period from 900AD to 1850.[63]

The most important part of the Dhliwayo critique however centres on the aspects that are central in Beach's analysis of Shona society, namely; the dynasty, kinship and state. In this sense Beach is seen as a reductionist in his

60. D.N. BEACH, *The Shona and their Neighbours*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994), 13

61. A.V. DHLIWAYO, 'Studying the Pre-Colonial History of the Shona of Zimbabwe: Preliminary Reflections on Some Methodological Conceptual and Professional Issues and Problems,' Unpublished Seminar Paper No. 80, Department of History, University of Zimbabwe, 1991

62. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

approach of collecting facts and presenting them with 'strict clinical objectivity' whose net effect would be to produce half-truths. We will focus on the dynasty. Dhliwayo chastises Beach for making the dynasty a central feature of pre-colonial Shona history as if it were a magical concept that threw 'infinite light on the infinite details of the Shona past'. This gave the impression that all the other Shona who did not belong to those dynasties already identified did not have a history or were in fact not Shona at all of which was short of saying Shona history was made up of this 'tiny, tiny section of the Shona'. For Dhliwayo although dynasties existed, they did not actually form the substance of Shona history; this was in fact reducing Shona history to histories of a few families.[64] This focus on dynasties and chiefs as has been illustrated above can be explainable, among other reasons, in terms of the 'tyranny of sources and the scientific settler world outlook which informs all his work'. Most of his sources are in fact traditions of origin and migration of those dynasties based on antiquarian sources as well as the delineation reports. The problem however is not on the use of these sources but the ability of the historian to transcend them; and as far as Dhliwayo is concerned Beach failed in that regard and he 'ended up being tyrannised by the world outlook and the thinking which informed them.'

This is how in Dhliwayo's perspective Shona history ended up being these dynasties history and this view that history is made by kings, chiefs and the powerful individuals is misleading. The masses the ordinary producers' material values are central to societal development and it is they who make history. For what it included or left out, in a Marxist sense, Beach's method like the ones before it focused on non-producing and unproductive dynastic families.[65] Finally on the issue of kinship, Dhliwayo observes that Beach places kinship as the fundamental concept regulating dynastic power and authority. The Shona rulers are presumed to have based their power on the strength and number of kinfolk of the main dynasty, whose numbers were kept up by the state's cattle herds. Thus in this framework of analysis, peoples, social groups and individuals are identified by Beach in terms of their totems so that like the dynasty the totemic system is raised to the level of a mystical power which actually determines people's actions, both at the territorial and the local level. We have already alluded to Susan Keech-McIntosh's revision of this line of thinking about chiefdoms and it is more or less on the same lines that Dhliwayo looks at kinship as more of a social phenomenon than a political one. In this sense, the socio-economic conditions within households and clans may lead to domination of one kingroup over another which may actually involve exploitation. Such

64. *Ibid.,* p. 15.

65. *Ibid.,* p. 16.

relationships of domination and subordination, initially purely economic might eventually develop into a system of kinship relations. Kinship system and kinship relations are actually a summation of a process which is rooted in people's system of social existence whose core are production relations.[66] We have already seen how Beach attempted to toy with this idea with the mode of production thesis but to this according to Dhliwayo was a misreading of the concept.

While I will leave the Marxist debates to the 'converted', the reason for incorparating the Dhliwayo critique, derives from the fact that although Zimbawean historians abandoned Marxist theory and theory in general for the disillusionment outlined above, their work continued to be informed by and to exhibit earlier theories in general from the trade and politics, branches of production, peasantisation, right up to worker consciousness theories.[67] The reason remains that most of their research had already been cast in stone and because of the usual gap between research and publication in the seventies-virtually all the wok published in the 80s is based on research done in the 70s. In addition Rhodesia did not have any radical scholarly shift following its independence. There was not even a conference called to address the directions of teaching and historical research in post-UDI Zimbabwe in the manner in which South Africa engaged its post-apartheid academic agendas. Although one International conference was held at the University of Zimbabwe in 1982 it was largely celebratory, no publication emerged out of its proceedings and research was continued with the same old canons and in fact looked back to the 'standards' set by the department of history during the colonial period. One other factor was that the departmental journal *Rhodesian History,* now renamed *Zimbabwean History*, ceased publication after only two issues under the new name. In the meantime nationalist history continued to flourish in celebration of the post-Independence dispensation, this time eulogising the heroes of the struggle against colonialism.[68] Another conference focusing specifically on methodology and the use of oral sources in history was convened at the University of Zimbabwe under the auspices of the India-Zimbabwe bilateral link where the dynasty was hailed as the standard source for dating and

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66. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

67. This is true of Beach; *The Shona and Zimbabwe, idem; War and Politics*, H. H. K. BHILA, *Trade and Politics in a Shona Kingdom*, (Longman, Harlow, 1982), S. I. G. MUDENGE, *A Political History of Munhumutapa,* (ZPH, Harare, 1988).

68. See for instance T.O. RANGER, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe,* (James Currey, London, 1985); N. BHEBE, *Benjamin Burombo: African Politics in Zimbabwe 1947-1958,* (College Press, Harare, 1989), C.S. BANANA (ed.) *Turmoil and Tenacity* (College Press, Harare, 1989).

understanding the intricacies of Shona history.[69] Thus although independence was a turning point in the history of Zimbabwe, for historians of pre-colonial Zimbabwe and for the academic study of oral traditions in particular, it remained the turning point that never turned. The irony was that no African was able to complete a PhD in the entire post independence era until 2001, and only one of the many MPhil students graduated in 1994, just as one of the lecturers resigned amid allegations of racism

Legacy of Beach and the 'Crisis' in Zimbabwe's oral heritage

A few months before he died Beach had delivered a fiery inaugural lecture, lamenting the decay of the University and the Zimbabwean political economy in general, but more importantly his isolation in being the only historian left working on pre-colonial Zimbabwe.[70]. The latter was a fact in as far as the department was concerned and indeed the issue at stake immediately after Beach 's death was finding a replacement for him and the department was hysterical about it. It toyed around with the idea of an expatriate and one of the PhD candidates at an advanced stage of his thesis was made to recast his focus in the direction of pre-colonial history. The department was in fact convinced that it was responding to a crisis, and in the debates that ensued an observer in the audience at the Book Café in central Harare stood up to question why the historians were creating a crisis for themselves by behaving as if academia was a system of 'creating empires such that when these empires crumbled the world was in crisis'.[71] Edmore Mufema as the lad turned out to be was a recent appointment to the Economic History department which had broken away from the History department in the 80s following ideological differences between new and conservative schools of thought had struck the note. He had pointed to the very core not only of university politics but the real methodological 'crisis' affecting the production of knowledge in post independent Zimbabwe. If this comes a little too late perhaps it may be time to look further still and think about the heritage and the legacy of interpreting the past that we leave for the next generations. In the case of oral traditions it is about time we entered a

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69. D.N. BEACH, 'Shona Dynastic Histories: The Central and Southern Shava Belt', in N. BHEBE (ed), *The Methodology of the Use of Oral Sources in History*, (History Department, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, 1989), 24-27

70. D.N. BEACH, 'Zimbabwe: Pre-colonial History, Demographic Disater and the University', *Zambezia*, (XXVI), (I) (1999), 5-33

71. More publications of Beach's contributions have appeared in *Zambezia* and *History in Africa 28 (2001)* which the author is still chasing for a much more informed review.

methodological revolution in the lines of that taken by South African historiography.

On methodology: oral traditions as heritage and the Southern Shona

I have talked of the manner in which oral traditions are a product of society, that is not new, I again mentioned the politics of production of knowledge which again is nothing to write home about, what I wish to end with is the theory of writing. In the abstract sent initially to the conference there was an implicit intention to focus on the southern Shona. This was abandoned for the reasons this paper has sought to deal with, how south is south and south to who anyway? The honest bias is that I have been working on southern Zimbabwe and this literary means the Masvingo-Chivi region, but if we look at it there are more Shona living further south and beyond. If I were to publish anything from that research and it had 'canonical impact' the category of the 'Southern Shona' will be firmly established and there is no doubt that history will be perceived that way. I have also abandoned the term for fear of beginning my own ethnocartography and pigeonholing. If we accept that, then history whether oral or written can easily be the dominant discourse, or even what we want it to be thus giving weight to the rather absurd reference to heritage as being 'anything you want!' This is where I feel heritage and oral tradition meet and need somehow to feed each other methodologically. It is in this sense that history could be the sum product of the activities of the subjects of focus, the views of those who collected the tradition, the society in which the tradition is kept and the interpretation all that entails, the context in which it is presented and the interpretation by the final consumer of that tradition. Above all it is important to make our methods applicable to address phenomena in the present not to wait until they are history and therefore worth interpreting. This view is itself a-historical together with the archival rules that give grace periods for the consultation of public records.

Although looking up to South African trends it is only fair to acknowledge the work in this direction so far done by Carolyn Hamilton and Isabel Hofmeyr for example.[72] There is no reason to be disillusioned by the current state in Zimbabwean historiography however. There are now more people working on pre-colonial Zimbabwe than there were three years ago, there are more intriguing topics on a number of aspects involving the use of oral

72. C HAMILTON, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1998), I. HOFMEYR, *"We Spend out Years as a Tale That is Told': Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom'* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH, 1993)

sources. Scholars have gone into looking for almost everything in the 'intelligence of daily life' from hygiene to commodification to mapping the blind spots of history such as homosexuality, right up to landscape and historical geography. [73] My view is if all this material and the context in which it is produced is incorporated into the mainstream interpretation of oral tradition and heritage we may have a more informed view of the past than when we simply search for the truth.

Opsomming

Mondelinge tradisie as erfenis: die historiografie van mondelinge navorsing en die Shonagemeenskappe van Zimbabwe. Sommige metodologiese aspekte

In hierdie bydrae word die belangrikheid van mondelinge oorlewering as erfenis, wat bewaar behoort te word, spesifiek met betrekking tot die Shona in Zimbabwe aangetoon. Die uitgangspunt is historiografies deur na te gaan hoe mondelinge oorlewering deur verskillende persone versamel is , wat die redes vir versameling was sowel as die verskillende interpretasies daarvan deur opeenvolgende navorsers was. Teen hierdie agtergrond doen die artikel sekere metodologiese oplossings aan die hand.

73. See T. BURKE, *'Lifebouy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe,* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1996), M. EPPRECHT, 'The Gay Oral History project in Zimbabwe: Black Empowerment, Human Rights, And he Research Process', *History in Africa*, 26, (1999) among others.