

Materialities of Graves in Colonial Matobo c1890-1960s

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Abstract

Matobo district is characterised with many landscape that speak into the history of the district. Matobo district's history is summarised and archived in the various landscape in the district such as shrines, rivers, caves and hills. This article discusses the significance of landscape by focusing on graves as posters of belonging. It argues that graves in the district curate the history of how these communities have negotiated for belonging through time. By focusing at the graves of Europeans, the Ndebele and BaKalanga, this article posits that the state has had a dissimilar trajectory from local communities about Matobo graves. The article uses ethnographic methodologies to argue that the significance of Matobo graves to the state and local communities is different. Matobo communities and the state use graves to advance different trajectories. Matobo graves were capital in the hands of the state to dominate Matobo. On the other hand, Matobo communities weaponized the same graves to defy state power. The article submits that Matobo graves capture the nub of struggles between the state and communities at the periphery.

Keywords: Graves, materialities, belonging, landscape, memory, Matobo.

Introduction

This article focuses at Matobo district and local communities who are mainly BaKalanga. Matobo district sits south of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. The northern boundary is generally the Bulawayo-Plumtree road. To the east is the Bulawayo-Beitbridge road. The western boundary alternated between Shashani and Semokwe rivers. The road from Bulawayo through Kezi and Maphisa cleaves the district into two slices through the district's heart. Located at the hub of the district, are the Matobo hills, which were at the epicentre of colonial land contestations. Within these hills, most of the graves discussed in this article were located. Taking a bleacher like an aeroplane rather pushed to the north of the district, is the Matobo National Park, in whose perimeters most discussed graves are located. The park noshes much of the hilly area, which up to 1962, housed BaKalanga. Up to the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893, most Ndebele Communities lived to the north of the park in Insiza and Khami Districts.¹ The Native Commissioner of Gwanda in 1897 assumed that the total population in the "district was 118 000, of which only 12 000 were pure Matabele".²

The word BaKalanga is used rather loosely in this article as there is malleability in the way BaKalanga viewed themselves. For instance, most BaKalanga in Matobo today prefer to use the Ndebele language. Sharon Maphosa's study of Mangwe adjacent to Matobo notes that "Ndebele has been taught in

¹ Danziger commission report, May 1949, p.3.

² Ibid.

predominantly Kalanga-speaking areas for generations. This system has over time produced people who learned Ndebele at school and eventually used it in their homes, creating the use of two languages in some families and a shift from Kalanga to Ndebele in others.”³ State perpetual onslaught on Matobo communities also forced them into identity metamorphosis. It is therefore hard to speak of BaKalanga with absolute rigidity. This chapter acknowledges that most BaKalanga of the district would rather identify themselves as Ndebele. In this district, communities struggles with state control of their ancestral land, landscape, and their ‘bodies’ whether dead or alive.

Literature review

There is a large corpus of work written on the history of Matobo district but the starting point in studying Matobo could be T. O. Ranger’s *Voices from the Rocks*.⁴ Ranger discusses the significance of landscape such as shrines to Matobo communities. This work goes beyond *voices from the rocks* to evaluate voices from Matobo communities which are embodied as ‘Halal’. These voices show disjuncture from voices from ‘Harare’ about graves in the district. Ranger posits that the picturesque hills can be understood from its history.⁵ This article rather argues that Matobo’s history can be understood from its graves. When analysing Matobo, it is necessary to situate it not only in the environment, but in the communities which inhabit those environments.⁶ Ranger also treats the Nyubi, BaKalanga, Venda, Sotho and Ndebele homogeneously in as much as it also views whites and blacks as relatively equal agents interacting equally with the hills and with one another. However, those communities which were dominated by the state cannot be viewed as equal to those who were constantly exercising power over them.

Simon Makuvaza has also analysed the history of Matobo and argues that it is difficult for marginalised communities to conserve the environment which do not benefit from.⁷ This view agrees with Baxter Tavuyanago who studied evictions of communities from Gonarezhou national park.⁸ Whereas these views are important, this study does not focus at forced removal of BaKalanga from ancestral land. It extends that discourse to people-landscape relations by analysing graves which dictated politics of belonging in Matobo. J. McGregor who studied the importance of the Zambezi landscape to Tonga communities argues that the Zambezi River was a centre of contestations between the Tonga and outsiders and among the Tonga themselves.⁹ Her work informs this study in as much as it narrows down to landscape and its importance in history. Whereas McGregor centralises her study on the materialities of the Zambezi River, this study analyses the materialities of graves in the district. McGregor’s work agrees with J. Fontein who studied the importance of Mtirikwi dam in Masvingo and concluded that landscapes’ long histories and memories have a bearing on politics embedded within them.¹⁰ A. F. Isaacman and B. S. Isaacman who

³ Sheron Maphosa (2021) “An Ecological Approach to the Implementation of Language-in-Education Policy: A Kalanga Case study” in *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Africa*, 52:3, 4-25, P.13.

⁴ Ranger, T. (1999) *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopo Hills of Zimbabwe*. Harare: Baobab Books.

⁵ T. O. Ranger, *Voices From the Rocks*, p.289

⁶ L. Marques, (2012) “Boosting potential creative resources: The case of Siby (Mali)” in *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice*, Vol 4, N.2, p117.

⁷ S. Makuvaza (2016) *The Management of the Matobo Hills: Perceptions of the Indigenous Communities on their involvement and Use of Traditonal Conservation practices*. Leiden University: PhD Thesis

⁸ B. Tavuyanago (2016) *Living on the fringes of a Protected area: Gonarezhou National Park and the indigenous communities of South Eastern Zimbabwe, 1934-2008*, Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

⁹ J. McGregor, (2009) *Crossing the Zambezi: Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier*, London: James Currey

¹⁰ J. Fontein (2015) *Remaking Mutirikwi: Landscape, Water and Belonging in Southern Zimbabwe*, London: James Currey.

also studied eviction to construct a dam goes further to argue that narratives of the state are dissimilar to those of local communities which were displaced to erect Cahora Bassa.¹¹ These findings are of significance as narratives of Matobo communities about graves in the district suggest deviations from how the state characterises graves. The colonial state sought to de-centre the graves which local communities cared to centralise and in turn centralised what locals did not care to centralise.

Joseph Mujere who studied the significance of migrant BaSotho in Gutu posits that graves were ascribed important materialism in articulating BaSotho belonging in Dewure.¹² Mujere argues that the Bethel cemetery “became a marker of BaSotho belonging”.¹³ Mienert, Willersle and Seebach have also argued that “graves play significant roles as land markers in disputes over land” in Northern Uganda.¹⁴ These scholars agree with Fontein who argues that “around Mutirikwi... graves... have a more ‘active’ and ‘affective’ presence”.¹⁵ These studies are of import value to Matobo as the state endeavored to have entitlement over graves, proving how graves were valuable material in colonial struggles. The state sought to dictate which graves locals should and should not materialise. Contestations over the significance of what locals chose to remember and forget and what the state on the other hand wanted them to remember and forget is the fulcrum of this article. Geschiere notes that funerals in Africa often “constitute a high point for the reaffirmation of belonging”, even where “quite different modalities of belonging are at stake”.¹⁶ The Geschierean notion explains claims by communities in Matobo. Whereas graves offered communities weapons for belonging, they can also offered them weapons for defying state power. On the other hand, the state used graves to also articulate belonging and entitlement of the same land claimed by local communities. It is necessary to analyse the significance of various graves to various communities in Matobo over a long period of time.

Entumbane grave site and Ndebele connectedness to Matobo.

The Ndebele arrived in Matobo around 1838. Before long, King Mzilikazi established close links with the hills. One of his kraals was Isigodini, located on the eastern side of the Matobo hills. Isigodini means ‘home in the hollow’ which captured the location of the palace in the Matobo valleys. At this palace, Mzilikazi died.

F. W. T. Posselt wrote in a paper in 1919 which was read before the Rhodesia Scientific Association that “Mzilikazi the Matabele King died on September 5th 1868, ... the body was removed at night-time (from Isigodini) in a cart to KwaMhlanhlandlela, the capital and there deposited in a royal heart under the guard of the late King’s twelve wives (he was reputed to have 300.) and kept for 2 months until decomposed. On the 2nd of November, in the early morning, the funeral procession left KwaMhlanhlandlela.”¹⁷ His remains and personal effects were placed on two wagons and transported to Entumbane, in the Matobo

¹¹ A. F. Isaacman and B. S. Isaacman, (2015) “Dams, Displacement and the Delusion of Development: Cahora Bassa and its legacies in Mozambique, 1965-2007”, in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol.48, No.2, pp.384-387.

¹² J. Mujere (2012) *Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists and Progressive Farmers: Basotho struggles for belonging in Zimbabwe, 1930-2008*, University of Edinburgh: PhD Thesis.

¹³ Ibid, p.120.

¹⁴ L. Mienert, R. Willerslev and S. H. Seebach (2017) “Cement, Graves, and Pillars” in *Land Disputes in Northern Uganda*, in *African Studies Review*, Vol.60, Issue 3, p.37.

¹⁵ J. Fontein (2011) “Graves, Ruins and Belonging: towards and Anthropology of Proximity” in *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol.17, p713.

¹⁶ P. Geschiere (2005) “Funerals and belonging: Different patterns in southern Cameroon”, in *African Studies*, Vol.48, No.2, p59.

¹⁷ R. Tredgold (1956) *The Matopos*, p67.

hills, for burial, in a large cave. The wagons, after being broken to pieces were placed into another cave close by. In this second grave which is located about 300m off Mzilikazi's, his personal relics, furniture, cooking utensils, and other items he used can be seen through the cave opening. Both graves were closed with stones on the edge of the Matobo overlooking the Mzingwane River. Subsequently fifty black oxen were sacrificed to the spirit of Mzilikazi and Ndebele ancestors. His death was referred to as "*ukudilika kwe ntaba*", (the falling of a mountain).¹⁸ This reflected that a 'big man' had died in society.

The Inyathi regiment guarded his remains. In 1893, they were fifty guarding, out of the 1500. These constituted the King's guard of honour. They prevented unwanted entry to the graves, veld fires, and shouted the king's *isibongo* (totem), titles and praises. Mzilikazi's grave in Matobo was viewed as Ndebele affirmation of ownership of the hills. It confirmed the control of Matobo land by the Ndebele. In Murinye, Burials in resettled areas have often provoked tensions between returning 'autochthonous' clans and incoming '*vatorwa*' (strangers).¹⁹ In Matobo, Mzilikazi's burial in BaKalanga hills suggested landscape negotiation and shared materials of belonging.

Mzilikazi's remains shared Matobo hills with remains of BaKalanga chiefs was *Malindidzimu*. Mzilikazi's grave reflected shared landscape between the Ndebele and BaKalanga. It was not a spiritual confiscation and overpowering of BaKalanga. According to Sobhuku MaNdlovu, Mzilikazi was buried "among us because he belonged to us. He was not a robber like whites nor a killer like Mugabe. He did not intent to steal our land but to share it with us. He gave us black cows during ceremonies at Njelele and we respected him."²⁰ MaNdlovu's comments capture the gradual negotiations for belonging that had shaped the history of the hills from the arrival of the Ndebele including Mzilikazi's participation in BaKalanga worship.

Later other royalties were buried at the Entumbane cemetery, including Sidojiwe, who died in July 1866. Sidojiwe was Lobengula's son. Entumbane turned out to be the burial site for the Ndebele ruling elite just as *Malindidzimu* was for BaKalanga. The burial of Sidojiwe among his ancestors was not only about materializing autochthony for the purposes of claiming land; showing the colonial state whose the hills were. It was also about renegotiating with the colonial state on power dynamics in the region and how Matobo graves were central in those matrices. Graves were significant not just as pegs of belonging but also as they created material shrines of belonging after communities had been evicted in 1962.

Malindidzimu or Rhodesian heroes' acre? European graves in Matobo

In Matobo, graves of Europeans also dictated colonial policy to evict BaKalanga from ancestral land. Rhodesians became determined that Matobo was meant to be separated as a graveyard of "those who deserved well of their country" and "To The Brave Men". Graves of European heroes in Matobo whispered the eviction of BaKalanga from Matobo. Matobo graves gave this space agency and meaning both in Salisbury (colonial name for Harare) and around the hills, un-ascribed to it hitherto. This is because apart from what people touch, feel, smell, see, experience and do within space, all space is potentially the same and can be comparable to any other. Matobo's *izindawo ezizilayo* (sacred places) became stretched by the presence graves of Ndebele and Europeans. Ndebele and BaKalanga shrines and graves were never again to monopolise sacred places of Matobo.

Europeans' claim of the hills were partly on grounds of graves of their pioneers in Matobo. The presence of graves of Europeans in Matobo was a source of their connection with the hills. A number of European visitors into Matabeleland died and were buried in the hills even before colonisation. Father Kroot, for

¹⁸ Interview with Webster Sibanda, Fourwinds, 22 February 2021.

¹⁹ J. Fontein, (2011) p.714.

²⁰ Interview with Sobhuku MaNdlovu, Tshapu, 24 April 2019.

instance, who was one of the first missionaries at Pandamatenga died at Old Bulawayo and was buried close-by facing the hills and close to his grave is the grave of Jan.²¹ During the Umvukela, on 5 August 1896, there was a fierce fight between Sikombo and Nyanda on the east of Matobo near Umlugulu. Kershaw, Hubert Hervey, Ainslie, Gibbs, McClaskie, Innes Ker and Holmes were killed and buried “in a beautiful spot under some big tree.”²² These graves show the spots which early Europeans used as reference points for claiming Matobo land as ancestral land. Just as BaKalanga had graves of their ancestors dotted around the hills, by 1900, a number of Europeans could use ancestral graves as tools for claiming the hills too. The Ndebele, BaKalanga and Europeans shared the hills’ materiality both in life and in death.

One key graveyard on the hills is located at a place commonly known as ‘the world view’. One key European to be buried there was Cecil John Rhodes; the arch-bishop of the colonisation of Southern Africa. Rhodes died at Muizenberg, Cape Colony, on the 26 March 1902. His remains were conveyed from there to Bulawayo by train in a coffin made of Rhodesian teak wood. Burial and ceremonials at grave took place on 10 April 1902 at a place Rhodes had referred to as ‘*the World View*’. BaKalanga called it *Malindidzimu*. The place where BaKalanga considered as housing *makuva evadzimu* (ancestral graves) now had to be shared with European graves. This *ndawo yakayekengemala* (sacred place) became collectively and mutually pooled as sacred. Some BaKalanga narratives suggest that European graves defiled the dead ancestral spirits (*kutsvenya bakalala/ bakafa*).²³ Others view that as a moment when the state tried to force Matobo communities to forget their ancestors in the hills and focus on European graves.²⁴ To Webster Sibanda, even though Rhodes’ grave represented the capture of BaKalanga landscape by Europeans, the state failed to de-memorialise BaKalanga’s tenets in grave.²⁵ These new graves represented change and continuity in Matobo landscape.

People came from all over the world to attend Rhodes’ funeral. They came in carts and wagons drawn by horses, mules and oxen, and some by bicycle or on foot. The location for his grave in many ways defined European connectedness to the hills. On the other hand, it forewarned BaKalanga about future attempts at capturing their landscape using the European imperial prophet who was buried in their backyard. Just as Mutirikwi was “intimately related to the historical and material coexistences and proximities of shared landscapes”, and so was Matobo, after 1902.²⁶

Robert Tredgold noted that “A great concourse of natives assembled, among them many of those who had not so long before fought against the white man, and who had met Rhodes in his famous indabas during the rebellion...”²⁷ Ranger argues that “both white and black came to see Rhodes’ burial as a conscious usurpation.”²⁸ Tredgold and Ranger attempt to equate the colonisers and the colonised on how they viewed Rhodes and his burial on one of their most *ndawo yakayekengemala* with their ancestral graves. The way Africans memorialised Rhodes was definitely shaped by the wars of conquest which had been waged in these hills and the wholesale seizure of their ancestral land by Europeans in the past decade. To suggest that Africans admired Rhodes is to paint a grotesque picture on the way they captured his burial. Rhodes

²¹ Ibid, 71.

²² Ibid, 76.

²³ Interview with Sitwanyana,

²⁴ Interview with Maloni Ncube, Kezi, 13 December 2020.

²⁵ Interview with Webster Sibanda, Fourwinds,

²⁶ J. Fontein (2011) p721.

²⁷R. Tredgold, (1956) *The Matopos*, p.14.

²⁸ T. O. Ranger (1999) *Voices from the Rocks*, p.31

was not necessarily an African hero as he was a Rhodesian one. Even the royal salute by the “natives” who shouted, ‘*N’Kosi!*’ at the end of the burial only happened when a signal was given by chiefs²⁹, meaning it was not voluntary but a premeditated and procedural signal of the memorisation of Rhodes by Salisbury.

But it is undeniable that to Europeans, Rhodes was capturing the Matobo spirit-scape. The following caption written by the bishop of Mashonaland for this burial, Rudyard Kipling, captures and summarises European sentimentalities about Rhodes’ grave;

“... it is his will that he look forth
Across the world he won,
The granite of the ancient North...
(As when the death he dared)
And there await a people’s feet
In the paths that he created.
...the immense and brooding Spirit still
Shall quicken and control
Living he was the land and dead
His soul shall be her soul”³⁰

This caption embalms European materialization of Rhodes’ grave to claim the ownership of Matobo. “Living he was the land,” claimed the bishop, “and dead his soul shall be her soul”; archives how Salisbury envisaged Rhodes’ grave as usurping Matobo *amalinda*. To Europeans, Africans’ inferior *amalinda*, sharing burial space with Rhodes’ graves had been ‘colonised’ by the imperialist. They had been his subjects in life, they would be subjects even in death and what came beyond it. Rhodes was imperialist in life, and so was he going to remain in death. Rhodes’ grave had pioneered in novel ways, Salisbury’s conceptualization of turning *Malindidzimu* into a European sacred landscape. Soon, many more Rhodesian patriarchs would be buried there and the hill would reflect European Machiavellian belonging even in the post-life spiritocratic world. These graves reshaped Matobo claims for land and redefined how communities were meant to remember and forget what was and was not significant landscape in the hills. The next grave of Rhodesians at this cemetery was of those who had ‘sacrificed’ their lives at the Shangani battle in 1893. Rhodes at one time had muted that his remains lie at Great Zimbabwe with this group of ‘martyrs’ which was led by Alan Wilson. Remains were exhumed, and transferred to Matobo in March 1904. A monument of Grecian design, a quire column of chiselled granite blocks, each weighing ten tons, drawn from the quarry on the eastern side of the hills, was erected in honour of the Wilson group. The inscription on the monument, “To The Brave Men”, is altogether an anecdote summarizing how Europeans memorialized the Wilson group. This had been chiselled on a tree at the original grave on the field of battle by drawn by Dawson. The panels for the Matobo monument were made by John Tweed. The location, the beauty of graves and the constant visits to this cemetery dictated which graves Salisbury wanted Matobo to forget and remember. The state neglected Entumbane; BaKalanga graves were dememorialised by Salisbury.

Jameson was next to be buried at the sacred ‘whites’ heroes acre. Jameson died in London on 26 November 1917, but his coffin covered by the Union Jack, only came from Britain after the 1st World War. It was transported to Matobo in van on 18 May 1920. The gun carriage on which his coffin sat was drawn as far

²⁹ R. Tredgold (1956) *The Matopos*, p.15

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.15-16

as passable, by 6 mules, then people carried it to the grave site “so that in death as in life, Jameson remains at the right hands of Rhodes”³¹ On the 20th of May, Dr Leander Starr Jameson was finally buried a few yards from Rhodes’ grave. 150 African chiefs and their headmen witnessed the burial as if to force them to memorialize this graveyard more than those where their own ancestors were buried. Jameson’s burial was paradoxically to mark an important turning point in the eviction of BaKalanga from the hills as first discussions of turning Matobo hills into a park were muted here.

The last European hero to be buried at *Malindidzimu* was Charles Patrick John Coghlan who was buried there on the 14th of August 1930. His grave is on the southern side of the hill, in respect of his Catholic faith. Coghlan was the first premier of the colony in 1923 after Rhodesia became a responsible government and was weaned from company rule. He died on the 28 August 1927 but was only buried at *Malindidzimu* in August 1930. Coghlan completed the quartet of graves at this cemetery.

Pilgrimages to the graves flowed annually from as far as England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. For instance, on the 5th of July 1953, a great pilgrimage procession more than a quarter of a mile long, wound slowly to the graves, at a time when, as a damp squib, thousands of local BaKalanga were being evicted from the hills. Queen Elizabeth, Princess Margaret and Governors of the 3 Rhodesian federal territories were also part of the procession.³² A press reporter sensationalized the moment by noting that “the most moving moment of the service was the Lord’s Prayer. Everyone spoke this softly, but the linked voices completely surrounding the hilltop and became a solid bond of faith homage”.³³ Yet echoes of “faith homage” from the rocks coincided with requiem, not psalms, of domicile by BaKalanga evicts being displaced from ancestral land being denied access to their ancestral graves. BaKalanga were now denied memory of their ancestral graves, whereas Europeans were memorializing ‘their’ landscape.

Tredgold, addressing these proceedings noted that, “I think we may claim that here we have history in rock rather than John Burns’ reference of the Thames as “liquid history”.³⁴ Tredgold was affirming the displacement of those who claimed that *madombo awo ndowedu* (these rocks are ours). He echoed what Salisbury envisaged; that Matobo had become a European sacred graveyard which also whispered the exclusion of locals who ‘deserved well of their country’. It also suggested the dememorialisation of African ancestral graves. A few Europeans had been honored by burial at *Malindidzimu*, but by 1900, “throughout the length and breadth of the hills scattered the graves, known and unknown, of many good men, Boer and Briton... and European, who, each in his humbler way, contributed to the building of our country”.³⁵ To some Europeans, *Malindidzimu* represented Rhodes’ “edge to seek high places to find communion with the elementary powers of the universe.”³⁶ That intimated that Salisbury’s focal point for graves was where state-heroes were buried and not where African graves were located.

Material proximities were deliberate moves by Salisbury to create a memory. They can at times be viewed as coincidental, a by-product of intricate factors. Yet burials suggest that Salisbury weaponised graves to contest Matobo land. Fontein argues that in Murinye, “Europeans developed their strongest emotional attachments to precisely the same places though the attachments are constructed on a quite different basis”.³⁷ In Matobo the colonial state developed more interest in the same landscape, and the state’s

³¹ Ibid, 16

³² R. Tredgold (1956) *The Matopos*, 21.

³³ The Herald, 6 July 1953

³⁴ R. Tredgold (1956) *The Matopos*, 21.

³⁵ Ibid, 22.

³⁶ Ibid, 23.

³⁷ J. Fontein (2011) p.722.

interest was to reshape the memory of locals, re-drill their idea of what they must and must not remember. This does not seek to amplify how the politics of difference usually crystallized less from existing symbolic or material discrepancies than from conscious or unconscious strategies of organizing difference. Contrariwise, the de-amplification of differences serve to create an ugly picture of landscape studies. Europeans and Africans did not always have dissimilar interpretation of landscape. However, their motivation for those interpretations were dissimilar. Europeans and Africans together viewed graves in Matobo as museums of where they came from, they were at and they were going. We may therefore do better not by emphasizing phenomenal differences but rather accentuating important sensitivity to the proximities, co-existences, change and continuities that derived from people's shared material engagements.

To Tredgold, The World View did not represent the best view of the world because it did not offer that but, "from this spot we... seem to look out over the great globe itself, out beyond our own little lives, even our own country, out and out over the great suffering, struggling mass of humanity... This is why Rhodes left us these hills and wished us to come here to find something of the spirit that he left behind him." Tredgold thought "Rhodes left (Europeans) these hills", which suggests that Europeans saw Matobo as their heritage, a colonial inheritance. By the 1950s therefore, Europeans viewed Matobo not as BaKalanga ancestral land, but as their own. Tredgold viewed Europeans' graves as a source of spiritual reconnection with the spirit of early Rhodesians. Yet to BaKalanga Europeans' graves were a source of their evictions from ancestral graves.

Quintessentially, graves of pioneer Europeans were at the centre of attaching Europeans to the hills, just as BaKalanga and Ndebele graves attached locals to the same landscape. Mujere notes that "although, as 'latecomers', BaSotho do not have ancestral graves in (Gutu) to back their claims to autochthony, their cemetery and family graveyards have been critical in the identification of the area as a Basotho enclave and also in cementing their attachment to it."³⁸ This can be imported to Matobo for the European cemetery at *Malindidzimu*. Yet for Europeans, unlike BaSotho, there were a number of European graves dotted around the hills which they used to claim attachment to the hills too. Graves provide insights into the complex and manifold sediments of the history of claims for Matobo land. They capture the way Matoboans negotiated belonging through time. Struggles and quest for control of Matobo can be understood through analyzing attachments to graves in the hills which are centers of how locals and Salisbury memorialized that landscape. Behind the frostiness of funerals, burials and graves was always a blanket wrapping issues of land claims and belonging. We should understand the materialities which were sources of the energy which mesmerized contestation for Matobo land. The state had graves to protect, and so were local communities.

Bombing Graves: Fighting the dead through the living or the living through the dead?

Another window for viewing the materialities of Matobo graves is by analysing how they were centralized in wars and struggles for land. The Ndebele state was defeated by Europeans in 1893. In 1896, the Ndebele revolted against European rule. The revolts, called *umvukela*, lasted until September 1896. The meeting to end the war was presided over by Rhodes at the *Indaba* tree in Matobo. Mzilikazi's grave is about a mile or two from the *Indaba* tree. During the *Umvukela* of 1896-7, Mzilikazi's grave was rifled by European troops and it was alleged that his head was removed.³⁹ To the Ndebele, this was a spiritual attack and an unprecedented contempt of the dead king. It fraught the dead king's chances of 'resting in peace'.

³⁸ J. Mujere (2012) *Autochthons, Strangers...*, p.38.

³⁹ Tredgold (1956) *The Matopos*, p.79.

The “disturbed spirits could only be propitiated by the sacrifice of five black oxen”.⁴⁰ Europeans were given this demand as one of the peace terms. A ceremony was held after the Indabas and Rhodes provided the black oxen for the atonement of Mzilikazi’s spirit. A great dance was held round a huge pyre close-by. The five oxen were killed and consumed by the crowd. Afterwards, Rhodes had the entrance of the grave strongly walled and guarded.

The attack of Mzilikazi’s grave by Europeans was definitely not meant to kill the king for he had died about 18 years back. It was rather symbolic. As they attacked Mzilikazi’s grave they were venging anger to the guiding spirit of the Ndebele. They used his grave to hawk discontent against the Ndebele who drew strength from the Ndebele icon’s grave to contest European authority. Mzilikazi’s empire building lied symbolic in the grave and Europeans were denting that. The attack of the dead was an attack of the living. It was meant to injure Ndebele memorialization of Mzilikazi in order to dampen communities’ fighting spirit. But it was also an attack on the spirit of Mzilikazi whose grave stood as a bulwark against European desires to own the hills and the region. It mirrored European defiance of dead Africans as it was also contempt of the living who respected the dead’s vision which was buried in that cave-grave. It was an attempt to de-memorialise Entumbane through ‘polluting’ its spiritual power among communities.

It is interesting to compare that attack with the 1962 bombing of Rhodes’ grave by Africans. The Matobo national park was created in 1926. From 1950 onwards, local communities started being evicted from the hills. The final eviction of Africans from the hills happened in March 1962 midst an atmosphere of fear and discontent in the hills. Consequently, Rhodes’ grave was petrol bombed on the 12th of October 1962.⁴¹ Africans who were evicted from the hills and whose land was taken were suspected to have bombed the grave. It was representing the prophet of imperialism which symbolized European supremacy in Matobo lying peacefully when Africans were being tossed away from ancestral land.

There had been other forms of resistance to eviction from the hills but this petrol bombing is interesting in as much as it compares well with the 1896 attack of Mzilikazi’s grave. Both reflect on the frustration of the living against their living opponents. Both were attacks of graves of leaders; one, of the European colonialists and another, of the African colonised. They also capture the dead and how they were characterized by the living. The attacks give us an interesting window into the imagined power of the dead and the significance of their graves. That imagined power and its influence on the living and in determining the direction of events in the hills was also being attacked. These attacks were therefore messages being sent to enemies, but they were also compensatory. Compensatory in that they show inability to challenge enemies explicitly and were therefore implicit challenges.

After the attack on Rhodes’ grave, the Commission for the Preservation of Natural and Historical Monuments took over Rhodes’ grave to protect it from further attacks, just as Mzilikazi’s grave also got protected. They argued that the grave “should not be taken by the Department of Federal Parks because they as a department are very unpopular with Africans owing to their policy of removing all Africans and cattle”⁴² which caused Africans to attack the grave. The grave was however attacked again. After the second attack of the grave, guards were given duty to protect Rhodes’ grave, as was the case at Mzilikazi’s. Rhodes and Mzilikazi were therefore important ‘bodies’ in life and in death.

It has been suggested that graves were fundamental in settling scores in Matobo. Attacking graves was fighting the living by fighting the dead. It reflects on the value of graves in settling contestations among

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *The Herald*, 13 October 1962.

⁴² Ranger (1999) *Voices from the Rocks*, p192.

the living. One of the targets for European fighters during the 1st Chimurenga was a grave, Mzilikazi's grave. Similarly, one of the targets for Matobo communities was Rhodes' grave. This cannot be explained by superstition alone. It is clear that graves were important material for military, political economic and social claims for territory. In battles for land, graves are exhibits of ancestral ownership of land and hence are targets and assets in settling those disputes. In a boundary dispute between Chief Fuyana Mdilizelwa and Bango of Matobo, both claiming Mbembeswana as their territory, Fuyana used the presence of his ancestral graves in the area to claim Mbembeswana. Fuyana claimed that "Mdilizelwa stayed at Mbembeswana and was buried there... Traditionally, it was not possible that a chief can die at the other chief's area and be buried there. So chief Mdilizelwa died at his area at Mbembeswana and was buried there because it was his area."⁴³ This suggests that graves claim territories. They are significant pointers of belonging. The graves of Mzilikazi and Rhodes were contesting Matobo belonging. The state used graves to apply dominance over communities that considered the hills as their ancestral land. Contrariwise, Matobo communities also drew power from and used graves to also resist state domination.

In other words, the politics of Fuyana's burial in Mbembeswana is as implicated in a wider remaking of belonging as it is about substantiating the autochthon of the Fuyana over the Bango in settling boundary contests. Graves are memorialisations, cues of past history of communities. As Geschiere has noted, funerals in Africa often "constitute a high point for the reaffirmation of belonging", even where "quite different modalities of belonging are at stake".⁴⁴ That is also corroborated by the burial of John Rendo Ndlovu under Chief Nhlamba in Gwanda to the South of Matobo. The Johanne Masowe Yevadzidzi Apostolic sect chased relative of the dead from the grave during burial because they claimed that John Ndlovu had recently joined their sect. However, the family summoned the chief complaining that "our request is that his head be put on the eastern side as per our culture. They refused and chased us away from the grave." By the time the chief arrived, the sect had already buried John. John's son claimed that he "would have wanted to exhume and rebury (his) father the traditional way". Chief Nhlamba summoned the Apostolic sect to stop them from conducting "illegal burials".⁴⁵ From this contestation over John Ndlovu's burial, it can be noted that altering family burial customs made relatives furious and want to exhume the dead. John's head had to be put to the east in the grave for him to belong to the Ndlovu family. It was a key marker of belonging. The family imagined bad spells could result from not following their customs on burial. The Ndlovu and Apostolic Sect contestation was a battle over what should happen at burial. It was about what was the wrong and right ways of burying. Just as Rhodes and Mzilikazi's graves, these mirrored a clash over belonging. Graves can therefore accord us a window through which to gaze into its past.

Conclusion

This study has explored the materialities of Matobo graves up to the 1960s. It has been argued that the history of Matobo is the history of graves by other means. Graves in the district can be viewed as archives of information on the history of the district. In Matobo, graves talk, they are memory cues, they summarize events of the district. Struggle over belonging can be explored when we evaluate the materialities of BaKalanga, Ndebele and European graves. Mujere has argued that BaSotho graves in Gutu defined their construction of belonging. The Basotho cemetery was a fundamental part of attachment to the Dewure

⁴³ Letter from Fuyana to D.A Kezi, dated 7 July 1995 in Matobo delineation Reports.

⁴⁴ Geschiere P. (2005) "Funerals and belonging: Different patterns in southern Cameroon", in *African Studies*, Vol.48, No.2

⁴⁵ *The Chronicle*, 16 May 2016.

Purchase area.⁴⁶ Mujere's work is important in that Ndebele and European graves in BuKalanga gave the two inhabitants connection to the land. Many Cameroonians consider burial places as fundamental tools for locating their belonging.⁴⁷ Lotti Nkomo notes that to Mujere, "graves were key in the BaSotho memorialisation of their migration, settlement, displacement and resettlement"⁴⁸. In BuKalanga, graves and funeral rituals are closely connected to belonging.⁴⁹ Europeans also built attachments with the Matobo using graves and funerals held in the hills. According to Mujere, graves can be "markers of where 'somebody' or 'bodies' belong(s)".⁵⁰ Pointing at an ancestral grave seems to be a key instrument in African place attachment. It can therefore be argued that Matobo graves are instrumental in how Matobo communities memorialized their various historical epochs throughout the colonial era.

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⁴⁷ J. D. Smith, (2004) "Burials and belonging in Nigeria: Rural-Urban relations and social inequality in a contemporary African ritual", in *American Anthropologist, Vol 106, No 3*, p.569.

⁴⁸ Lotti Nkomo, (2019) , Mujere J. (2012) *Autochthons, Strangers, Modernising Educationists and Progressive Farmers: Basotho struggles for belonging in Zimbabwe, 1930-2008*, University of Edinburgh: in Book Review, Southern Journal for Contemporary Studies, 44(2), p137.

⁴⁹ Interview with Webster Sibanda, Fourwinds, 22 February 2021.

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