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MAKING ZIMBABWEAN LANDSCAPES
Painters, Projectors and Priests*

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Introduction

Historians, myself included, have begun to study all sorts of "inventions" and "imaginations" – to cite two of my own titles, for instance, *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe* (1985). It was merely a matter of time before the construction of landscape became an important theme for historians. It is, in fact, a particularly important theme for historians of colonial conquest. Europeans in Southern African "explored", exploited, conquered new *land*. It took them time to convert it into landscape, i.e. to submit it to their imagination; to appropriate it to their culture; to annex it to their history.

While I was writing this article, I accidentally came across a piece in the *Scotsman* about the Duke of Edinburgh's private art collection. Prince Phillip has "five gorgeous Australian pictures". The Prince commented upon them: "The first artists who went out there were European, and they painted Australian landscapes to try to make them fit with their concept of what they had learned in Europe. But then native artists came along who were much easier with the light and the vegetation and the landscape." Unexpectedly the Duke of Edinburgh gave me my text, and I'll return to it from time to time to tease out its ambiguities.

Making Zimbabwean Land into Landscape

But I am content to begin with the idea of European painters trying to make colonial landscapes "fit with their concept of what they had learned in Europe". One can very obviously see this process at work with those nineteenth century travellers Thomas Baines and Frank Oates and Eduard Mohr. And one can see that it was by no means an easy process.

I have been working for some time on the history of the Matopos, those extraordinary granite hills south of Bulawayo in which Cecil Rhodes lies buried and Njelele and the rest of the rain shrines of the High God, Mwali, still function. It has struck me that there do not seem to be any nineteenth century paintings of the hills. This certainly was not because painters did not see them. In fact, "wild" though they seemed to European travellers, the Matopos were on the main route into Matabeleland and the jour-

* An earlier version of this article was given as a lecture at the National Galleries in Harare and Bulawayo and also presented as seminar at the University of the Western Cape. I am grateful to the audiences on these occasions for many useful comments.

ney through the hills is a set-piece of every Victorian traveller's tale. Baines traversed them, but he didn't paint them; Oates travelled through them, but he didn't paint them either. Yet both men painted the Victoria Falls, in pursuit of which Oates died of fever.

I have asked myself why this should have been. The Falls, one would suppose, are technically more "difficult" than the hills. But it seems that the Falls fell into an instantly recognisable category. As Eduard Mohr wrote, in describing the awe of his San guide when they reached the Zambezi: "The eloquent language of Creation, though it speaks not in words, is intelligible to all nations of the earth!" (Mohr 1896: 318). In other words, the Falls are one of the rare marvels of nature which transcend culture and history and are there to be admired and recorded.[1] The hills, on the other hand, do not enter into this category. They struck the first artistic travellers as *almost* picturesque, but to be fully picturesque, and therefore paintable as landscape, they needed something which seemed lacking to European eyes. They needed a castle, or a hermitage, or some of the other signs of human interaction which marked the great nineteenth century paintings of the picturesque.

Frank Oates is the most helpful guide here. Oates was a naturalist, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and a traveller to Guatemala and California before his Southern African expedition. He was also a water colourist. His diary shows him in deep debate and confusion about the Matopos. In September 1873, as he approached the hills from the south, he wrote:

> What a wonderful difference is made to one's feelings by the constant impression caused by fine scenery! South Africa is sadly dull and monotonous, and I believe the influence is a bad one, and the loss of scenery has a depressing effect on the spirits; one's imagination is never called into play.

The Matopos almost, but not quite, brought Oates out of this aesthetic depression. "There is something here which might remind one a little of Central America", he noted, "but somehow the charm is wanting." Next day there was "a lovely moon as we trekked, but after all it is South Africa and one cannot feel poetical" (Oates 1889: 46f.).

On his return journey in January and February 1874 the Matopos began to undermine his scepticism. "As we went through some really beautiful scenery the sun set, and the sunset was a lovely one. I can now fancy that South Africa may have much fine scenery." And a few days later he weakened yet more:

> The scenery about here *is* pretty, I admit, [and] wakened a little enthusiasm and thoughts of former days, such as the usual dull uniformity of South African scenery usually fails to elicit. The ground is broken up into rugged crags, piled one upon another in such a manner that you can't help wondering how the mischief they ever got there.

The moon shed "a clear light over the romantic scene". Oates began to see the Matopos in terms of colour – the silvers, golds and greens of the grass; the "deep violet" of the kopjes set against a sunset sky streaked with lilac and gold. He found one valley "park-like". Plainly Oates was getting close to seeing the Matopos as paintable. But he still did not paint them.

No more did Baines. But Baines had an excuse, since he was pre-eminently a projector as well as a painter. As he passed through the mountains he was hurrying to reach

1 It was pointed out to me by Pip Curling at the National Gallery in Harare that paintings of the Victoria Falls were also eminently marketable in Britain and South Africa.

Lobengula and extract a gold mining concession. So although "some of the scenes presented at various turnings of the road were indeed most beautiful, and I would fain have sketched them, the rate at which we are travelling forbids any attempt of that kind". Baines had to rest content with word pictures in which, significantly enough, he imported castles into the "hill scenery":

> Our road lay over an undulating country between granite hills, some of which were of considerable magnitude and most picturesque forms, grey or sometimes nearly white masses of rock rising like gigantic pillars, pinnacles or castles.[2]

Baines went on to become the main producer of visual images of the nineteenth century Rhodesian landscape. Reproduced in huge numbers, his paintings have come to shape our own imagination of that time and place.[3] But his master-work, it seems to me (the one he did have time for) is that great projector's picture of the hunter-prospector Henry Hartley discovering gold beside the corpse of a huge elephant – a true icon of dominance over animate and inanimate nature.[4] Baines would perhaps have taken the Matopos more seriously had gold been found in the hills.

My title added priests to painters and projectors. And the reaction of missionaries to the Matopos adds another significant dimension to the nineteenth century European struggle with the landscape. For the painter the landscape needed historical and cultural associations; for the projector it needed to be *used*; for the priests the scenery needed to be redeemed. So T.M. Thomas of the London Missionary Society responded to what he called "the Amadobo":

> Among these mountains, there are countless hills and dales, cliffs and deep ravines, perennial fountains and meandering brooks, green fields of pasturage and gardens full of ripe maize [...] And while the beauty of the scene entrances the lover of nature, and leads even the Christian to forget, for the time, the moral and spiritual waste, the latter soon feels his spirit stirred within him [and longs for] these dark places of the earth [to be] filled with the knowledge of the Lord. (Thomas 1872: 81)

The Jesuit priests, entering the hills in 1879, became aware that they were the site of an African religion – the oracular cult of Mwali, in which the Voice of God spoke from the rocks and caves. So far from humanising the Matopos in their eyes, however, this diabolised the landscape, rendering its African inhabitants yet more enslaved to nature:

> This God lives in a subterranean cave in a labyrynth of rocks [...] In this cave is a deep, black well, the well of the abyss. From time to time dull sounds like thunder come forth from this well. The faithful trembling with fear, place offerings on the edge of the abyss [...] to appease the hunger of the terrible God [...] After a few moments of deep silence they hear, in the midst of the subterranean noises, inarticulate sounds, strange words, broken and incomprehensible, which the accomplices of the makers of thunder explain to the credulous devotees [...] That is the bliss of the children of nature.[5]

The Jesuits took steps to claim the Matopos for Christ. They offered their first Mass in a cave in the hills, as an artefact of Christian culture and promise of salvation for unredeemed nature:

2 Wallis 1946: 50,66, entries in June and July 1869.
3 The National Archives in Harare does good business by selling a portfolio of Baines' reproductions, thereby lending a seal of official approval on his representation of the landscape.
4 Hartley gave his name to one of Rhodesia's main mining towns.
5 Letter of 28 March 1880, in Roberts 1979: 264f.

> We set up camp at the foot of a hill which rose like a pyramid to about 700 foot. During the night the wind blew with great violence, bringing rain. We had to take refuge in a mountain cave to say Mass. There, with an altar of rock and the 700 foot pyramid as canopy, we offered to God the sacred sacrifice of Calvary. At that solemn moment it seemed that the mountain itself, together with the Holy Angels surrounding us, was trembling with joy and adoring the Eucharist God.[6]

But the Jesuits passed on and for nearly twenty years the Matopos were left to their "terrible God".

War and the Domestication of the Matopos

The first real notion of what the Matopos look like came in an odd but significant form. In March 1896 most Ndebele regiments rose up against the white prospectors, missionaries and traders who had settled amongst them. After laying siege to Bulawayo, many Ndebele fighting men fell back into the Matopos. There they were attacked by British troops. Frank Sykes, a Trooper in Colonel Plumer's regiment, wrote a lucid account of the various battles in the hills. Sykes did not see the Matopos as romantic or picturesque. To him they were a terrible, hard place in which to have to fight. Nor did he see the hills as unpeopled, or see those people as the mere slaves of nature. Sykes' description of the landscape sees it as belonging to the Ndebele. He described:

> Tiers upon tiers of gigantic granite boulders [...] thrown together as it were carelessly by the forces of nature. It is in these mountain fastnesses that the Matabele always have their strongholds. Another kind of mountain slope, frequently met with in the Matopos, is that in which a smooth rock rises upwards without a vestige of vegetation on its surface [...] gradually rounding off gently until the broad flat top is reached. It is along these elevated plateaux that the Matabele have their highroads from stronghold to stronghold. The valleys are all splendidly watered [and] in these valleys of the Matopos alone their is ample ground for the growing of sufficient crops to supply the whole Matabele race.

And if Sykes saw the Matopos with a different eyes, he also saw much more of them than the preceding painters, projectors and priests. As he correctly claimed, the soldiers had to fight in country which was "to all intents and purposes *terra incognita*, into which very few white men have as yet penetrated" (Sykes 1979: 168–9).

Sykes made another well-founded claim. Most accounts of Southern African adventures contained illustrations as a decoration. *His* illustrations were essential to a sober account of the war. So his book does not present picturesque landscapes. Instead it offers the results of what Sykes called "the Matoppographic work of taking views among the hills". Immediately after the first *Indaba* between Cecil Rhodes and the Ndebele commanders, he set off with 2 horses, a pack-mule, four companions and a camera "in search of photographic spoil". The book is full of photos – of soldiers, of forts, of the defeated enemy, and of particular hills in the Matopos as sites of battle. There is no hint of the picturesque – but this is certainly in its own way landscape humanised.

I believe, indeed, that the fighting of 1896 was critical to the European imaginative appropriation of the Matopos. When Sykes' book was reprinted much later in the Rhodesian Reprint series, the blurb claimed that it was "an invaluable companion on

6 Letter of 28 August 1879, in *ibid.*: 155.

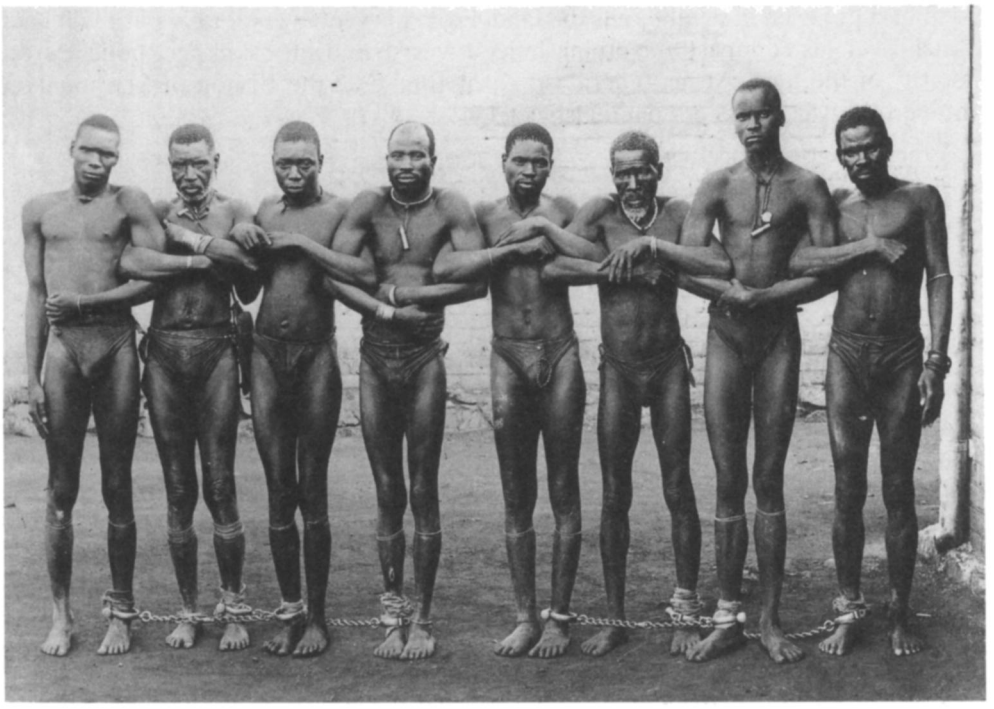

Fig. 1: Priests of the Mwali rain shrines in chains during the 1896 rising. (Courtesy of National Archives, Harare, Zimbabwe)

outings to the Matopos. With Sykes as a guide the reader is able to appreciate that there is as much of historical interest in these intruiging hills as there is of beauty." History came late to the Matopos in this view – in 1896 – but now that it had come the "beauty" of the hills had all the romantic resonance which Oates had been vainly seeking. Thus the Jesuit, Father Barthelemy (who accompanied the British troops through all their encounters in the mountains and earned himself a special chapter in Sykes' book) wrote in 1898 of "a country unique in the world for its weirdness" in which British soldiers had "written with their blood on these imperishable rocks a glorious and authentic page of *English* history" (Barthelemy 1898: 21, my italics).

Soon the Jesuits were able to rhapsodise over a definitive occupation of the hills by British heroic legend. During the fighting in 1896 Rhodes had come across a great hill with a gentle ascent but a spectacular view. He at once declared that he wished to be buried there. It was in the Matopos, after all, that Rhodes' had won his place in the heroic legend of the new Colony. It had been Rhodes, so the story went, who took his life into his hands and went into the hills unarmed to end the bloodshed by speaking with the *indunas*.[7] With Rhodes' interment in the Matopos, "a man stronger than

7 The facts of the case are slightly different since several other emissaries had made contact with the Ndebele and sounded out the situation before Rhodes himself went in. The event is described in Ranger 1967: 241–245.

Mzilikazi [...] even in death holds the land. From his vantage point his spirit will keep watch over his conquest".[8] Nothing indeed was spared in installing Rhodes as the "spirit" of the land. At his funeral on April 10th 1902 the Bishop of Mashonaland intoned Rudyard Kipling's pantheistic elegy:

> It is his will that he look forth
> Across the world he won
> The granite of the ancient North,
> Great spaces washed with sun.
>
> The immense and brooding Spirit still
> Shall quicken and control.
> Living he was the land, and dead
> His soul shall be her soul.

After Rhodes' interment the Matopos became the iconic landscape *par excellence* of white Rhodesia. The remains of the Alan Wilson patrol were removed from Great Zimbabwe to be reburied below Rhodes' grave; the Boy Scouts inscribed a tribute to Baden Powell on one rock; the Memorable Order of the Tin Hats set up a shrine to the dead of the World Wars at another. Rhodes' grave became a place of pilgrimage and the rest of the Matopos became a white playground. Rocks, pools and caves were given nicknames – one dumpy rock becoming known as "Queen Victoria"; remarkable perennial water holes in the eastern Matopos came to be called Diana's Pool, after the Native Commissioner's wife; the school-boys of the Matopos Farm School imposed more earthy names – one cave becoming known as "The Devil's Arse-hole".

One can glimpse this process of appropriation in an African oral testimony. The Kezi road through the western hills runs through an area known as Whitewaters (once the setting of a London Missionary Society church and a thriving Christian community, and now of a National Parks office and the Game Park). In November 1984 G.A. Dube told Mark Ncube how Whitewaters came by its name:

> The name Whitewaters was inscribed by the whites while we were still herdboys. There was a swampy area where cattle were not allowed to graze on. This area was always green. One day a white man on his motor-bike asked for drinking water. We told him not to go to that area since it was very wet. It was so deep that one could disappear. The white man came to drink on the other side of the hill. When the white man came back he inscribed the name "Whitewaters" on a tree with a knife [...] The tree was cut down [but] the name is now inscribed on a rock.[9]

This casual triumph of white inscription over local ecologial knowledge makes a good metaphor for the twentieth century experience of the Matopos. There was no longer any difficulty in perceiving, in naming, in depicting. The hills became a haunt of photographers and sketchers, and even of film-makers.[10] They were constructed as the accessible "wild".

Meanwhile, they were also being *used* and nature was being subdued to the work of man. The Brethren in Christ missionaries arrived in the eastern Matopos in 1898.

8 "The graves in the Matoppo Hills", *Zambesi Mission Record*, 2, 24, April 1904, 496–500.

9 Interview by Mark Ncube with G.A. Dube, Kezi, 22 November 1984.

10 In June 1916 a representative of "Mr Schlesinger's cinematographic scheme" was told that while the Administration could not allow a reconstruction of Wilson's last stand, or even the congregation of so "large a number of natives" that Rhodes' *indaba* in 1896 could be reproduced, "a limited number of natives" would be provided by the Native Department for a "reproduction of Mr Rhodes' funeral". Sir Drummond Chaplin to Sir Lewis Michell, 30 June 1916, CH 8/2/2/12, NAZ.

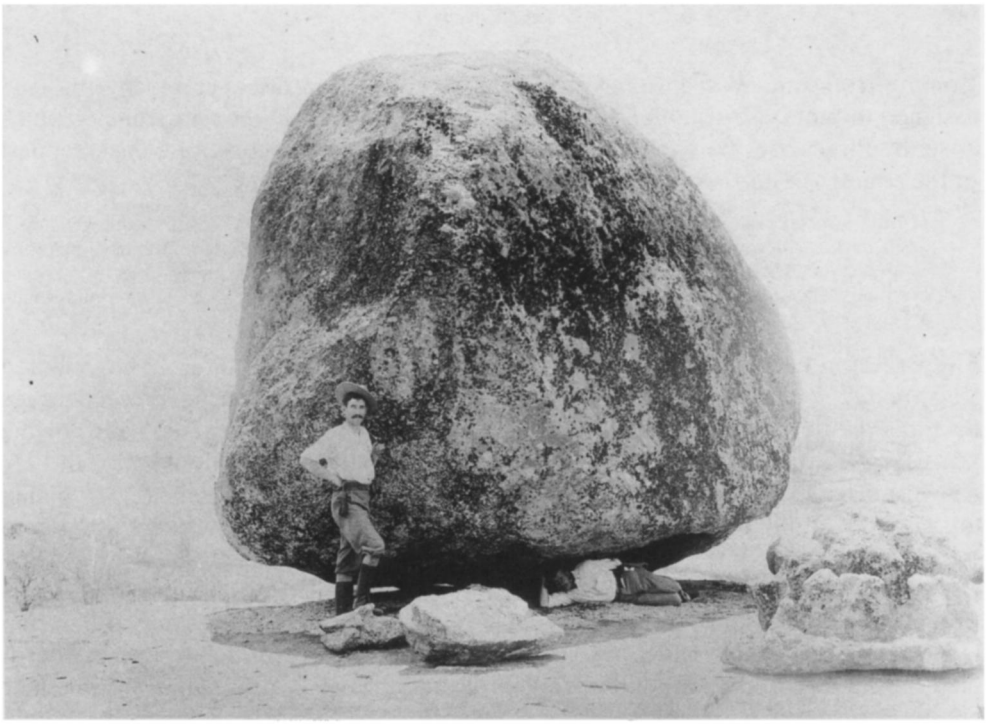

Fig. 2: Settlers amusing themselves at what was to become the site of Rhodes' Grave, 1898. (Courtesy of National Archives, Harare, Zimbabwe)

Fig. 3: African labourers opening up the grave in 1902 with a view to the Matopos behind. (Courtesy of National Archives, Harare, Zimbabwe)

Coming from mid-West farming stock, they were at first disconcerted by the land assigned to them, "surrounded by immense granite hills and boulders, some of which cover hundreds of acres, so that at first sight the rocks seem to constitute the chief part of the country". But they soon regained confidence:

> Closer inspection showed us to what a beautiful place God had led us [...] a beautiful rolling valley of rich, dark earth, well supplied with an abundance of fresh water [...] sparkling fountains of beautiful water, crystal clear, oozing from under the surface of the rocks, and flowing down the valley. Some contain delicate mosses and pretty water lilies, and surpass the Michigan lakes in transparency. (Davison 1915: 33, 40, 55)

The Brethren had no intention of leaving this idyllic scene to nature. They planted fruit-trees, began to plough, held "tea-drinks" (instead of beer parties) to encourage local people to open up a ten acre mission farm with hoes, and trained oxen for the yoke. By 1913 the valley had become densely settled with African ploughmen. In 1922 a government Inspector praised this new Christian entrepreneurial landscape: "highly attractive, carefully planned, among beautiful trees and even the rocks are fitted in to the general scheme".[11]

As we have seen the London Missionary Society occupied a similar oasis at Whitewaters, where Christian entrepreneurial peasants created a domesticated agrarian landscape around their much-photographed stone church. And white farmers occupied the surveyed farms around the edges of the Matopos – although ironically their greatest prosperity has come in the last two or three years when they have been able to market the scenery by the construction of safari lodges.

As this last comment suggests, in the long run the various white images of the Matopos came to contradict each other. The hills could not be simultaneously seen as a wilderness playground and as farmland. In my forthcoming book, *Voices from the Rocks*, I narrate how this contradiction was resolved. White mastery of nature came to be expressed in the Matopos by *preserving* the landscape rather than exploiting it. African Christian farmers in Whitewaters were expelled, the stone church pulled down, and a Game Park created to replace them.[12]

This is not the place to tell that story. What I seek to do instead is to take up the implications of the second part of Prince Phillip's account of Australian landscape painting.

African "Landscapes" in the Matopos

Prince Phillip says that in Australia the "first artists were Europeans". Of course, he is wrong. Long before water colourists and landscape artists, Aboriginal painters had produced a complex rock art. Their paintings operate on the land-forms, submitting them to culture and hence transforming them into landscape. Aboriginal myth-history largely took the form of stories of how the totemic ancestors had journeyed through

11 R. McIntosh, Matopos Day School Report, 3 August 1922, NAZ N 9/5/8.

12 Terence Ranger, "Nature and Culture in the Matopos", chapters one and two in *Voices from the Rocks. The Twentieth Century History of the Matopos,* forthcoming.

this or that piece of country and how they had come literally to inhabit and be embodied in this or that rock form. At the great Australian tourist symbol, Ayers Rock, Aboriginal groups have been able to demonstrate territorial and imaginative possession; the Rock has been handed over to their care and returned to its Aboriginal name of Uluru; Aboriginal custodians restrict the flow of tourists along ecologically damaging trails and forbid photographs or other European representations at especially sacred sites (Layton 1989).

Obviously in the Matopos the first painters were not Europeans either. The hills have long been famous for their own magnificent rock paintings, carried out by long-vanished hunter-gatherers. As Peter Garlake writes:

> The granite country of Zimbabwe provides surroundings of extraordinary variety and splendour. The view from many caves stretches 100 km or more. Every hill in sight seems to have a more dramatic and extraordinary shape than its neighbour. The original light, open woodland surrounding the hills is often unchanged. It takes little imagination to recreate the landscape of the artists themselves. This landscape was the setting of the paintings.

Garlake asserts that one needs to see the paintings in this original setting in order to be able to appreciate them.

But through no fault of his own, he cannot really show how the paintings and the setting are related. They are certainly not in any ordinary sense landscape paintings. As he says, "space is never suggested. Conventional perspective [...] is of course, not found. There is no landscape background to any painting". He seeks to understand them by drawing upon studies of San myth and ritual in desert country, but these have obvious limitations in helping us to enter into their vision of the hills. He is probably right to conclude that the paintings express "supernatural potency" and an urge "to control many aspects of the natural world, from rain to animals". Yet although rain is just as important to hunter-gatherers as it is to farmers and cattle keepers, and despite all the work that has been done on the Stone Age archaeology of the Matopos, we know nothing of San rain rituals there (Garlake 1987: 3, 9, 63).

My unproven assumption is that rain ceremonies were held in the Matopos caves long before they became Mwali shrines, and that the myths and practices of the Mwali priests which I describe later contain within them elements of a much older "spiritual potency". But for the time being, I can extract no more from the cave paintings.

Let me turn next to what Prince Phillip does say rather than what he leaves out. He remarks that when "native artists came along" Australian landscape began to be seen in a quite new way. He is speaking of the extraordinary school of Aborigine Water-Colourists, of whom Albert Namatjira is the best known (Hardy 1992). When I visited Australia and read the intense debate about Namatjira's paintings – whether they represented a submission to colonial culture or an assertion of aboriginal insights; whether they sprang from a Christian or a "traditional" vision of the land – I asked myself whether there was any Zimbabwean equivalent. It made me wish to find out more about the work produced at Cyrene mission, famous as the centre of an Anglican school of African Christian painting, so close to the Matopos and so clearly inspired by them. It is obvious that the paintings around the external and internal walls of Cyrene Church situate the great events of the Bible in the landscape of the Matopos, but I had not wondered before whether this represents a further stage in the missionary appro-

Fig. 4: An example of Cyrene religious art set in Matopos. "The Showing of Christ to the Sheperds' by Livingstone Sango." (Courtesy of National Archives, Harare, Zimbabwe)

priation of the hills for Christ, or represents some sort of restatement of indigenous ways of seeing.[13]

I have come across some answers to these questions. Canon Edward Patterson, the "midwife" of Cyrene painting, wrote two articles about it in the *Native Affairs Department Annual*. From these it is evident that both Christian appropriation and indigenous insights were at work in the Cyrene water-colours. When Patterson took two thousand pictures and forty sculptures to London in 1949, they were broken up into two very different exhibitions. One was sponsored by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, who wanted pictures of "the Gospel seen as though it had been delivered by a native Jesus to the native people of this country". As Patterson remarks, "of such pictures there were quite a few", his pupils having turned "of their own volition" from their own fierce history to "the milder atmosphere of the New Testament, with incursions into the blood and thunder of the Old Testament". Plainly the wall paintings at Cyrene church fall into this tradition. The other exhibition, at the London Central School of Arts and Crafts, consisted of first-year work. This was "a sort of compost

13 I am sure that there is room for a similar debate about African Christianity in the Matopos and its representations. Mrs Lesabe, herself a daughter of Whitewaters, Head Girl of the LMS school at Hope Fountain, and now a firm believer in the High God cult, maintains that the prosperity of Whitewaters was as much due to respect for ritual traditions of the land as to familiarity with modern farming methods.

heap of pure art", which might possibly go in any direction, though under "pressure from the rocks and trees and animals" (Patterson 1955: 73–76).

Out of this "compost heap" there evidently did emerge some representations of the Matopos. Patterson wrote:

> The typical Cyrene picture is a large imperial sheet crammed to the sky with every imaginable sort of detail: rocks, trees, animals, villages and people. My pupils at Cyrene have not attempted to paint landscape but rather the cumulative detail one gets after a picnic with children in the Matopos; detail added to detail until there remains room for only a thin line of empty sky against which the final details are silhouetted.

But Patterson went beyond this generalisation, to suggest approaches to "landscape" itself. His Shona pupils, he thought, "were not interested in drawing a particular tree, but first pass the tree through the brain, turn it over and then paint a symbolic version of it [...] i.e. the picture is only reminiscent of nature – it never imitates it". The Ndebele pupils, on the other hand, delighted in "recording the subtle differences which distinguish one rock from another". One at least of the Cyrene artists – John Balopi – had come to paint the "deep rythms in nature" rather than to pile up detail. "He paints his pictures of great rocks, tortured rivers and gnarled trees rapidly and with great confidence" (Patterson 1949: 45–50).

From the examples of Balopi's work which I have seen exhibited or illustrated it would not be absurd to see him as a Zimbabwean Namatjira.[14] But given the limitations of my understanding of rock art and the great need for a thorough study of the Cyrene tradition, I shall have to fall back on the third category of my title. In outlining an African view of the Matopos, I shall not be talking so much about painters, nor about African entrepreneurial "prospectors", but about priests. And this time, not Christian priests but the priests of what the Jesuits called the religion of "the children of Nature". I want to argue that the Mwali cult, in its mythology, in its rituals and its "readings" of the land and of the rocks, constructed a radically different "picture" from that of the white painter or photographer. I want to argue that by the time Baines and Oates and the rest arrived in the Matopos, and tried to make paintable sense of what struck them as mountains without history, the hills had already been profoundly possessed by human imagination. And I want to argue that this imaginative reading of the land combined both "symbolic versions" of its meaning and the capacity to "record the subtle differences which distinguish one rock from another".

I shall begin not in the Matopos at all, but with Oliver Zvabva's 1988 University of Zimbabwe Honours thesis in Religious Studies, which deals with the "Nyachiranga Cult" on the mountain frontier of north-eastern Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Zvabva shows that in a cave in the Nyachiranga mountain is heard the Voice of Dzivaguru, the High God. He describes what the cave contains:

> The structures inside the cave are very symbolic and have a bearing on agricultural fertility. In the cave is a stream which has its source in the cave, which flows into a *ninga*, or bottomless pit; a Baobab tree; a dome-shaped pillar; *mipfura* trees with bee-hives; two expansive rock *dwalas*, one close to the entrance and the other at the far back of the cave.

14 There is a reproduction of a Balopi landscape depicting Cyrene itself in *Arts Zimbabwe*, no. 2, 1981/2, p. 31. In 1990 there was a 50th anniversary exhibition of Cyrene artists in the Bulawayo Art Gallery. This included two "graphics" by John Balopi.

Zvabva adds:

> In the cave, scenery is attractive, full of life: biological as well as social. It has an independent existence, hence paradisial – like Adam in the Garden of Eden, the people are seen as living in a paradise of their own. (Zvabva 1988)

Of course, I have chosen to begin with this extract precisely because of Zvabva's invocation of the "alien" ideas of scenery and of paradise. But he uses them quite legitimately to make a point. *This* cave is not a place where fearful, trembling and credulous worshippers, turn their back on landscape to propitiate the terrible God of the abyss. It is, writes Zvabva, "natural, undomesticated", but also "source of all biological and social life". It is the focus of history – past chiefs are buried in the *ninga*; the stone in the cave "stands as the seat of the Voice, the centre of all instructions, and the highest point of authority". Many of these instructions concern people's relationships with and obligations to the land. The cave is the nucleus of a living and active landscape.

In this environment, so Zvaba tells us, the liberation war of the 1970s became "an astonishing act of collaboration between the dead and the living"; between the people and their environment. Guerrillas were given "the greatest protection" by being hidden in Nyachiranga cave; the Nyamahasa river rose in permanent flood "so that it was impossible for the Rhodesian Security Forces to cross". After the war, all changes to the landscape – a school to be built here, or a bore-hole to be drilled there – were referred by the Committees to the judgement of the Voice.

I am prepared to assert that the Mwali cult of the Matopos does all these things to the landscape of the hills. Since 1988 Mark Ncube of the Bulawayo National Archives and I have been interviewing priests, pilgrims and "parishioners" of the four great Mwali shrines of the Matopos, Njelele, Dula, Dzilo and Bembe. The cave shrines possess their own "interior" landscapes – of pools and rocks and trees. They are "natural" – their floors have to be cleaned by twigs and stones, not by tools; their priests mount to the heights clad as leopards. But they are also the source of agricultural prosperity – the chosen priestess is the one in whose clenched fist ungerminated millet sprouts between the closed fingers; from the shrines is distributed the *divisi* seed, blessed by Mwali. Through the Voice from the Stone they are the source of political legitimacy. "No-one can rule the country who does not come to the Stone", say the priests.[15]

But what of the "exterior" landscape? I think the shrines relate to it in two ways. They are the source of a doctrine of the environment which sets out the terms of people's relationship with the hills – where and how fire can be used; which springs can be used and by whom; which groves must not be disturbed; when planting can begin; where cattle can graze. The landscape of the Matopos, which seemed to nineteenth century European travellers so "wild" and so unsubdued by man, had in fact been shaped by thousands of years of interaction with hunter-gatherers, cultivators and cattle-keepers. And yet the landscape of the hills has always struck adepts of the

15 I have discussed the shrines in a number of papers, most as yet unpublished. A published account of many of these themes is Terence Ranger, "Power, Religion and Community: the Matobo Case", *Subaltern Studies*, 7, 1992. The first chapter in my forthcoming "Voices From the Rocks" is entitled "Nature and Culture in the Matopos".

shrines as super-human, the work of a divine power. As far away as Masvingo, myths of the creation of the known world begin with the creation of the Matopos.

One such Karanga myth describes how a Son of God, Mudzanapabwe, literally brings the hills down from the Heavens. Mudzanapabwe enters an unknown country armed only with a bow and arrows and a red needle. The land is hot and dry, with no plants and no animals. Then Mudzanapabwe remembers that his Father's parting words of advice were: "There is life in the big rocks". He looks about for a rock, and at last finding a small one he stamps his foot upon it:

> At once a large dust-cloud rose to the sky. Mudzanapabwe looked up and saw huge rocks towering in the heavens [...] He shot an arrow into the sky which hit a rock. There was a great noise, the heavens shook, and the rocks turned black. Mudzanapabwe shot once more at the rocks but this time the red needle sewed together the large rocks and the country in which Mudzanapabwe now lived. Then it started to rain and went on raining until the whole country was flooded. Mudzanapabwe was at a loss and again shot an arrow into the sky. This separated heaven and earth again. The rain stopped and trees, grass and vegetables began to grow. [...] There were great holes where his arrows had hit the rocks [...] In those places where the needle had made a seam, rivers formed.[16]

The Karanga call the Matopos *mabwe adziva*, "the stone of the pool", and praise Mwali as "the stone from which the rain comes". And there is no doubt that the same combination of stone and water is central to the imagination of the landscape in the Matopos themselves. People can live in the hills, Mwali adepts say, because the rocks provide water; the rocks provide water because people live in the hills.[17] The Matopos represent an original nature, but it is a nature which operates inseparably from human culture. Men are not just living in nature; nor are they operating *on* it. Nature and culture are in symbiosis in the landscape of the Matopos.

It is not surprising that with such intensity of meaning invested by Africans in the Matopos, Rhodes' burial there was seen by both black and white as an usurpation. The Rhodesian poet, Cullen Gouldsbury, described Rhodes as re-shaping the landscape and triumphing over the African spirit guardians of the hills:

> 'Twas his to have fashioned the valleys
> In semblance of subsequent weal –
> And, braving the ghosts and their malice
> To summon their spirits to heel –
>
> 'Twas his to have braved, in a measure,
> The pulse of their primitive wrath
> To clutch from the silence the treasure
> En Route for the Uttermost North.[18]

Sitwanyana, one of the contesting priests at Njelele, told Mark Ncube and myself in 1988 that there is a huge but secret cave below the rock where Rhodes is buried.

16 Aschwanden 1989: 11f. Kahari cites this myth in order to make sense of the water theme in Shona "romances" (1994: 98f.)

17 In an interview with Michael Ncube on 21 July 1989 he explained to me that "the water is a gift from the rock", but that if the people were moved out of the hills by conservationists who wanted to save the water table, "the hills will dry up".

18 "A Reminder", in Gouldsbury 1932: 157. The poem was written in the 1910s. The last line refers to Rhodes' ambitions to carve out a great road to the north, from Cape to Cairo.

"Rhodes' grave is fine for the whites but not for us. That grave is at the fontanelle of the nation. There were sell-outs who revealed the secrets of the nation."[19]

If you visit the Matopos today – sixteen years after black majority rule – it seems as if Rhodes' conquest has been complete. Safari guides will take you to the Grave and point out the hills around it on which the battles of 1896 were fought. On one of these, Inungu, you will see the great cross erected as late as 1982 as a symbol of the Christian conquest of the Matopos. On a clear day you can also see Njelele to the south, but guides do not point it out. Save for the cave paintings, the African history of the hills is unvoiced; the meaning of the rocks is still expounded by the memorial inscriptions of the whites.[20]

Yet this is misleading. The treasure has not been snatched from the silence. Unknown to the many tourists, yet greater numbers of pilgrims still go to the shrines at Njelele, Dula and Dzilo. And it is still possible to find a Mwali adept to begin to teach one how to read the rocks.

My own teacher (Obed Masuku, an apprentice adept at Njelele) mocked the foolish European habit of seizing upon a fugitive likeness, seen from one angle, and then naming a rock for it – like the Queen Victoria rock at Whitewaters. Great rocks can never be summed up so simply. One of the praise names of Njelele shrine is *Dombo letshipoteleka*, the shifting or turning rock; adepts continuously comment how different it looks as one walks around it. But no-one can, should, walk right around Njelele hill on pain of death. No human being should aspire to grasp its full meaning. Obed showed me at his own small rock shrine how at the front it sweeps down to the overhang, which is the shrine proper, compelling one to kneel in worship. At the back it gently slopes upwards, inviting access to the "dancing floor" on its summit. At Njelele itself, there are the rock walls above the cave which compel submission and the dancing ground at the top, where pilgrims pitch their fires around the perennial pools. And while I have not sought to walk right round Njelele, I have seen for myself the difference between the face it presents to pilgrims coming from the north – rising like a great smooth brow – and to pilgrims from the south, to whom it shows a pitted and tortured countenance.

Perhaps some of the Cyrene paintings offer an African Christian landscape art similar to that of the Aranda in Australia. But it would be even more fascinating to see an attempt to render in paint the Mwali way of looking at rocks. I have hanging on the wall of my flat in Oxford a painting by the veteran Zimbabwean landscape painter, Pat Pearce, done at a recent workshop at Cyrene. (Pat Pearce is the painter of the most re-

19 Interview with Sitwanyana Ncube, Mguza, 28 July 1988. In 1964 W.R. Benzies described the burial of Rhodes in an article in *NADA* (1964, pp. 37–8). He writes that the gun-party of which he was a member were "merely ordered to present arms instead of the usual volley. This was due to the fact that the Chiefs had requested Mr Taylor, the C.N.C., that there would be no shooting as we were on sacred ground. Years later it transpired that the bones of the rulers of the indigenous natives (not the Matabele) were placed in a cave known as Murindidzimu only a few hundred yards from Mr Rhodes' tomb, the bones being covered with stones."

20 The hunter-gatherer artists of the Matopos have been comfortably absorbed into the white "preservationist" myth of the hills. *They* did not damage the environment, unlike subsequent agriculturalists and cattle-keepers. Thus a notice informs tourists at Nswaguti Cave that agriculture should never be carried out in the hills. It is the African Iron Age history of the Matopos which has been obliterated.

markable picture of the Matopos shown in the permanent collection of the National Gallery in Bulawayo.) It strikes most of my visitors as an abstract but in fact depicts the entrance to a Mwali cave-shrine. It captures something of the multiple meanings of that place. Yet I hope to see a Zimbabwean landscape art which extracts from the silence still more of the treasure – or at least as much as it is given to human beings to perceive.

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